

This article was downloaded by: [University of Denver]

On: 13 December 2010

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 922941597]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Rethinking Marxism

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713395221>

## Realizing class justice

George DeMartino

Online publication date: 04 June 2010

**To cite this Article** DeMartino, George(2003) 'Realizing class justice', Rethinking Marxism, 15: 1, 1 – 31

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/0893569032000063556

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0893569032000063556>

## PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Realizing Class Justice

*George DeMartino*

The newly resurgent challenge to global neoliberalism by advocates for labor, human rights, indigenous communities, environmentalism, and other diverse constituencies and causes across the globe requires of heterodox political economists a response that we have been somewhat reluctant to offer. Most simply, this is to provide an explicitly *normative* critique of global neoliberalism. This critique should help to sharpen and strengthen the most progressive aspects of the opposition to neoliberalism (e.g. promoting international solidarity rather than nativism or parochialism), but also provide a foundation for envisioning alternatives to neoliberalism that stand a chance of achieving support among progressives in the North and in the South.

Rather than articulate and advance a compelling normative critique, many political economists on the Left have chosen instead to demonstrate that neoliberalism fails to make good on its own promises. Instead of the robust growth, efficiency, and prosperity claimed on its behalf, critics argue that neoliberalism generates economic stagnation, instability, insecurity, unemployment, and industrial decline. Some of these demonstrations are compelling; some are not. But the problem with this strategy is that it implicitly adopts the normative standards embraced by the advocates of neoliberalism as the appropriate terrain on which to conduct the battle. After all, why indict neoliberalism for failing to achieve rapid growth unless we believe that growth is indeed an unambiguous social good?

Neoclassical theory considers growth to be unambiguously desirable, of course, and grounds the demonstration in a normative position known as “welfarism”. This is an approach to the assessment of social and economic outcomes that relies on but one desideratum—namely, the psychological state of the people affected by the outcome. This approach yields the famous Pareto criteria, such as the judgment that some outcome *A* is superior to some alternative outcome *B* provided only that at least one person prefers *A* to *B* and no one prefers *B* to *A*. Breaking with classical

utilitarianism (from which it derives), welfarism bars interpersonal subjective comparisons on the grounds that we lack a dependable metric for making them. We therefore cannot determine whether one person will gain greater or less satisfaction from the enjoyment of a good than will another person. Neoclassical theory appends to this approach a set of vitally consequential assumptions about human nature. Most important, people are taken to be rational in a particular way. Each is assumed to be driven in her economic and even noneconomic activities by her own self-interests, as she defines them for herself according to her own "preferences". Each is also assumed to have insatiable desires so that she always wants more of the things she values, no matter how much she already possesses.

Against this normative standard, neoliberalism emerges in the neoclassical view as an ideal economic arrangement. Neoclassical theory undertakes to show that neoliberalism promises efficiency and rapid economic growth, given the incentives associated with market competition. And it also promises expansive personal choice, with each agent allowed to choose those goods and services that best accord with her personal preferences.

This ceding of the normative ground to the proponents of neoliberalism is consequential and problematic. Welfarism is a deeply flawed normative principle to guide Left critique, politics, economics, or policymaking. These flaws are well known. Not least, welfarism shows little concern for equality. In part, this results from the features we have just considered, particularly its exclusive focus on subjective states to assess social arrangements coupled with its refusal to permit interpersonal comparisons. An extreme example will make the point: under welfarism we cannot necessarily conclude that redistribution of \$100,000 from a billionaire to a program to inoculate poor children is Pareto-improving because we have no metric for comparing the subjective welfare loss of the billionaire with the welfare gains of those now inoculated. It may be that the poor children who now lead healthy lives earn insufficient funds to fully repay the billionaire for his loss. And it may be that the loss of this paltry sum causes the billionaire *unimaginable distress* insofar as he has organized his entire life around the accumulation of wealth. Knowledge of the improved life chances of those now inoculated might therefore provide him little solace. Welfarism's ban on interpersonal comparisons precludes our investigating whether the benefits that flow to those now inoculated exceed the losses suffered by their unwilling benefactor.<sup>1</sup>

Given this and other deficiencies, it is troubling that progressive economists have tended to abstain from explicit discussions of normative matters when contesting neoliberalism. This silence leaves the impression that

1. See Sen (1987) for an introduction to a range of problems associated with welfarism and the utilitarian tradition from which it arose.

welfarism is indeed the right standard, and that growth ought to be the single most important economic goal. And this places us at a significant disadvantage in disputes over domestic and international policy regimes (cf. Ruccio 1992). To reiterate my initial claim: we find ourselves attacking neoliberalism for failing to make good *on its own promises* when we should be arguing that *it promises the wrong things*.

It is imperative today that heterodox political economists emphasize that the alternative policy regimes they advocate are not more faithful to welfarism than is neoliberalism, but that they seek fidelity to other, more worthy normative principles. In earlier work (DeMartino 2000), I argued for a recommitment to internationalist egalitarianism as an appropriate principle to guide progressive politics and policymaking, especially in the context of the egregiously inequitable world we confront today. Advocating international equality provides a more compelling basis for critiquing neoliberalism, while providing guidance for envisioning new policy regimes that would better serve the needs of working people, the poor, and dispossessed.

Over the past several decades, Marxists and non-Marxists have produced a good deal of useful normative theoretical work. Recent debates have helped to sharpen our understanding of just what distinct normative criteria entail. And much of this work has strengthened the egalitarian perspective that has historically informed Left politics. The contributions of Amartya Sen (1992) have been particularly valuable in this regard. His notion of “capabilities equality” provides a fertile framework for undertaking a thoroughgoing critique of neoliberalism (though he certainly does not intend it as such), and for envisioning new campaigns and policy measures that might enable new forms of solidarity among egalitarians in the North and in the South.

In this paper I want to explore the basis of a distinctly Marxian set of normative principles—principles that could serve the socialist project to resist global neoliberalism, to be sure, but also inform more mundane, local political initiatives. Specifically, I will flesh out an explicitly *antiessentialist Marxian approach to justice*. This approach has much to offer those seeking a more egalitarian world order. To date, however, there has been a relative neglect of normative issues and investigation among those advancing this approach.<sup>2</sup> But strong normative impulses underlie this approach. Not least, these impulses animate its focus on class as a vital site of social interaction, and I will try to illuminate these impulses in what follows.

The Marxian tradition generally leads us toward a conception of what I will call “class justice.” Marx himself excoriated class exploitation, and advocated nonexploitative forms of social organization. The specific contribution of antiessentialism is to help us see four things:

2. Exceptions include Burczak (1996-7, 1998, 2001), Cullenberg (1992, 1998), DeMartino (2000), Gibson-Graham (2003), and Ruccio (1992).

1. that class justice must comprise no less than three distinct and overlapping components, what I will call “productive justice,” “appropriative justice,” and “distributive justice”;
2. that a comprehensive account of social justice must be internally complex, comprising but reaching far beyond class issues;
3. that even a comprehensive account of justice must be combined and articulated with other valuable normative principles;

and, finally,

4. that class justice might be immediately achievable, and might indeed already be achieved—locally, partially and imperfectly, to be sure—even in the heart of what most Marxists have theorized to be a thoroughly capitalist and therefore unjust society. Provided we know what to look for and where to look, we might discover instances of class justice awaiting replication and expansion in a Gramscian normative war of position.

The first point (heterogeneity) emerges clearly once we import Marx’s account of class as a constellation of distinct social processes into our consideration of justice. The second point (complexity) stems from an appreciation, inherent in antiessentialism, of the richness, nuances, and contradictions of social life. In this view, no one facet of life serves as the foundation or cause of all others; nor can one facet possibly capture all that is important to individuals and their communities. As a consequence, we would do well to construct a complex conception of justice that faces up to and encompasses this richness, even at the expense of normative elegance. In this connection I will elaborate and advocate Sen’s notion of capabilities equality as one appropriate vehicle for undertaking this enrichment of the concept of justice. The third point (plurality) stems from the same insight regarding human and social complexity. We ask far too much of any normative principle (of justice or otherwise) by requiring it to govern all social affairs. No matter the attractiveness of any normative principle we might devise, a society that is entirely and rigidly faithful to it alone is likely to be deeply deficient in all sorts of ways that its inhabitants rightly deem to be important. Glorifying and imposing one standard over all others (e.g., justice over mercy) is certain to yield a most imprisoning sort of human emancipation. The fourth point (feasibility) arises out of the decentered, contradictory conception of society that emerges within antiessentialist thought. This conception emphasizes the coexistence of diverse class forms in each and every social formation, and refuses to anoint any one of them as the essence of political, economic, cultural, or social affairs. This conception encourages a disaggregated, localized inspection of class processes and disaggregated, localized judgments about class justice.

