

Karl Marx: Communist as Religious Eschatologist

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Marx as Millennial Communist

The key to the intricate and massive system of thought created by Karl Marx is at bottom a simple one: *Karl Marx was a communist*. A seemingly trite and banal statement set alongside Marxism's myriad of jargon-ridden concepts in philosophy, economics, and culture, yet Marx's devotion to communism was his crucial focus, far more central than the class struggle, the dialectic, the theory of surplus value, and all the rest. Communism was the great goal, the vision, the desideratum, the ultimate end that would make the sufferings of mankind throughout history worthwhile. History is the history of suffering, of class struggle, of the exploitation of man by man. In the same way as the return of the Messiah, in Christian theology, will put an end to history and establish a new heaven and a new earth, so the establishment of communism would put an end to human history. And just as for post-millennial Christians, man, led by God's prophets and saints, will establish a Kingdom of God on Earth (for *pre*-millennials, Jesus will have many human assistants in setting up such a kingdom), so, for Marx and other schools of communists, mankind, led by a vanguard of secular saints, will establish a secularized Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

In messianic religious movements, the millennium is invariably established by a mighty, violent upheaval, an Armageddon, a great apocalyptic war between good and evil. After this titanic conflict, a millennium, a new age, of peace and harmony, of the reign of justice, will be installed upon the earth.

Marx emphatically rejected those utopian socialists who sought to arrive at communism through a gradual and evolutionary process, through a steady advancement of the good. Instead, Marx harked back to the apocalyptic, the post-millennial coercive German and

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Dutch Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, to the millennial sects during the English Civil War, and to the various groups of pre-millennial Christians who foresaw a bloody Armageddon at the last days, before the millennium could be established. Indeed, since the apocalyptic post-mils refused to wait for a gradual goodness and sainthood to permeate mankind, they joined the pre-mils in believing that only a violent apocalyptic final struggle between good and evil, between saints and sinners, could usher in the millennium. Violent, worldwide revolution, in Marx's version, to be made by the oppressed proletariat, would be the inevitable instrument for the advent of his millennium, communism.

In fact, Marx, like the pre-mils (or "millenarians"), went further to hold that the reign of evil on earth would reach a peak just before the apocalypse ("the darkness before the dawn"). For Marx as for the millenarians, writes Ernest Tuveson,

The evil of the world must proceed to its height before, in one great complete root-and-branch upheaval, it would be swept away ...

Millenarian pessimism about the perfectibility of the existing world is crossed by a supreme optimism. History, the millenarian believes, so operates that, when evil has reached its height, the hopeless situation will be reversed. The original, the true harmonious state of society, in some kind of egalitarian order, will be re-established.¹

In contrast to the various groups of utopian socialists, and in common with religious messianists, Karl Marx did not sketch the features of his future communism in any detail. It was not for Marx, for example, to spell out the number of people in his utopia, the shape and location of their houses, the pattern of their cities. In the first place, there is a quintessentially crackpotty air to utopias that are mapped by their creators in precise detail. But of equal importance, spelling out the details of one's ideal society removes the crucial element of awe and mystery from the allegedly inevitable world of the future.

But certain features are broadly alike in all visions of communism. Private property is eliminated, individualism goes by the board,

¹Ernest L. Tuveson, "The Millenarian Structure of 'The Communist Manifesto,'" in C. Patrides and J. Wittreich, eds., *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 326-27. Tuveson speculates that Marx and Engels may have been influenced by the outburst of millenarianism in England during the 1840s. On this phenomenon, particularly the flareup in England and the U.S. of the Millerites, who predicted the end of the world on October 22, 1844, see the classic work on modern millenarianism, Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). See Tuveson, "Millenarian Structure," p. 340 n. 5.

individuality is flattened, all property is owned and controlled communally, and the individual units of the new collective organism are in some way made "equal" to one another.

Marxists and scholars of Marxism have tended to overlook the centrality of communism to the entire Marxian system.² In the "official" Marxism of the 1930s and 1940s, communism was slighted in favor of an allegedly "scientific" stress on the labor theory of value, the class struggle, or the materialist interpretation of history, and the Soviet Union, even before Gorbachev, grappling with the practical problems of socialism, treated the goal of communism as more of an embarrassment than anything else.³ Similarly, Stalinists such as Louis Althusser dismissed the pre-1848 Marx's stress on "humanism," philosophy, and "alienation," as unscientific and pre-Marxist. On the other hand, in the 1960s it became fashionable for new left Marxists such as Herbert Marcuse to dismiss the later "scientific economist" Marx as a rationalistic prelude to despotism and a betrayal of the earlier Marx's stress on humanism and human "freedom." In contrast, I hold with the growing consensus in Marxist studies⁴ that, at least since 1844 and possibly earlier, there was only *one* Marx, that Marx the "humanist" established the goal that he would seek for the remainder of his life: the apocalyptic triumph of revolutionary communism. In this view, Marx's exploration later into the economics of capitalism was merely a quest for the mechanism, the "law of history," that allegedly makes such a triumph inevitable.

But in that case, it becomes vital to investigate the nature of this allegedly humanistic goal of communism, what the meaning of this the "freedom" might be, and whether or not the grisly record of Marxist-Leninist regimes in the twentieth century was implicit in the basic Marxian conception of freedom.

Marxism is a religious creed. This statement has been common among critics of Marx, and since Marxism is an explicit enemy of religion, such a seeming paradox would offend many Marxists,

²Thus, in the highly touted work of Thomas Sowell, *Marxism: The Philosophy and Economics* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1986), there is scarcely any consideration whatsoever paid to communism.

³The official Soviet textbook on Marxism treated its own proclaimed goal with brusque dismissal, insisting that all Soviets must work hard and not skip any "stages" on the long road to communism. "The CPSU [the Communist Party of the Soviet Union], being a party of scientific communism, advances and solves the problem of communist construction as the material and spiritual prerequisites for them to become ready and mature, being guided by the fact that necessary stages of development must not be skipped over ..." *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*, 2nd rev. ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), p. 662. Also see *ibid.*, pp. 645-46, 666-67, and 674-75.

⁴Thus, see the illuminating work of Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (1970, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

since it clearly challenged the allegedly hard-headed scientific materialism on which Marxism rested. In the present day, oddly enough, an age of liberation theology and other flirtations between Marxism and the Church, Marxists themselves are often quick to make this same proclamation. Certainly, one obvious way in which Marxism functions as a “religion” is the lengths to which Marxists will go to preserve their system against obvious errors or fallacies. Thus, when Marxian predictions fail, even though they are allegedly derived from scientific laws of history, Marxists go to great lengths to *change* the terms of the original prediction. A notorious example is Marx’s law of the impoverishment of the working class under capitalism. When it became all too clear that the standard of living of the workers under industrial capitalism was rising instead of falling, Marxists fell back on the view that what Marx “really” meant by impoverishment was not immiseration but *relative* deprivation. One of the problems with this fallback defense is that impoverishment is supposed to be the motor of the proletarian revolution, and it is difficult to envision the workers resorting to bloody revolution because they only enjoy one yacht apiece while capitalists enjoy five or six. Another notorious example was the response of many Marxists to Böhm-Bawerk’s conclusive demonstration that the labor theory of value could not account for the pricing of goods under capitalism. Again, the fallback response was that what Marx “really meant”⁵ was not to explain market pricing at all, but merely to assert that labor hours embed some sort of mystically inherent “values” into goods that are, however, irrelevant to the workings of the capitalist market. If this were true, then it is difficult to see why Marx labored for a great part of his life in an unsuccessful attempt to complete *Capital* and to solve the value-price problem.

Perhaps the most appropriate commentary on the frantic defenders of Marx’s value theory is that of the ever witty and delightful Alexander Gray, who also touches on another aspect of Marx as religious prophet:

To witness Böhm-Bawerk or Mr. [H. W. B.] Joseph carving up Marx is but a pedestrian pleasure; for these are but pedestrian writers, who are so pedestrian as to clutch at the plain meaning of words, not realising that what Marx really meant has no necessary connection with what Marx undeniably said. To witness Marx surrounded by his friends is, however, a joy of an entirely different order. For it is fairly clear that none of them really knows what Marx really meant; they

⁵*What Marx Really Meant* was the title of a sympathetic work on Marxism by G. D. H. Cole (London, 1934).

are even in considerable doubt as to what he was talking about; there are hints that Marx himself did not know what he was doing. In particular, there is no one to tell us what Marx thought he meant by "value." *Capital* is, in one sense, a three-volume treatise, expounding a theory of value and its manifold applications. Yet Marx never condescends to say what he means by "value," which accordingly is what anyone cares to make it as he follows the unfolding scroll from 1867 to 1894. ... Are we concerned with *Wissenschaft*, slogans, myths, or incantations? Marx, it has been said, was a prophet ... and perhaps this suggestion provides the best approach. One does not apply to Jeremiah or Ezekiel the tests to which less inspired men are subjected. Perhaps the mistake the world and most of the critics have made is just that they have not sufficiently regarded Marx as a prophet—a man above logic, uttering cryptic and incomprehensible words, which every man may interpret as he chooses.⁶

Reabsorption Theology

But the nature of Marxism-as-religion cuts deeper than the follies and evasions of Marxists⁷ or the cryptic and often unintelligible nature of Marxian writings. For it is the contention of this article that the crucial goal—communism—is an atheized version of a certain type of religious eschatology; that the alleged inevitable process of getting there—the dialectic—is an atheistic form of the same religious laws of history; and that the supposedly central problem of capitalism as perceived by "humanist" Marxists, the problem of "alienation," is an atheistic version of the selfsame religion's metaphysical grievance at the entire created universe.

As far as I know, there is no commonly-agreed upon name to designate this fatefully influential religion. One name is "process theology," but I shall rather call it "reabsorption theology," for the word "reabsorption" highlights the allegedly inevitable end-point of human history as well as its supposed starting point in a pre-creation union with God.

As Leszek Kolakowski points out in his monumental work on Marxism, reabsorption theology begins with the third-century Greek philosopher Plotinus, and moves from Plotinus to some of the Christian Platonists, where it takes its place as a Christian heresy. That heresy tends to bubble up repeatedly from beneath

⁶Alexander Gray, *The Socialist Tradition* (London: Longmans Green, 1946), pp. 321-22.

⁷Another example of what may be termed "religious" behavior by Marxists is the insistence of thinkers who have clearly abandoned almost all the essential tenets of Marxism on calling themselves by the magical name "Marxist." A recent case in point is the British "analytical Marxists," such as John Roemer and Jon Elster. For a critique of this school by an orthodox Marxist, see Michael A. Lebowitz, "Is 'Analytical Marxism' Marxism?" *Science and Society* 52 (Summer 1988): 191-214.

the surface in the works of such Christian mystics as the nineteenth-century philosopher John Scotus Erigena and the fourteenth-century Meister Johannes Eckhart.⁸

The nature and profound implications of reabsorption theology may best be grasped by contrasting this heresy to Christian orthodoxy. We begin at the beginning—with *creatology*, the science or discipline of the first days. Why did God create the universe? The orthodox Christian answer is that God created the universe out of a benevolent and overflowing love for his creatures. Creation was therefore good and wondrous; the fly in the ointment was introduced by man's disobedience to God's laws, for which sin he was cast out of Eden. Out of this Fall he can be redeemed by the Incarnation of God-in-human flesh and the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. Note that the Fall was a moral one, and that Creation itself remains metaphysically good. Note, too, that in orthodox Christianity, each human individual, made in the image of God, is of supreme importance, and each individual's salvation becomes of critical concern.

Reabsorption theology, however, originates in a very different creatology. One of its crucial tenets is that, *before* Creation, man—obviously the collective-species man and not each individual—existed in happy union, in some sort of mighty cosmic blob, united with God and even with Nature. In the Christian view, God, unlike man, is perfect, and therefore does not, like man, perform actions in order to improve his lot. But for the reabsorptionists, God acts analogously with humans: God acts out of what Mises called "felt uneasiness," out of dissatisfaction with his current lot. God, in other words, creates the universe out of loneliness, dissatisfaction, or, generally, in order to develop his undeveloped faculties. God creates the universe out of felt need.

In the reabsorptionist view, Creation, instead of being wondrous and good, is essentially and metaphysically evil. For it generates diversity, individuality, and separateness, and thereby cuts off man from his beloved cosmic union with God. Man is now permanently "alienated" from God, the fundamental alienation; and also from other men, and from nature. It is this cosmic metaphysical separateness that lies at the heart of the Marxian concept of "alienation," and *not*, as we might now think, personal griping about not controlling the operation of one's factory, or about lack of access to wealth or political power. Alienation is a cosmic condition and not a psychological complaint. For the reabsorptionists, the crucial problems of the world come not from moral failure but from the essential nature of creation itself.

⁸Leszek Kolakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origins, Growth and Dissolution*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 9-39.

Buddhism and various pantheistic religions, as well as many mystics, offer one partial way out for this cosmic alienation. To such pantheists, God-Man-and-Nature are and continue to be one, and individual men can recapture that desired unity by various forms of training until Nirvana (nothingness) has been achieved and the individual ego has been—at least temporarily—obliterated.⁹

But the Way Out offered by the reabsorptionists is different. First, it is a way offered only to man-as-species and not to any particular individuals; and second, the way is a religiously determined and inevitable Law of History. For there is one good aspect of creation, for the reabsorptionists: that God and man each get to fulfill their faculties and expand their respective potentials through history. In fact, history is a process by which these potentials are fulfilled, in which God and man both perfect themselves. Then, finally, and here we come to *eschatology*, the science of the Last Days, there will eventually be a mighty reunion, a reabsorption, in which man and God are at last not only reunited, but reunited on a higher, on a perfected level. The two cosmic blobs—God and man (and presumably Nature too)—now meet and merge on a more exalted level. The painful state of creation is now over, alienation is at last ended, and man returns Home to be on a higher, post-creation level. History, and the world, have come to an end.

A crucial feature of reabsorption is that all this “perfecting” and “reuniting” obviously takes place only on a species-collectivist level. The individual man is nothing, a mere cell in the great collective organism man; only in that way can we say that “man” progresses or fulfills “himself” over the centuries, suffers alienation from “his” pre-creation state, and finally “returns” to unity with God on a higher level. The relation to the Marxian goal of communism is already becoming clear; the “alienation” eliminated by the inevitable communist end of history is that of the collective species man, each man being finally united with other men and with Nature (which, for

⁹The great orthodox Christian apologist G. K. Chesterton brilliantly illuminated the difference between Christian individualism and pantheistic collectivism in the following critique of the Buddhist Mrs. Annie Besant, one of the founders of the Fabian Society:

According to Mrs. Besant the universal Church is simply the universal Self. It is the doctrine that we are really all one person; that there are no real walls of individuality between man and man. ... She does not tell us to love our neighbor; she tells us to be our neighbors. ... The intellectual abyss between Buddhism and Christianity is that, for the Buddhist or the theosophist, personality is the fall of man, for the Christian it is the purpose of God, the whole point of His cosmic idea.

G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York, 1927), pp. 244-45. Quoted in Thomas Molnar, *Utopia: the Perennial Heresy* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967), p. 123.

Marx, was “created” by the collective species man, who thereby replaces God as the creator).

I shall deal later with communism as the goal of history. Here we focus on the *process* by which all these events must take place, and necessarily take place. First, there is the pre-creation cosmic blob. Out of this blob there then arises a very different state of affairs: a created Universe, with God, individual men, and nature each existing. Here are the origins of the magical Hegelian-Marxian “dialectic”: one state of affairs somehow *gives rise to* a contrasting state. In the German language, Hegel, the master of the concept of the dialectic, used the crucial term *aufhebung*, a “lifting up,” which is ambiguous enough to encompass this sudden shift into a very different state, this lifting up which is at one and the same time a preserving, a transcending, and creating a stark contrast to, the original condition. The standard English translation for this process in Hegel and Marx is “negating,” but such translation makes the theory even more absurd than it really is—probably “transcending” would be a better term.¹⁰ Thus, as usual, the dialectic consists of three stages. Stage One is the original state of the pre-creation cosmic blob, with man and God in happy and harmonious unity, but each rather undeveloped. Then, the magic dialectic does its work, Stage Two occurs, and God creates man and the universe. But then, finally, when the development of man and God is completed, Stage Two creates its own *aufhebung*, its transcendence into its opposite or negation: in short, Stage Three, the reunion of God and man in an “ecstasy of union,” and the end of history.

