

"In the Interests of Civilization": Marxist Views of Race and Culture in the Nineteenth Century

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“IN THE INTERESTS OF
CIVILIZATION”: MARXIST VIEWS
OF RACE AND CULTURE IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

BY DIANE PAUL

On August 7, 1866 Karl Marx wrote the first in a series of letters to Friedrich Engels and Ludwig Kugelmann enthusiastically recommending a new book, *The Origin and Transformation of Man and Other Beings*, by the French traveller and amateur scientist Pierre Trémaux.¹ Marx's enthusiasm was not shared by Engels (who thought the book absurd), or by the scientific community or general public. Like Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*, it appears to have fallen “dead-born from the press”; unlike the *Treatise*, it enjoyed no revival. Entirely ignored in histories of biology, geology, and paleontology, its importance derives solely from the fact that Marx thought it “a very great advance over Darwin” scientifically and “far more significant in its historical and political applications.”²

The Trémaux correspondence is fairly well-known, at least among scholars concerned with Marx's and Engels' attitudes toward Darwin. As someone interested in that general topic, I was eventually led to read the original letters, having up until then relied on the summaries and shortened versions in the literature. I was immediately struck by a sentence my studies had not prepared me to find: “As he [Trémaux] indicates, (he was in Africa a long time) the common Negro type is only a degeneration of a much higher one.”³ The strik-

¹ Pierre Trémaux, *Origine et Transformation de l'homme et des autres êtres*. Part I (Paris, 1865). Apparently a second volume was planned but never completed, or at least never published. The Marx/Engels/Kugelmann correspondence in the *Marx-Engels Werke* (Berlin, 1966), hereafter cited as *Werke*, is dated as follows (all 1866): Marx to Engels, 7 Aug., Engels to Marx, 10 Aug., Engels to Marx, 13 Aug., Engels to Marx, 2 Oct., Marx to Engels, 3 Oct., Engels to Marx, 5 Oct., and Marx to Kugelmann, 9 Oct.

² Marx to Engels, 7 Aug., 1866. All references, unless otherwise stated, are to the *Werke*.

³ “. . . wie er (er war lang in Afrika) nachweist, dass der gemeine Negertyp nur Degenereszenz eines viel höhern ist.” *Ibid*. I know a few references to this sentence in the literature, out of at least a dozen discussions of Trémaux: in Conway Zirkle, *Evolution, Marxian Biology, and the Social Scene* (Philadelphia, 1959), 91-111 (a highly polemical treatment of Marx's racial views), in Lewis Feuer, *Karl Marx and the Intellectuals* (Garden City, 1969), 20, and in Saul Padover (ed.), *Marx on History and People* (New York, 1977), although for some reason it is included in the section

ing omission of this sentence in much—though as it turned out not all—of the Marx-Darwin literature led naturally to the following question: What other comments on race may have been more or less systematically edited out of the literature? Marx's view of Jews has been debated for many years, and his and Engels' unflattering references to the Slavs are also fairly well-known. But what of their attitudes toward other groups, such as blacks and the Irish, and the links between their views of various cultures? These questions in turn raise another, logically prior, one: Given the very real differences between the nineteenth- and twentieth-century concepts of race, the links between race and biology, and the content of biology itself, how can we characterize the views of Marx and Engels in a way which is both true to the texts yet avoids looking through a twentieth-century glass darkly at men who were—as we shall see—very much of the nineteenth?

*Biology, Race, and Culture in the
Nineteenth Century*

In the twentieth century, to hold that differences among human groups are biologically-based is necessarily to imply that those differences are largely outside of human control. If human populations are in important ways genetically distinct, there is little that we can do about it, given the imperviousness of genes to direct environmental manipulation. Modern genetics, in turn, has led to a sharp distinction between biological and cultural explanations of human differences, the former assuming relative immutability, the latter, relative plasticity. In this context, the epithet "racist" has come to be applied almost exclusively to those views which ascribe non-trivial differences among human populations to biological, hence more or less permanent, differences.