## Marxian Class Justice

To situate this discussion of class justice, we should recall two famous normative principles that appear in Marx and that have generated tremendous discussion and debate.<sup>3</sup> The first, which I will refer to for simplicity as principle 1, is Marx's clear antipathy toward "exploitation". Exploitation occurs when those who produce surplus labor are excluded from the process of its appropriation. For Marx and many Marxists, exploitation entails a form of "social theft" in which the surplus is wrested from its rightful owners (the producers) by other social actors (Geras 1985). Much of Marx's later work endeavors to expose this kind of oppression, particularly in its capitalist form. Under capitalism, exploitation is obscured by the apparent equality, freedom, and "rights of man" that obtain in the marketplace, the domain of exchange. Each agent is free to offer or withhold whatever she has to sell, be it means of subsistence, luxury goods, or labor power. Each secures a price equal to the socially necessary abstract labor-time that her commodity embodies: equal therefore exchanges for equal.<sup>4</sup> But the articulation of equal exchange with capitalist production nevertheless results in workers providing some portion of labor-time to capital gratis, entirely without compensation. This unpaid (surplus) labor is appropriated by the capitalist; when realized in exchange in the form of surplus value, it yields capitalist profits. There can be little doubt that Marx believed class exploitation in all its forms to be normatively indefensible; indeed, it is hard to understand why he would have undertaken the tremendous labors associated with the writing of *Capital* (1977) if this were not so. *Capital* represents a thoroughgoing, normative indictment of capitalism, and the centerpiece of this indictment is class exploitation.

A second normative principle that appears in Marx (which I will call principle 2) is rendered in the famous statement from the *Critique of the Gotha Program*: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!" (Marx 1938, 10). This exhortation comprises normative principles to guide contribution and reward in what Marx called the "higher phase" of communism. It appears only with the complete transcendence of capitalist society; it is a marker of the achievement of a stage of development in which social arrangements are fully compatible with social and human flourishing.

3. There is an extensive literature on questions pertaining to Marxian normative commitments, and I will not examine it here. See Geras (1985, 1992) for an influential (though controversial) investigation that surveys the debate. Lukes (1987) presents a careful, insightful account of the normative ambivalences in Marx and in the Marxian tradition.

4. This formulation abstracts from myriad complicating factors that might disrupt this equation. Marx undertakes this demonstration in volume I of *Capital* to show that even where such disruptions are absent, where each exchange is entirely "fair", capitalist relations of production are nevertheless unjust.

Now the question arises as to how to make sense of these two, distinct normative principles. Do they entail the same set of social arrangements, such that they are redundant? Does the end of exploitation, for instance, necessarily entail the patterns of contribution and reward codified in principle 2? Or is one less ambitious but conducive to the other: a steppingstone on the way to further social reform? For instance, is principle 1 appropriate for one historical context and principle 2 for another—such that Marxists should seek different normative objectives under different circumstances? This is how they are presented in the *Critique*. It is a conception that is appropriate to a political imaginary (which Marx apparently embraced) that is predicated upon a social ontology in which fundamental (material) contradictions induce thoroughgoing eruption that yields societal class transformation. In this imaginary, exploitation is eliminated in the transformation from capitalism to the first (or immature) phase of communism, when the means of production are expropriated from the bourgeoisie all at once and converted to common property. Under this arrangement, consumption goods are distributed according to the criterion of relative labor contribution. In contrast, as stated above, principle 2 is realized only in a more advanced stage of communism, where the “bourgeois right” of equality in exchange and compulsion are replaced by fully voluntary participation of workers in a scheme that calls for them to contribute according to their abilities, and that rewards them according to their needs.

I would like to offer a different kind of interpretation, one that views these two principles as partial, distinct but compatible components of a more adequate, composite normative principle. This interpretation yields a principle that can be applied for the purposes of social assessment and policy enactment *at each and every moment of historical development*. In what follows I will demonstrate how an antiessentialist Marxian account generates this interpretation, and discuss how it can be enlisted in contemporary controversies over policy, institutions, and social arrangements more generally.

### Antiessentialism and Class Justice

From an antiessentialist perspective, the notion of class that appears in *Capital* (and elsewhere in Marx’s work) is a heterogeneous, multifaceted social process that comprises three distinct, nonhierarchically ordered moments. These moments are the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus labor (Resnick and Wolff 1987). None of these three moments dominates the other two—analytically, empirically, or causally. Rather, delineating class processes in a particular conjuncture—that is, undertaking a class analysis of a particular social formation, event, policy initiative or

the like—requires specifying each of these three moments and the ways in which they interact. Much Marxian scholarship emphasizes but one or two of these moments (typically the production and appropriation of surplus), and infers capitalist laws of motion on the basis of this incomplete class analysis. But this omission contradicts Marx's own method (particularly as elaborated over the course of the three volumes of *Capital*) and in any event generates a simplistic, reductionist understanding of capitalism. With Marx, we should instead pay due attention to the separate effectivity of each of these moments so as to glean a more nuanced understanding of social and economic affairs.

Most Marxian scholarship operates upon the assumption that one and only one class process dominates within any particular social formation except during transitional historical periods (such as the centuries-long transition from feudalism to capitalism). This is particularly true of most accounts of recent history, during which capitalism is seen to dominate other class processes. This is because capitalism is vested with the properties of "unity", "singularity", and "totality" that other class arrangements lack (Gibson-Graham 1996). When noncapitalist economic arrangements are discovered, they are generally dismissed as archaic, subordinate, or otherwise marginal aspects of *capitalism*. In contrast, antiessentialist Marxism refuses to acknowledge the (ontological) dominance of any particular class process. It encourages us to expect that each and every economy (no matter its self-designation) will comprise diverse class forms and that these will be articulated in various and unpredictable ways (rather than merely in a structure of dominance). It bears emphasis that a Marxian analysis that encompasses (and weights equally) all three aspects of class and that presumes and discovers multiple class forms will generate a very different assessment of events than will accounts that essentialize one or two aspects of class or one particular class arrangement.<sup>5</sup>

But there is a separate and equally important reason for investigating the three distinct moments of class while recognizing the coexistence of diverse class forms, one that relates to the matter before us. It has to do with fashioning an appropriate Marxian normative standard for undertaking social assessment. The first point—recognition of the three moments of class—leads us to see that we must adopt a *composite* account of class justice. In this view, a society is characterized by class justice the degree to which it exhibits "productive", "appropriate", and "distributive" justice. The second point—recognition of coexisting class forms—leads us to a more feasible kind

5. Blair Sandler's (1994) critique of James O'Connor's notion of the "second contradiction of capitalism" provides a concise and careful example of what I have in mind. See also Norton (1986), which comprises the reductionism in Marxian approaches that chart the workings of the logic of accumulation. I also take up this matter (DeMartino 1992, 1993).

of politics than tends to emerge within much of the Marxian tradition. It is a politics that centers on the realization of class justice in those sites where it is immediately achievable (and sustenance of class justice where it already exists), coupled with campaigns to secure the conditions for the future realization of class justice in those sites where it remains elusive. I will take up this first point immediately, and return to the second toward the end of this paper.

## The Elements of Class Justice

Productive class justice refers to fairness in the allocation of the work of producing the social surplus. In the aggregate, social surplus is the residual that arises from the fact that those who perform the labor necessary to provision society produce more than they themselves consume. This surplus provides for private consumption by those who cannot or otherwise do not participate in production, the public goods and services that will be shared by the community, and for other social projects and practices. Viewed in this way, there is nothing illicit about the production of surplus per se. Indeed, the social surplus provides much of the material basis for social sustenance, reproduction, and development.<sup>6</sup> But each society must confront a difficult normative question regarding the distribution of the labor effort that generates the social surplus. Each society must (and indeed does) establish mechanisms and practices for allocating this obligation. Insofar as the notion of surplus is not recognized as such in most economic and social discourses, however, this allocation often remains an obscured effect of society's economic arrangements. This is nevertheless an important site of normative evaluation, as Marx labored to show. Who should be encouraged or required to contribute to the social surplus? What mechanisms are legitimate for securing these contributions? And how much should be asked of each contributor?