The dialectical process by which one state of affairs gives rise to a very different state, if not its opposite, is, for the reabsorptionists, a mystical though inevitable development. There was no need for them to explain the mechanism. Indeed, particularly influential for Hegel and later reabsorptionist thinkers was one of the later Christian mystics in this tradition: the early seventeenth century German cobbler Jakob Boehme. Pantheizing the dialectic, Boehme declared that it was not God’s will but some primal force, that launched the

¹⁰Alexander Gray has a lot of fun with the concept of “negation” in the Hegelian and Marxian dialectic. He writes that the examples of the “negation of the negation” in Engels’s *Anti-Dühring* “may be sound Hegelianism, but otherwise they appear rather silly. A seed of barley falls into the ground and germinates: negation of the seed. In the autumn it produces more grains of barley: negation of the negation. A butterfly comes from an egg: negation of the egg. After many transformations, the butterfly mates and dies: negation of the negation. ... Hegel is surely something more than this.” Gray adds a comment that Marx’s admiring summary of Hegelianism in his *Poverty and Philosophy* is “not without entertainment value”: “yes becomes no, no becomes yes, yes becomes at the same time yes and no, no becomes at the same time no and yes, the contraries balance, neutralize, and paralyze each other.” (My own translation from Gray’s original French quote, which he found “especially” entertaining.) Gray, *Socialist Tradition*, p. 300 n. 1 and n. 2.

cosmic dialectic of creation and history. How, Boehme asked, did the world of pre-creation transcend itself into creation? Before creation, he answered, there was a primal source, an eternal unity, an undifferentiated, indistinct, literal Nothing [*Ungrund*]. Oddly enough, this Nothing possessed within itself an inner striving, a *nisus*, a drive for self-realization. That drive, Boehme asserted, gave rise to its opposite, the Will, the interaction of which with *nisus* transformed the Nothing into the Something of the created universe.¹¹

Heavily influenced by Jakob Boehme was the mystical English communist, Gerrard Winstanley, founder of the Digger sect during the English Civil War. Son of a textile merchant who had failed in the cloth business and then had sunk to the status of agricultural laborer, Winstanley, in early 1649, had a mystical vision of the ideal communist world of the future. Originally, according to this vision, a version of God had created the universe; but the spirit of "selfishness," the Devil itself, had entered into man and brought about private property and a market economy. The curse of the self, opined Winstanley, was "the beginner of particular interest," or private property, with men buying and selling and saying "This is mine." The end of original communism and its breakup into private property meant that universal liberty was gone, and creation brought "under the curse of bondage, sorrow, and tears." In England, Winstanley absurdly held, property had been communist until the Norman Conquest of 1066, which created the institution of private property.¹²

But soon, declared Winstanley, universal "love" would eliminate private property, and would thus restore the earth to "a common property as it was in the beginning ... making the earth one storehouse, and every man and woman to live ... as members of one household." This communism and absolute equality of possessions would thus bring to the world the millennium, "a new heaven, and a new earth."¹³

At first, Winstanley believed that little or no coercion would be necessary for establishing and maintaining his communist society.

¹¹See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 161.

¹²Most of the Protestants held the very different, and far more correct, view that the Norman Conquest had imposed a state-created feudal-type landed estates on an England which had been much closer to being an idyll of genuine private property.

Engels and other historians and anthropologists saw the original Early Communism, or Golden Age, in primitive pre-market tribal societies. Modern anthropological research, however, has demonstrated that most primitive and tribal societies were based on private property, money, and market economies. Thus, see Bruce Benson, "Enforcement of Private Property Rights in Primitive Societies: Law Without Government," *Journal of Libertarian Studies* 9 (Winter 1989): 1-26.

¹³In M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 517n.

Soon, however, he realized, in the completed draft of his utopia, that all wage labor and all commerce would have to be prohibited on the penalty of death. Winstanley was quite willing to go this far with his program. Everyone was to contribute to, and take from, the common storehouse, and the death penalty was to be levied on all use of money, or on any buying or selling. The “sin” of idleness would of course be combatted by forced labor for the benefit of the communist community. This all-encompassing stress on the executioner makes particularly grisly the declaration of Winstanley that “all punishments that are to be inflicted ... are only such as to make the offender ... to live in the community of the righteous law of love one with another.” Education in “love” was to be insured by free and compulsory schooling conducted by the state, mainly in useful crafts rather than in liberal arts, as well as by “ministers” elected by the public to preach secular sermons upholding the new system.¹⁴

Hegel as Pantheist Reabsorptionist

Everyone knows that Marx was essentially a Hegelian in philosophy, but the precise scope of Hegel’s influence on Marx is less well-understood. Hegel’s dubious accomplishment was to completely pantheize reabsorption theology. It is little realized that Hegel was only one, although the most elaborate and hypertrophic, of a host of writers who constituted the highly influential Romantic movement in Germany and England at the end of the eighteenth, and during the first half of the nineteenth, centuries.¹⁵ Hegel was a theology student at the University of Tübingen, and many of his fellow Romantics, friends and colleagues, such as Schelling, Schiller, Holderlin, and Fichte, began as theology students, many of them at Tübingen.¹⁶

The Romantic twist to the reabsorption story was to proclaim that God is in reality Man. Man, or rather the Man-God, created the universe. But Man’s imperfection, his flaw, lay in his failure to realize that he *is* God. The Man-God begins his life in history unconscious of the vital fact that he is God. He is alienated, cut off, from the crucial knowledge that he and God are one, that he created, and continues to empower, the universe. History, then, is the inevitable process by which the Man-God develops his faculties, fulfills his potential, and advances his knowledge, *until* that blissful day when Man acquires

¹⁴Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 136. Also see F. D. Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 74-80.

¹⁵See the superb work by the leading literary critic of Romanticism, Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*.

¹⁶Hegel was nominally a Lutheran, but Lutheranism in Germany at that time was evidently latitudinarian enough to encompass pantheism.

Absolute Knowledge, that is, the full knowledge and realization that he is God. At that point, the Man-God finally reaches his potential, becomes an infinite being without bounds, and thereby puts an end to history. The dialectic of history occurs, again, in three fundamental stages: the Pre-Creation stage; the post-Creation stage of development with alienation; and the final reabsorption into the state of infinity and absolute self-knowledge, which culminates, and puts an end to, the historical process.

Why, then, did Hegel's Man-God (also termed by Hegel the "world-self" or "world-spirit" [*Weltgeist*]) create the universe? Not out of benevolence, but out of a felt need to become conscious of itself as a world-self. This process of growing consciousness is achieved through the creative activity by which the world-self externalizes itself. First, this externalization occurs by the Man-God creating nature, and next, by a continuing self-externalization through human history. By building civilization, Man increases the knowledge of his own divinity; in that way, through history Man gradually puts an end to his own "self-alienation," which for Hegel was *ipso facto* the alienation of Man from God. Crucial to Hegelian doctrine is that Man is alienated, and he perceives the world as hostile, *because* it is not himself. All these conflicts are finally resolved when Man realizes at long last that the world really *is* himself.

But why is Hegel's Man so odd and neurotic that he regards everything that is not himself as alien and hostile? The answer is central to the Hegelian mystique. It is because Hegel, or Hegel's Man, cannot stand the idea of himself not being God, and therefore not being of infinite space and without boundary or limit. Seeing any other being or any other object exist, would imply that he himself is not infinite or divine. In short, Hegel's philosophy constitutes solipsistic megalomania on a grand and cosmic scale. Professor Robert C. Tucker describes the situation with characteristic acuity:

For Hegel alienation is finitude, and finitude in turn is bondage. The experience of self estrangement in the presence of an apparent objective world is an experience of enslavement, ... Spirit, when confronted with an object or "other," is *ipso facto* aware of itself as merely finite being ... as extending only so far and no farther. The object is, therefore, a "limit" (*Grenze*). And a limit, since it contradicts spirit's notion of itself as absolute being, i.e. being-without-limit, is necessarily apprehended as a "barrier" or "fetter" (*Schranke*). ... In its confrontation with an apparent object, spirit feels imprisoned in limitation. It experiences what Hegel calls the "sorrow of finitude."

... In Hegel's quite unique conception of it, freedom means the consciousness of self as unbounded; it is the absence of a limiting object or non-self ...

Accordingly, the growth of spirit's self-knowledge in history is alternatively describable as a progress of the consciousness of freedom.¹⁷

Hegel's dialectic of history did not simply have three stages; history moved forward in a series of stages, each one of which was moved forward dramatically by a process of *aufhebung*. It is evident that the Man who creates the world, advances his "self"-knowledge, and who finally "returns" "Home" in an ecstasy of self-knowledge is not puny individual Man, but Man as collective-species. But, for Hegel, each stage of advance is propelled by great individuals, "world-historical" men, who embody the attributes of the Absolute more than others, and act as significant agents of the next *aufhebung*, the lifting up of the Man-God's or "world-soul's" next great advance into "self-knowledge."

Thus, at a time when most patriotic Prussians were reacting violently against Napoleon's imperial conquests, and mobilizing their forces against him, Hegel wrote to a friend in ecstasy about having seen Napoleon, "the Emperor—this world-soul" riding down the street; for Napoleon, even if unconsciously, was pursuing the world-historical mission of bringing a strong Prussian State into being.¹⁸ It is interesting that Hegel got his idea of the "cunning of Reason," of great individuals acting as unconscious agents of the world-soul through history by perusing the works of the Rev. Adam Ferguson, whose phrase about events being "the product of human action but not of human design,"¹⁹ has been so influential in the thought of F. A. Hayek and his disciples.¹⁹ In the economic realm, as well, Hegel learned of the alleged misery of alienation in separation—that is specialization and the division-of-labor, from Ferguson himself through Friedrich Schiller and from Ferguson's good friend, Adam Smith, in his *Wealth of Nations*.²⁰

¹⁷Robert C. Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁸See Raymond Plant, *Hegel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 120.

¹⁹Ferguson, furthermore, used his phrase in a fashion very similar to that of Hegel, and was originally far from the Hayekian analysis of the free market. Ferguson, as a young Calvinist minister, enlisted in the suppression of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745 in Scotland. After the rebellion was at last put down, Ferguson preached a sermon in which he tried to solve the great puzzle: why did God permit the Catholics to pursue their evil goals and almost triumph? His answer: that the Catholics, even though consciously pursuing evil ends, served as the unconscious agents of God's good purpose: i.e., rousing the Presbyterian Church of Scotland out of its alleged apathy. Hence, a prototype of the "cunning of Reason" in history, except for theist rather than pantheist goals. See Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 40-44.

²⁰As Paul Craig Roberts has rightly emphasized, "alienation" in Marx is not simply the capitalist wage-relation, but, more deeply, specialization, the division of labor, and the money economy itself. But as we see, alienation is even more rootedly the cosmic condition of man's state until the reabsorption of collective man-and-nature under communism. See Paul Craig Roberts, *Alienation and the Soviet Economy* (Albuquerque:

It is easy to see how the reabsorptionist-Hegelian doctrine of unity-good, separation-bad, helped form the Marxian goal of communism, the end-state of history in which the individual is totally absorbed into the collective, thus attaining the state of true collective-man "freedom." But there are also more particular influences. Thus, the Marxian idea of early or primitive communism, happy and integrated though undeveloped, and then burst apart by rapacious, alienating if developing capitalism, was prefigured by Hegel's historical outlook. Following his friend and mentor the Romantic writer Friedrich Schiller, Hegel, in an article written in 1795, lauded the alleged homogeneity, harmony, and unity of ancient Greece, supposedly free of the alienating division of labor. The consequent *aufhebung*, though leading to the growth of commerce, living standards, and individualism, also destroyed the wonderful unity of Greece and radically fragmented man. To Hegel, the next inevitable stage of history would reintegrate man and the State.

The State was critical for Hegel. Again foreshadowing Marx, it is now particularly important for man—the collective organism—to surmount unconscious blind fate, and "consciously" to take control of his "fate" by means of the State.

Hegel was quite insistent that, in order for the State to fulfill its vital function, it must be guided by a comprehensive philosophy, and indeed by a Great Philosopher, to give its mighty rule the necessary coherence. Otherwise, as Professor Plant explains, "such a state, devoid of philosophical comprehension, would appear as a merely arbitrary and oppressive imposition of the freedom of individuals." But, on the contrary, if armed with Hegelian philosophy and with Hegel himself as its great leader, "this alien aspect of the progressive modern state would disappear and would be seen not as an imposition but a development of self-consciousness."²¹

Armed, then, with such a philosophy and such a philosopher, the modern, especially the modern Prussian, State could take its divinely-appointed stand at the apex of human history and civilization, as God on earth. Thus: "The modern State, ... when comprehended philosophically, could therefore be seen as the highest articulation of Spirit, or God in the contemporary world." The State, then, is "a supreme manifestation of the activity of God in the world"; "The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on earth"; "The State is the march of God through the world"; "The State is the actually existing, realized

University of New Mexico, 1971); and Roberts and Matthew A. Stephenson, *Marx's Theory of Exchange, Alienation and Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Praeger, 1983).

²¹Plant, *Hegel*, p. 96.

moral life"; the "State is the reality of the kingdom of heaven." And finally: "The State is God's Will."²²

For Hegel, of all the various forms of State, monarchy—as in contemporary Prussia—is best, since it permits all its subjects to be "free" (in the Hegelian sense) by submerging their being into the divine substance, which is the authoritarian, monarchial State. The people are only "free" as insignificant particles of this divine substance. As Tucker writes:

Hegel's conception of freedom is totalitarian in a literal sense of the word. The world-self must experience itself as the totality of being, or in Hegel's own words must elevate itself to a "self-comprehending totality," in order to achieve the consciousness of freedom.²³

Every determinist creed thoughtfully provides an escape hatch for the determinist himself, so that he can rise above the determining factors, expound his philosophy and convince his fellowmen. Hegel was no exception, but his was unquestionably the most grandiose of all escape-hatches. For of all the world-historical figures, those embodiments of the Man-God, who are called on to bring on the next stage of the dialectic, who can be greater, more in tune with the divinity, than the Great Philosopher himself who has brought us the knowledge of this entire process, and thereby was able to himself complete man's final comprehension of the Absolute and of man's all-encompassing divinity? And isn't the great creator of the crucial philosophy about man and the universe in a deep sense greater than the philosophy itself? And therefore, if the species man is God, isn't he, the great Hegel, in a profound sense God of Gods?²⁴ Finally, as

²²See Plant, *Hegel*, pp. 122, 123, and 181. Also see Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 31.

²³Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, pp. 54-55. E. F. Carritt points out that, for Hegel, "freedom" is "desiring above all things to serve the success and glory of their State. In desiring this they are desiring that the will of God should be done." If an individual thinks he should do something which is *not* for the success and glory of the State, then, for Hegel, "he should be 'forced to be free.'" How does a person *know* what action will redound to the glory of the State? To Hegel, the answer was easy. Whatever the State rulers demand, since "the very fact of their being rulers is the surest sign of God's will that they should be." Impeccable logic indeed! See E. F. Carritt, "Reply" (1940), reprinted in W. Kauffmann, ed., *Hegel's Political Philosophy* (New York: Atherton Press, 1970), pp. 38-39.