The nineteenth century did not recognize a sharp break between biological and cultural explanations, nor could it, given the lack of

on "Marx and Darwin" rather than "Marx on Negroes and Mongols." The latter section includes but one entry, and that Marx's critique, in *The German Ideology*, of Max Stirner's view! Both Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York, 1968), 236-40, and Leon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth*, trans. Edmund Howard (New York, 1974), 244-46, briefly discuss Marx's racial views in light of the Trémaux correspondence but without reference to that particular comment. Some scholars, clearly familiar with the Trémaux correspondence, nevertheless praise Marx's "anti-racialism." Perhaps the most striking example is Lawrence Krader, editor of Marx's ethnological notebooks. In "Marxist Anthropology: Principles and Contradictions . . .," *International Review of Social History*, 20 (1975—Part 2), 236-72. Krader writes: "Marx was one of the first to denounce the racist cant" (of 19th-century anthropology), 236, but does not say where.

any genetic theory which would make such a distinction plausible. Nineteenth-century genetics was predominantly "Lamarckian," that is, based on the assumption that organisms actively adapt to their environments by acquiring characteristics (both physical and behavioral) that over a period of time become inherited. The view that acquired characters are under certain conditions heritable, though it had its nineteenth-century critics (most notably August Weismann in Germany and Alfred Russel Wallace, Edward Poulton, and E. Ray Lankester in England), was widely accepted even after publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859. Although we today recognize the incompatibility of Darwinism and Lamarckism, the nineteenth century did not. Darwin himself was forced to explain the origin of variation at least in part through Lamarckian factors, having rejected the alternatives of saltation (macro-mutation) and hybridization. Moreover, as the result of serious criticisms levelled at his explanation of the mechanism of evolution (i.e., natural selection), Darwin's followers, such as the German Ernst Haeckel, allowed even greater scope to Lamarckian factors in evolution than did Darwin. (Darwin's critics, of course, went even further, some to the point of abandoning selection altogether in favor of explanations based on the direct adaptation of organisms to their environment.)⁴

This point is crucial to an understanding of nineteenth-century racial attitudes since Lamarckian assumptions may entail very different conclusions about the nature of racial differences than would modern genetic theory. Given the assumption that acquired characters are heritable, it follows that poor environments, whether natural or cultural, are almost inexorably bound to be reflected biologically. "Backward" peoples, whatever the original reason for their failure to develop, must after centuries of living in deprived environments become biologically degenerate. This was in fact the argument advanced at the beginning of the assault on Mendelian genetics in the Soviet Union by biologists such as Iu. A. Filipchenko. Filipchenko argued that the opponents of Mendelism assumed that only good environments are heritable. A consistent Lamarckian interpretation, he noted, implied that all deprived populations, including the proletariat, would be genetically "lamed."⁵ The potentially reactionary character of Lamarckism was also asserted by J. B. S. Haldane, the

⁴ A good general source on late nineteenth-century evolutionary biology is John Coleman, *Biology in the 19th Century: Problems of Form, Function, and Transformation* (New York, 1971) which also contains an excellent bibliography.

⁵ Loren R. Graham, "Eugenics and Human Heredity in Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia in the 1920's: An Examination of Science and Values," unpublished paper, 1977, 37-39.

distinguished Marxian geneticist, who claimed in the British *Daily Worker*:

Lamarckism is now being used to support reaction. A British biologist who holds this view thinks that it is no good offering self-government to peoples whose ancestors have long been oppressed, or education to the descendants of many generations of illiterates. He has, however, to explain why even the children of orators must still be taught to speak, though men have been speaking for hundreds of generations.⁶

The pessimistic, negative side of Lamarckism, with its implication that poor environments are genetically crippling, is illustrated by Engels' discussion of the difficulty of teaching mathematics to bushmen and Australian Negroes. In the *Dialectics of Nature* he writes:

. . . modern natural science has extended the principle of the origin of all thought content from experience in a way that breaks down its old metaphysical limitation and formulation. By recognizing the inheritance of acquired characteristics, it extends the subject of experience from the individual to the genus; the single individual that must have experienced is no longer necessary, its individual experience can be replaced to a certain extent by the results of the experiences of a number of its ancestors. If, for instance, among us the mathematical axioms seem self-evident to every eight-year-old child, and in no need of proof from experience, this is solely the result of "accumulated inheritance." It would be difficult to teach them by a proof to a bushman or Australian negro.⁷

On the other hand, some stressed the *reversibility* of biological degeneration. In this view, genetic differences are seen to be real but transient. Given Lamarckian assumptions, it is possible to emphasize either modifiability *or* the accumulated effects of environment. In *The German Ideology* Marx stresses the former, more positive side of Lamarckism:

[Max Stirner] . . . has not the slightest idea that the ability of children to develop depends on the development of their parents and that all this crippling under existing social relations has arisen historically, and in the same way can be abolished again in the course of historical development. Even naturally evolved differences within the species, such as racial differences, etc., which Sancho [Stirner] does not mention at all, can and must be abolished in the course of historical development.⁸

⁶ J. B. S. Haldane, *Science and Everyday Life* (London, 1939), 115. Ironically, another article in the same collection is titled: "A Great Soviet Biologist" (i.e., T. D. Lysenko).

