

or naked, sick or in prison, and did not come to your help? Then he will answer, 'I tell you solemnly, in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me'. And they will go away to eternal punishment, and the virtuous to eternal life'.<sup>41</sup>

# On Not Quite Agreeing with Marx

by Hugo Meynell

Marx denied that he was a moralist<sup>1</sup>. But it can hardly be disputed that anyone who thinks seriously about certain matters which have to do with morals—the nature and causes of wrongdoing and suffering in human society, and how they may be remedied—must come to grips with his arguments. To put the matter bluntly, any responsible intellectual who is not a Marxist must at times ask himself just why he is not; and in what follows, I shall try to explain why I am not. To cope with the whole range of Marx's writings, one needs to be a specialist; those who are not so may well be, as I am, deeply indebted to David McLellan for his admirable summary, supported with copious quotations, of the main features of Marx's thought.<sup>2</sup> For better or for worse, anyway, my Marx will be largely Marx as McLellan presents him.

It is fundamental to Marx's thought that human relationships, and consequently the whole web of institutions which make up society, are determined by the material circumstances in which men live and work; and consequently that if you change these material circumstances, you will change human ideas and behaviour at large. This thesis is generally labelled 'historical materialism'.<sup>3</sup> Now the word

<sup>41</sup>*Matthew*, Chapter 25: xxxi-xlvi.

<sup>1</sup>*The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London, 1970); p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>David McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx* (London 1971). All references not otherwise assigned will be to this volume.

<sup>3</sup>Marx himself did not use this expression; yet it seems a convenient label for his philosophy (cf. 123). Engels admitted (cf. 124) that some statements by Marx and himself had encouraged an extreme and erroneous view of the dependence of ideas on material circumstances. Cf. also the Third Thesis on Feuerbach, to the effect that men change their circumstances as well as being the product of circumstances. In *The Communist Manifesto* the question is asked: 'Does it require intuition to comprehend that man's ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life?' (45). It is highly reasonable to believe that they do; but the question remains whether these

'determined' may be understood here in a relatively strong or a relatively weak sense. If it is taken in a strong sense, the thesis is that, given the material circumstances and the means of production prevalent in a society, its members *cannot but* behave very much as they do. (It would appear to be incorrect to ascribe to Marx a rigid determinism applying to the details of every individual action.) If it is taken in a weaker sense, the thesis will amount to no more than that the prevailing material circumstances and means of production are *necessary conditions* for people behaving as they do, but that other and perhaps equally important factors are involved as well. Evidently the weak thesis is distinguishable from the strong, and thus good evidence for the weak thesis cannot necessarily be taken as good evidence for the strong. As far as I can judge, oscillation between the weak and the strong thesis is very characteristic of Marx's arguments; and it seems to me that the resulting confusion tends to vitiate somewhat his theories about class conflict, alienation, and what can be expected from revolutionary action.

Sartre has argued powerfully for the weaker as opposed to the stronger thesis since his espousal of Marxism. Sure enough, he says, in accounting for any distinguished individual's achievement, one must emphasise its basis in his economic and social circumstances; but also to be taken into account in his individual *projet*, what he himself has made of these circumstances. Sartre castigates many Marxist theorists for neglecting this point.<sup>4</sup> An extreme opponent of Marx might object that while the stronger thesis was totally implausible, the weaker was quite trivial. But this, I think, would be a great mistake. Historians have as a matter of fact tended to overlook the influence of the economic upon the social situation of an epoch, and the effect of both on the ideas which were characteristic of it. We frequently assign importance to the wrong causes, overlooking, for example, the economic forces that govern capitalist society. At the very least, Marxist historians have provided a much-needed corrective. And the weaker thesis is of some importance in the political sphere, given that persons may frequently try to bring about a revolution when the social and economic circumstances are not ripe for it; this was the burden of many of Marx's writings.<sup>5</sup>

It may be heartily agreed that, short of appropriate material and social circumstances, ideas are apt to be ineffective. But, given the appropriate material and social circumstances, ideas can surely be very effective indeed. The whole literary activity of Marx, and its phenomenal ultimate success, presupposes and demonstrates that

material conditions are the sole or even the principal determinant. Marx, to do him justice, *argues for* the proposition that social and economic revolution, and not arguments, will alter people's basic pattern of ideas and beliefs (129); but one wonders how, on his own premisses taken on a strong interpretation, there is any point in his doing so.

<sup>4</sup>*Critique de la Raison Dialectique*, particularly the opening section.