²⁴Tucker offers an amusing comment on the reaction of the eminent Hegelian W. T. Stace, who had written that "we must not jump to the preposterous conclusion that, according to Hegel's philosophy, I, this particular human spirit, am the Absolute, nor that the Absolute is any particular spirit, nor that it is humanity in general. Such conclusions would be little short of shocking." Tucker adds that this "argument from propriety" does not answer the question "why we must assume that Hegel could not be 'shocking.'" Or, we might add, preposterous, or megalomaniacal. Tucker, *Philosophy*, pp. 46 n. and 47 n.

luck and the dialectic would have it, Hegel was just in time to take his place as the Great Philosopher, in the greatest, the noblest, and most developed authoritarian State in the history of the world: the existing Prussian monarchy of King Friedrich Wilhelm III. If the King would only accept his world-historical mission, Hegel, arm-in-arm with the King, would then usher in the final culminating self-knowledge of the Absolute Man-God. Together, Hegel, aided by the King, would bring an end to human history.

For his part, King Friedrich Wilhelm III was all too ready to play his divinely appointed role. When the reactionary powers took over Prussia in 1815, they needed an official philosopher to call on Prussian subjects to worship the State, and thereby to combat the French Revolutionary ideals of individualism, liberty, reason, and natural rights. Hegel was brought to the great new University of Berlin in 1818, to become the official philosopher of that academic monument to the authoritarian Prussian State.

While highly influential in Prussia and the Protestant sectors of Germany, Hegelianism was also akin to, and influential upon, the Romantic writers in England. Virtually all of Wordsworth's poetic output was designed to set forth what he called a "high Romantic argument" designed to transcend and counteract Milton's "heroic" or "great" argument expounding the orthodox Christian eschatology, that man, as individual men, will either return to Paradise or be consigned to Hell upon the Second Advent of Jesus Christ. To this "argument," Wordsworth counterposed his own pantheist vision of the upward spiral of history in which Man, as species, inevitably returns home from his cosmic alienation. Also dedicated to the Wordsworthian vision were Coleridge, Shelley and Keats. It is instructive that all of these men were Christian heretics, converts from explicitly Christian theology: Wordsworth had been trained to be an Anglican priest; Coleridge had been a lay preacher, and was steeped in neo-Platonism and the mystical works of Jakob Boehme; and Shelley had been absorbed in the study of the Bible.

Finally, the tempestuous conservative statist British writer, Thomas Carlyle, paid tribute to Hegel's mentor Friedrich Schiller by writing a biography of Schiller in 1825. From then on, Carlyle's influential writings were to be steeped in the Hegelian vision. Unity is good, diversity and separateness is evil and diseased; science as well as individualism constitutes division and dismemberment. Selfhood, Carlyle ranted, is alienation from nature, from others, and from oneself. But one day, Carlyle prophesied, the breakthrough, the world's spiritual rebirth, will arrive, led by world-historical figures

("great men"), through which man will return home to a friendly world by means of the utter "annihilation of self" (*Selbst-todtung*).²⁵ Finally, in *Past and Present* (1843), Carlyle applied his profoundly anti-individualist vision to economic affairs. He denounced egoism, material greed, and laissez-faire, which, by fostering man's severance from others, had led to a world "which has become a lifeless other, and in severance also from other human beings within a social order in which 'cash payment is ... the sole nexus of man with man.'" In opposition to this evil "cash nexus" lay the familial relation with nature and fellow-men, the relation of "love." The stage was set for Karl Marx.²⁶

Communism as the Kingdom of God on Earth: From Joachim to Müntzer

So far we have dealt with reabsorption theology as a crucial forerunner of Marx's religious eschatological communism. But there is another important strand sometimes woven in with the first, fused into his eschatological vision: messianic millennialism, or chiliasm, the establishing of a communist Kingdom of God on Earth.

Throughout its history, Christianity has had to confront the question of the millennium: the thousand-year reign of God on earth. Particularly in such murky parts of the Bible as the book of *Daniel* and the book of *Revelation*, there are suggestions of such a millennial Kingdom of God on Earth before the final Day of Judgment and the end of human history. The orthodox Christian line was set by the great Saint Augustine in the early fifth century, and has been accepted ever since by the mainstream Christian churches: Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and arguably by Calvin and at least by the Dutch wing of the Calvinist church. That orthodox line holds that the millennial Kingdom of God on Earth [KGE] is strictly a metaphor for the Christian Church, which reigns on earth only in the spiritual sense. The material realization of the Kingdom of God will only arrive upon the Day of Judgment, and is therefore to be confined to heaven alone. Orthodox Christians have always warned that taking the KGE literally, what the late orthodox Christian theorist Erich Voegelin called "immanentizing the eschaton"—bringing the eschaton down to earth—is bound to create grave social problems. For one thing, most versions of how the KGE will come into being are apocalyptic. The KGE is to be preceded by a mighty Armageddon, a titanic war of good against evil, in which the good will finally, though inevitably, triumph.

²⁵On the influence of Schiller's views on organicism and alienation upon Hegel, Marx and later sociology, see Leon Bramson, *The Political Context of Sociology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), p. 30 n.

²⁶See Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 311.

One reason for the apocalypse is a fundamental problem faced by all KGE theorists. The KGE, by definition, will consist of a society of saints, of perfect people. But if this is true, what has become of the host of human sinners, of whom alas there are legion? In order to establish the KGE there must first be some sort of mighty apocalyptic purge of the sinners to clear the ground for the society of saints. "Pre-millennial" and "post-millennial" variants of apocalypics accomplish this task in different ways. The pre-mils, who believe that Jesus's Second Advent will precede the KGE, and that Jesus will run the Kingdom with the cadre of saints at his right hand, achieve the purge by a divinely determined Armageddon between God's forces and the forces of the Beast and the Anti-Christ. The post-mils, who believe that man must establish the KGE as a precondition of Jesus's Second Coming, have to take matters more directly in their own hands and accomplish the great purge on their own.

Thus, one disturbing aspect of the KGE is the preparatory purgation of the host of human sinners. A second problem is what the KGE is going to look like. As we might imagine, KGE theorists have been extremely cloudy about the nature of their perfect society, but one troublesome feature is that, to the extent that we know its operations at all, the KGE is almost always depicted as a communist society, lacking work, private property, or the division of labor. In short, something like the Marxian communist utopia, except run by a cadre, not of the vanguard of the proletariat, but of theocratic saints.

Any communist system faces the problem of production: who would have the incentive to produce for the communal storehouse, and how would this work and its products be allocated? The first, and most highly influential, communist Christian heretic was the late twelfth-century Calabrian abbot and hermit, Joachim of Fiore. Joachim, who almost managed to convert three popes to his heresy, adopted the thesis that there are destined to be in history, not just two Ages (pre and post-Christian) as orthodox Christians believe, but a Third Age a-borning, of which he was the prophet. The pre-Christian era was the age of the Father, of the Old Testament; the Christian era the age of the Son, the New Testament. And now arrives the third apocalyptic age of the Holy Spirit, to be ushered in during the next half-century, an age of pure love and freedom, in which history was to come to an end. The Church, the Bible, and the State would be swept away, and man would live in a free communist community without work or property.

Joachim dispensed with the problem of production and allocation under communism very neatly and effectively, more so than any

communist successor. In the Third Age, he declared, man's material bodies will disappear, and man will be pure spirit, free to spend all of his days in mystical ecstasy chanting praises to God for a thousand years until the Day of Judgment. Without physical bodies, there is of course precious little need for production.²⁷ For Joachim, the path to this kingdom of pure spirit would be blazed by a new order of highly spiritual monks, from whom would come 12 patriarchs headed by a supreme teacher, who would convert the Jews to Christianity as foretold in the book of *Revelation*. For a blazing three and a half years a secular king, the Antichrist, would crush and destroy the corrupt Christian Church, after which the Antichrist would be overthrown by the new monastic order, who would promptly establish the millennial age of the Spirit. It is no wonder that a rigorist wing of the Franciscan order, which was to emerge during the first half of the thirteenth century, and be dedicated to material poverty, should see themselves as the coming Joachimite cadre.

At the same period, the Amaurians, led by a group of theology students of Amalric at the University of Paris, carried on the Joachimite doctrine of the three Ages, and added an interesting twist: each age, they declared, has enjoyed its own Incarnation. In the age of the Old Testament, the divine Incarnation settled in Abraham and perhaps some other patriarchs; for the New Testament age, the Incarnation was of course Jesus; and now, for the dawning Age of the Holy Spirit, the Incarnation would emerge among the various human beings themselves. As might be expected, the Amaurian cadre proclaimed themselves to be living gods, the Incarnation of the Holy Spirit. Not that they would always remain a divine elite, among men; on the contrary, they were destined to be the vanguard, leading mankind to its universal Incarnation.

During the following century, a congeries of groups throughout northern Europe known as the Brethren of the Free Spirit added another important ingredient to this brew: the mystical dialectic of the "reabsorption into God." But the brethren added their own elitist twist: while the reabsorption of all men must await the end of history, and the mass of the "crude in spirit" must meanwhile meet their individual deaths, there was a glorious minority, the "subtle in spirit," who could and did become reabsorbed and therefore living gods during their lifetime. This minority, of course, was the cadre of the Brethren themselves, who, by virtue of years of training, self-torture,

²⁷As the historian Norman Cohn put it, the Joachimite new "world would be one vast monastery, in which all men would be contemplative monks rapt in mystical ecstasy and united in singing the praises of God." Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 108-09.

and visions had become perfect gods, more perfect and more godlike than even Christ himself. Furthermore, once this stage of mystical union was reached, it was to be permanent and eternal. These new gods, in fact, often proclaimed themselves greater than God himself.

Being living gods on earth brought a lot of good things in its wake. In the first place, it led directly to an extreme form of the antinomian heresy; that is, if people are gods, then it is impossible for them to sin. Whatever they did is necessarily moral and perfect. This means that any act ordinarily considered to be sin, from adultery to murder, becomes perfectly legitimate when performed by the living gods. Indeed, the Free Spirits, like other antinomians, were tempted to demonstrate and flaunt their freedom from sin by performing all manner of sins imaginable.

But there was also a catch. Among the Free Spirit cultists, only a minority of leading adepts were "living gods"; for the rank-and-file cultists, striving to become gods, there was one sin and one alone which they must not commit: disobedience to their master. Each disciple was bound by an oath of absolute obedience to a particular living god. Take, for example, Nicholas of Basle, a leading Free Spirit whose cult stretched most of the length of the Rhine. Claiming to be the new Christ, Nicholas held that everyone's sole path to salvation consisted of making an act of absolute and total submission to Nicholas himself. In return for this total fealty, Nicholas granted his followers freedom from all sin.

As for the rest of mankind outside the cults, they were simply unredeemed and unregenerate beings who existed only to be used and exploited by the Elect. This gospel of total rule went hand in hand with the social doctrine of many of the fourteenth century cults of the Free Spirit: a communistic assault on the institution of private property. In a sense, however, this philosophic communism was merely a thinly camouflaged cover for the Free Spirits' self-proclaimed right to commit theft at will. The Free Spirit adept, in short, regarded all property of the non-Elect as rightfully his own. As the Bishop of Strasbourg summed up this creed in 1317: "They believe that all things are common, whence they conclude that theft is lawful for them." Or as the Free Spirit adept from Erfurt, Johann Hartmann, put it: "The truly free man is king and lord of all creatures. All things belong to him, and he has the right to use whatever pleases him. If anyone tries to prevent him, the free man may kill him and take his goods."²⁸ As one of the favorite sayings of the Brethren of the Free Spirit phrased it: "Whatever the eye sees and covets, let the hand grasp it."

The following century, the fifteenth, brought the first attempt to initiate the KGE, the first brief experiment in totalitarian theocratic communism. This attempt originated in the left, or extreme, wing, of

²⁸Cohn, *Pursuit of the Millennium*, p. 182.

the Taborites, which in turn constituted the radical wing of the revolutionary Hussite movement in Czech Bohemia of the early fifteenth century. The Hussite movement, led by Jan Hus, was a pre-Protestant revolutionary formation that blended struggles of religion (Hussite vs. Catholic), nationality (popular Czech vs. upper-class and upper-clergy German), and class (artisans cartelized in urban guilds trying to take political power from patricians). Building on the previous communist KGE movements, and especially on the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the ultra-Taborites added, with considerable enthusiasm, one extra ingredient: the duty to exterminate. For the Last Days are coming, and the Elect must go forth and stamp out sin by exterminating all sinners, which means, at the very least, all non-ultra-Taborites. For all sinners are enemies of Christ, and “accursed be the man who withholds his sword from shedding the blood of the enemies of Christ. Every believer must wash his hands in that blood.” This destruction was of course not to stop at intellectual eradication. When sacking churches and monasteries, the Taborites took particular delight in destroying libraries and burning books. For “all belongings must be taken away from God’s enemies and burned or otherwise destroyed.” Besides, the Elect have no need of books. When the Kingdom of God on Earth arrived, there would no longer be “need for anyone to teach another. There would be no need for books or scriptures, and all worldly wisdom will perish.” And all people too, one suspects.

The ultra-Taborites also wove in the reabsorption theme: a return to the alleged early condition of Czech communism: a society lacking the sin of private property. In order to return to this classless society, determined the Taborites, the cities, those notorious centers of luxury and avarice, must be exterminated. And once the communist KGE had been established in Bohemia, the Elect must forge out from that base and impose such communism on the rest of the world.

The Taborites also added another ingredient to make their communist ideal consistent. In addition to the communism of property, women would also be communized. The Taborite preachers taught that “Everything will be common, including wives; there will be free sons and daughters of God and there will be no marriage as union of two—husband and wife.”

The Hussite revolution broke out in 1419, and in that same year, the Taborites gathered at the town of Usti, in northern Bohemia near the German border. They renamed Usti “Tabor,” i.e., the Mount of Olives where Jesus had foretold his Second Coming, was ascended to heaven, and where he was expected to reappear. The radical Taborites engaged in a communist experiment at Tabor, owning everything in

common, and dedicated to the proposition that “whoever owns private property commits a mortal sin.” True to their doctrines, all women were owned in common, and if husband and wife were ever seen together, they were beaten to death or otherwise executed. Characteristically, the Taborites were so caught up in their unlimited right to consume from the common store that they felt themselves exempt from the need to work. The common store soon disappeared, and then what? Then, of course, the radical Taborites claimed that their need entitled them to claim the property of the non-elect, and they proceeded to rob others at will. As a synod of the moderate Taborites complained: “many communities never think of earning their own living by the work of their hands but are only willing to live on other people’s property and to undertake unjust campaigns for the sake of robbing.” Moreover, the Taborite peasantry who had rejoiced in the abolition of feudal dues paid to the Catholic patricians, found the radical regime reimposing the same feudal dues and bonds only six months later.

Discredited among their moderate allies and among their peasantry, the radical communist regime at Usti/Tabor soon collapsed. But their torch was quickly picked up by a sect known as the Bohemian Adamites. Like the Free Spirits of the previous century, the Adamites held themselves to be living gods, superior to Christ, since Christ had died while they still lived (impeccable logic, if a bit short-sighted). For the Adamites, led by a peasant leader they dubbed “Adam-Moses,” all goods were owned strictly in common, and marriage was considered a heinous sin. In short, promiscuity was compulsory, since the chaste were unworthy to enter the messianic Kingdom. Any man could choose any woman at will, and that will would have to be obeyed. On the other hand, promiscuity was at one and the same time compulsory and severely restricted; since sex could only take place with the permission of the leader Adam-Moses. The Adamites added a special twist: they went around naked most of the time, imitating the original state of Adam and Eve.

Like the other radical Taborites, the Adamites regarded it as their sacred mission to exterminate all the unbelievers in the world, wielding the sword, in one of their favorite images, until blood floods the world up to the height of a horse’s bridle. The Adamites were God’s scythe, sent to cut down and eradicate the unrighteous.

Pursued by the Hussite military commander, Jan Zizka, the Adamites took refuge on an island in the river Nezarka, from which they went forth in commando raids to try their best, despite their relatively small number, to fulfill their twin pledge of compulsory communism and extermination of the non-elect. At night, they raided the mainland—in forays they called a “Holy War”—to rob everything they could lay

their hands on and to exterminate their victims. True to their creed, they murdered every man, woman, and child they could find.