Appropriative justice refers to fairness in the processes by which some individuals and/or groups in society receive the social surplus produced by themselves or by others. As initial claimants, appropriators also serve as distributors of the surplus (at least in a formal sense). Appropriation is a necessary precondition for making the surplus available for use. Unappropriated surplus would lie as wasting fruit in the orchard. Like surplus production, then, appropriation per se is entirely legitimate. But each

6. I ignore here the theoretical possibility of an advanced communist society in which the concept of surplus no longer obtains. Resnick and Wolff (1988) explore this possibility, which appears in passing in the work of Marx. Were such a society to exist, the concept of class justice as defined here would have no relevance, though certainly other conceptions of justice would.

society must (and indeed does) establish rules, conventions, and institutions to govern appropriation, and here all sorts of difficult normative questions arise. Which arrangements of appropriation are just, and which are unjust? Who should enjoy appropriation rights and just what authority should these rights entail? Moreover, and also like surplus production, these processes too may remain obscured in societies and discourses that do not recognize the concept of surplus.

Distributive justice, finally, refers in Marxian terms to fairness in the processes by which the social surplus is divided among society's members (and, perhaps, other people) for their personal use, and in the ultimate distributive patterns that emerge from these processes. *Distribution is distinct from appropriation*: there is no presumption that those who lay first claim to the surplus (the appropriators) will choose or be able to direct the surplus exclusively to their own ultimate consumption. It may be, for instance, that the appropriators are required to pay income taxes that result in their distributing a portion of the surplus to the state, to fund all sorts of public programs and institutions that they do not endorse. They may also be required by law or circumstance to distribute shares of the surplus to the many people who supply the conditions necessary for surplus production to occur (cf. Resnick and Wolff 1988). It is important to note that antiessentialist Marxism refuses to treat surplus distribution as an epiphenomenon of either surplus production or appropriation (Cullenberg 1992). Instead (and the importance of this point will emerge presently), each of these three moments of class is taken to be uniquely efficacious. But this does not mean that they are independent, either: patterns of production and appropriation will surely affect ultimate distribution, just as distribution will necessarily affect patterns of production and appropriation. In the vernacular of anti-essentialist social analysis, the three components of class are taken to be mutually constitutive in complex and even contradictory ways.

Contemporary discussions of justice among non-Marxian political theorists, philosophers, and others typically do not recognize issues of class as it is defined in the Marxian tradition (in terms of surplus production, appropriation, and distribution). These accounts are often entirely silent on what I have identified as productive and appropriative justice. The allocation of work burdens and the right to appropriate any residuals in production are typically treated as natural effects of the existing economic system. In contrast, much of this literature is concerned directly with distributive justice. Even these typically ignore the concept of surplus, however. But this is not to say that all non-Marxian approaches *necessarily* preclude class concerns. For instance, the most satisfactory contemporary approaches provide what Walzer (1983) calls "complex" accounts of distributive justice that range over the vast array of "social goods" that all societies distribute, from the material means of survival to careers, honors, status, and

opportunities.<sup>7</sup> Confronting such accounts of justice, the challenge facing Marxian normative theorists is to advocate the importance of including surplus among the elements of this array—to demonstrate that a complex account of distributive justice that ignores class is in an important respect incomplete and in need of further elaboration, *not* to replace these non-Marxian accounts with a narrowly focused class account. A second task must be to advocate the inscription of productive and appropriative class concerns within normative perspectives that focus only on distribution in order to arrive at a more adequate account of justice.

We have here, then, a three-part conception of class justice that comprises productive, appropriative, and distributive class assessment. A society that fails to strive for or achieve attainable fairness in any one of these three class dimensions would be deemed unjust in that regard. This normative assessment requires careful and equal attention to each of the separate aspects of class. Such attention will undoubtedly reveal diverse patterns of justice and injustice. For instance, we might encounter an impoverished slave society in which the social output is relatively equally distributed across slaves and slave owners. This “egalitarian” distributive pattern might result not from benevolence on the part of the slave owners (though that is indeed possible), but from their self-interest insofar as they recognize that an unequal distribution in their favor would imperil the lives of the slaves on whom their welfare depends.<sup>8</sup> This society might satisfy a normative standard that privileges distributive justice, perhaps, but would nevertheless be indictable in class terms (and on other grounds as well) insofar as the slaves would face egregious productive and appropriative injustice. Alternatively, we can imagine a society of independent petty producers, all self-employed, in which all worked equally hard and long at their respective crafts but in which some secured substantial shares of the social surplus due to their skill in bargaining or monopoly control over vital resources, thereby consigning others to poverty. This society might be deemed just in terms of productive and appropriative justice, perhaps, but would nevertheless be indictable on distributive grounds.

Of course, making evaluative judgments of this sort entails a prior, careful specification as to what we mean by “fairness” in each of these domains. Without that, it is at best imprecise to claim that the slaves suffer productive and appropriative injustice, or that the poor petty producers suffer

7. In addition to the work of Walzer, Rawls (1971, 1996) and Sen (1992) are exemplars of complex accounts of justice (though each is complex in a different way). I examine Sen below.

8. This would represent a perverse inversion of John Rawls’ “maximin” criterion, in which *inequality* is warranted only to the degree that it could be shown to benefit most those worst off. The slave example in the text would be an instance where *equality* is warranted only to the degree that it benefits most those *best off*.

distributive injustice. What, then, might Marxism have to say about fairness in each class dimension?

### The Two Marxian Normative Principles and Class Justice

Marx himself provides reasonable answers to this question that should serve as a starting point for normative discussion. They appear in principles 1 and 2, read as statements pertaining to class. Principle 1 (the indictment of exploitation) addresses class explicitly, of course, and so this interpretation will strike most readers as uncontroversial. But principle 2 (regarding contribution and reward) is not always interpreted in class terms (as defined here); indeed, the notion of distribution according to need in particular has been widely adopted by many non-Marxian normative theorists who abstract from class entirely. I take as my warrant in this exercise the tremendous normative weight that Marx attached to class arrangements. It would seem odd were principle 2 to ignore the issue that drove much of Marx's theoretical and political work over the final decades of his life. Moreover, in the section of the *Critique* where Marx offers principle 2, he is clearly concerned with the production and distribution of surplus labor (1938, 7-10).<sup>9</sup>

#### Productive Class Justice

Principle 2 may be read as combining two distinct criteria of class justice. "From each according to ability" pertains directly and importantly *but only* to the first (productive) moment of class justice. We may say that a society exhibits productive class justice when those with the greatest abilities to produce surplus in fact make the greatest contributions. This principle entails primarily a normative obligation on the part of individuals to their communities rather than vice versa. Simultaneously and subordinately, it bears on the matter of the aggregate level of social wealth. This is because a society that allocates labor burdens according to ability will enjoy far greater capacity to produce surplus (as embodied in a stock of output of private and public goods) than one that demands equal contribution from all, or greatest contribution from those with least abilities. This is consistent with Marx's view that communism would remove the fetters on productive rationality associated with exploitative class processes, and thereby

9. In the relevant section Marx takes issue with Lassalle's concept of the "undiminished proceeds of labour." He argues that Lassalle's claim that this ought to accrue in its entirety to labor overlooks the fact that much of the surplus must be allocated to functions necessary for the sustenance of economy and society.

generate unprecedented wealth that would serve as the material basis of a new social consciousness and human flourishing (Lukes 1987).<sup>10</sup>

While a principle of this sort may have had great appeal in the context of the deepening revolutionary fervor of the early twentieth century, it is far less attractive today among both Marxists and others. Eighty years of “actually existing socialism” have certainly discredited principles that emphasize citizens’ obligations to “society” rather than their rights and freedoms. But embracing this principle hardly requires of us that we endorse any and all arrangements to achieve it, especially those that rely on coercion. Marx would have us search for social arrangements that cultivate a spirit of genuine voluntarism in labor performance. We have learned by now that Draconian social engineering is a poor means for enlisting such voluntarism; we have also learned that authoritarian state strategies that cast compulsion as voluntarism (and that vilify dissent) warp the human spirit and are normatively indefensible on multiple grounds. But from the antiessentialist perspective, there is a more important lesson here: this historical experience suffices to warn against the single-minded pursuit of any one normative objective over all others. The price of normative purity, ranging from human misery to the sacrifice of vital rights and freedoms, is far too high.

