CHAPTER EIGHT

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT
We have in the preceding chapters tried to offer an exposition of Marxian ethics and also made an attempt to critically examine its implications. In summing up the standpoint of Marxian ethics in brief we may say that first of all Marxian ethics is through and through man and society oriented without any reference to the transcendental. Its concern is for the man and the society he lives in. Taking as its first premise the original nature of man, it examines his alienated condition and contemplates upon the ways and means of transcending the same by attaining freedom through an egalitarian order of society.

To the extent Marx calls attention to the necessity of economic equality as an ideal, he adds a new dimension to freedom. The significance of economic equality and sufficiency cannot be under-rated for the realization of freedom. However, the economic equality cannot be considered as an end because it is only a means to higher reaches of mind and to a higher quality of freedom. This is at best only a base. Of course, not to recognize this base is to commit a sociological fallacy even as to consider economic equality as an end is no less a fallacy.
Freedom is a supreme value for Marx, but he does not go to pains to define the whole ethical character of freedom. What is more, he considers the original man as absolutely free. But the fact anthropologically is, that man has both the strains of freedom and necessity ever since his appearance on earth. It is another thing though which of the two strains is predominant and to what degree in particular individuals or in particular cultures.

Marx apparently leaves no room for personal morality of any kind. He shows little or no interest in the cultivation of individual conscience for its own sake. Yet one might argue that he feels obliged not just to fulfil his duties as a social being, but also to live up to a certain standard in his personal life. He owes much to his fellows, but he also owes something to himself. There is the imperative necessity for man to be a good man, that is to cultivate his self. While Marx takes pains to argue out how the right circumstances can be created for the attainment of man's total happiness, he is altogether insensitive to the whole dimension of moral life which pertains to man's relation with himself, in so far as moral virtues can be cultivated in him. He seems to have made the good life — an entirely a social affair.
While the social aspect of morality can be safely granted, what cannot be granted is the neglect of inward reflection on the moral situation of a particular man. Without this journey into the subjectivity, it is not possible to recognize the fundamental moral urges and responsibilities of an individual. His ethics would have been the richer for an exposition of the inner moral struggle and growth of man and its relationship to and influence on the social good. What may be generally called character building and self-realization by way of control of certain elemental impulses, i.e., the whole range of self culture is indispensable for a sound moral basis.

In any genuine morality the personal and the social are two integral components. It is one of the failings of Marx that he could not relate the two in one integral whole. This unfinished task should be the business of any sound ethics which as it works itself out is bound to alter Marxian ethics radically even as it would perfectionism and theories of its kind.

Marx's is an interpersonal morality which implies a kind of objective basis which must be accepted without any questioning. As such there is no room for individual dissent. The right of free judgment in the matters of morality does not exist in the sphere of Marxian moral
system. And as such a system of morality, like the one Marx tried to propound, precludes the possibility of any sound basis for a system of morality.

It is clear, as we have seen earlier that Marxian ethics makes a sharp departure from the theological, traditional and the capitalistic ethics. In so doing it trails a new direction in political history. Diagnosing the pathology of class war, Marx concentrates on the means for removal of the class conflict. In a bid to actualize classless society, he has no patience with the slow moving methods and processes of social reconstruction. And therefore makes bold to suggest the path of revolution and violence for the ends spelt out by him. The accent on revolution in contemporary political scene is the greater for Marx having appeared on the scene. The intellectual and the political worlds since Marx could never be the same old worlds, for the revolutionary and violent forces have since been released on a large scale dividing the world broadly into two intellectual and political blocks i.e. the communistic and the non-communistic.

The confrontation of these two worlds is one of the major political issues of the age, indeed, one of the major issues of history. For, it seems politically and ethically the competing human tendencies of authoritarianism and freedom have culminated in this confrontation.
As such, this confrontation is more than political in the sense that it has already begun to seep into our moral, social, economic, industrial and military complex.

Marxian thought which held out high hopes and set on an adventurous career of political domination has certainly created a sensation in the intellectual and political worlds. But as we have shown there is more noise about Marxian ethics than actual substance about it. It is ironical that the philosophy that should have attempted to set man and his freedom on high key should fall on rather a low key in political orchestra. And this is primarily due to the basically non-ethical elements that Marx has introduced in his philosophical thought.