Finally, in October 1421, Zizka sent a force of 400 hundred trained soldiers to besiege the Adamite island, soon overwhelming the commune and massacring every last Adamite. One more hellish Kingdom of God on Earth had been put to the sword.

The moderate Taborite army was, in turn, crushed by the Hussites at the Battle of Lipan in 1434, and from then on, Taborism declined and went underground. But Taborite and millennialist ideas continued to pop up, not only among the Czechs, but also in Bavaria and in other German lands bordering Bohemia.

Sometimes Martin Luther must have felt that he had loosed the whirlwind, even opened the Gates of Hell. Shortly after Luther launched the Reformation, Anabaptist sects appeared and spread throughout Germany. Anabaptists believed that they were the Elect, and that the sign of that election was an emotional, mystical conversion experience, the process of being “born again,” or baptized in the Holy Spirit. For groups of the Anabaptist elect finding themselves within a corrupt and sinful society, there were two routes to take. One, the voluntary Anabaptists, such as the Amish or Mennonites, became virtual anarchists, striving to separate themselves as much as possible from a sinful State and society. The other wing, the theocratic Anabaptists, sought to seize power in the State and to shape up society by extreme coercion. As Monsignor Knox has pointed out, this ultra-theocratic approach must be distinguished from the sort of theocracy (what has recently been called *theonomy*—the rule of God’s Law) imposed by Calvin in Geneva or by the Calvinistic Puritans in the seventeenth century North America. Luther and Calvin, in Knox’s terminology, did not pretend to be “prophets” enjoying continuing personal divine revelation; they were only “pundits,” scholarly experts in interpreting the Bible, and in applying Biblical law to man.²⁹ But the coercive Anabaptists were led by men claiming mystical illumination and revelation and deserving therefore of absolute power.

The wave of theocratic Anabaptism that swept over Germany and Holland with hurricane force may be called the “Müntzer-Münster era,” since it was launched by Thomas Müntzer in 1520, and ended in a holocaust at the city of Münster 15 years later. A learned young theologian and graduate of the Universities of Leipzig and Frankfurt, Müntzer was selected by Luther to become a Lutheran pastor in the city of Zwickau. Zwickau, however, was near the Bohemian border, and there Müntzer was converted by the weaver and adept Niklas

²⁹Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion* (1950; New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 132-34.

Storch, who had lived in Bohemia, to the old Taborite creed. In particular: continuing personal divine revelation to the prophet of the cult, and the necessity for the elect to seize power and impose a society of theocratic communism by brutal force of arms. In addition, there was to be communism of women: marriage was to be prohibited, and each man was to be able to have any woman at will.

Thomas Müntzer now claimed to be the divinely chosen prophet, destined to wage a war of blood and extermination by the elect against the sinners. Müntzer claimed that the "living Christ" had permanently entered his own soul; endowed thereby with perfect insight into the divine will, he asserted himself to be uniquely qualified to fulfill the divine mission. He even spoke of himself as "becoming God." Having graduated from the world of learning, Müntzer was now ready for the world of action.

Müntzer wandered around central Germany for several years, gaining adepts and inspiring uprisings that were quickly suppressed. Gaining a ministerial post in the small Thuringian town of Allstedt, Müntzer gained a wide popular following by preaching in the vernacular, attracting a large number of uneducated miners, whom he formed into a revolutionary organization called "The League of the Elect." A turning point in Müntzer's career came in 1524, when Duke John, brother of the Elector of Saxony and a Lutheran, came to town and asked Müntzer to preach him a sermon. Seizing his opportunity, Müntzer laid it on the line: the Saxon princes must take their stand as either servants of God or of the Devil. If they would do the former, they must "lay on with the sword" to "exterminate" all the "godless" and "evil-doers," especially including priests, monks, and godless rulers. If the Saxon princes failed in this task, Müntzer warned, "the sword shall be taken from them. ... If they [the princes] resist, let them be slaughtered without mercy. ..." Such extermination, performed by the princes and guided by Müntzer, would usher in a thousand-year-rule by the Elect.

Duke John's reaction to this fiery ultimatum was surprisingly blasé, but, warned repeatedly by Luther that Müntzer was becoming dangerous, the Duke finally ordered Müntzer to refrain from any provocative preaching until his case was decided by the Elector.

This reaction by the Saxon princes, however mild, was enough to set Thomas Müntzer onto his final revolutionary road. The princes had proved themselves untrustworthy: it was now up to the mass of the poor to make the revolution. The poor, the Elect, would establish a rule of compulsory egalitarian communism, where all things would be owned in common by all, where everyone would be equal in all things and each person would receive according to his need. But not yet. For even the poor must first be broken of worldly desires and frivolous enjoyments,

and they must recognize the leadership of a new “servant of God” who “must stand forth in the spirit of Elijah ... and set things in motion.” It was not difficult to guess who that Leader was supposed to be.

Seeing Allstedt as inhospitable, Müntzer moved to the Thuringian city of Muhlhausen, where he found a friendly home in a land in political turmoil. Under Müntzer’s inspiration, a revolutionary group took over Muhlhausen in February 1525, and Müntzer and his allies proceeded to impose a communist regime upon that city.

The monasteries of Muhlhausen were seized, and all property was declared to be in common; as a consequence, as a contemporary observer noted, the regime “so affected the folk that no one wanted to work.” As under the Taborites, the regime of communism and love soon became, in practice, a systemic excuse for theft:

when anyone needed food or clothing he went to a rich man and demanded it of him in Christ’s name, for Christ had commanded that all should share with the needy. And what was not given freely was taken by force. Many acted thus. ... Thomas [Müntzer] instituted this brigandage and multiplied it every day.³⁰

At that point, the great Peasants’ War erupted throughout Germany, a rebellion by the peasantry in favor of their local autonomy, and opposing the new centralizing, high tax rule of the German princes. In the process of crushing the feebly armed peasantry, the princes came to Muhlhausen on May 15, and offered amnesty to the peasants if they would hand over Müntzer and his immediate followers. The peasants were tempted, but Müntzer, holding aloft his naked sword, gave his last flaming speech, declaring that God had personally promised him victory; that he would catch all the enemy cannonballs in the sleeves of his cloak; and that God would protect them all. At a climactic moment in Müntzer’s speech, a rainbow appeared in the heavens. Since Müntzer had adopted the rainbow as the symbol of his movement, the credulous peasantry naturally interpreted this event as a veritable Sign from heaven. Unfortunately, the Sign failed to work, and the princes’ army crushed the peasantry, killing 5,000 while losing only half a dozen men. Müntzer himself fled and hid, but was captured soon after, tortured into confession, and duly executed.

Communism as the Kingdom of God on Earth: The Takeover of Münster

Thomas Müntzer and his Sign may have gotten short shrift, and his body be a-mouldrin’ in the grave, but his soul kept marching on. His cause was soon picked up by a Müntzer disciple, the bookbinder Hans

³⁰Quoted in Igor Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 57.

Hut. Hut claimed to be a prophet sent by God to announce that Christ would return to earth at Whitsuntide, 1528, and would give the power to enforce justice to Hut and to his following of rebaptized saints. The saints would then "take up double-edged swords" and wreak God's vengeance upon priests, pastors, kings, and nobles. Hut and his men would then "establish the rule of Hans Hut on earth," with Muhlhausen, as one might expect, as the world's capital. Christ, aided by Hut and company, would then establish a millennium of communism and free love. Hut was captured in 1527 (unfortunately before Jesus had a chance to return), imprisoned at Augsburg, and killed allegedly trying to escape. For a year or two, Huttian followers popped up throughout southern Germany, threatening to set up a communist Kingdom of God by force of arms. In 1530, however, they were smashed and suppressed by the alarmed authorities. Müntzerian-type Anabaptism would now move to northwestern Germany.

Northwestern Germany was dotted by a number of small ecclesiastical states, each run by a prince-bishop, bishops who were secular aristocratic lords not ordained as priests. The ruling clergy of the state exempted themselves from taxation, while imposing heavy taxes on the rest of the populace. Generally, the capital cities of each state were run by an oligarchy of guilds who cartelized their crafts, and who battled the state clergy for a degree of autonomy.

The largest of these ecclesiastical states in northwest Germany was the bishopric of Münster; its capital city of Münster, a town of some 10,000 people, was run by the town guilds. During and after the Peasants' War, the guilds and clergy battled back and forth, until, in 1532, the guilds, supported by the people, were able to take over the town, soon forcing the Catholic bishop to recognize Münster officially as a Lutheran city.

Münster was not destined to remain Lutheran for long, however. From all over the northwest, hordes of Anabaptist crazies flooded into the city of Münster, seeking the onset of the New Jerusalem. Anabaptism escalated when the eloquent and popular young minister Bernt Rothmann, a highly educated son of a town blacksmith, converted to Anabaptism. Originally a Catholic priest, Rothmann had become a friend of Luther and a head of the Lutheran church in Münster. But now he lent his eloquent preaching to the cause of communism as it had supposedly existed in the primitive Christian Church, with everything being held in common, with no mine or thine, and each man receiving according to his "need." Rothmann's widespread reputation attracted thousands more into Münster, largely the poor, the rootless, and those hopelessly in debt.

The leader of the horde of Münster Anabaptists, however, was

destined to be not Rothmann but a Dutch baker from Haarlem, Jan Matthys. In early 1534, Matthys sent out missionaries or “apostles” to rebaptize everyone they could into the Matthys movement, and his apostles were greeted in Münster with enormous enthusiasm. Even Rothmann was rebaptized once again, followed by many former nuns and a large part of the population. The leader of the Matthys movement soon arrived, a young Dutchman of 25 named Jan Bockelson (Jan of Leyden). Bockelson quickly married the daughter of the wealthy cloth merchant, Bernt Knipperdollinck, the leader of the Münster guilds, and the two men, leading the town in apocalyptic frenzy, led a successful uprising to dominate the town. The two leaders sent messengers outside the town urging all followers to come to Münster. The rest of the world, they proclaimed, would be destroyed in a month or two; only Münster would be saved, to become the New Jerusalem. Thousands poured in from as far away as Frisia in the northern Netherlands. As a result, the Anabaptists were able to impose absolute rule on the city, with the incoming Matthys, aided by Bockelson, becoming the virtual dictators of Münster. At last, Anabaptism had seized a real-life city; the greatest communist experiment in history to that date could now begin.

The first cherished program of this new communist theocracy was, of course, to purge the New Jerusalem of the unclean and the ungodly, as a prelude to their ultimate extermination throughout the world. Matthys, therefore, called for the execution of all remaining Catholics and Lutherans, but Knipperdollinck, slightly more politically astute, warned Matthys that such immediate slaughter might bring down the wrath of the rest of the world. Matthys therefore did the next best thing, and on February 27 the Catholics and Lutherans were driven out of the city, in the midst of a horrendous snowstorm. Prefiguring the actions of communist Cambodia in the 1970s, all non-Anabaptists, including old people, invalids, babies, and pregnant women, were driven into the snowstorm, and all were forced to leave behind all their money, property, food, and clothing. The remaining Lutherans and Catholics were compulsorily rebaptized, all those refusing being put to death. The mass expulsion of non-Anabaptists was enough for the bishop, who began a long military siege of Münster the next day.

With every person in the city drafted for siege work, Jan Matthys launched his totalitarian communist social revolution. The first step was to confiscate the property of the expellees. All their worldly goods were placed in central depots, and the poor were encouraged to take “according to their needs,” the “needs” to be interpreted by seven appointed “deacons” chosen by Matthys. When a blacksmith protested at these measures imposed, particularly gallingly, by a group of Dutch

foreigners, Matthys arrested the courageous smithy. Summoning the entire population of the town to be witness, Matthys personally stabbed, shot, and killed the "godless" blacksmith, and then threw into prison several leading citizens who protested his treatment. The crowd was warned to profit by this public execution, and they obediently sang a hymn in honor of the killing.

A crucial part of the Anabaptist reign of terror was their decision, again prefiguring that of the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia, to abolish all private ownership of money. With no money to purchase any good, the population became slavishly dependent on handouts or rations from the power elite. Accordingly, Matthys, Rothmann and the rest launched a propaganda campaign that it was un-Christian to own money privately; and that all money should be held "in common," which in practice meant that all money whatsoever must be handed over to Matthys and his ruling clique. Several Anabaptists who kept or hid their money were arrested and terrorized into crawling to Matthys on their knees, begging forgiveness, which Matthys graciously granted them.

After two months of unremitting propaganda, combined with threats and terror against those who disobeyed, the private ownership of money was effectively abolished in Münster. The government seized all the money and used it to buy goods or hire workers from the outside world. Wages were doled out in kind by the only employer: the theocratic Anabaptist State.

Food was confiscated from private homes, and rationed according to the will of government deacons. Also, to accommodate the host of immigrants, all private homes were effectively communized, with everyone permitted to quarter themselves everywhere; it was now illegal to close, let alone lock, one's doors. Compulsory communal dining-halls were established, where people ate together to the readings from the Old Testament.

The compulsory communism and reign of terror was carried out in the name of community and Christian "love." This communization was considered the first giant steps toward egalitarian communism, where, as Rothmann put it, "all things were to be in common, there was to be no private property and nobody was to do any more work, but simply trust in God." Somehow, the workless part never seemed to arrive.

A pamphlet sent by the Matthys regime to other Anabaptist communities hailed their new order of Christian love through terror:

For not only have we put all our belongings into a common pool under the care of deacons, and live from it according to our need; we praise God through Christ with one heart and mind and are eager to help one another with every kind of service.

And accordingly, everything which has served the purposes of self-seeking and private property, such as buying and selling, working for money, taking interest and practicing usury ... or eating and drinking the sweat of the poor ... and indeed everything which offends us against love—all such things are abolished amongst us by the power of love and community.

At the end of March 1534, however, Matthys's swollen *hubris* brought him down. Convinced at Easter time that God had ordered him and a few of the faithful to lift the Bishop's siege and liberate the town, Matthys and a few others rushed out of the gates at the besieging army, and were literally hacked to pieces in response.

The death of Matthys left Münster in the hands of young Bockelson. And if Matthys had chastised the people of Münster with whips, Bockelson would chastise them with scorpions. Bockelson wasted little time in mourning his mentor. He preached to the faithful: "God will give you another Prophet who will be more powerful." How could this young enthusiast top his master? Early in May, Bockelson caught the attention of the town by running naked through the streets in a frenzy, falling then into a silent three-day ecstasy. When he rose on the third day, he announced to the entire populace a new dispensation that God had revealed to him. With God at his elbow, Bockelson abolished the old town offices of Council and burgermaster, and installed a new ruling council of 12 Elders headed by himself. The Elders were given total authority over the life and death, the property and spirit, of every inhabitant of Münster. The old guilds were abolished, and a strict system of forced labor was imposed. All artisans not drafted into the military were now public employees, working for the community for no monetary reward.

Totalitarianism in Münster was now complete. Death was now the punishment for virtually every independent act. Capital punishment was decreed for the high crimes of: murder, theft, lying, avarice, and quarrelling. Death was also decreed for every conceivable kind of insubordination: the young against the parents, wives against their husbands, and, of course, anyone at all against the chosen representative of God on earth, the government of Münster. Bernt Knipperdollinck was appointed high executioner to enforce the decrees.

The only aspect of life previously left untouched was sex, and this deficiency was now made up. The only sexual relation now permitted by the Bockelson regime was marriage between two Anabaptists. Sex in any other form, including marriage with one of the "godless," was a capital crime. But soon Bockelson went beyond this rather old-fashioned credo, and decided to enforce compulsory polygamy in Münster. Since many of the expellees had left their wives and daughters

behind, Münster now had three times as many marriageable women as men, so that polygamy had become technologically feasible. Bockelson convinced the other rather startled preachers by citing polygamy among the patriarchs of Israel, reinforcing this method of persuasion by threatening any dissenters with death.