These concerns (about social obligations) are entirely warranted, but they speak to the dangers of *essentializing* the principle of contribution according to ability, and to the resulting *means* deemed appropriate to achieve it, rather than to the legitimacy of the principle per se. In fact, diverse contemporary theoretical perspectives endorse this principle in one form or another. It is noteworthy that even neoclassical theory, which foregrounds personal liberties rather than social obligations, embraces this principle (though not theorized in class terms, of course) on welfarist grounds. In this view, the market is taken to be efficient in part because its incentive structure encourages each agent to maximize the contribution she makes to the social good. As a consequence, those with greater abilities are induced to make the greatest contributions. But there are three important differences between neoclassical and Marxian thought in this regard: the normative grounding of the contribution principle; the meaning and assessment of the social good; and the means deemed appropriate for enacting this principle. For neoclassicals, the contribution principle is a matter of efficiency; for Marxists, it is primarily (though not exclusively) a matter of justice. For neoclassicals, the social good is inferred from market prices

10. This is not to say, however, that this principle entails the pursuit of maximum growth—only that a properly organized economy would achieve a level of output and patterns of allocation and distribution (see below) that are sufficient to allow for human emancipation and social development.

which arise as a consequence of the private, subjective preferences of individual consumers that drive their market behavior; for Marxists (and many others), it is discovered through reasoned, collective deliberation over just what is most valuable in a given social/historical context. For neoclassicals, finally, the contribution principle is to be enacted via market competition that rewards most heavily those who make the greatest social contribution. For Marxists, a system that ties reward to contribution (in surplus production or otherwise) would fail the criterion of distributive justice (see below).

### Distributive Class Justice

Proposition 2 concludes “to each according to need.” This clause pertains directly and importantly *but only* to the third (distributive) moment of class justice. Distributive justice requires that the allocation of that share of the social surplus that is destined for consumption be based on people’s distinct needs: those with greatest needs should receive the greatest shares.<sup>11</sup> This proposition entails a strong obligation on the part of the community as a whole to its individual members. It implies an obligation to provide each member of society with the resources she needs to flourish. This principle seeks to provide individuals with relatively equal *substantive freedom*—equal “opportunity sets”—and so is far more demanding than approaches (such as welfarism) that value individuals’ “formal” freedom to choose from among their possibly very unequal opportunity sets.

This needs-based distributive principle encounters all sorts of conceptual (and practical) difficulties. How is need to be assessed, when many of the factors that create differential need (aptitude, motivation, etc.) are largely intangible and invisible? How might we reasonably measure differential need, even where the differences are in fact visible? To what degree are people to be held accountable for and expected to comport themselves in ways that minimize their needs, so as to reduce their claim on social expenditures and resources and thereby allow greater shares for others? How should we assess a situation in which a person knowingly makes a decision (riding a motorcycle on the freeway without protective gear) that is apt to

11. Not all the surplus is to be allocated to consumption and distributed on this basis, of course. As Marx argues in the *Critique, Capital* (e.g., 1977, 709, and volume 3) and elsewhere, much of the surplus must be used for a wide array of economic and social functions, such as expanding production and securing the innumerable conditions of existence for production to occur. See Resnick and Wolff (1987) for an extensive examination of these distributions, which they call “subsumed class payments.” The vitally important authority to determine the dispersion of these payments falls under the reach of appropriative justice (see below). In contrast, distributive justice refers only to the allocation of that share of the surplus that is targeted for public and private consumption goods.

increase his subsequent need (for complicated and expensive surgery) relative to others who live more prudently? In this rather common kind of case, what normative weight should be given to his greater need when it subsequently arises? And what of the infamous “perverse incentive” problem—the danger that a needs-based system of distribution might encourage actors to cultivate needs rather than capacities so as to qualify for larger allocations?

Assessment, measurement, accountability, and incentive difficulties attend all needs-based approaches to distributive justice, not just the Marxian approach that focuses on distributions of the surplus. Each of these difficulties can be resolved in diverse ways, and choosing among them entails political (rather than strictly philosophical) judgments by any community that seeks to install needs-based distributive systems. Indeed, all societies—even the most neoliberal among them—face these difficulties routinely since all distribute at least some goods according to need. Equally important, it is imperative that we recognize that *all* principles of distributive justice (by no means just needs-based variants) face equally difficult questions. Consider, for instance, approaches that tie reward to contribution (such as neoclassical theory), which are commonly taken to be straightforward and unproblematic.<sup>12</sup> These approaches depend on the presumption that we can attribute unambiguously distinct increments of output to the efforts of distinct individuals (even when production requires an extensive and sophisticated division of labor and cooperation among many actors) so that we can then equate their income with their contribution. This exercise also depends on our choosing one among many possible accounting conventions, and this choice will affect decisively the calculation of respective contributions (and hence rewards). One of the most important conventions (that though contentious goes largely unremarked in the literature) entails an a priori decision about how to theorize the social output to which individual agents’ efforts contribute. That is, each unit of the total social output must be understood to comprise some common attribute so that qualitatively different contributions (of the nurse, the ad executive, and the athlete) can be compared (and the total product divided commensurately). The conceptual problem lies in the fact that the social output exhibits innumerable conceivable common attributes, and computing contribution requires that we endorse but one of them as normatively dominant over all others. For instance, should we conceive the total social output as representing the physical embodiment of the total labor-time required by society to produce it, as the labor theory of value suggests? In this case, rewarding

12. Virtually all neoclassical economists argue for the equation of reward with contribution on instrumental (or efficiency) grounds. Libertarians also generally advocate this pattern of distribution on intrinsic grounds.

contribution would entail a scale of compensation based on number of hours worked, full stop.<sup>13</sup> Or should we conceive social output as representing the physical embodiment of the capacity to promote human flourishing? In this case, means would have to be established to determine just how much each of society's members contributed to that goal, so that they could be compensated accordingly. And in this case, even the community's most mediocre nurse might rate far higher income than its most agile executive or professional athlete—though that determination would depend on normatively laden judgments about the value of their respective contributions. The neoclassical alternative, which is no less fraught with difficulties than these first two, is to conceive social output as the embodiment of what it calls "social welfare", with market price serving as the mechanism for imputing a specific amount of social welfare to each unit of output. Each of these alternative valuation conventions might be legitimate, but the important point to note is that each would generate a significantly different pattern of distribution.<sup>14</sup> And each entails thorny philosophical and practical problems of its own. It is therefore no particular embarrassment to needs-based distributive principles to encounter all sorts of difficulties: *all non-trivial normative principles do*. It is indeed naïve to presume that a compelling normative account of justice could emerge that was internally complete, unambiguous, and uncontroversial.

### Appropriative Justice

Notice that while proposition 2 speaks to the production of the surplus and the distribution of that share that forms the basis of private and public consumption, it says nothing at all about who should appropriate the surplus—about who should serve as its initial receivers. Recall that the surplus must be received by someone or some group if it is to become available for use by the community. What is just in this domain? Here we turn to principle 1 and its explicit excoriation of exploitation: for Marx, a class process is exploitative and thereby unjust if those who produce the surplus are excluded from the process of appropriation. This line of argument generates a concise definition of appropriative justice: those who produce the surplus should themselves appropriate it.<sup>15</sup> *Appropriate, but*

13. That is, unless we think it valid to consider work intensity and efficiency as well as duration (cf. Marx 1938), a decision that would yield a perhaps significantly different assessment of contribution and reward.

14. These matters are explored in greater detail in DeMartino (2000), which also provides an extended critique of the neoclassical approach to distribution.

15. Or they should at least participate meaningfully along with others in its appropriation (see below).

*not keep!* The final distribution of the share of the surplus allocated to private and public consumption, as we have just seen, should be based on need, not on agents' proximity to the process of surplus production or appropriation.

But why, exactly, is exploitation unjust? I noted earlier that many Marxists view exploitation as a form of social theft. This conclusion depends on a conception of property rights that some antiessentialists find problematic.<sup>16</sup> Cullenberg argues that the form of reasoning that links exploitation with theft suffers from what he calls the "general myth of property rights", which is "the belief that a property right over any productive asset automatically entails an ownership share of the residual or surplus produced in part by that property" (1998, 71). For Cullenberg, this myth derives from the deeply essentialist natural law doctrine underlying the Lockean labor theory of property. Why, asks the antiessentialist, should participation in the production of an object override all other bases for establishing proprietary claims? In a complementary vein, others argue that a property right approach to class justice depends on a notion of the preconstituted laboring subject that contradicts Marx's more adequate conception of the social constitution of human subjectivity. For instance, the Community Economies Collective argues that an antiessentialist approach encourages recognition of the way in which patterns of surplus appropriation constitute the individual and construct relations among individuals in the formation of society. In their words:

Thinking of the surplus not as property and prize but as the origin of distributive flows [offers] a new understanding of class exploitation. The trauma of exploitation is not that something is taken from you. Rather, it is that you are cut off from the conditions of social possibility that the surplus both enables and represents. Restricted to the necessary labor that sustains you, separated from the surplus that sustains the larger society, you are constituted as an "individual" bereft of a possible community and communal subjectivity. (2001, 24)