It is not only the hatred of capitalism but very directly and also by transference hatred of a section of humanity i.e. the capitalists. Torn between the ambivalence of hatred towards the capitalism and love for a mass of people, Marx could not formulate the correct ethical means for the realization of the projected moral ends. To fully reap the fruits of hatred in the name of the love for the masses, Marx could think of no better means than revolution implying violence. This hatred-violence-revolution complex is surely unethical — no matter against whom it is directed. It is unethical even from the simplest pragmatic point of view for if one sows
the seeds of hatred and violence, one is bound to end up with more of destruction and degeneration of human spirit.

The history of wars is an ample testimony that wars cannot end wars. Even the war-loving nations have at times to recognize the futility of war as a means to peace and good life. All this is substantiated by a careful study of human nature which reveals that aggression cannot be dissolved by aggression but by gestures of conciliation and peace alone.

As such Marxian ethics is easily the weakest on this point, for it has failed to reckon with the war-peace mechanism within the human psyche. To have tried to wish away class consciousness through revolution, Marx is obviously being over-simplistic, and utopian. Neither the past history since Marx nor the trends in future prove Marx. If anything, the revolutionary method has pressurised the need for perpetual revolution. It is elementary psychology that once you unleash the forces of anger and hatred, they go unabated and there is no easy way of stopping them. Theoretically, any ideology can be made to look very imposing and architectonic but the test of practical ethics, as Marxian ethics claims to be, lies in how far the principles when put into practice result in the aims sought. By this criterion, Marxian ethics falls much too below the standard.
We have seen that in claiming scientific character for his system as well as for his ethics, Marx has taken shelter behind the prestige of science. He has not offered any cogent criterion for evaluating practice in relation to theory and vice versa. His conclusions are arrived at neither on the basis of scientific observations, nor scientific experimentation of social and political phenomena. They are the outcome of speculation, which by no stretch of imagination can be described as scientific. Had it some elements of scientific character in its make-up, Marxian ethics would have had a built-in-structure to accommodate new values in the light of new experiences and new knowledge. In claiming to be finalistic, Marx has once for all sealed his ethics with the non-scientific wax.

Ethics, to the extent the discipline can be scientific, goes much better with evolutionism and pragmatism than with the rigid Marxian categories of materialism and dialectic. It is surprising that Marx who should have understood the essence of science, failed to engage the scientific temper for solving the problems of society. The conclusion therefore cannot be resisted that Marxian system is not scientific but rather ideological and utopian in character.

As a consequence, the values formulated and the human scene portrayed by Marx become more imposing and
powerful than the man in society they were calculated to serve. It is, as it were, the tyranny of values over man, for what could be more tyrannical than violence and regimentation which constitute a significant part of means-end continuum in Marxian thought.

All in all, the Marxian promise goes unfulfilled, nor is there any hope of its fulfilment, because it is so rigid an ideology that it knows no point of return or change. Marx, the prophet, did not assure any specific period when the society of his dreams would be realized, but perhaps he never imagined that inside of a century, his philosophy would be exploited to a point where, as philosophy, it could easily be proved fallacious. As he could not conceive of philosophy as independent of socio-political action, he cannot escape the application of practical criterion for validating his philosophy, whatever theoretical critique we may apply in addition to evaluate his philosophic standpoint.

As we have already stated, he was banking on ever more deterioration of the labour conditions with the advancing industrialization. But this was not to be exactly after his calculations. With industrialization and attendant abundance and liberation of the attitude towards the labour, the conditions of labour in many parts of the world have improved considerably. And with
the popularization of the idea of welfare state within democratic structure, the labour has been getting new deals. Consequently, there could be no universal upheaval on the part of the labour if their basic needs were reasonably well met. What is more, socialistic measures, again within democratic framework, are providing the labourers more participation in the affairs of their industrial concerns, as well as more share in profits by way of annual bonus etc.

It is, therefore, possible both theoretically and practically to bridge the gap between the labourers and the employers through committees on which both the representatives of employers and the labourers are represented. Now, this sitting together of the employer and the labour across the table for settlement of issues between them is one of the innovations of post-Marxian thought and practice which Marx himself could not have foreseen. This is not to say by any chance that conditions of labour are satisfactory all over the world but what is to the point is that employer-employee relationships and imbalances are being gradually tackled by conciliatory, persuasive, peaceful and enlightened ways.