Compulsory polygamy was a bit a much for many of the Münsterites, who launched a rebellion in protest. The rebellion, however, was quickly crushed and most of the rebels put to death. And so, by August 1554, polygamy had been coercively established in Münster. As one might expect, young Bockelson took an instant liking to the new regime, and before long he had amassed a harem of 15 wives, including Divara, the beautiful young widow of Jan Matthys. The rest of the male population also began to take enthusiastically to the new decree. Many of the women reacted differently, however, and so the Elders passed a law ordering compulsory marriage for every woman under (and presumably also over) a certain age, which usually meant becoming a compulsory third or fourth wife.

Since marriage among the godless was not only invalid but also illegal, the wives of the expellees became fair game, and they were forced to "marry" good Anabaptists. Refusal of the women to comply with the new law was punishable, of course, with death, and a number of women were actually executed as a result. Those "old" wives who resented the new competitors in their households were also cracked down on, and their quarrelling was made a capital crime; many women were thereupon executed for quarrelling.

Bockelsonian despotism could only reach so far, however, and general resistance forced the regime to relent and permit divorce. In an aboutface, not only divorce was now permitted, but all marriage was now outlawed totally, and divorce made very easy. As a result, Münster now became a regime of what amounted to compulsory free love. Thus, within the space of a few months, a rigid puritanism had been transmuted into a system of compulsory promiscuity.

Bockelson proved to be an excellent organizer of a besieged city. Compulsory labor was strictly enforced, and he was also able to induce many of the Bishop's poorly paid mercenaries to quit by offering them regular pay—with *money*, of course, that had been confiscated from the citizens of Münster. When the Bishop fired pamphlets into the town offering a general amnesty in return for surrender, Bockelson made reading such pamphlets a crime punishable by death. As a result, the Bishop's armies were in disarray by the end of August, and the siege was temporarily lifted.

Jan Bockelson took the opportunity to triumphantly carry his "egalitarian" communist revolution one crucial step further: he had

himself proclaimed King and Messiah of the Last Days.

Bockelson realized that proclaiming *himself* King might have appeared tacky and unconvincing, even to the Bockelsonian faithful. And so he arranged for one Dusentschur, a goldsmith from a nearby town and self-proclaimed prophet, to do the job for him. At the beginning of September, Dusentschur announced to one and all a new revelation: that Jan Bockelson was to be the King of the whole world, the heir of King David, destined to keep that throne until God himself came to reclaim His Kingdom. Unsurprisingly, Bockelson confirmed that he himself had had the very same revelation. After a moment's coyness, Bockelson accepted the Sword of Justice and anointment as King of the World from Dusentschur, and Bockelson announced to the crowd that God had now given him "power over all the nations of the earth," and that anyone who might dare to resist God's will "shall without delay be put to death with the sword." The Anabaptist preachers of Münster dutifully explained to their bemused flock that Bockelson was indeed the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament, and therefore the rightful ruler, both temporal and spiritual, of the entire world.

It often happens with self-proclaimed "egalitarians" that a special escape hatch from the drab uniformity of life is created—for themselves. And so it was with King Bockelson. It was important to emphasize in every way the importance of the Messiah's Advent. And so Bockelson wore the finest robes, metals and jewelry; he appointed courtiers and gentlemen-at-arms, who also appeared in splendid finery. King Bockelson's chief wife, Divara, was proclaimed Queen of the World, and she too was dressed in great finery and enjoyed a suite of courtiers and followers. The new luxurious court included two hundred people housed in fine requisitioned mansions. King Bockelson would hold court on a throne draped with a cloth of gold in the public square, wearing a crown and carrying a sceptre. Also garbed in finery were Bockelson's loyal aides, including Knipperdollinck as chief minister, and Rothmann as royal orator.

If communism is the perfect society, *somebody* must be able to enjoy its fruits; and who better than the Messiah and his courtiers? Though private property in money was abolished, the confiscated gold and silver was now minted into ornamental coins in honor of the new King. All horses were confiscated for the King's armed squadron. Names in revolutionary Münster were also transformed; all the streets were renamed; Sundays and feast days were abolished; and all new-born children were named personally by the King in accordance with a special pattern.

In order that the King and his nobles might live in high luxury,

the subject population were now robbed of everything above the bare minimum; clothing and bedding were severely rationed, and all "surplus" turned over to King Bockelson on pain of death.

It is not surprising that the deluded masses of Münster began to grumble at being forced to live in abject poverty while King Bockelson and his courtiers lived in great luxury on the proceeds of their confiscated belongings. Bockelson responded by beaming propaganda to justify the new system. The justification was this: it was all right for Bockelson to live in pomp and luxury because he was already "dead" to the world and the flesh. Since he was dead to the world, in a deep sense his luxury didn't count. In the style of every guru who has ever lived in luxury among his poor credulous followers, he explained that for him material objects had no value. More importantly perhaps, Bockelson assured his subjects that he and his court were only the advance guard of the new order; soon, *they* too would be living in the same millennial luxury. Under their new order the people of Münster would soon forge outward, armed with God's will, and conquer the entire world, exterminating the unrighteous, after which Jesus would return and they will live in luxury and perfection. Equal communism with great luxury for all would then be achieved.

Greater dissent meant, of course, escalated terror, and King Bockelson's reign of "love" and death intensified its course of intimidation and slaughter. As soon as he proclaimed the monarchy, the prophet Dusentschur announced a new divine revelation: that all who persisted in disagreeing with or disobeying King Bockelson shall be put to death, and their very memory extirpated forever. Many of the victims executed were women, who were killed for denying their husbands marital rights, insulting a preacher, or daring to practice polygyny—which was considered to be a solely male privilege.

The Bishop was beginning to resume his siege, but Bockelson was able to use much of the expropriated gold and silver to send apostles and pamphlets out to surrounding areas, attempting to rouse the masses to Anabaptist revolution. The propaganda had considerable effect, leading to mass uprisings throughout Holland and northwestern Germany during January 1535. A thousand armed Anabaptists gathered under the leadership of someone who called himself Christ, Son of God; and serious Anabaptist uprisings took place in West Frisia, in the town of Minden, and even the great city of Amsterdam, where the rebels managed to capture the town hall. All these uprisings were eventually suppressed, with the help of betrayal of the names of the rebels and the location of their munition dumps.

By this time, the princes of northwestern Europe had had enough; and all the states of the Holy Roman Empire agreed to supply troops

to crush the hellish regime at Münster. By late January, Münster was totally and successfully blockaded and cut off from the outside world. Food shortages appeared immediately, and the crisis was met by the Bockelson regime with characteristic vigor: all remaining food was confiscated, and all horses killed, for the benefit of feeding the king, his royal court, and his armed guards. At all times throughout the siege the king and his court managed to eat and drink well, while famine and devastation swept through the town of Münster, and the masses ate literally anything, even inedible, they could lay their hands on.

King Bockelson maintained his rule by beaming continual propaganda and promises to the starving masses. God would definitely save them by Easter, or else Bockelson would have himself burnt in the public square. When Easter came and went, and no salvation had appeared, Bockelson craftily explained that he had meant only "spiritual" salvation, which had indeed occurred. He then promised that God would change the cobblestones to bread, and this of course did not happen either. Finally, Bockelson, long fascinated by the theater, ordered his starving subjects to engage in three days of dancing and athletics. Dramatic performances were held, as well as a Black Mass.

The poor starving people of Münster were now doomed totally. The Bishop kept firing leaflets into the town promising a general amnesty if they would only depose King Bockelson and his court and hand them over to the princely forces. To guard against this threat, Bockelson stepped up his reign of terror still further. In early May, Bockelson divided the town into 12 sections, and placed a "Duke" over each section with an armed force of 24 men. The Dukes were foreigners like himself, and as Dutch immigrants would be more likely to be loyal to King Bockelson. Each Duke was strictly forbidden to leave his own section, and they, in turn, prohibited any meetings of even a few people. No one was allowed to leave town, and anyone caught attempting or plotting to leave, helping anyone else to leave, or criticizing the King, was instantly beheaded—mainly by King Bockelson himself. By mid-June such deeds were occurring daily, with the body often quartered in sections and nailed up as a warning to the Münster masses.

Bockelson would undoubtedly have let the entire population of the city starve to death rather than surrender; but two escapees betrayed weak spots in the town's defenses and on the night of June 24, 1535, the nightmare New Jerusalem of communism and "love" at last came to a bloody end. The last several hundred Anabaptist fighters surrendered under an amnesty and were promptly massacred, and Queen Divara was beheaded. As for King Bockelson, he was led about on a

chain, and, the following January, he and Knipperdollinck were publicly tortured to death, and their bodies suspended in cages from a church-tower.

The old establishment of Münster was duly restored and the city became Catholic once more. The stars were again in their courses, and the events of 1534-35 understandably led to an abiding distrust of mysticism and enthusiast movements throughout Protestant Europe.

It is instructive to understand the attitude of all Marxist historians toward Münster and the other millennialist movements of the early sixteenth century. The Marxists have always understandably lauded these movements and regimes, (a) for being communist, and (b) for being revolutionary movements from below. Marxists have invariably hailed these movements as forerunners of their own.

Ideas are notoriously difficult to kill, and Anabaptist communism was one such idea. One of Müntzer's collaborators, Henry Niclaes, who had been born in Münster, survived to found Familism, a pantheistic creed claiming that *Man is God*, and calling for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on Earth as the only place that it would ever exist. A key to that kingdom would be a system in which all property would be held in common, and all men would attain the perfection of Christ. Familist ideas were carried to England by a Dutch joiner, Christopher Vittels, a disciple of Niclaes, and familism spread in England during the late sixteenth century. A center of familism in early seventeenth century England was the Grindletonians, in Grindleton, Yorkshire, led, in the decade after 1615, by the curate, the Rev. Roger Brearly. Part of the attraction of familism was its antinomianism, the view that a truly godly person—such as themselves—could never, by definition, commit a sin, and antinomian behavior usually flaunted what most people considered sins in order to demonstrate to one and all their godly and sin-free status.

During the English Civil War, of the 1640s and 1650s, many radical religious groups bubbled to the surface, including Gerrard Winstanley and the pantheist communist Diggers noted above. Featuring extreme antinomianism combined with pantheism and communism including communism of women, were the half-crazed Ranters, who urged everyone to sin so as to demonstrate their purity.

The Reappearance of Communism in the French Revolution

In times of trouble, war, and social upheaval, millennial and messianic sects have always appeared and burgeoned. After the English Civil War subsided, millennialist and communist creeds vanished, only to appear again in force at the time of the French Revolution. The difference was that now, for the first time, secular rather than

religious communist movements appeared. But the new secular communist prophets faced a grave problem: What was their agency for social change? The agency acclaimed by the religious millennialists had always been God and his Providential Messiah or vanguard prophets and destined, apocalyptic tribulations. But what could be the agency for a secular millennium and how could secular prophets drum up the necessary confidence in their foreordained triumph?

The first secularized communists appeared as two isolated individuals in mid-eighteenth century France. One was the aristocrat Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, elder brother of the laissez-faire liberal philosopher Etienne Bonnot de Condillac. Mably's major focus was to insist that all men are "perfectly" equal and uniform, one and the same everywhere. As in the case of many other communists after him, Mably found himself forced to confront one of the greatest problems of communism: if all property is owned in common and every person is equal, then there can be little or no incentive to work. For only the common store will benefit from anyone's work and not the individual himself. Mably in particular had to face this problem, since he also maintained that man's natural and original state was communism, and that private property arose to spoil everything precisely out of the indolence of some who wished to live at the expense of others. As Alexander Gray points out, "the indolence that ruined primitive communism would probably once again ruin communism, if reestablished."

Mably's two proposed solutions to this crucial problem were scarcely adequate. One, was to urge everyone to tighten their belts, to want less, to be content with Spartan austerity. The other was to come up with what Che Guevara and Mao Tse-tung would later call "moral incentives": to substitute for crass monetary rewards the recognition of one's merits by one's brothers—in the form of ribbons, medals, etc. In his devastatingly witty and perceptive critique, Alexander Gray writes that:

The idea that the world may find its driving force in a Birthday Honours List (giving to the King, if necessary, 365 birthdays a year) occurs with pathetic frequency in the more Utopian forms of socialist literature ...

But obviously, if any were wise or depraved enough to say that they preferred indolence to a ribbon (and there would be many such) they would have to be allowed to continue to lead idle lives, sponging on their neighbours; perhaps some who had at last attained the ribbon might burst into a blaze of *faineantise* (laziness) in order that they might without distraction savour the pleasure which accompanies consideration.

Gray goes on to point out that the more "distinctions" are handed out as incentives, the less they will truly distinguish, and the less influence

they will therefore exert. Furthermore, Mably “does not say how or by whom his distinctions are to be conferred.” Gray goes on:

it is assumed, and always is assumed, that there will be a universal and unquestioning belief that the fountain of honour has sprayed its refreshing waters on all the most deserving and on none but the most deserving. This naively innocent faith does not exist in the world we know, nor is it likely to exist in any earthly paradise that many may imagine.

Gray concludes that in a communist society in the real world, many people who *don't* receive honors may and probably will be disgruntled and resentful at the supposed injustice: “A general or a civil servant, kept waiting unduly in the queue for the Bath, may find his youthful ardour replaced by the sourness of hope deferred, and zeal may flag.”³¹

Thus, in his two preferred solutions, Gabriel de Mably was resting his hope on a miraculous transformation of human nature, much as the Marxists would later look for the advent of the New Socialist Man, willing to bend his desires and incentives to the requirements of, and the baubles conferred by, the collective. But for all his devotion to communism, Mably was at the bottom a realist, and so he held out no hope for communist triumph. Man is too steeped in the sin of selfishness and private property for a victory to occur. Clearly, Mably had scarcely begun to solve the secularist problem of social change or to inspire the birth and flowering of a revolutionary communist movement.

If Mably's pessimism was scarcely suitable for inspiring a movement, the same was not true of the other influential secular communist of mid-eighteenth century France, the unknown writer Morelly. Though personally little known, Morelly's *La Code de la Nature*, published in 1755, was highly influential, going into five more editions by 1773. Morelly had no doubts about the workability of communism; for him there was no problem of laziness or negative incentive, and therefore no need for the creation of a New Socialist Man. To Morelly, man is everywhere good, altruistic, and dedicated to work; only *institutions* are degrading and corrupt, specifically the institution of private property. Abolish that, and man's natural goodness would easily triumph. (Query: where did these corrupt human institutions come from, if not from man?)

Similarly, for Morelly, as for Marx and Lenin after him, the administration of the communist utopia would be absurdly easy as well. Assigning to every person his task in life, and deciding what material goods and services would fulfill his needs, would apparently

³¹Gray, *The Socialist Tradition*, pp. 90-91.

be a trivial problem for a Ministry of Labor or of Consumption. For Morelly, all this is merely a matter of trivial enumeration, listing things and persons.

And yet, somehow things are not going to be *that* easy in the Morelly utopia. While Mably the pessimist was apparently willing to leave society to the voluntary actions of individuals, the optimist Morelly was cheerfully prepared to employ brutally coercive methods to keep all of his “naturally good” citizens in line. Morelly worked out an intricate design for his proposed ideal government and society, all allegedly based on the evident dictates of natural law, and most of which were supposed to be changeless and eternal.

In particular, there was to be no private property, except for daily needs; every person was to be maintained and employed by the collective. Every man is to be forced to work, to contribute to the communal storehouse, according to his talents, and then will be assigned goods from these stores according to his presumed needs. Marriages are to be compulsory, and children are to be brought up communally, and absolutely identically in food, clothing, and training. Philosophic and religious doctrines are to be absolutely prescribed; no differences are to be tolerated; and children are not to be corrupted by any “fable, story, or ridiculous fictions.” All trade or barter is to be forbidden by “inviolable law.” All buildings are to be the same, and grouped in equal blocks; all clothing is to be made out of the same fabric (a proposal prophetic of Mao’s China). Occupations are to be limited and strictly assigned by the state.

Finally, the imposed laws are to be held sacred and inviolable, and anyone attempting to change them is to be isolated and incarcerated for life.