This passage reminds us that appropriation rights entail some degree of authority over allocation of the surplus across the myriad purposes to which it might be put. Appropriative justice therefore bears not just on the matter of receipt but also on the subsequent dispersal that this receipt entails. We

16. Though some do not. Working within this tradition, Burczak (1996/7, 2001) finds his claim that exploitation is unjust on Ellerman's (1992) "labor theory of property." Ellerman contests Locke's claim that labor-time can be alienated through voluntary contracting in which the right of ownership of the product is exchanged by the worker for a wage. Ellerman applies the juridical principle of imputation to maintain that a human being cannot rightfully alienate responsibility for the likely consequences of his or her actions (cf. Burczak [2001]). Doing so violates Kant's categorical imperative that people should treat each other "never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."

have already considered the distribution of that share of the surplus that is destined for consumption goods, this being the domain of distributive class justice. One of the distinguishing features of Marxian class justice is that it reaches beyond this limited (though important) domain, and highlights the normative significance of the processes by which a society allocates its social wealth across *all* uses and purposes. Authority over surplus allocation comprises decisions over investment in productive enterprises, housing, and other private institutions—something that is treated today in most societies as a right that attaches to the ownership of capital—as well as over the nature and quality of public services, and so forth. This allocation shapes the nature of society's institutions and practices, modes of political and social interaction, forms of cultural production and representation, and much more. Allocating surplus is therefore fundamental to the processes of social (and personal) construction, expression, and experimentation. To be "cut off" from this process is therefore tantamount to disenfranchisement in a most fundamental sense. It is to be denied not one's rightful *property*, but one's rightful *participation* in a process that defines one's community and even oneself. Clearly there is far more at stake here than the level of wages workers receive for their labors.

Appropriative justice, too, raises a host of thorny theoretical and normative problems. First, just who is responsible for producing the surplus? For some Marxists, those workers who apply their bodies and minds directly in the production process, transforming inputs into outputs through their immediate labor, are taken to be the *exclusive* producers of the surplus. They alone are defined as "productive". The efforts of other people are necessary for this process to occur, of course. Workers on an assembly line cannot do their jobs unless engineers maintain their machines and adjust them properly, buyers have ordered just the right materials in the right quantities, and inspectors have ensured that these materials meet the relevant standards. In a Marxian accounting scheme, this supporting cast of workers is theorized as providing the "conditions of existence" for the production of surplus, but not as producing surplus. They are designated "unproductive" to signal this analytical distinction (cf. Resnick and Wolff 1987).

This is an entirely appropriate theoretical framework and accounting scheme that is useful for many purposes, as Marx demonstrated at length. But it is by no means the only viable scheme we might imagine. We might just as well designate "productive" all those workers in an enterprise who participate in creating the conditions necessary for surplus production to occur. The latter approach has the virtue of avoiding what can seem rather arbitrary distinctions between productive and unproductive laborers working side by side under identical conditions. Which if either of these conceptualizations of productive worker (in the sense of responsibility for surplus

production) we choose may be entirely academic in some contexts, but the choice takes on tremendous normative weight in the context of allocating the right of appropriation to productive workers. Under the first approach identified here, which distinguishes between productive and unproductive workers, proposition 1 would be satisfied provided that appropriation rights are granted *only* to that subset of workers in the firm (perhaps a small minority of the work force) who directly produce the surplus. Under the second approach, which regards as productive all who contribute directly or indirectly to surplus production, proposition 1 would extend this right to all those workers in an enterprise who cooperate in the production of surplus. Nevertheless, both alternatives tie appropriation rights to one's role in the production of the surplus. I will designate this the "strong definition of appropriative justice": under this definition, appropriative rights are restricted to productive workers, however they be defined.

But matters are messier, still, since these two analytical options do not exhaust the range of possibilities when allocating responsibility for surplus production. Cullenberg (1998) reminds us that there are many workers beyond the enterprise who contribute to surplus production. There are those who serve the firm directly by providing conditions of existence on site (e.g., the independent electrician who contracts to rewire a machine), but there are also those whose efforts promote surplus production vitally though indirectly and off-site (e.g., the nurse who provides flu shots to its workers at the local HMO). A full mapping of all those in society who contribute in vital ways to society's surplus production capacity would be very extensive, indeed. Shouldn't they, too, enjoy appropriation rights?

These questions and examples demonstrate that the application of principle 1 is complex and contentious. Distinct judgments regarding responsibility for surplus production will yield distinct conclusions about appropriative justice.<sup>17</sup> The most prudent course under these circumstances might be to adhere to a somewhat vague definition of appropriative justice that allows for multiple specifications. Under what I will call a "weak definition of appropriative justice," a class arrangement would be deemed appropriatively just provided that those who directly produce the surplus (Marx's productive workers) *are not excluded* from fair and meaningful participation in its appropriation. This weak definition could be strengthened in various ways, not least by requiring strong democratic procedures among those

17. As the debate in the pages of this journal between Burczak (1998) and Cullenberg (1998) reveals. Burczak (1996/7, 1998) argues for "democratic, collectively appropriating firms" in which all the firm's workers (and only those workers) should appropriate the firm's surplus, since they are responsible for its creation. In his reply, Cullenberg (1998) argues that the logic of "responsibility" that Burczak employs would seem to require that appropriation rights be extended to all those beyond the firm who furnish the conditions necessary for surplus production.

deemed eligible for the role of appropriator (cf. Cullenberg 1992). *But it purposely leaves open the question of who besides direct surplus producers should be granted appropriation rights.* At one pole, we might conclude that only these direct producers should enjoy appropriation rights; at the other, we might follow the lead of radical institutionalist economists and conclude that insofar as the entire community is responsible for the production of social wealth (and since it is impossible in any event to ascertain the particular contributions of specific individuals or groups), the entire community ought to participate democratically in appropriation (cf. Dugger 1989; DeMartino 2000).<sup>18</sup> I will advance an egalitarian defense of this latter view below. Though these two poles demarcate a wide range of options, they nevertheless provide substantial and immediate normative bite. Even at this level of ambiguity, the principle of appropriative justice provides the basis for subjecting economic arrangements to a demanding standard of normative evaluation.

Let us pull together the main threads of the argument. I have offered a melding of the two prominent Marxian normative commitments (principles 1 and 2) into a three-part statement of class justice—one that comprises productive, appropriative, and distributive moments. Productive justice requires that contribution to surplus production be tied to ability; appropriative justice requires that the producers of the surplus not be excluded from fair and meaningful participation in its appropriation; and distributive justice requires that the share of the surplus destined for consumption be distributed according to need. From an antiessentialist perspective, none of the three is to be accorded privilege; none is to be taken as determinative; none is to be dismissed as epiphenomenal of or subordinate to either of the other two. Moreover, the two principles that yield this composite notion of class justice are to be taken as complementary and universally relevant rather than as alternative statements pertaining to distinct social contexts or historical eras.<sup>19</sup> From this perspective, finally, we have a basis for assessing existing economic arrangements and intervening in policy debates in the here and now. *Policy regimes and associated social arrangements are*

18. Resnick and Wolff (1988) explore two models of communism that differ in terms that bear directly on the matter before us. Under what they call type 1 communism, all adult members of society enjoy appropriation rights; this approach is consistent with the radical institutionalist view summarized in the text. Under type 2 communism, in contrast, all productive workers (but only productive workers) enjoy the right to appropriate the entire social surplus produced by society. In response, Cullenberg (1992) defines “shared” appropriation as an arrangement in which all members of a firm (productive and nonproductive) appropriate the surplus produced *at that site*. In normative terms, Resnick and Wolff’s type 2 communism is an example of the strong definition of appropriative justice, while their type 1 communism and Cullenberg’s shared appropriation (as well as Burczak’s “democratic firm”) are instances of the weak definition.

19. This is consistent with the antiessentialist view of social formations as constellations of multiple class processes (see below).

*just in a Marxian sense the degree to which they promote productive, appropriative, and distributive class justice.*

### Class Justice and “Capabilities Equality”

To say that we can and should apply a Marxian class justice standard for assessing policies and outcomes is not to say that we should apply *only* this standard. Many important and normatively compelling aspects of society are not adequately addressed in this standard; others are ignored entirely. Antiessentialism warns us against treating class injustice as more salient than other forms of injustice, or treating other forms of injustice as the necessary effects of class injustice. Within this framework, there is simply no warrant to elevate this normative standard above all others in our social evaluations. Marxists are entitled to (and indeed should) interject class justice into normative assessment, but they should be prepared to embrace other normative standards (such as those that relate to environmental stewardship, gender and racial equality, and so forth) that speak to other aspects of social life. Insisting on the primacy of Marxian normative principles over these others would be to recommit to the reductionist error that antiessentialist Marxism rightly rejects.