<sup>5</sup>199—201.

persons in appropriate circumstances can be induced to act through being convinced, by argument, that such activity is intelligent, reasonable and morally right.<sup>6</sup> The limitations which circumstances can impose on the existence and effectiveness of ideas are what give the thesis of 'historical materialism' its evident plausibility and partial truth. It seems plain, when one thinks about the matter, firstly, that material and social circumstances set limits on what men can achieve, and indelibly stamp the nature of their achievement; secondly, that features of a man's material environment and his day-to-day activity within it are apt to suggest to him some ideas rather than others; thirdly, that social pressures may make some ideas difficult or even dangerous to entertain, and may make the acceptance of a socially convenient falsehood a condition of good reputation or of physical comfort or even survival. At least in all these ways, our thoughts and our actions, and the framework of ideas—our law, our science, our religion—which are involved in them, are thus subject to material and social influences. It is one of Marx's great merits to have pointed out the absurdities which ensue from neglect of these limits on the range and effectiveness of human ideas. For ideas to be effective, men must at least entertain them; short of favourable circumstances they will scarcely do so at all nor, even if they do so, put them into effect with a favourable issue.

That circumstances have a tremendous influence on ideas, then, is true and important. The pressure of war stimulates inventions which are relevant to the purpose of making weapons; and it must be a matter of distress to the high-minded how great an effect the interest in gambling had on the development of probability theory. Yet a certain detachment of ideas from immediate circumstances, such as is consistent at best with a rather weak version of 'historical materialism', seems difficult to deny. The mathematics of conic sections was developed by the Greeks more than a millennium before any use for it was found. The philosophy of the Indian eighth-century philosopher Shankara, and that of the English nineteenth-century philosopher Bradley, are very similar to one another in conclusions and in methods of argument; but the material circumstances within which the two men lived and wrote must have been very different indeed. It seems to me that a good illustration at once of the partial rightness of 'historical materialism' and of its limitations is the nature of science. Here theory and practice certainly have something to do with one another, but are by no means, at least at first sight, to be too closely fused. One of the tests, sure enough, of whether a scientific theory is true, is whether it has practical results which can be relied upon. And yet, except on a very paradoxical interpretation (and one which would be rejected as a matter of course, I think, by most Marxists), in

<sup>6</sup>This point has been well argued by H. B. Acton. Cf. *The Aristotelian Society*, Suppl. Vol. XLIV, 1970; 143-156, *On Some Criticisms of Historical Materialism*.

grasping that a scientific theory is true, one comes to know something that would be the case even if one had never existed at all, let alone propounded and tested the theory or come to believe it on the testimony of others. The contemporary theory of the structure of atomic nuclei, for instance, has innumerable consequences for human activity in the world; but there would have been atomic nuclei constructed out of protons and neutrons even if men had never evolved at all, let alone acted in such a way as to be able to test the theory that there were such. What I want to show by this example is that the development of science both depends upon and illustrates a certain independence of thoughts and ideas from the immediate concerns and activities of human beings. Science, it has been plausibly said, consists of three essential elements: the observation of data, the formulating of theories, and the assertion as probably true of those theories which survive testing by observation and experiment. The second phase, the propounding of theories, is admittedly empty and arbitrary short of the other two; it was the tendency in philosophy to such empty theorizing that Marx understandably inveighed against. But if detached theorising is not the whole of science, it does have an important place in it; which needs the kind of judicious articulation and definition for which philosophers are or ought to be qualified. Marx tends to brush such epistemological questions aside (or rather to leave them to Engels, which I would sooner he had not done);<sup>7</sup> for him there is on the one hand the real world which the ordinary man can see and touch and above all work upon for himself, and on the other hand there is the sententious humbug of the philosophers, which the ordinary man can see doesn't fit the facts—and can be shown, on analysis, to be little or nothing more than a reflection and justification of the philosophers' class position. But there is no guarantee, so far as I can see, that the patient gathering of data, propounding of hypotheses, and testing of these hypotheses in the light of the data, will vindicate the hunches of the plain man any more than the abstruse speculations of the philosopher. The conceptions of modern physics, which are at least as repugnant to common sense as are the wildest speculations of philosophers, are an obvious illustration of the point.<sup>8</sup>

One may readily agree with Marx that wherever thinkers do not

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Engels' *Anti-Dühring*, where such questions are dealt with at length.