The practical shape of the Marxian theory of revolution is to be seen in the emergence of a powerful class of rulers who in the name of equally powerful state
reign supreme. This elite, a powerful class, with the tyrannical statism cannot be considered any the better than the old bourgeois capitalistic order of the society. And if monolithic state and the overlording handful party men have to be, as a necessary condition of the transition to a stateless society, Marx, then, was surely mistaken. It is historical experience consistent with socio-biological study of man, that if too much political power is concentrated in a few hands, it leads to a lot more appetite for more and ever more power. Unless, therefore, power, like money, is fairly distributed there can neither be freedom, nor the dignity of the individual man.

In not taking into calculus the wide distribution of power Marx presented rather an inadequate formula for the solution of human problems. If, it be argued, in a transitional society i.e. transitional to stateless society, it does not matter, whether the power is in few hands or in many, then once again Marx is gravely mistaken. For, the intoxication of power, having come to stay, will fight to the last the battle against the delegation of power to a large number of people. It is not without reason that political philosophers and religious leaders have always called attention to one of the weakest points in man i.e. the impulse to power which must be managed individually, socially and politically, if the society is to remain sane.
From the standpoint of the values of individual dignity and freedom, nothing is a greater affront to man, than to reduce him to a position when he has no say in the matters of society and must act mediumistically on the dictates of a handful of men in power and in the name of the state. Imagine where a few men arrogate to themselves all moral and political righteousness and become values and laws unto themselves. It is precisely this danger of accumulation of power and its ruthless exercise over the humbler lot which has turned a number of thinkers away from the monolithic state to the formulation of democratic principles.

While no single political philosophy in practice can be considered perfect in view of the vagaries and uncertainties of human nature, yet the political vision and wisdom lie in choosing or formulating that which would maximize the human good, taking fully into consideration the infirmities and possibilities of man in the light of total knowledge available.

Democracy as a broad framework of political government and behaviour meets the test referred to in the foregoing. First of all it restores to the individual the political power to vote and recall people from power. This is not mere mechanical political action but through and through an ethical action of moral responsibility in
taking decisions which have far-reaching consequences. To be sure, any ethics to be genuine and effective must be based on reason and as such take into account the new finds in knowledge. For otherwise it would tend to fall in line with the authoritarian and oppressive forces which do incalculable harm to the moral progress of man.

By providing built-in apparatuses of balance of power, conciliation, persuasion and dialogue, democracy takes care of the stormy side of man's nature and is thus able to contain that. The consciousness of political power on the part of an individual is a considerable element in his moral consciousness, so that the affairs of the state do not remain merely economic and political ones, but also ethical in the ultimate analysis.

Historical experience and sociological studies of authoritarian societies reveal that moral integrity and concern as well as unity of society are more assured in a democratic organization than in authoritarian ones. The authoritarian society has inherent seeds of destruction and disunity, for once the authority is challenged, there is no easy way of keeping it in its seat. In the democratic society, on the other hand, there are ample occasions when not only the opinions are freely expressed but also the course of events modified by the popular voice.

Freedom of expression, it will be appreciated, is
one of the major safeguards of a free society and hence a guarantee of individual's freedom and equality. It is not difficult to see how freedom of expression is a vital part of moral growth. For man, self-actualizing ethically as he is, reaches out to higher moral heights through self-expression. Authoritarianism in any form is inimical to moral values and virtues, for, as can be amply demonstrated, freedom is the essential precondition of the growth of the moral self.

It is interesting that Marx who was undoubtedly actuated into philosophising for definite moral reasons, failed to see the ethical tone of his transitional society. Theoretically, he had realized the dictatorship of the proletariat. In the first instance: dictatorship of proletariat over whom? In any case, it smacks of the lust for power on some or the other sections of society. In the second, nowhere in the world, following Marx, has the dictatorship of the proletariat come about. What has emerged instead is ironically a small group of powerful people who amongst themselves vie with each other for power. It is as such the dictatorship of the few at the best. As a result, both in theory and in practice, Marxian thought does not fulfill its promises and predictions for the suffering lot of humanity which otherwise remained throughout the ethical concern of Marx.
Democratic form of society has a tremendous advantage over Marxian society. In the Marxian society there is no institutionalized apparatus for debating criteria to determine the genuine morality of social action and for changing the pace and methods of political action accordingly. In a fast-changing society, as our society is, and as it is going to be ever more in this space age, the apparatus of individual and collective thinking provided by the democratic form of government is indispensable.