One way to avoid this error is to articulate Marxian justice within the far broader principle of equality of capabilities proposed by Amartya Sen that I mentioned at the outset. This framework judges a society to be just in the degree to which it affords its members “equal capability to achieve functionings.”<sup>20</sup> “Functionings” refers to the multiple and distinct states or conditions that people have reason to value. These range from the fairly basic (such as the functioning of being well nourished and sheltered, or avoiding preventable morbidity and premature mortality) to more complex states (such as possessing political efficacy or “appearing in public without shame”). In contrast, a person’s “capabilities” refers to the full set of functionings that she can achieve given her personal attributes and command over resources, the physical climate where she lives, the institutional arrangements of her society, and so forth. A more extensive, denser capabilities set implies a greater degree of substantive freedom. The principle of capabilities equality therefore entails an extraordinarily radical claim that people ought to have *equal substantive freedom* to achieve the functionings that they value. This principle requires that those with greatest need be provided the greatest share of resources, so that they can approach the achievement possibilities of those more fortunate. Contra welfarism,

20. Sen (1992) provides a fairly recent, comprehensive introduction to the capabilities approach.

this approach requires interpersonal comparisons and advocates the equalization (to the degree possible) of agents' respective opportunity sets. As Sen acknowledges, this principle is deeply and explicitly indebted to Marx. This principle can easily encompass the matter of surplus, but its view of distribution (and distributive justice) reaches beyond surplus to account for other kinds of distribution (both material and nonmaterial) that occur in all societies.

Sen is largely concerned with distributive justice, and the capabilities approach tackles only this issue explicitly. But the obligations that this principle places on the community to care for its members combined with its emphasis on equality of substantive freedom make space for productive and appropriative justice as well.<sup>21</sup> This elaboration is hardly contrived: after all, each of the three aspects of class bears directly and consequentially on the substantive freedoms of society's members (as I have argued above). Against this standard, then, a society in which a privileged elite enjoys exclusive appropriation rights over the surplus produced (largely or entirely) by others would be viewed as unjust since it is marked by capabilities inequality in this class functioning.

It bears emphasis that capabilities equality requires that *all* members of society enjoy *equal* efficacy: that they have equal substantive ability to participate meaningfully in all vital decisions that affect the community. A Marxian elaboration would include among these decisions those that pertain to class: to how the social surplus is to be produced, appropriated, and distributed. This elaboration enriches the capabilities approach, to be sure. But articulating class with capabilities equality also reverberates back upon the Marxian conception of class justice. Not least, the pursuit of the radical equality entailed in the capabilities approach directs us toward an expansive interpretation of the *weak* definition of appropriative justice, since the strong definition would introduce inequality in substantive freedom across individuals based on the fairly arbitrary matter of their proximity to the process of surplus production. Normatively speaking, the capabilities equality standard leads us to break the connection between appropriation and production entirely and, in its place, demand equal appropriation rights for all agents irrespective of their proximity to the processes and sites of surplus production.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, capabilities equality requires not just formal

21. Sen purposely refrains from enumerating what are valued functionings, taking the view that this is a matter that each community can and must decide for itself. Other proponents of the capabilities approach have attempted to fashion a universal set of valuable functionings, however. The most notable of these is Nussbaum (1992). For an antimodernist critique of this approach, see Charusheela (2001).

22. Or, if one prefers, one can retain the link between surplus production and appropriation and remain faithful to capabilities equality by accepting the institutionalist notion (introduced above) that since all of society is ultimately responsible for the surplus, all of its members ought to enjoy appropriation rights.

participation rights but meaningful democratic decisionmaking over surplus production, appropriation, and distribution. It directs us to look beyond strictly juridical definitions of rights to unearth de facto patterns of authority over class matters.<sup>23</sup>

While inviting the inclusion of class justice, this capabilities principle speaks to a diverse range of aspects of social life and personal concerns beyond class. Its complex approach to justice refuses to privilege a priori any subset of these aspects over others in devising just policies and institutions (though a community pursuing capabilities equality would be forced to make such political judgments since equality in any one area might induce inequality in some other). It is purposely open-ended and flexible, to allow for multiple specifications of what are valued functionings, how competing functionings should be ranked, and what kinds of social institutions and other arrangements might be appropriate to enhance and equalize capabilities. It is at once deeply partisan (it provides a sure footing to indict all sorts of inequalities that emerge as salient) and entirely consistent with antiessentialist precepts.<sup>24</sup> In short, capabilities equality can serve as an appropriate and powerful vessel within which to embed Marxian justice claims in order to assess social arrangements and to devise progressive alternatives.

### Articulating Alternative Normative Principles

I argued above that the inherent richness of human existence and social life warrants a complex account of justice, and I have offered capabilities equality as a viable principle that can include but necessarily reaches beyond class. But even a nuanced, complex account of justice is by itself an inadequate normative standard of social assessment. People may have good reason to value things other than justice, and these things may not always be entirely compatible with whatever account of justice we embrace (cf. Sen 1992). And people might very well be able to produce reasonable, coherent normative claims in support of these other aspirations—indeed,

23. The articulation of class justice with the capabilities approach points us toward two distinct domains in reaching normative judgments about class matters: *processes* and *outcomes*. The former relates to authority and effective decisionmaking (e.g., who participates meaningfully in decisions concerning the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus), while the latter refers to the ultimate results of this decisionmaking. Justice in these two domains might very well conflict: just appropriative processes might yield unjust distributive patterns, while unjust distributive patterns might undermine equal effective participation and thereby undermine just appropriative processes. An approach that recognizes but one of these two domains is apt to miss this complexity, and to validate as just arrangements marked by even egregious inequality.

24. These features make it particularly valuable for negotiating the normatively difficult terrain of cross-cultural assessment (DeMartino 2000). But see Charusheela's critique (2001).

normative conflict and controversy are ineradicable features of a vibrant social life. From the antiessentialist perspective, it would be wrong-headed and indeed dogmatic to subordinate all alternative commitments to the demands of justice once and for all—to trump all such alternative normative claims with the justice card. Social arrangements that are singly and fully faithful to any justice standard are likely to be rather unlivable in all sorts of important ways. Far better to anticipate and even welcome the need to negotiate among competing normative principles, and to understand the fashioning of normative commitments as an endless process of articulation rather than a contest among unchanging and unyielding normative truths.

There is political justification for this normative open-mindedness as well. Marxists these days have a lot to answer for, especially as concerns the social atrocities carried out in the name of Marx over much of the past century. Not all these atrocities were committed for venal reasons—surely at least some arose from the honest pursuit of social and theoretical purity; from a rigid fidelity to a compelling but inflexible conception of class emancipation. The antiessentialist approach seeks to displace this dogmatism within Marxism by maintaining a commitment to the concept of class and class analysis while refusing the temptation to invoke class as an explanatory essence. In the normative domain, this same attitude warrants the coupling of an unapologetic concern for class justice with a refusal to demote all other justice claims or other normative concerns not reducible to justice. This attitude may be vital to the task of rescuing the legitimacy of class in normative debate.

### Antiessentialist Marxism and “Thin” Socialism

For many Marxists throughout the twentieth century, the achievement of some form of socialism or communism served as the ultimate goal of theoretical and political work. These social arrangements were viewed as necessary to eliminate class injustice (variously defined), of course. But because of the causal significance attributed to class in much Marxian analysis, the eradication of class injustice was also taken to be necessary and even (more or less) sufficient to achieve justice in all other domains (such as racial and gender relations, and so forth). If it could be shown that actually existing socialist societies were marred by various forms of injustice, the imperative was to show how those societies had not yet fully matured—that they were in transition to true socialism—or that they had been irreparably corrupted and had forfeited any claim to legitimacy.