It should be clear that these utopias are debased, secularized versions of the visions of the Christian millennialists. Not only is there no ordained agency of social change to achieve this end-state, but they lack the glitter of messianic rule or glorification of God to disguise the fact that these utopias are static states, in which, as Gray puts it, “Nothing ever happens; no one ever disagrees with any one; the government, whatever its form may be, is always so wisely guided that there may be room for gratitude but never for criticism. ... Nothing happens, nothing can happen in any of them.” Gray concludes that even though, according to the utopian writers, “we are assured that never was there such a happy population,” that “in fact no Utopia has ever been described in which any sane man would on any conditions consent to live, if he could possibly escape ...”³²

³² Gray, *Socialist Tradition*, pp. 62-63.

We must not think, however, that Christian communist millennialism had disappeared. On the contrary, heretical Christian messianism was also revived in the stormy times of the middle and late eighteenth century. Thus, the Swabian Pietist Johann Christoph Otinger, in the mid-eighteenth century, prophesied a coming theocratic world-kingdom of saints, living communally, without rank or property, as members of a millennial Christian commonwealth. Particularly influential among later German Pietists was the French mystic and theosophist Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, who in his influential *Des Erreurs et la Verite* (1773) portrayed an "inner church of the elect" allegedly existing since the dawn of history, which soon would take power in the coming age. This "Martinist" theme was developed by the Rosicrucian movement, concentrated in Bavaria. Originally alchemist mystics during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Bavarian Rosicrucians began to stress the coming to world power by the church of the elect during the dawning millennial age. The most influential Bavarian Rosicrucian author, Carl von Eckartshausen, expounded on this theme in two widely read works, *Information on Magic* (1788-92) and *On Perfectibility* (1797). In the latter work, he developed the idea that the inner church of the elect had existed backward in time to Abraham and then to go forward to a world government ruled by these keepers of the divine light. The third and final Age of History, the Age of the Holy Spirit, was now at hand. The illuminated elect destined to rule the new communal world order were, fairly obviously, the Rosicrucian Order, since major evidence for the dawn of the Third Age being imminent was the rapid spread of Martinism and Rosicrucianism itself.

And these movements were indeed spreading during the 1780s and 1790s. The Prussian King Frederick William II and a large portion of his court were converted to Rosicrucianism in the late 1780s, as was the Russian Czar Paul I a decade later, based on his reading of Saint-Martin and Eckartshausen, both of whom Paul considered to be transmitters of divine revelation. Saint-Martin was also influential through his leadership of the Scottish Rite Masonry in Lyons, and was the major figure in what might be called the apocalyptic-Christian wing of the Masonic movement.³³

The leading communist movement during the French Revolution, however, was secularized. The ideas of Mably and Morelly could not hope to be embodied in reality in the absence of a concrete ideological *movement*, and the task of applying these ideas in movement form

³³See the revealing article by Paul Gottfried, "Utopianism of the Right: Maistre and Schlegel," *Modern Age* 24 (Spring 1980): 150-60.

was seized by a young journalist and commissioner of land deeds in Picardy, Francois Noel (“Caius Gracchus”) Babeuf, who came to Paris at the age of 26 in 1790, and imbibed the heady revolutionary atmosphere in that city. By 1793, Babeuf was committed to egalitarianism and communism; two years later, he founded the secret Conspiracy of the Equals, a conspiratorial revolutionary organization dedicated to the achievement of communism. The Conspiracy was organized around his new journal, *The Tribune of the People*. The *Tribune*, in a prefiguration of Lenin’s *Iskra* a century later, was used to set a coherent line for his cadre as well as for his public followers. Babeuf’s *Tribune* “was the first journal in history to be the legal arm of an extralegal revolutionary conspiracy.”³⁴

The ultimate ideal of Babeuf and his conspiracy was absolute equality. Nature, they claimed, calls for perfect equality; all inequality is injustice; therefore community of property is to be established. As the Conspiracy proclaimed emphatically in its *Manifesto of Equals*—written by one of Babeuf’s top aides, Sylvain Marechal—“We demand real equality, or Death; that is what we must have.” “For its sake,” the *Manifesto* went on, “we are ready for anything; we are willing to sweep everything away. Let all the arts vanish, if necessary, as long as genuine equality remains for us.”

In the ideal communist society sought by the Conspiracy, private property would be abolished, and all property would be communal, and stored in communal storehouses. From these storehouses, goods would be distributed “equitably” by the superiors—oddly enough, there would apparently be a cadre of “superiors” in this “equal” world! There was to be universal compulsory labor, “serving the fatherland ... by useful labor.” Teachers or scientists “must submit certifications of loyalty” to the superiors. The *Manifesto* acknowledged that there would be an enormous expansion of government officials and bureaucrats in the communist world, inevitable where “the fatherland takes control of an individual from his birth till his death.” There would be severe punishments consisting of forced labor against “persons of either sex who set society a bad example by absence of civic-mindedness, by idleness, a luxurious way of life, licentiousness.” These punishments, described, as one historian notes “lovingly and in great detail”³⁵ consisted of deportation to prison islands. Freedom of speech and the press are treated as one might expect. The press would not be allowed

³⁴James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), p. 73.

³⁵For this phrase and other translated quotes from the *Manifesto*, see Shafarevich, *The Socialist Phenomenon*, pp. 121-24. Also see Gray, *Socialist Tradition*, p. 107.

to “endanger the justice of equality” or to subject the Republic “to interminable and fatal discussions.” Moreover, “No one will be allowed to utter views that are in direct contradiction to the sacred principles of equality and the sovereignty of the people.” In point of fact, a work would only be allowed to appear in print “if the guardians of the will of the nation consider that its publication may benefit the Republic.”

All meals would be eaten in public in every commune, and there would, of course, be compulsory attendance imposed on all community members. Furthermore, everyone could only obtain “his daily ration” in the district in which he lives; the only exception would be “when he is traveling with the permission of the administration.” All private entertainment would be “strictly forbidden,” lest “imagination, released from the supervision of a strict judge, should engender abominable vices contrary to the commonweal.” And, as for religion, “all so-called revelation ought to be banned by law.”

Important as an influence on later Marxism-Leninism was not only the communist goal, but also Babeuf’s strategic theory and practice in the concrete organization of revolutionary activity. The unequal, the Babouvists proclaimed, must be despoiled, the poor must rise up and sack the rich. Above all, the French Revolution must be “completed” and redone; there must be total upheaval (*bouleversement total*), a total destruction of existing institutions so that a new and perfect world can be built from the rubble. As Babeuf called out, at the conclusion of his own *Plebeian Manifesto*: “May everything return to chaos, and out of chaos may there emerge a new and regenerated world.”³⁶ Indeed, the *Plebeian Manifesto*, published slightly earlier than the *Manifesto of Equals* in November 1795, was the first in a line of revolutionary manifestos that would reach a climax in Marx’s *Communist Manifesto* a half-century later.

The two Manifestos, the *Plebeian* and the *Equals*, revealed an important difference between Babeuf and Marechal which might have caused a split had not the Equals been crushed soon afterward by police repression. For in his *Plebeian Manifesto*, Babeuf had begun to move toward Christian messianism, not only paying tribute to Moses and Joshua, but also particularly to Jesus Christ as his, Babeuf’s, “co-athlete.” In prison, furthermore, Babeuf had written *A New History of the Life of Jesus Christ*. Most of the Equals, however, were militant atheists, spearheaded by Marechal, who liked to refer to himself with the grandiose acronym l’HSD, *l’homme sans Dieu* [the

³⁶Billington, *Fire in the Minds*, p. 75. Also see Gray, *Socialist Tradition*, p. 105n. As Gray comments, “what is desired is the annihilation of all things, trusting that out of the dust of destruction a fair city may arise. And buoyed by such a hope, how blithely would Babeuf bide the scour.” *Ibid.*, p. 105.

Man without God].

In addition to the idea of a conspiratorial revolution, Babeuf, fascinated by military matters, began to develop the idea of people's guerilla warfare: of the revolution being formed in separate "phalanxes" by people whose permanent occupation would be making revolution—whom Lenin would later call "professional revolutionaries." He also toyed with the idea of military phalanxes securing a geographical base, and then working outward from there.

A secret, conspiratorial inner circle, a phalanx of professional revolutionaries—inevitably this meant that Babeuf's strategic perspective for his revolution embodied some fascinating paradoxes. For in the name of a goal of harmony and perfect equality, the revolutionaries were to be led by a hierarchy commanding total obedience; the inner cadre would work its will over the mass. An absolute leader, heading an all-powerful cadre, would, at the proper moment, give the signal to usher in a society of perfect equality. Revolution would be made to end all further revolutions; an all-powerful hierarchy would be necessary, allegedly to put an end to hierarchy forever.

But of course, there was no real paradox here because Babeuf and his cadre harbored no real intention to eliminate hierarchy. The paeans to "equality" were a flimsy camouflage for the real objective—a permanently entrenched and absolute dictatorship.

After suffering police repression at the end of February, 1796, the Conspiracy of the Equals went further underground, and, a month later, constituted themselves as the Secret Directory of Public Safety. The seven secret directors, meeting every evening, reached collective and anonymous decisions, and then each member of this central committee radiated activity outward to 12 "instructors," each of whom mobilized a broader insurrectionary group in one of the 12 districts of Paris. In this way, the Conspiracy managed to mobilize 17,000 Parisians, but the group was betrayed by the eagerness of the secret directorate to recruit within the army. An informer led to the arrest of Babeuf on May 10, followed by the destruction of the Conspiracy of the Equals. Babeuf was executed the following year.

Police repression, however, almost always leaves pockets of dissidents to rise again, and the new carrier of the torch of revolutionary communism became a Babouvist arrested with the leader but who managed to avoid execution. Filippo Guiseppe Maria Lodovico Buonarroti was the oldest son of an aristocratic but impoverished Florentine family, and a direct descendant of the great Michelangelo. Studying law at the University of Pisa in the early 1780s, Buonarroti was converted by disciples of Morelly on the Pisa faculty. As a radical journalist and editor, Buonarroti then participated in battles for the

French Revolution against Italian troops. In the spring of 1794, he was put in charge of the French occupation in the Italian town of Oneglia, where he announced to the people that all men must be equal, and that any distinction whatever among men is a violation of natural law. Back in Paris, Buonarroti successfully defended himself in a trial against his use of terror in Oneglia, and finally plunged into Babeuf's Conspiracy of Equals. His friendship with Napoleon allowed him to escape execution, and eventually to be shipped from a prison camp to exile in Geneva.

For the rest of his life, Buonarroti became what his modern biographer calls "The First Professional Revolutionist," trying to set up revolutions and conspiratorial organizations throughout Europe. Before the execution of Babeuf and others, Buonarroti had pledged his comrades to write their full story, and he fulfilled that pledge when, at the age of 67, he published in Belgium *The Conspiracy for Equality of Babeuf* (1828). Babeuf and his comrades had been long forgotten, and this massive work now told the first and most thoroughgoing narrative of the Babouvist saga. The book proved to be an inspiration to revolutionary and communist groupings, and sold extremely well, the English translation of 1836 selling 50,000 copies in a short space of time. For the last decade of his life, the previously obscure Buonarroti was lionized throughout the European ultra-left.

Brooding over previous revolutionary failures, Buonarroti counselled the need for iron elite rule immediately after the coming to power of the revolutionary forces. In short, the power of the revolution must be immediately given over to a "strong, constant, enlightened immovable will," which will "direct all the force of the nation against internal and external enemies," and very gradually prepare the people for their sovereignty. The point, for Buonarroti, was that "the people are incapable either of regeneration by themselves or of designating the people who should direct the regeneration."

The Burgeoning of Communism in the 1830s and 1840s

The 1830s and 1840s saw the burgeoning of messianic and chiliastic communist and socialist groups throughout Europe: notably in France, Belgium, Germany and England. Owenites, Cabetists, Fourierists, Saint Simonians, and many others sprouted and interacted, and we need not examine them or their nuanced variations in detail. While the Welshman Robert Owen was the first to use the word "socialist" in print in 1827, and also toyed with "communionist," the word "communist" finally caught on as the most popular label for the new system. It was first used in popular printed work in Etienne

Cabet's utopian novel, *Voyage in Icaria* (1839),³⁷ and from there the word spread like wildfire across Europe, spurred by the recent development of a regular steamboat mail service and the first telegraphy. When Marx and Engels, in the famous opening sentence of their *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, wrote that "A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of Communism," this was a bit of hyperbolic rhetoric, but still was not far off the mark. As Billington writes, the talismanic word "communism" "spread throughout the continent with a speed altogether unprecedented in the history of such verbal epidemics."³⁸

Amid this welter of individuals and groups, some interesting ones stand out. The earliest German exile group of revolutionaries was the League of the Outlaws, founded in Paris by Theodore Schuster, under the inspiration of the writings of Buonarroti. Schuster's pamphlet, *Confession of Faith of an Outlaw* (1834) was perhaps the first projection of the coming revolution as a creation of the outlaws and marginal outcasts of society, those outside the circuit of production whom Marx would understandably dismiss brusquely as the "lumpenproletariat." The *lumpen* were later emphasized in the 1840s by the leading anarcho-communist, the Russian Mikhail Bakunin, foreshadowing various strains of the New Left during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Outlaws was the first international organization of communist revolutionaries, comprised of about 100 members in Paris and almost 80 in Frankfurt am Main. The League of Outlaws, however, disintegrated about 1838, many members, including Schuster himself, going off into nationalist agitation. But the League was succeeded quickly by a larger group of German exiles, the League of the Just, also headquartered in Paris. The German communist groups always tended to be more Christian than the other nationalities. Thus, Karl Schapper, leader of the Paris headquarters section of the League of the Just, addressed his followers as "Brothers in Christ," and hailed the coming social revolution as "the great resurrection day of the people." Intensifying the religious tone of the League of the Just was the prominent German communist, the tailor Wilhelm Weitling.

³⁷Cabet had been a distinguished French lawyer and attorney-general of Corsica, but was ousted for radical attitudes toward the French government. After founding a journal, Cabet fled into exile in London during the 1830s and initially became an Owenite. Despite Cabet's nationality, the book was originally written and published in English and a French translation was published the following year. A peaceful communist rather than a revolutionary, Cabet tried to establish utopian communes in various failed projects in the United States, from 1848 until his death 8 years later.

³⁸Billington, *Fire in the Minds*, p. 243.

In the manifesto that he wrote for the League of the Just, *Humanity as it is and as it ought to be* (1838), which though secret was widely disseminated and discussed, Weitling proclaimed himself a “social Luther,” and denounced money as the source of all corruption and exploitation. All private property and all money was to be abolished and the value of all products to be calculated in “labor-hours”—the labor theory of value taken all too seriously. For work in public utilities and heavy industry, Weitling proposed to mobilize a centralized “industrial army,” fueled by the conscription of every man and woman between the ages of 15 and 18.

Expelled from France after revolutionary troubles in 1839, the League of the Just moved to London, where it also established a broader front group, the Educational Society for German Workingmen in 1840. The three top leaders of the Society, Karl Schapper, Bruno Bauer, and Joseph Moll, managed to raise their total to over 1000 members by 1847, including 250 members in other countries in Europe and Latin America.

A fascinating contrast is presented by two young communists, both leaders of the movement during the 1840s, and both of whom have been almost totally forgotten by later generations—even by most historians. Each represented a different side of the communist perspective, two different strands of the movement.

One was the English Christian visionary and fantasist, John Goodwyn Barmby. At the age of 20, Barmby, then an Owenite, arrived in Paris in 1840 with a proposal to set up an International Association of Socialists throughout the world. A provisional committee was actually formed, headed by the French Owenite Jules Gay, but nothing came of the scheme. The plan did, however, prefigure the First International. More importantly, in Paris Barmby discovered the word “communist,” and adopted and spread it with enormous fervor. To Barmby, “communist” and “communitarian” were interchangeable terms, and he helped organize throughout France what he reported to the English Owenites were “social banquet(s) of the Communist or Communitarian school.” Back in England, Barmby’s fervor was undiminished. He founded a Communist Propaganda Society, soon to be called the Universal Communitarian Society, and established a journal, *The Promethean or Communitarian Apostle*, soon renamed *The Communist Chronicle*. Communism, to Barmby, was both the “societarian science” and the final religion of humanity. His *Credo*, propounded in the first issue of *The Promethean*, avowed that “the divine is communism, that the demonic is individualism.” After that flying start, Barmby wrote communist hymns and prayers, and called for the building of Communitariums, all directed by a supreme

Communarchy headed by an elected Communarch and Communarchess. Barmby repeatedly proclaimed “the religion of Communism,” and made sure to begin things right by naming himself “Pontifarch of the Communist Church.”