<sup>8</sup>Man's productive activity, says Marx, is fundamental; his ideas—in politics, philosophy, law, metaphysics, and religion—are secondary (cf. particularly the beginning of *The German Ideology*; and McLellan, 123, 128). Does this apply to science or does it not? If it does not, I fail to see why this one particular field of ideas should have any privilege over the rest. If it does, but all the same it is to be admitted that some scientific doctrines are true, Marx owes us an account of why this should not apply to some of the ideas of philosophy, metaphysics and religion as well. If he says that scientific ideas correspond to visible and tangible realities, modern nuclear physics has proved him to be wrong. One may agree with Marx that discourse ought to aspire to correspond with the facts, while wondering whether he has quite hit off what such correspondence amounts to.

attend to the facts, they will tend to cook their book of ideas in such a way as to justify their own way of life and the position of their group within society. But modern physics is only one of the most conspicuous among many witnesses that the facts are often abstruse, need highly abstract theorising as well as observation and immediate pragmatic testing in order to be known, and do not necessarily declare themselves the moment one gets rid of the obfuscating jargon of the ideologists.

When all this is said, however, it must surely be admitted that Marx's analysis of the nature and function of ideology is one of his greatest contributions to the good of mankind. Ideology is what constricts and warps a group's conception of itself and of those individuals and groups whose interests are opposed to it. The essence of ideology is what Harry Stack Sullivan called 'selective inattention'; a dominant class adverts only to the facts which seem to justify its privileges, and suppresses those which tend to show that these privileges are excessive. This is why the 'ruling ideas' of an epoch, as Marx shrewdly observes, are apt to be the ideas of the ruling class in that epoch. But that ideas are *simply* a function of class and economic situation we have already found reason to doubt. A proletarian no less than a bourgeois may fail to attend to relevant data, or to theorise with sufficient lack of prejudice or to judge shrewdly enough with respect to them; though he will lack the particular motive in this of trying to bolster the class interest of the bourgeoisie.

There is a strong tendency with Marx to confuse the question of what is true with that of what is apparent from the viewpoint of and suits the interests of a particular social group; this is one of the results of his insistence on 'the unity of theory and practice'<sup>9</sup>. It seems to me both true and important that an oppressed class will have less motive for concealing the facts of oppression than will its oppressors; though it ought to be added that it may have strong motives for exaggerating them. The actual record of Marxist states in relation to their own history may be thought sufficiently to show the dangers of this tendency. What went on in the Ukraine in the 1930s is something that can only be discovered by patient examination and comparison of documents and the reports of eye-witnesses; there is no more certainty that what comes out of such a proceeding will suit the self-image of the proletarian than that it will suit the self-image of the counter-revolutionary. Of course, it would be extremely unfair to treat Marxists as peculiar in their tendency to falsify history to suit their political stance; the point I want to make is just that Marx's theories are such as to tend to justify this practice. Any cause, however good—except that of the unremitting pursuit of truth as such—may be assisted, people being what they are, by judicious falsifications. 'Materialism' in its most commendable sense is characterised by

<sup>9</sup>Cf., e.g. the first three of Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach*.

fearless scrutiny of the facts in despite of personal interest and social pressure.<sup>10</sup> In this case and in this sense, one may wonder how far Marx and Marxists are 'materialistic' enough; it goes without saying, I hope, that capitalists are not.

No one has shown more vividly than Marx how economic and social injustices may exacerbate and in some instances actually create what has been called 'group bias', that is to say, the tendency of each small group and its members to pursue its own interest in despite of the general interest, and to misrepresent facts in such a way as to justify such a stance.<sup>11</sup> What it does not seem to me that Marx has shown, though he claims to have done so, is that with the removal of such injustices group rivalries will altogether cease. Roughly, his argument is as follows. Classes as such are mutually antagonistic, since their very existence is bound up with the fact that societies are organised in such a way that the interest of each is not the interest of all. But the proletariat do not count in one sense as a 'class' at all, since they receive all the kicks and none of the halfpence that society has to offer, carrying all its burdens and enjoying none of its privileges. National differences which might have divided the proletariat have now become irrelevant with the development of modern communications. As a result of all this, once the proletariat have succeeded in sweeping away their oppressors by revolution, there is no reason why they should not act spontaneously each for the good of all and all for the good of each.<sup>12</sup> But there is now a good deal of evidence that the mutual combativeness of human individuals and groups has a biological basis, that it is not merely contingent upon the strife between economically opposed classes. Admittedly economic inequities *exacerbate* such combativeness; but this does not entail that economic justice would *altogether remove* it.<sup>13</sup> The phenomenon of