Antiessentialist Marxism rejects this view. For instance, Cullenberg (1992) offers what he calls a “thin” definition of socialism. A society is socialist, in this account, provided only that it secures what he calls collective

appropriation of the surplus (where a version of what I have called the weak definition of appropriative justice holds). A society's class processes overdetermine its other myriad features (its political system and distribution of power, its rights and freedoms, the level of human flourishing it affords, its ecological practices, etc.), but they do not dictate the nature or character of those features. In this account, class is but one isolated aspect of a social formation—not without effect, of course, but hardly uniquely efficacious, either. Class no more serves as a driving essence of social affairs or human history than any other aspect of society. Any particular class arrangement can therefore coexist with a wide range of other social arrangements. Just as it is possible to imagine a “benevolent capitalism,” so is it possible to imagine a “hideous communism” (1992, 70; see also Resnick and Wolff forthcoming, chap. 2).<sup>25</sup>

This approach to class formations has an important implication for the present argument. It suggests that the identification of a social formation as even truly “communist” or “socialist” provides a deeply insufficient normative basis for evaluating that society. Though it may be free of exploitation, for instance, it might be deeply indictable in obvious and subtle ways. This insight strengthens the case for nesting class within a broader, complex account of justice, and articulating this complex account with other, worthy normative principles. It suggests that all societies must be evaluated critically and equally against both the class and nonclass normative criteria we embrace. And it suggests that the political goal of Marxists ought not be to construct something called “socialism” or “communism” per se, and to assume that this social formation will solve all other social problems, but to achieve social arrangements that entail class and nonclass justice and other, worthy normative objectives. It suggests that Marxists will encounter all sorts of conflicts between these class and nonclass normative objectives, and that under some circumstances class concerns might have to give way in the name of creating a livable and normatively defensible society. All these are discomfiting thoughts, especially to those who seek in normative theory clear and unambiguous guidance for action. But from an anti-essentialist perspective, normative ambiguity is an inescapable component of a rich, personal, political and civic life. It is entirely desirable, not least since it saves us from somnambulism that leaves us intoning normative slogans that give comfort but little practical guidance in contesting unjust social arrangements.

25. Ruccio (1998) captures the antiessentialist impulse well in his discussion of possibilities for future *socialisms* that might come into view, once we break with a narrow, restrictive, unified conception that typically reduces socialism to a specific set of property relations and planning regimes. See also the other articles in the special issue of *Rethinking Marxism* 5 (2), on “Marxism after Communism” (Summer 1992).

## Class Justice and Global Neoliberalism

How might we apply class justice concretely in contemporary social assessment and policy dispute? One implication of antiessentialist Marxian analysis is that normative assessment at the level of social formations is at best incomplete, since social formations comprise diverse class processes. Care must be taken not to pass judgment on a formation *in toto* based on conceptions that essentialize but one of its constituent class processes—perhaps its most visible, celebrated, or notorious.

That said, we can certainly subject those political projects that seek to achieve particular class objectives to normative scrutiny. For the sake of brevity, I will ignore all sorts of complicating factors, such as the (likely though) unintended consequences that a policy regime might be expected to induce, the viability of the class arrangements sought, and so forth. I will take as my example the case with which we began—the controversy over global neoliberalism. This project seeks to install a sharpened, purified capitalism in place of any and all alternative class arrangements. I think we should have no difficulty indicting the political project to secure this regime on the basis of the class justice standard. To demonstrate the power and reach of this standard, let us assume for the moment that all the claims made on behalf of this regime by its proponents were likely to be realized. Even under these most favorable circumstances, this form of capitalism would exacerbate class injustice in all its dimensions. Neoclassical proponents of neoliberalism do not and indeed cannot claim otherwise, because neoclassical theory does not recognize the concept of class. But the claims it does make on behalf of neoliberalism give credence to this Marxian indictment.

Consider first the matter of appropriation. Neoclassical theory claims that under neoliberalism the free mobility of capital within and across national borders facilitates productive efficiency, in part by allowing the substitution of “cheap” for “expensive” laborers. In Marxian terms, this substitution entails the displacement of workers with a relatively high value of labor power by those with a lower value of labor power, thereby increasing the rate of surplus value (by increasing the unpaid portion of the workday). Neoliberalism also (intentionally) reduces the political and economic power of labor organizations, which reduces workers’ control over the labor process, wages, and other working conditions. Next, rather than extend the right to appropriate society’s wealth to all those who produce it, neoliberalism restricts the exclusive right of appropriation to the representatives of the owners of capital. It does this in part by forcing the privatization of state-owned enterprises, so that capitalists rather than the state receive the surplus generated within the firm. And by reducing corporate taxation, regulation, and state expenditures, it also seeks to deepen the effective

control that these appropriators enjoy over the allocation of the surplus. In Marxian terms, then, neoliberalism exacerbates appropriate injustice by increasing the rate of exploitation while simultaneously reducing all forms of effective public control over surplus appropriation and allocation.

In distributive terms, neoliberalism fares equally poorly. Neoclassical theory cannot and does not claim that neoliberalism ties distribution to need—not least, since all agents are taken to have infinite desires and since it permits no criterion for assessing and comparing these desires interpersonally. Moreover, while it claims that neoliberalism affords each individual the right to choose freely among the elements of the opportunity set available to her, it expressly does not claim that it affords all individuals equal opportunity sets. As such, it violates distributive justice in class terms and in capabilities terms more broadly.

Regarding productive justice, things are a bit more complicated. As discussed above, neoclassical theory claims that one of the virtues of neoliberalism is that it induces those with greatest capacities to make the greatest contribution to social welfare. But as we have seen, its definition of social welfare is derived from subjective private judgments of individual actors and is inferred strictly from market prices. This differs markedly from the social good as Marxists define it. In evaluating the performance of neoliberalism in terms of productive justice, then, Marxists must emphasize the different manner in which Marxism theorizes the social good, and press the case for the superiority of this normative accounting over that of neoclassical theory. Marxists are aided in making this claim by the fact that so many non-Marxian economists (see above), political theorists (e.g. Sagoff 1988; Anderson 1990), and others have already subjected welfarism to rather rigorous critique.

### Conclusion: Desiring and Realizing Class Justice

It is not difficult to infer from Marx's own work or from the broader Marxian tradition a conception of class justice. In this paper I have attempted to do just that, and have advanced a complex approach to class justice that comprises three moments. Nor is it difficult to bring this conception of class justice to bear within contemporary policy controversies, such as the debate over global neoliberalism.<sup>26</sup> But there is a far more difficult task awaiting those who would advance any sort of Marxian justice claim. This is to argue persuasively that class justice is a *legitimate* and *compelling* standard for evaluating policy regimes.

26. Though a satisfactory normative adjudication of this or any other policy debate would require far more careful attention than I've been able to give it here.

Typically, those concerned about justice do not need to be convinced of the salience of income, or wealth, or freedom (be it formal or substantive), or the other focal variables that appear in the literature on justice. Each of these registers in our minds an immediate set of connotations. Egregious inequality in income or wealth obviously exacerbates all sorts of other inequalities that matter, such as in housing and nutrition and health and political efficacy. Inequality of freedom is generally taken to be illegitimate intrinsically, on deontological grounds, separate from any particular consequences that it might yield. Those who couch their justice claims in these spaces can therefore concentrate their attention on getting their arguments right; they need not concern themselves overly with the challenge of convincing others that distribution in these spaces matters.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of those who advocate class justice. The Marxian concepts of surplus and class do not predominate in any of the social sciences today, least of all economics; neither are they recognized as legitimate, relevant, or scientific categories by those who produce official statistics or by those who make policy. Asking the question "How has the rate of exploitation in the United States been affected by the North American Free Trade Agreement?" would strike most social scientists and normative theorists as irrelevant, if not entirely nonsensical.

The suppression of class poses two challenges for Marxian normative theorists. The first, shared by all Marxian social theorists, is to find ways to persuade others that class is indeed a relevant and vital concept of social analysis. This requires demonstrating that an analysis informed by class yields important insights into social arrangements and historical developments that are otherwise missed. As difficult as this is, the second challenge is perhaps more daunting: it is to convince others that the concept of class *justice* is salient—that we should care enough about it to incorporate it into normative claims, and that it is indeed legitimate to do so. But this means that class (in)equality must be made to resonate in the same way that income, wealth, or freedom (in)equality resonates. Part of this task is conceptual and requires showing that class inequality matters concretely, just as income inequality matters, and/or that it is intrinsically illicit, in the way that inequality of freedom is often taken to be illicit. A related part is more emotive. As Gibson-Graham (2003) and the Community Economies Collective (2001) argue, it entails cultivating a strongly felt desire for class justice—not least, among Marxists.