The subtitle of *The Communist Chronicle* revealed its neo-Christian messianism: “The Apostle of the Communist Church and the Communitive Life: Communion with God, Communion of the Saints, Communion of Suffrages, Communion of Works and Communion of Goods.” The struggle for communism, declared Barmby, was apocalyptic, bound to end with the mystical reunion of Satan into God: “In the holy Communist Church, the devil will be converted into God. ... And in this conversion of Satan doth God call peoples. ... in that communion of suffrages, of works, and of goods both spiritual and material ... for these latter days.”³⁹ The arrival in London of Wilhelm Weitling in 1844 led him and Barmby to collaborate on promoting Christian communism, but by the end of 1847, they had lost out and the communist movement was shifting decisively toward atheism.

The crucial turn came in June 1847, when the two most atheistical of communist groups—the League of the Just in London, and the small, fifteen-man Communist Correspondence Committee of Brussels, headed by Karl Marx, merged to form the Communist League. At its second congress in December, ideological struggles within the League were resolved when Marx was asked to write the statement for the new party, to become the famed *Communist Manifesto*.

Cabet and Weitling, throwing in the towel, each left permanently for the United States in 1848, to try to establish communism there. Both attempts foundered ignominiously amid America’s expanding and highly individualistic society. Cabet’s Icarians settled in Texas and then Nauvoo, Illinois, then split and split again, until Cabet, ejected by his former followers in Nauvoo, left for St. Louis and died, spurned by nearly everyone, in 1856. As for Weitling, he gave up more rapidly. In New York, he became a follower of Josiah Warren’s individualistic though left-Ricardian labor-money scheme, and in 1854 he deviated further to become a bureaucrat with the U.S. Immigration Service, spending most of his remaining 17 years trying to promote his various inventions. Apparently, Weitling, willy-nilly, had at last “voted with his feet” to join the capitalist order.

Meanwhile, Goodwyn Barmby sequestered himself in one after another of the Channel Islands to try to found a utopian community, and denounced a former follower for setting up a more practical *Communist Journal* as “an infringement of his copyright” on the word “communism.” Gradually, however, Barmby abandoned his universalism

³⁹Billington, *Fire in the Minds*, p. 257.

and began to call himself a “National Communist.” Finally, in 1848, he went to France, became a Unitarian minister and friend of Mazzini’s and abandoned communism for revolutionary nationalism.

On the other hand, a leading young French communist, Theodore Dezamy, represented a competing strain of militant atheism and a tough, cadre approach. In his early youth the personal secretary of Cabet, Dezamy led the sudden communist boom launched in 1839 and 1840. By the following year, Dezamy became perhaps the founder of the Marxist-Leninist tradition of ideologically and politically excommunicating all deviationists from the correct line. In fact, in 1842, Dezamy, a highly prolific pamphleteer, turned bitterly on his old mentor Cabet, and denounced him, in his *Slanders and Politics of Mr. Cabet*, for chronic vacillation. In *Slanders*, Dezamy, for the first time, argued that ideological as well as political discipline is requisite for the communist movement.

More importantly, Dezamy wanted to purge French communism of the influence of the quasi-religious poetic and moralistic communist code propounded by Cabet in his *Voyage in Icaria* and especially in his *Communist Credo* of 1841. Dezamy therefore countered with his *Code of the Community* the following year. Dezamy attempted to be severely “scientific” and claimed that communist revolution was both rational and inevitable. It is no wonder that Dezamy was greatly admired by Marx.

Furthermore, pacific or gradual measures were to be rejected. Dezamy insisted that a communist revolution must confiscate all private property and all money immediately. Half measures will satisfy no one, he claimed, and, furthermore, as Billington paraphrases it, “Swift and total change would be less bloody than a slow process, since communism releases the natural goodness of man.”⁴⁰ It was from Dezamy, too, that Marx adopted the absurdly simplistic view that the operation of communism was merely a clerical task of bookkeeping and registration of people and resources.⁴¹

Not only would revolutionary communism be immediate and total; it would also be global and universal. In the future communist world, there will be one global “congress of humanity,” one single language, and a single labor service called “industrial athletes,” who will perform work in the form of communal youth festivals. Moreover, the new “universal country” would abolish not only “narrow” nationalism, but also such divisive loyalties as the family. In stark practical

⁴⁰Billington, *Fire in the Minds*, p. 251.

⁴¹See the standard biography of Marx by David McLellan, *Karl Marx: His Life and Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 118.

contrast to his own career as ideological excommunicator, Dezamy proclaimed that under communism conflict would be logically impossible: "there can be no splits among Communists; our struggles among ourselves can only be struggles of harmony, or reasoning," since "communitarian principles" constitute "the solution to all problems."

Amidst this militant atheism there was, however, a kind of religious fervor and even faith. For Dezamy spoke of "this sublime devotion which constitutes socialism," and he urged proletarians to reenter "the egalitarian church, *outside of which there can be no salvation.*"

Dezamy's arrest and trial in 1844 inspired German communists in Paris such as Arnold Ruge, Moses Hess, and Karl Marx, and Hess began to work on a German translation of Dezamy's Code, under the encouragement of Marx, who proclaimed the Code "scientific, socialist, materialist, and real humanist."⁴²

Karl Marx: Apocalyptic Reabsorptionist Communist

Karl Marx was born in Trier, a venerable city in Rhineland Prussia, in 1818, son of a distinguished jurist, and grandson of a rabbi. Indeed, both of Marx's parents were descended from rabbis. Marx's father Heinrich was a liberal rationalist who felt no great qualms about his forced conversion to official Lutheranism in 1816. What is little known is that, in his early years, the baptized Karl was a dedicated Christian.⁴³ In his graduation essays from Trier *gymnasium* in 1835, the very young Marx prefigured his later development. His essay on an assigned topic, "On the Union of the Faithful with Christ" was orthodox evangelical Christian, but it also contained hints of the fundamental "alienation" theme that he would later find in Hegel. Marx's discussion of the "necessity for union" with Christ stressed that this union would put an end to the tragedy of God's alleged rejection of man. In a companion essay on "Reflections of A Young Man on the Choice of a Profession," Marx expressed a worry about his own "demon of ambition," of the great temptation he felt to "inveigh against the Deity and curse mankind."

Going first to the University of Bonn and then off to the prestigious new University of Berlin to study law, Marx soon converted to militant atheism, shifted his major to philosophy, and joined a

⁴²See J. L. Talmon, *Political Messianism: The Romantic Phase* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 157.

⁴³Friedreich Engels was the son of a leading industrialist and cotton manufacturer, who was also a staunch Pietist from the Barmen area of the Rhineland in Germany. Barmen was one of the major centers of Pietism in Germany, and Engels received a strict Pietist upbringing. An atheist and then a Hegelian by 1839, Engels wound up at the University of Berlin and the Young Hegelians by 1841, and moved in the same circles as Marx, becoming fast friends in 1844.

Doktorclub of Young (or Left) Hegelianism, of which he soon became a leader and general secretary.

The shift to atheism quickly gave Marx's demon of ambition full rein. Particularly revelatory of Marx's adult as well as youthful character are volumes of poems, most of them lost until a few were recovered in recent years.⁴⁴ Historians, when they discuss these poems, tend to dismiss them as inchoate Romantic yearnings, but they are too congruent with the adult Marx's social and revolutionary doctrines to be casually dismissed. Surely, here seems to be a case where a unified (early plus late) Marx is vividly revealed. Thus, in his poem "Feelings," dedicated to his childhood sweetheart and later wife Jenny von Westphalen, Marx expressed both his megalomania and his enormous thirst for destruction:

*Heaven I would comprehend
I would draw the world to me;
Loving, hating, I intend
That my star shine brilliantly ...*

and

*... Worlds I would destroy forever,
Since I can create no world;
Since my call they notice never ...*

Here, of course, is a classic expression of Satan's supposed reason for hating, and rebelling against, God.

In another poem Marx writes of his triumph after he shall have destroyed God's created world:

*Then I will be able to walk triumphantly,
Like a god, through the ruins of their kingdom.
Every word of mine is fire and action.
My breast is equal to that of the Creator.*

And in his poem "Invocation of One in Despair," Marx writes:

*I shall build my throne high overhead,
Cold, tremendous shall its summit be.
For its bulwark—superstitious dread.
For its marshal—blackest agony.⁴⁵*

The Satan theme is most explicitly set forth in Marx's "The Fiddler," dedicated to his father.

⁴⁴The poems were largely written in 1836 and 1837, in Marx's first months in Berlin. Two of the poems constituted Marx's first published writings, in the *Berlin Atheneum* in 1841. The others have been mainly lost.

⁴⁵Richard Wurmbrand, *Marx and Satan* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1986), pp. 12-13.

*See this sword?
The prince of darkness
Sold it to me.*

and

*With Satan I have struck my deal,
He chalks the signs, beats time for me
I play the death march fast and free.*

Particularly instructive is Marx's lengthy unfinished poetic drama of this youthful period, *Oulanem, A Tragedy*. In the course of this drama his hero, Oulanem, delivers a remarkable soliloquy, pouring out sustained invective, a deep hatred of the world and of mankind, a hatred of creation, and a threat and a vision of total world destruction.

Thus Oulanem pours out his vials of wrath:

*I shall howl gigantic curses on mankind.
Ha! Eternity! She is an eternal grief. ...
Ourselves being clockwork, blindly mechanical,
Made to be foul-calendars of Time and Space,
Having no purpose save to happen, to be ruined,
So that there shall be something to ruin ...
If there is a Something which devours,
I'll leap within it, though I bring the world to ruins—
The world which bulks between me and the Abyss
I will smash to pieces with my enduring curses.
I'll throw my arms around its harsh reality:
Embracing me, the world will dumbly pass away,
And then sink down to utter nothingness,
Perished, with no existence—that would be really living!*

And

*... the leaden world holds us fat,
And we are chained, shattered, empty, frightened,
Eternally chained to this marble block of Being, ... and we—
We are the apes of a cold God.⁴⁶*

All this reveals a spirit that often seems to animate militant atheism. In contrast to the non-militant variety, which expresses a simple

⁴⁶For the complete translated text of *Oulanem*, see Robert Payne, *The Unknown Karl Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), pp. 81-83. Also excellent on the poems and on Marx as a messianist is Bruce Mazlish, *The Meaning of Karl Marx* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1984).

Pastor Wurmbrand points out that *Oulanem* is an anagram of Emmanuel, the Biblical name for Jesus, and that such inversions of holy names are standard practice in Satanic cults. There is no real evidence, however, that Marx was a member of such a cult. Wurmbrand *Marx and Satan*, pp. 13-14 and *passim*.

disbelief in God's existence, militant atheism seems to believe implicitly in God's existence, but to hate Him and to wage war for His destruction. Such a spirit was all too clearly revealed in the retort of militant atheist and anarcho-communist Bakunin to the famous pro-theist remark of Voltaire: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to create Him." To which the demented Bakunin retorted: "If God did exist, it would be necessary to destroy Him." It was this hatred of God as a creator greater than himself that apparently animated Karl Marx.

When Marx came to the University of Berlin, the heart of Hegelianism, he found that doctrine regnant but in a certain amount of disarray. Hegel had died in 1831; the Great Philosopher was supposed to bring about the end of History, but now Hegel was dead, and History continued to march on. So if Hegel himself was not the final culmination of history, then perhaps the Prussian State of Friedrich Wilhelm III was not the final stage of history either. But if he was not, then mightn't the dialectic of history be getting ready for yet another twist, another *aufhebung*?

So reasoned groups of radical youth, who, during the late 1830s and 1840s in Germany and elsewhere, formed the movement of the Young, or Left, Hegelians. Disillusioned in the Prussian State, the Young Hegelians proclaimed the inevitable coming apocalyptic revolution that would destroy and transcend that State, a revolution that would *really* bring about the end of History in the form of national, or world, communism. After Hegel, there was one more twist of the dialectic to go.

One of the first and most influential of the Left Hegelians was a Polish aristocrat, Count August Cieszkowski, who wrote in German and published in 1838 his *Prolegomena to a Historiosophy*. Cieszkowski brought to Hegelianism a new dialectic of history, a new variant of the three ages of man. The first age, the age of antiquity, was, for some reason, the Age of Emotion, the epoch of pure feeling, of no reflective thought, of elemental immediacy and hence unity with nature. The "spirit" was "in itself" (*an sich*). The second age, the Christian Era, stretching from the birth of Jesus to the death of the great Hegel, was the Age of Thought, of reflection, in which the "spirit" moved "toward itself," in the direction of abstraction and universality. But Christianity, the Age of Thought, was also an era of intolerable duality, of alienation, of man separated from God, of spirit separated from matter, and thought from action. Finally, the third and culminating age, the Age a-borning, heralded (of course!) by Count Cieszkowski, was to be the Age of Action. The third post-Hegelian age would be an age of practical action, in

which the thought of both Christianity and of Hegel would be transcended and embodied into an act of will, a final revolution to overthrow and transcend existing institutions. For the term “practical action,” Cieszkowski borrowed the Greek word *praxis* to summarize the new age, a term that would soon acquire virtually talismanic influence in Marxism. This final age of action would bring about, at last, a blessed unity of thought and action, spirit and matter, God and earth, and total “freedom.” With Hegel and the mystics, Cieszkowski stressed that *all* past events, even those seemingly evil, were necessary to the ultimate and culminating salvation.

In a work published in French in Paris in 1844, Cieszkowski also heralded the new class destined to become the leaders of the revolutionary society: the *intelligentsia*, a word that had recently been coined by a German-educated Pole, B. F. Trentowski.⁴⁷ Cieszkowski thus proclaimed and glorified a development that would at least be implicit in the Marxist movement (after all, the great Marxists, from Marx and Engels on down, were all bourgeois intellectuals rather than children of the proletariat). Generally, however, Marxists have been shamefaced about this reality that belies Marxian proletarianism and equality, and the “new class” theorists have all been critics of Marxian socialism, (e.g. Bakunin, Machajski, Michels, Djilas).

Count Cieszkowski, however, was not destined to ride the wave of the future of revolutionary socialism. For he took the Christian messianic, rather than the atheistic, path to the new society. In his massive, unfinished work of 1848, *Our Father (Ojciec nasz)*, Cieszkowski maintained that the new age of revolutionary communism would be a Third Age, an Age of the Holy Spirit (shades of Joachimism!), an era that would be the Kingdom of God on earth “as it is in heaven.” This final Kingdom of God on earth would reintegrate all of “organic humanity,” and would be governed by a Central Government of All Mankind, headed by a Universal Council of the People.

At that time, it was by no means clear which strand of revolutionary communism, the religious or the atheist, would ultimately win out. Thus, Alexander Ivanovich Herzen, a founder of the Russian revolutionary tradition, was entranced by Cieszkowski’s brand of Left Hegelianism, writing that “the future society is to be the work not of the heart, but of the concrete. Hegel is the new Christ bringing the word of truth to men.”⁴⁸ And soon, Bruno Bauer, friend and mentor

⁴⁷In B. F. Trentowski, *The Relationship of Philosophy to Cybernetics* (Poznan, 1843), in which the author also coined the word “cybernetics” for the new, emerging form of rational social technology which would transform mankind. See Billington, *Fire in the Minds*, p. 231.

⁴⁸Billington, *Fire in the Minds*, p. 225.

of Karl Marx and leader of the *Doktorklub* of Young Hegelians at the University of Berlin, hailed Cieszkowski's new philosophy of action in late 1841 as "The Trumpet Call of the Last Judgment."