<sup>10</sup>In *The Holy Family* we read of 'the teaching of materialism on the original goodness and equal intellectual endowment of men, the omnipotence of experience, habit and education' (127). This sounds to me more like ideology, in that it suits the aspirations of a particular section of society, admittedly a worthy one; and does not attend too much to inconvenient facts. One may contrast Sartre, who conceives genuinely Marxian materialism to amount to a careful scrutiny of evidence, and constant revision of one's theoretical scheme in deference to it. In this sense, as Sartre points out, some excessively doctrinaire Marxists, who dismiss their opponent with a ready-made label rather than attending to their arguments, may be called 'idealists'. Cf. Sartre, *op. cit.* p. 82.

<sup>11</sup>The expression 'group bias' is due to Bernard Lonergan (*Insight*, London 1957, especially 222-5). In *The German Ideology* Marx speaks of men 'who make the perfecting of the illusion of the class about itself their chief source of livelihood' (McLellan, 154). But he does admit that some individuals may achieve a correct assessment of certain aspects of their situation in spite of their class backgrounds (*loc. cit.*). I would agree with Marx to the extent of holding that great watchfulness and perseverance are needed if one is to escape the illusions of one's class; but would add the suggestion that this applies to proletarians as well as to bourgeois.

<sup>12</sup>On the question of whether, and to what extent, the proletariat counts as a class (155-6), cf. especially a passage from *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (158).

<sup>13</sup>Cf. particularly K. Lorenz, *On Aggression* (London 1966). The awe-inspiring badness of the usual counter-arguments to Lorenz's central thesis may be gauged from *Man and Aggression*, ed. Ashley Montagu (London 1968). Marx does

children's gangs may be felt to confirm these doubts; the children concerned *may* simply be reacting to the polemical dispositions of their parents, but the analogy with animals, as well as consideration of human history, would seem to tell strongly against this. If it is true, as the Polish social philosopher Maria Ossowska claims, that the problem of juvenile delinquency is much the same in countries which have had their revolutions as in those which have not,<sup>14</sup> this would seem to be further confirmation. Marx admits that combativeness has characterised human beings up till now, owing to the opposition of class interest; but he thinks that with the disappearance of economic inequality, and the consequent clearing away of 'the muck of ages',<sup>15</sup> the tendency to group bias will disappear. But I see no reason to believe this, and several reasons for not doing so. The weaker thesis, that economic inequalities worsen the group oppositions that there are, is certainly susceptible of confirmation; but the weaker thesis is distinct from the stronger. Such considerations, incidentally, do not seem opposed so much to Marxism itself, as to some plausible interpretations of it.

There is no doubt that the stronger thesis has an emotional appeal such as is peculiarly calculated to strike the man of good will. The proletarian has been neglected, exploited, starved, degraded in every way; there seems something peculiarly mean about the suggestion that he might, on gaining power, behave much as other human beings in power have done. And if, when the revolution is supposed to have occurred, the new leaders apparently turn out to further their own interest and that of their friends in the usual way rather than working for the general good, is there not an overwhelming temptation either to suppress consciousness of the fact; or to attribute it entirely and unquestioningly to the lurking influence of dispossessed classes or outsiders, or to the continuing effects of pre-revolutionary modes of education, or to the fact that the *real* revolution has not yet come about? All these moves may be attributed to Marxists; very often they are largely justified, and perhaps at times wholly so; my point is merely that there may sometimes be some crucial contributory factor which they leave out of account. This is not to say that

advert to the distinction between human drives which could exist in all social and economic circumstances, and those which depend only on particular forms of production and exchange, in *The German Ideology* (McLellan, 215); but he seems to assume rather than argue that all individual and group selfishness belong to the second category. His argument against Max Stirner in Part II of *The German Ideology* (ed. Arthur, 103-5), to the effect that there is no necessary clash between the different interests of human beings, is an illustration of the point. 'Communists . . . do not put egoism against self-sacrifice or self-sacrifice against egoism . . . On the contrary, they demonstrate the material basis engendering it (egoism), with which it disappears of itself' (ibid. 104). But the question is, whether this basis is merely a particular economic and social order, or whether it is not also the central nervous system with which human beings happen to have evolved. I should add that I do not think Lorenz's theories to be necessarily inconsistent with every conceivable form of Marxism.

<sup>14</sup>*Social Determinants of Moral Ideas*, London 1971.

<sup>15</sup>*The German Ideology*, ed. Arthur; 95.