Cultivating a desire for class justice might require arguing persuasively that it is indeed achievable—not just in some deferred future Utopia, but achievable (incrementally) right here, right now. And one vital step in this argument might entail a demonstration that alternative class arrangements, which entail varying degrees of class justice, are already instantiated among us. Fortunately, this work—which may indeed prove to be the most important

and lasting contribution of antiessentialist Marxism—is now well under way. Gabriel (1990), Fraad, Wolff, and Resnick (1994), Gibson-Graham (1996), Kayatekin (1996/7), Arvidson (2000), Levin (1998), the Community Economies Collective (2001) and many others have begun to map the existence of multiple, coexisting class arrangements—in previous historical eras (Saitta 2001), but also surviving and even thriving today in the heart of what we have typically viewed as a thoroughly and unambiguously capitalist U.S. economy. This work demonstrates that class occurs not just in the capitalist enterprise but also in all sorts of sites where we have been reluctant to look for it. And it demonstrates that participation in various *non-capitalist* class processes is the norm, even for most Americans who believe they inhabit the most thoroughly capitalist society in the history of human civilization. Some people participate in noncapitalist class processes in the workplace, such as those who work for collectives, for themselves, or in partnerships where they produce, appropriate, and distribute their own surplus. Many more participate in noncapitalist class processes in the household, where surplus labor is produced, appropriated, and distributed among household members under diverse class arrangements (ranging from feudal to communal; see Fraad, Wolff, and Resnick 1994). Others engage in noncapitalist class processes in various community institutions (such as church-affiliated and secular voluntary organizations and sports leagues) or in a range of practices that occur outside any formal institution whatsoever (such as when people perform labor for their neighbors or friends). For many, these are the sites and relationships in which they spend a good bit of the time that is by far most valuable to them. In many of these sites and relationships, compensated and uncompensated labor is performed under communal arrangements and, in many, the appropriation and distribution of the surplus are determined collectively (and, often, democratically). Indeed, drawing on recent feminist scholarship that charts the diversity of class processes in the household and beyond, the Community Economies Collective estimates that the majority of economic activity in the United States today entails *noncapitalist* class processes. The claim yielded by antiessentialist Marxism is strange but riveting: in all sorts of sites class happens—surplus is produced, appropriated, and distributed—and in many of these, class arrangements exhibit one or more features of class justice.

What are we to make of these noncapitalist class processes? Judging by the relative silences in much Marxian scholarship (particularly political economy), the consensus seems to be that they are relatively insignificant. They are residual practices that fill the interstices not (yet?) filled by capital; they are dominated by (or otherwise infused with) capitalism in some sort of functionalist articulation (such as ensuring social reproduction of the working class or the reserve army of the unemployed); and so forth (Gibson-Graham 1996). But the antiessentialist approach views these

practices and the sites where they occur differently—refusing the power and status of capital, it treats these representatives of noncapitalism as equally vital, significant, and constitutive of human subjectivity and society. And it suggests the possibility of opening up these noncapitalist practices to normative assessment, in part to show that perhaps we are already discovering ways to achieve class justice, even in the heart of this preeminently capitalist society.

Cultivating a desire for class justice, then, might be a bit simpler than it appeared a moment ago. It might require making visible what is largely suppressed in hegemonic discourses that refuse the legitimacy of class—and even in Marxian discourses that ignore the prevalence of class diversity in contemporary society—so that people can recognize that they already experience class justice.<sup>27</sup> Not in all their workplaces (though there are many exceptions), perhaps, but in virtually all their civic organizations and churches and families and neighborhoods. And it may require demonstrating that class justice can be affirming, empowering, compassionate, nurturing and indeed enjoyable when compared to the class injustice that obtains in other aspects of their lives. Such a demonstration might go some way toward restoring the normative force of Marxian theory while strengthening local and global movements for economic justice.

### *Acknowledgements*

*The author would like to thank the participants at the 2001 summer retreat of the Association for Economic and Social Analysis and the 2001 annual meeting of the Union for Radical Political Economics for their helpful reactions to this paper. Special thanks are due John Roche and Blair Sandler, each of whom provided extensive, careful comments on an earlier draft.*

27. Class diversity also complicates our social assessment, however. With surplus production occurring under multiple arrangements and in innumerable sites, we face difficult judgments regarding each moment of class justice. For instance, need there be mechanisms to reallocate the surplus produced within households (and not just firms) in order to satisfy the demands of distributive justice? And how do we equalize appropriation rights across societies' members in the context of such heterogeneous economic activity? The antiessentialist approach advanced here confronts these difficulties with a pragmatic attitude that seeks the good rather than the perfect. Moreover, and as discussed above, it also accepts the equal legitimacy of alternative normative principles (personal autonomy, privacy, etc.) that will surely have something to say about the kinds of social arrangements that are warranted in pursuit of class justice. But it does not turn away from class justice merely on the grounds that it is only imperfectly achievable. It recognizes that class justice is no different from other important aspirations—like emancipation, democracy, equality, and sustainability. None can be achieved in full, but that hardly diminishes their value as inspiration for political struggle.

## References

- Anderson, E. 1990. The ethical limitations of the market. *Economics and Philosophy* 6 (2): 179-205.
- Arvidson, E. 2000. Los Angeles: A postmodern class mapping. In *Class and its others*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, S. A. Resnick, and R. D. Wolff. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Burczak, T. 1996/7. Socialism after Hayek. *Rethinking Marxism* 9 (3): 1-18.
- . 1998. Appropriation, responsibility, and agreement. *Rethinking Marxism* 10 (2): 96-105.
- . 2001. Ellerman's labor theory of property and the injustice of capitalist exploitation. *Review of Social Economy* 59 (2): 161-83.
- Charusheela, S. 2001. The promise and limits of Martha Nussbaum's universalist ethics. Unpublished manuscript.
- Community Economics Collective. 2001. Imagining and enacting noncapitalist futures. *Socialist Review* 28 (3 + 4): 93-135.
- Cullenberg, S. 1992. Socialism's burden: Toward a "thin" definition of socialism. *Rethinking Marxism* 5 (2): 64-83.
- . 1998. Exploitation, appropriation, and exclusion. *Rethinking Marxism* 10 (2): 66-75.
- DeMartino, G. 1992. Modern macroeconomic theories of cycles and crisis: A methodological critique. Ph.D. diss.
- . 1993. The necessity/contingency dualism in Marxian crisis theory: The case of long wave theory. *Review of Radical Political Economics* 25 (3): 68-74.
- . 2000. *Global economy, global justice: Theoretical objections and policy alternatives to neoliberalism*. London: Routledge.
- Dugger, W. 1989. Radical institutionalism: Basic concepts. In *Radical institutionalism*, ed. W. Dugger. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Ellerman, D. 1992. *Property and contract in economics*. Cambridge Mass.: Blackwell.
- Fraad, H., S. Resnick, and R. Wolff. 1994. *Bringing it all back home: Class, gender and power in the modern household*. London: Pluto Press.
- Gabriel, S. 1990. Ancients: A Marxian theory of self-exploitation. *Rethinking Marxism* 3 (1): 85-106.
- Geras, N. 1985. The controversy about Marx and justice. *New Left Review*, no. 150 (March/April): 47-85.
- . 1992. Bringing Marx to justice: An addendum and rejoinder. *New Left Review*, no. 195 (September/October): 37-69.
- Gibson-Graham, J. K. 1996. *The end of capitalism (as we knew it): A feminist critique of political economy*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- . 2003. An ethics of the local. *Rethinking Marxism* 15 (1).
- Kayatekin, S. 1996/7. Sharecropping and class: A preliminary analysis. *Rethinking Marxism* 9 (1): 28-57.
- Levin, K. 1998. Communal production in high-tech firms: A theory of hybrid class structures. Unpublished manuscript.
- Lukes, S. 1987. *Marxism and morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Marx, K. 1938. *Critique of the Goth program*. New York: International Publishers.
- . 1977. *Capital*, Vol. 1. New York: Vintage Books.
- Norton, B. 1986. Steindl, Levine, and the inner logic of accumulation: A Marxian critique. *Social Concept* 3 (2): 43-66.

- Nussbaum, M. 1992. Human functioning and social justice: In defense of Aristotelian essentialism. *Political Theory* 20 (2): 202-46.
- Rawls, J. 1971. *A theory of justice*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- . 1996. *Political liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Resnick, S. A., and R. D. Wolff. 1987. *Knowledge and class: A Marxian critique of political economy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1988. Communism: Between class and classless. *Rethinking Marxism* 1 (1): 14-42.
- . Forthcoming. *Class theory and history: Capitalism and communism in the USSR*. New York: Routledge.
- Ruccio, D. 1998. Failure of socialism, future of socialists? *Rethinking Marxism* 5 (2): 7-22.
- Sagoff, M. 1988. *The economy of the earth*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Saitta, D. 2001. Communal class processes and Pre-Columbian social dynamics. In *Re/Presenting class: Essays in postmodern political economy*, ed. J. K. Gibson-Graham, S. A. Resnick, and R. D. Wolff. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Sandler, B. 1994. Grow or die: Marxist theories of capitalism and the environment. *Rethinking Marxism* 7 (2): 38-57.
- Sen, A. K. 1987. *On ethics and economics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- . 1992. *Inequality reexamined*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Walzer, M. 1983. *Spheres of justice*. New York: Basic Books.