⁷ Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, trans. & ed. Clemens Dutt (New York, 1940), 314.

⁸ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. 5 (New York, 1976), 425. In "The Works of Marx and Engels in Ethnol-

In this passage, Marx expresses the optimistic aspect of Lamarckism in an extreme form: all racial differences can, over time, be overcome. This conclusion is not, however, necessarily entailed by a Lamarckian genetics; whether crippled races can be restored depends upon, most importantly, the reasons for their degeneration. Not much can be done about climate, for example. When Marx himself refers to actual races, as opposed to his general, theoretical pronouncements on Race, we shall see that he is sometimes less sanguine about the possibility of improvement. Moreover, for all Lamarckians, whether the time-scale of improvement is brief or lengthy depends upon the extent of degeneration as well as its causes. Marx never suggests how rapidly the improvement he envisages might occur; most probably, he had no clear idea.

Lamarckian assumptions also blur the modern distinction between "nations" and "races." References to the French, Italian, Greek, Jewish, Russian, or Slavic "races" in nineteenth-century literature simply describe peoples with a common language, religion, and history, not peoples who are biologically distinct. But given widespread nineteenth-century assumptions, a human population which maintained a unity of language and culture would *become* a race; nations are, in George Stocking's words, "races in the process of formation."⁹ The author of "Heredity and Progress," an article appearing in the English socialist journal *Progress* in 1885, expressed the conventional wisdom of his time when he wrote: "Anyone who considers the Jews will see at once that their character, as much as their noses, are an inheritance. A Scotchman 'caught young' as Johnson said, may lose some of the superficial characteristics, but

ogy Compared," *International Review of Social History*, 17 (1973—Part 2), 223-75. Lawrence Krader writes: "The footnote to this passage of *The German Ideology* mentions personal energy of individuals of the various nations, energy through race mixture. This is likewise a step back from a social theory, introducing biological elements which Marx later rejected . . .," 275. Unlike Krader, I believe *The German Ideology* to represent Marx's most anti-racist position. That Marx never abandoned the view that racial differences affect historical development is indicated by the following quote from volume three of *Capital*: "The form of this relation between rulers and ruled naturally corresponds always with a definite stage in the development of the methods of labor and of its productive social power. This does not prevent the same economic basis from showing infinite variations and gradations in its appearances, even though its principal conditions are everywhere the same. This is due to innumerable outside circumstances, natural environment, race peculiarities, outside historical influences, and so forth, all of which must be ascertained by careful analysis." Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Part VI, Chap. XLVII, II (Chicago, 1909), 919.

⁹ George W. Stocking, Jr., "Lamarckianism in American Social Science, 1890-1915," in *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York, 1968), 245.

will retain all the national peculiarities of his race; and so will the Irishman.”¹⁰

This is not to assert that the term “race” was never used in a purely cultural sense, but given the nature of nineteenth-century genetics, references to various national and cultural groups as “races” must generally be understood as implying some degree of biological distinctness. That national characteristics are to some extent biologically-based is assumed even by explicitly “anti-racialist” writers. For example, George Plekhanov, criticizing Antonio Labriola’s views of the effect of race on historical development, nevertheless concedes:

The temperament of every nation preserves certain peculiarities, induced by the influence of the natural environment, which are to a certain extent modified, but never completely destroyed, by adaptation to the social environment. These peculiarities of national temperament constitute what is known as *race*.¹¹

The exact relationship between biology and culture was doubtless unclear to most nineteenth-century writers; it had to be, given a genetic doctrine according to which acquired characters were heritable but which suggested no mechanism by which this process could occur. Hence the question of how readily racial differences, as manifested in nations or other groups, might develop or disappear was simply unanswerable. As a result, though accepting a common genetical framework, various writers were free to stress either the plasticity of traits or the accumulated effects of environment—the positive or negative side of Lamarckism—as it suited them.

What Marx and Engels Said About Blacks

In analyzing Marx’s and Engels’ comments on blacks there are at least two elements to consider: the content of their views and the style in which they are expressed. As to the content of their views, they wrote little directly on the subject though there is some relevant indirect evidence. As noted in the introduction, Marx commented with approval on Trémaux’s contention that Negroes had degenerated from a higher race. Trémaux’s general views on race are interesting and shed light on Marx’s views of both blacks and Slavs. It is perhaps worth quoting in some detail from Marx’s first letter to Engels urging him to read Trémaux’s book:

¹⁰ J. M. Wheeler, “Heredity and Progress,” *Progress*, 5, Nov. 1885, 499.