Marxists are peculiarly prone to self-deception—as though this were in some way an unusual feature of human beings, or one unknown among capitalists. But there does seem to be something to encourage this kind of oversight in the way of thinking characteristic of Marx himself.

There is a certain ambiguity in the concept of ‘revolution’; whether this ambiguity is misleading or not depends on facts about human nature. Two possible senses of the term may usefully be distinguished. In the first sense, ‘the revolution’ means the overthrowing of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the second, it means the inauguration of the state of affairs in which each man will gladly work for the good of all, and all for the good of each—when there will be no more ‘individual bias’ or ‘group bias’, but everyone will spontaneously act for the general good. One of the theses most characteristic of Marx and his followers is, of course, that the former state of affairs will in fact lead to the latter; but it seems germane to ask what evidence there is that it will do so. I heartily agree with Marx that the ideal constitution of society would be one in which action for the general good would be made satisfying to the individual *so far as possible*. But I look for evidence that the *prima facie* tension between self-interest, group-interest and the general interest would be altogether done away with in any possible social order; or that consistent self-application to the general good would not always involve strenuous effort and self-abnegation. The same applies to the division of labour. Would necessary tasks be done if there were no division of labour, as Marx tells us there will not be in the classless society? And does not the common good by its very nature demand that sometimes a man will have to perform tasks which, at least at some time and to some extent, are irksome to him? That such tasks would be minimised in a just society, that they would be shared as far as possible, and that they should be in general be allotted in each case to those who find them least disagreeable, is not to be denied. The same again applies to the ‘alienation’ of man from his labour.<sup>16</sup> There is a great deal of intrinsic satisfaction to be got out of some kinds of work in most circumstances, and some such satisfaction to be got out of most kinds of work in some circumstances. Surely Marx is quite right that the present conditions of civilisation greatly impede the intrinsic satisfaction to be got out of work. A just and happy society would be organised in such a way that the intrinsic satisfaction available in work should in fact be obtained so far as possible, and the disagreeable work that remained minimised, well-compensated, and fairly shared. But one looks in vain for evidence that, even in the just and happy society, no work which was in the least irksome to any man would ever be necessary for the general good.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>107, 111 ff.

<sup>17</sup>Martin Milligan has pointed out to me that Marx admits as much in Part III of *Capital*, p. 955.



To contest this utopian strain in Marx's ideas is not to say that the *status quo* ought to be preserved; it is quite consistent with the admission that society ought to be so constituted that any necessary burdens are fairly shared and compensated for, and that group and individual bias should be counteracted so far as possible. A utopianism which sets its sights higher than this may be morally dangerous, for the following reason. Those who believe that society might be so constituted that work was never irksome at all, and that there is no necessary tension between individual, group, and general interest, may be led to make things worse by destroying those very social structures which tend to counteract the corresponding evils. It was Rousseau, of all people, who wrote :

'I do not say that you should leave things as they are, but I say you should only change them with extreme circumspection. At present you are more struck by abuse than by advantages. I fear the time will come when you will be more conscious of the advantages, and unfortunately that will be when they have been lost'.<sup>18</sup>

One may admit with Marx that most societies are in fact largely constituted in such a way as to spoil the satisfaction available from work, and to intensify group conflict; but the question has at least to be raised of which, if any, of the present social structures are such as to ameliorate these evils. The dangerous aspect of Marxian utopianism is that, so long as these evils exist, there will always seem to be some person or persons to blame, whether they are really responsible or not. Corresponding to an unquestioning belief in the availability of utopia, there is apt to be an unquestioning vindictiveness against any group which can be construed at all plausibly as impeding its realisation. Aggressiveness is then united to self-righteousness in such a way as to justify the infliction of any amount of suffering on such 'enemies of the people'; even after 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' is officially established in a community, there will always be surviving bourgeois elements within and counter-revolutionary interference from without to blame for such unregenerate behaviour as might naturally demand some other kind of explanation.

There does seem to be a good deal of evidence, from such diverse fields as ethology and psychoanalysis, that a certain predisposition to individual and group bias is natural to man, in the sense that it would persist even in societies most carefully constituted to act against them. Someone might object that it is not conclusively established that human behaviour has biological as well as social determinants, or that these determinants, if they exist, tend to operate in the kind of way I have indicated. But even if these theses are not conclusively established, this does not entail that their contraries have been so; or

<sup>18</sup>Cf. A. Manser, *Rousseau as Philosopher (Reason and Reality)*, ed. G. N. A. Vesey, 119), quoting Rousseau's *Considerations on the Government of Poland*.

that the evidence which has been adduced to support them can be dismissed as counter-revolutionary propaganda, rather than being intelligently and reasonably assessed on its merits. It would be a truism, if it were not so often overlooked, that, even in questions bearing on politics and the constitution of society, one ought to proceed not according to whose point of view it suits, but by examination of the relevant evidence.