To be sure, like any political philosophy, democracy is not only a form of government but also a moral quality — a way of doing things in view of certain moral values and ideals. Contrasted to Marxian philosophy, one of its remarkable features is the concern for the qualitative character of the means for the realization of its ends. For, the means and the ends are interspersed and should therefore be compatible with each other.

It cannot be denied that the type of means that we adopt is not only indicative of the values behind it but also in the process of adoption of the means and their translation into practice, we create certain moral qualities. Hence yet another deficiency in Marxian ethics flows from his neglect of means. Since Marx is concerned with ends first and foremost and does not critically
examine the problem of means, he fails to see the possibility of the emergence of new values in the process of execution of means. As a matter of fact, we develop values and become conscious of them when we contemplate the means and chalk out an ethical plan of realizing them. By selecting and accenting on certain means, we set a direction in our goals because eventually it is through these means that we realize the commensurate ends.

It is impossible to practise one set of means and beget a different set of ends for one has to adopt like means to get like ends. And what are ends after all if not a certain point in the culmination of the actions performed by the individuals or groups. And actions have a certain overtone of attitudes and values which are bound to influence their moral quality. Actions, to be sure, do not issue out of vacuum, they result from a certain motivation of human beings and the motivation is worked up through feelings and desires in addition to reason. As such it should be possible to see that specific acts or means produce specific ends. The nature and quality of a political action or political behaviour is bound to differ, from the moral standpoint, from one set of means to another. If man morally grows through action, then it is very relevant to contemplate as to what type of action or means would be moral and as such conducive to his moral growth.
If for the realization of economic equality and classless society, violence in the form of revolution is used, it will not only disrupt the chances of sufficient production and fair distribution but will also degrade the human spirit as also make violence a perpetual phenomenon in the society. History bears a testimony to the fact that violence is always met with violence, and aggravates baser tendencies in human mind, as also it produces a climate which leads to further degeneration of spirit. How can we attain peace, freedom and the unity of mankind through revolution which by its very nature has the seeds of chaos and perpetual conflict inherent in it? Marx in this sense goes against his basic concept of the ideal man, since he could not find proper means of moral transactions between one individual and another. He belittled the importance of effective communication through a kind of perpetual dialogue — which alone is a moral absolute in socio-political morality.

It is obvious that Marx has not given sufficient attention to the question of ends and means which in any ethical theory decide conclusively the ethical validity of the whole moral problem. The answer to the question is to be sought first in the moral make up of the man and second, in the moral reconstruction of society and
third in ethical analysis of the relationship between ends and means as a whole. It is not only the end which is to be justified but the whole range of means-end continuum.

The world in this atomic age is right in the midst of the moment of destiny when it must choose between the affirmation of life or its negation. The political and moral problems of the age cannot be solved through ideological and propagandist projections of human endeavour, but by pragmatic and realistic steps. One of the urgent needs is to make "rational use of irrational forces". Particularly in an age when we are moving towards one world, and yet our issues remain complicated due to various forces of political power and technological necessities; we need new intellectual and political outfit to be able to solve those problems. It is certain that blind adherence to any ideology is bound to create more confusion and conflict in the world. New political consciousness with world patriotism, so to say, needs a large vision and large heartedness — two of the most valuable components of moral consciousness and moral progress.

In the telling phraseology of John Dewey, we have "a moral responsibility to be intelligent" — As such if we fail to train our reason for sane socio-political
action, it will amount to moral failure, because no genuine morality in the ultimate analysis is blind adherence or mechanical conditioning. It has essentially to be a morality of sound reflection. Can the total education of man or his self-culture today meet this challenge? On the response to this challenge hangs the destiny of man who is precariously struggling between decadence and moral excellence.