¹¹ George Plekhanov, *The Materialist Conception of History* (New York, 1940), 25.

In its historical and political applications, Trémaux is much more important and fruitful than Darwin. Here alone is found a natural basis for certain questions, as of nationality, etc. For example, he corrects the Pole, Duchinski, whose concern over the geological differences between Russia and the West Slavs he otherwise confirms, but in this matter it was not as Duchinski thought, that the Russians were not Slavs being much more Tartars, etc., but that the prevailing geological formation itself tartarized and mongolized the Slavs. As he indicates, (he was in Africa a long time) the common Negro type is only a degeneration of a much higher one. "Against the great laws of nature, the schemes of men are nothing but disasters; witness the efforts of the Tsars to make the Polish people into Muscovites. The same nature, the same faculties, revive on the same soil. The work of destruction never ceases, the work of reconstruction is eternal. The Slav and the Lithuanian races have their true boundary with the Muscovite in the great geological line which extends north of the basins of the Nieman and the Dnieper. To the south of this great line the capacities and types of men proper to this region are and will always remain different from those of Russia."¹²

As this excerpt from Marx indicates, Trémaux's theory relates the nature of the soil to human racial types (a not uncommon kind of argument in the nineteenth century although Trémaux's version is particularly crude).¹³ The nature of the soil, according to Trémaux, changes over time. Older—primary or secondary—rocks are less "perfect" than are rocks of more recent periods. It follows that persons who live on more recent terrain are themselves more perfect (except where recent soil is the product of the erosion of old rocks). Perfection in humans is defined largely in aesthetic terms; e.g., Negroes are ugly, not because of their color (which to Trémaux is an unimportant feature of race) but because of their shape, while white Caucasians, especially Greeks, are beautiful.

What makes new terrain more perfect, except that it is in some sense more "complex" or "varied," is not clear from the text. Moreover, Trémaux suggests no mechanism by which the perfection of the soil could be translated into improved human types. His entire argument is, in fact, based upon correlations: people with similar characteristics tend to live on the same kinds of soil. For example, Newfoundlanders (who live on old rocks) are "a sort of Negro."

¹² Marx to Engels, 7 Aug., 1866.

¹³ I am greatly indebted to Camille Limoges of the University of Montreal for his patient explanation of the *Origin and Transformation* . . . to someone baffled both by Trémaux's French and by his science. Oddly enough, none of the many scholars who have discussed Marx's view of Trémaux in the context of Trémaux's general attitude toward Darwinism have read the *Origin and Transformation*. . . Leon Poliakov did read a summary of Trémaux's racial views given in his account of his African travels, *Voyage en Ethiopie, au Soudan oriental et dans la Nigrite* (Paris, 1863), Vol. II.

American Negroes, however, are much closer to American whites than to Australian aborigines. There are, therefore, as many different human races as there are soils of different type. Even within France, claims Trémaux, the people of Brittany, who live on old soil, are religious, superstitious, traditional in their allegiances, and willing to place their government in the hands of a king, while the people of Paris, who live on recently developed terrain, are intelligent, industrious, independent, and favor representative government.

The effect of the soil on racial differences is not, however, always that clear-cut. For one thing, there may be interbreeding at the stage when differences have just begun to develop ("the soil diversifies; fecundity unifies"). For another, certain factors, such as the nature of diet, may intervene and mask the action of the soil. Slavery, for Trémaux, is another degenerative force which may work at cross-purposes with the action of the soil. In general, however, there is a parallel between the perfection of human beings and that of the soil. Trémaux even uses his theory to explain why the Confederate South, which was not at all industrialized, was able to hold out against the North for so long. Given the higher quality of Southern soil, he predicts that even if the North wins the Civil War, it will inevitably be governed by the South.

Degenerate races, therefore, are those that migrated to geologically inferior terrain. The Egyptians who moved South, to the Sudan for example, have characteristics less perfect than those in the North. The degeneration of the Mayan civilization is explained as the result of migration to a soil less perfect than the people. Trémaux is clearly a monogenist; he explains human racial differences not in terms of multiple origins but in terms of degeneration from a common type. For example, he insists that the Negro is not a perfected ape but a degenerated human being. Moreover, we are not entirely helpless in the face of geological-cum-racial differences. Besides the possibility of migration, man can have some influence over the quality of the soil through reforestation of lands and the use of fertilizers.