But the winning strand in the European socialist movement, as we have indicated, was eventually to be Karl Marx's atheism. If Hegel had pantheized and elaborated the dialectic of the Christian messianics, Marx now "stood Hegel on his head" by atheizing the dialectic, and resting it not on mysticism or religion or "spirit" or the Absolute Idea or the World-Mind, but on the supposedly solid and "scientific" foundation of philosophical materialism. Marx adopted his materialism from the Left Hegelian Ludwig Feuerbach, particularly from his work *The Essence of Christianity* (1843). In contrast to the Hegelian emphasis on "spirit," Marx would study the allegedly scientific laws of matter in some way operating through history. Marx, in short, took the dialectic and made it into a "materialist dialectic of history."

By recasting the dialectic onto materialist and atheist terms, however, Marx gave up the powerful motor of the dialectic as it supposedly operated through history: either Christian messianism or Providence or the growing self-consciousness of the World-Spirit. How could Marx find a "scientific" materialist replacement, newly grounded in the ineluctable "laws of history," that would explain the historical process thus far, and also—and most importantly—explain the inevitability of the imminent apocalyptic transformation of the world into communism? It is one thing to base the prediction of a forthcoming Armageddon on the Bible; it is quite another to deduce this event from allegedly scientific law. Setting forth the specifics of this engine of history was to occupy Karl Marx for the rest of his life.

Although Marx found Feuerbach indispensable for adopting a thoroughgoing atheist and materialist position, Marx soon found that Feuerbach had not gone nearly far enough. Even though Feuerbach was a philosophical communist, he basically believed that if man foreswore religion, then man's alienation from his self would be over. To Marx, religion was only one of the problems. The entire world of man (the *Menschenwelt*) was alienating, and had to be radically overthrown, root and branch. Only apocalyptic destruction of this world of man would permit true human nature to be realized. Only then would the existing un-man (*Unmensch*) truly become man (*Mensch*). As Marx thundered in the fourth of his "theses on Feuerbach," "One must proceed to destroy the 'earthly family' as it is 'both in theory and in practice.'"⁴⁹

In particular, declared Marx, true man, as Feuerbach had argued, is a "communal being" (*Gemeinwesen*) or "species being" (*Gattungswesen*).

⁴⁹Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, p. 101.

Although the state as it exists must be negated or transcended, man's participation in the state comes as such a communal being. The major problem comes in the private sphere, the market, or "civil society," in which un-man acts as an egoist, as a private person, treating others as means, and not collectively as masters of their fate. And in existing society, unfortunately, civil society is primary, while the State, or "political community," is secondary. What must be done to realize the full nature of mankind is to transcend the State and civil society by politicizing all of life, by making all of man's actions "collective." Then real individual man will become a true and full species being.^{50,51}

But only a revolution, an orgy of destruction, can accomplish such a task. And here, Marx harkened back to the call for total destruction that had animated his vision of the world in the poems of his youth. Indeed, in a speech in London in 1856, Marx gave graphic and loving expression to this goal of his "praxis." He mentioned that in Germany in the Middle Ages there existed a secret tribunal called the *Vehmgericht*. He then explained:

If a red cross was seen marked on a house, people knew that its owner was doomed by the *Vehm*. All the houses of Europe are now marked with the mysterious red cross. History is the judge—its executioner the proletarian.⁵²

Marx, in fact, was not satisfied with the philosophical communism to which he and Engels had separately been converted by the slightly older Left Hegelian Moses Hess in the early 1840s. To Hess's communism, Marx, by the end of 1843, added the crucial emphasis on the *proletariat*, not simply as an economic class, but as destined to become the "universal class" when communism was achieved. Ironically, Marx acquired his vision of the proletariat as the key to the communist revolution from an influential book published in 1842 by a youthful enemy of socialism, Lorenz von Stein. Stein interpreted the socialist and communist movements of the day as rationalizations

⁵⁰Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, p. 105.

⁵¹It is both ironic and fascinating that the dominant intellectuals in contemporary Hungary who are leading the drive away from socialism and toward freedom are honoring the Marxian concept of "civil society" as what they are moving toward while going away from the collective and the communal.

⁵²Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, p. 15.

⁵³Stein was a conservative Hegelian monarchist, who had been assigned by the Prussian government to study the unsettling new doctrines of socialism and communism becoming rampant in France. Marx displayed a "minute textual familiarity" with Stein's book, Lorenz von Stein, *Der Socialismus und Communismus des heutigen Frankreichs* (Liepzig, 1842), a book that remains untranslated. Stein spent his mature years as professor of public finance and public administration at the University of Vienna. See Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, pp. 114-17.

of the class interests of the propertyless proletariat. Marx discovered in Stein's attack the "scientific" engine for the inevitable coming of the communist revolution.⁵³ The proletariat, the most "alienated" and allegedly "propertyless" class, would be the key.

We have been accustomed, ever since Stalin's alterations of Marx, to regard "socialism" as the "first stage" of a communist-run society, and "communism" as the ultimate stage. This is not the way Marx saw the development of his system. Marx, as well as all the other communists of his day, used "socialism" and "communism" interchangeably to describe their ideal society. Instead, Marx foresaw the dialectic operating mysteriously to bring about the first stage, of "raw" or "crude" communism, to be magically transformed by the workings of the dialectic into the "higher" stage of communism. It is remarkable that Marx, especially in his "Private Property and Communism," accepted the horrendous picture that von Stein drew of the "raw" stage of communism. Stein forecast that communism would attempt to enforce egalitarianism by wildly and ferociously expropriating and destroying property, confiscating it, and coercively communizing women as well as material wealth. Indeed, Marx's evaluation of raw communism, the stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, was even more negative than Stein's: "In the same way as women abandon marriage for general [i.e., universal] prostitution, so the whole world of wealth, that is, the objective being of man, is to abandon the relation of exclusive marriage with the private property owner for the relation of general prostitution with the community." Not only that, but, as Professor Tucker puts it, Marx concedes that "raw communism is not the real transcendence of private property but only the universalizing of it, and not the abolition of labour but only its extension to all men. It is merely a new form in which the vileness of private property comes to the surface."

In short, in the stage of communalization of private property, what Marx himself considers the worst features of private property will be maximized. Not only that: but Marx concedes the truth of the charge of anti-communists then and now that communism and communization is but the expression, in Marx's words, of "envy and a desire to reduce all to a common level." Far from leading to a flowering of human personality, as Marx is supposed to claim, he admits that communism will negate that personality totally. Thus Marx:

In completely negating the *personality* of man, this type of communism is really nothing but the logical expression of private property. General *envy*, constituting itself as a power, is the disguise in which *greed* reestablishes itself and satisfies itself, only in *another way*. ... In the approach to *woman* as the spoil and handmaid of communal

lust is expressed the infinite degradation in which man exists for himself.⁵⁴

Marx clearly did not stress this dark side of communist revolution in his later writings. Professor Tucker explains that “these vivid indications from the Paris manuscripts of the way in which Marx envisaged and evaluated the immediate post-revolutionary period very probably explain the extreme reticence that he always later showed on this topic in his published writings.”⁵⁵

But if this communism is admittedly so monstrous, a regime of “infinite degradation,” why should anyone favor it, much less dedicate one’s life and fight a bloody revolution to establish it? Here, as so often in Marx’s thought and writings, he falls back on the mystique of the “dialectic”—that wondrous magic wand by which one social system inevitably gives rise to its victorious transcendence and negation. And, in this case, by which total evil—which turns out, interestingly enough, to be the post-revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat and *not* previous capitalism—becomes transformed into total good, a never-never land absent the division of labor and all other forms of alienation. The curious point is that while Marx attempts to explain the dialectic movement from feudalism to capitalism and from capitalism to the first stage of communism in terms of class struggle and the material productive forces, both of these drop out once raw communism is achieved. The allegedly inevitable transformation from the hell of raw communism to the alleged heaven of higher communism is left totally unexplained; to rely on *that* crucial transformation, we must fall back on pure faith in the mystique of the dialectic.

Despite Marx’s claim to be a “scientific socialist,” scorning all other Socialists whom he dismissed as moralistic and “utopian,” it should be clear that Marx himself was even more in the messianic utopian tradition than were the competing “Utopians.” For Marx not only sought a desired future society that would put an end to history, he claimed to have found the path toward that utopia inevitably determined by the “laws of history.”

But a utopian, and a fierce one, Marx certainly was. A hallmark of every utopia is a militant desire to put an end to history, to freeze mankind in a static state, to put an end to diversity and man’s free will, and to order everyone’s life in accordance with the utopian’s totalitarian plan. Many early communists and socialists set forth their fixed utopias in great and absurd detail, determining the size of everyone’s living quarters, the food they would eat, etc. Marx was

⁵⁴Quoted in Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, p. 155. Italics are Marx’s.

⁵⁵Tucker, *Philosophy and Myth*, pp. 155-56.

not silly enough to do that, but his entire system, as Professor Thomas Molnar points out, is “the search of the utopian mind for the definitive stabilization of mankind or, in gnostic terms, its reabsorption into the timeless.” For Marx, his quest for utopia was, as we have seen, an explicit attack on God’s creation and a ferocious desire to destroy it. The idea of crushing the many, the diverse facets of creation, and of returning to an allegedly lost Unity with God began, as we have seen, with Plotinus. As Molnar summed up:

In this view, existence itself is wound on nonbeing. Philosophers from Plotinus to Fichte and beyond have held that the reabsorption of the polichrome universe in the eternal One would be preferable to creation. Short of this solution, they propose to arrange a world in which change is brought under control so as to put an end to a disturbingly free will and to society’s uncharted moves. They aspire to return from the linear Hebrew-Christian concept to the Greco-Hindu cycle—that is, to a changeless, timeless permanence.

The triumph of unity over diversity means that, for the utopians including Marx, “civil society, with its disturbing diversity, can be abolished.”⁵⁶

Substituting in Marx for God’s will or the Hegelian dialectic of the World-Spirit or the Absolute Idea, is monist materialism, its central assumption, as Molnar puts it, being “that the universe consists of matter plus some sort of one-dimensional law immanent in matter.” In that case, “man himself is reduced to a complex but manipulable material aggregate, living in the company of other aggregates, and forming increasingly complex super aggregates called societies, political bodies, churches.” The alleged laws of history, then, are derived by scientific Marxists as supposedly evident and immanent within this matter itself.

The Marxian process toward utopia, then, is man acquiring insights into his own true nature, and then rearranging the world to accord with that nature. Engels, in fact, explicitly proclaimed the Hegelian concepts of the Man-God: “Hitherto the question has always stood: What is God?—and German Hegelian philosophy has revolved it as follows: God is man. ... Man must now arrange the world in a *truly* human way, according to the demands of his *nature*.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶Thomas Molnar, “Marxism and the Utopian Theme,” *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1978): 153-54. The economist David McCord Wright, while not delving into the religious roots of the problem, stressed that one group in society, the statist, seeks “the achievement of a fixed ideal static pattern of technical and social organization. Once this ideal is reached, or closely approximated, it need only be repeated endlessly thereafter.” David McCord Wright, *Democracy and Progress* (New York: Macmillan, 1948), p. 21.

⁵⁷Molnar, “Marxism,” pp.149, 150-51.

But this process is rife with self-contradictions; for example, and centrally, how can mere matter gain insights into his [its?] nature? As Molnar puts it: “for how can matter gather insights? And if it has insights, it is not entirely matter, but matter *plus*.”

In this allegedly inevitable process, of arriving at the proletarian communist utopia after the proletarian class becomes conscious of its true nature, what is supposed to be Karl Marx’s own role? In Hegelian theory, Hegel himself is the final and greatest world-historical figure, the Man-God of man-gods. Similarly, Marx in his own view stands at a focal point of history as the man who brought to the world the crucial knowledge of man’s true nature and of the laws of history, thereby serving as the “midwife” of the process that would put an end to history. Thus Molnar:

Like other utopian and gnostic writers, Marx is much less interested in the stages of history up to the present (the egotistic *now* of all utopian writers) than the final stages when the stuff of time becomes more concentrated, when the drama approaches its denouement. In fact, the utopian writer conceives of history as a process leading to himself since he, the ultimate *comprehensor*, stands in the center of history. It is natural that things accelerate during his own lifetime and come to a watershed: *he* looms large between the Before and the After.⁵⁸

Thus, in common with other utopian socialists and communists, Marx sought in communism the apotheosis of the collective species-mankind as one new super-being, in which the only meaning possessed by the individual is as a negligible particle of that collective organism. Many of Marx’s numerous epigones carried out his quest. One incisive portrayal of Marxian collective organicism—what amounts to a celebration of the New Socialist Man to be created during the communizing process—was that of a top Bolshevik theoretician of the early twentieth century, Alexander Alexandrovich Bogdanov. Bogdanov, too, spoke of “three ages” of human history. First was a religious, authoritarian society and a self-sufficient economy. Next came the “second age,” an exchange economy, marked by diversity and the emergence of the “autonomy” of the “individual human personality.” But this individualism, at first progressive, later becomes an obstacle to progress as it hampers and “contradicts the unifying tendencies of the machine age.” But then there will arise the Third Age, the final stage of history, communism. This last stage will be marked by a collective self-sufficient economy, and by

the fusion of personal lives into one colossal whole, harmonious in the relations of its parts, systematically grouping all elements for one

⁵⁸Molnar, “Marxism,” pp. 151-52.

common struggle—struggle against the endless spontaneity of nature. ... An enormous mass of creative activity ... is necessary in order to solve this task. It demands the forces not of man but of mankind—and only in working at this task does mankind as such emerge.⁵⁹

Finally, at the apex of Marxian messianic communism is a man who fuses all the tendencies and strands analyzed thus far. A blend of Christian messianist *and* devoted Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist, the twentieth century German Marxist Ernst Bloch set forth his vision in his recently translated three-volume phantasmagoria *The Principle of Hope (Das Prinzip Hoffnung)*. Early in his career, Bloch wrote a laudatory study of the views and life of the coercive Anabaptist communist, Thomas Müntzer, whom he hailed as magical, or “theurgic.” The inner “truth” of things, wrote Bloch, will only be discovered after “a complete transformation of the universe, a grand apocalypse, the descent of the Messiah, a new heaven and a new earth.” There is more than a hint in Bloch that disease, nay death itself, will be abolished upon the advent of communism.⁶⁰ God is developing; “God himself is part of the Utopia, a finality that is still unrealized.” For Bloch mystical ecstasies and the worship of Lenin and Stalin went hand in hand. As J. P. Stern writes, Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* contains such remarkable declarations as “*Ubi Lenin, ibi Jerusalem*” [Where Lenin is, there is Jerusalem], and that “the Bolshevikist fulfillment of Communism” is part of “the age-old fight for God.”

In the person of Ernst Bloch, the old grievous split within the European communist movement of the 1830s and 1840s between its Christian and atheist wings was at last reconciled. Or, to put it another way, in a final bizarre twist of the dialectic of history, the total conquest by 1848 of the Christian variants of communism at the hands of the superior revolutionary will and organizing of Karl Marx, was now transcended and negated. The messianic eschatological vision of heretical religious and Christian communism was now back in full force, within the supposed stronghold of atheistic communism, Marxism itself. From Ernst Bloch to the fanatical cults of personality of Stalin and Mao to the genocidal vision and ruthlessness of Pol Pot in Cambodia and the Shining Path guerrilla movement in Peru, it seems that, within the body and soul of Marxism, Thomas Müntzer had at last triumphed conclusively over Feuerbach.

⁵⁹Quoted in S. V. Utechin, “Philosophy and Society: Alexander Bogdanov,” in Leopold Labedz, ed., *Revisionism: Essays on the History of Marxist Ideas* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p. 122.

⁶⁰J. P. Stern, “Marxism on Stilts: Review of Ernst Bloch, “The Principle of Hope,” *The New Republic* 196 (March 9, 1987): 40, 42. Also see Kolakowski, *Main Currents*, vol. 3, pp. 423-24.