What in brief is to be learnt from Marx, and where is it reasonable and responsible to differ from him? That societies on the whole have so far been flagrantly unjust; that the official ideas—legal, moral, religious and so on—are affected by and largely reinforce such injustice; that group and individual bias are inflamed and exasperated by it; that it is apt to wreck the intrinsic satisfaction available in labour, and is inclined to poison even intimate human relationships; that social reconstruction can be and ought to be directed towards removal of the blockages in the path to human fulfilment; all these things are true and important, and the insight into them available to contemporary man is probably due more to Marx than to any other man. One may agree with Marx (or for that matter with Plato) on the need to re-organise society on an intelligent and reasonable basis, rather than just to tinker with any social structure which happens to lie to hand; one may even concur to the extent of saying that, if humanity is to survive at all, such reorganisation, whether abruptly brought about or projected over a long period, is more or less inevitable. One needs some organisation on the lines of Marx's party, Plato's guardians or Lonergan's cosmopolis, constantly to point to and co-ordinate work towards the general good, and to expose the ideologies with which ruling groups conceal both from others and from themselves their pursuit of self-interest in despite of the general good—even in the case where the groups concerned dignify themselves with the epithet 'revolutionary'. What seems to me the most dangerous oversight in Marx is his assumption that, since all these crying evils in human life are exacerbated by economic factors and the social structures based upon them, they would be done away with altogether by the destruction of the present framework or society and the re-allocation of the ownership of the means of production.

In general, Marx's thinking seems to me to underestimate what is common to human nature over the changes in economic circumstances and social arrangements.<sup>19</sup> There is a good deal of evidence for, and to my knowledge none against, the thesis that even a perfectly constituted social and economic order would not wholly do

<sup>19</sup>The fact that literature and visual art from very different ages and cultures remain sources of enjoyment and enlightenment is a strong indication that human nature is more constant, less amenable to historical variation, than Marx will allow. Marx just touches on the point I have mentioned in the *Grundrisse*; why should Greek art, which is bound up with a past form of social development, still be for us a source of aesthetic enjoyment (123, 133)? He suggests rather lamely that the Greek's represent the childhood of human society, and everyone loves a child.

away with the tendency of individuals and groups to try to grasp more than their share of available benefits and less than their share of inevitable burdens; that work for the general good by a group or an individual would always require rather an arduous and sustained self-commitment; that barriers to the general good, re-inforced by the mystifications of ideology, would always continue to be raised by those not prepared for the requisite degree of self-sacrifice—which means nearly all of us in nearly all conceivable circumstances. This is not a plea for conservatism; we need urgently profound changes in the constitution of society if we are to survive. It is just to suggest that, in drawing up a programme of change, we should advert not only to Marx's insights but also to what appear to be his oversights.<sup>20</sup>

# Justification and Verification

by Geoffrey Turner

In this article I want to draw attention to one particular argument used by some modern Protestant theologians, an argument concerning the verifiability and falsifiability of Christian belief. This argument consists of an appeal to the Pauline idea of justification, but the difficulty which the argument raises concerns the meaning which is given to 'justification'. The concept of 'justification' can acquire rather different meanings from the contexts in which it is used; that is to say, the meaning which 'justification' has on any particular occasion depends on the character of the position which it is being used to attack. Let us look at some of these positions in order to see what differences of meaning 'justification' may have.

Paul gave the first peculiarly Christian exposition of the idea of 'justification' in his letter to the Romans, though he had previously used the idea in a more rudimentary fashion in his letter to the Galatians. Paul used the idea to distinguish Christianity from any other form of religion, particularly that of Judaism. He says that justification, i.e. the state of being righteous which allows us to stand

<sup>20</sup>A system of thought at once rigorous and flexible enough to provide an *Aufhebung* of Marx's view of human nature, while providing room for the discoveries of Freud and his disciples, is urgently needed. In fact this has been provided by Bernard Lonergan in *Insight*, a really great book which ought to be much more widely read. In conclusion, my thanks are due to Fr. Herbert McCabe, whose advice has mitigated some of the crudities of the first draft of this article.