It is interesting to note that Trémaux's extreme environmentalist approach is extended to life on other planets, on which the perfection of life would also be a function of the soil, varying with the degree of development of parasites. Parasites in herbivores, according to Trémaux, do not advance beyond a certain low level of development. When eaten by carnivores whose intestinal tract is more advanced, they too progress. Apparently, the intestinal tract is the equivalent of "soil" for these organisms.

It is certainly not my intention to imply, on the basis of his enthusiasm for Trémaux's book, that Marx accepted all these aspects of the theory. Marx recognizes that the book has many deficiencies (though he is not explicit as to what they are), but his enthusiasm for

Trémaux's general theory, which even by nineteenth-century standards is particularly simple-minded, can only be explained either by the extent of his disenchantment with Darwin or by his desire to find a basis in natural science for his cultural prejudices or, most probably, both.

At Marx's urging, Engels purchased a copy of the book and, appalled at what he found, replied:

. . . I have arrived at the conviction, that there is nothing to his theory if for no other reason than because he neither understands geology nor is capable of the most ordinary literary historical criticism. One could laugh oneself sick about his stories of the nigger Santa Maria and of the transmutations of the whites into Negroes. Especially, that the traditions of the Senegal niggers deserve absolute credulity, *just because the rascals cannot write!* Besides it is nice to blame the soil formation for the difference between a Basque, a Frenchman, a Breton, and an Alsatian; and of course, it is also its fault that these people speak four different languages. Perhaps this man will prove in the second volume, how he explains the fact, that we Rhinelanders have not long ago turned into idiots and niggers on our own Devonian Transition rocks. . . . Or perhaps he will maintain that we are real niggers.

This book is not worth anything, a pure fabrication, which defies all facts and would have to give a proof for every proof which it adduces.¹⁴

Marx does not appear to have been much swayed by Engels' criticism, for on the next day he wrote back, defending Trémaux, in a letter which ends: "Trémaux's basic idea on the influence of the soil is, in my opinion, an idea which needs only to be announced, to secure for itself once and for all the right of citizenship in science and, at that, entirely independent of Trémaux's presentation."¹⁵ Engels replied two days later in a letter much softer in tone than his first one, admitting that the Trémaux book might have some value after all (he had only read a third of the book at the time of his original reply to Marx). In particular, he notes:

This man has the distinction of having stressed the influence of the soil upon racial and, logically, species formation more than has happened so far. And secondly, of having developed more correct opinions on the effect of the crossing than his predecessors (though in my opinion very one-sided ones). . . . There is something tremendously plausible about the hypothesis that the soil becomes in general more favorable for the development of higher species in proportion to its belonging to newer formations.¹⁶

In spite of these concessions, the thrust of Engels' letter is primarily critical: he repeats arguments made previously and suggests new

¹⁴ Engels to Marx, 2 Oct., 1866. Quoted in Zirkle, 93. All italicized phrases are emphasized in the original.

¹⁵ Marx to Engels, 3 Oct. 1866.

¹⁶ Engels to Marx, 5 Oct. 1866.

ones as well. At this point, the correspondence between Marx and Engels concerning Trémaux apparently breaks off, but Marx does write shortly afterward to Ludwig Kugelmann recommending the book “in spite of its diffuse style, geological errors and deficiency in literary–historical criticism” as an advance over Darwin.¹⁷

Although Engels more or less dismisses Trémaux’s book, nothing in his comments indicates any disagreement with either Trémaux’s or Marx’s characterization of blacks (or Slavs) or the view that cultural differences reflect biological ones. Engels’ complaint is that Trémaux is a poor geologist. Engels himself clearly believes that at least some human races degenerated from higher ones. As he writes in “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man”:

At first, therefore, the operations, for which our ancestors gradually learned to adapt their hands during the many thousands of years of transition from ape to man, could only have been very simple. The lowest savages, even those in whom a regression to a more animal-like condition, with a simultaneous physical degeneration, can be assumed, are nevertheless far superior to these transitional beings.¹⁸

If, for Engels, degeneration cannot be explained on the basis of geology, then how can it be explained? To the extent that Engels considers this problem at all, he appears to think that the introduction of milk and meat to the diet produced larger brains in some human races. Apparently he accepted literally Feuerbach’s famous dictum *Der Mensch ist was er isst* (“Man is what he eats.”). In the *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, Engels writes:

The plentiful supply of milk and meat and especially the beneficial effect of these foods on the growth of the children account perhaps for the superior development of the Aryan and Semitic races. It is a fact that the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, who are reduced to an almost entirely vegetarian

¹⁷ “Ich empfehle Ihnen auch Trémaux: ‘*De l’origine de les [sic] etres etc.*’ Obgleich verlottert geschrieben, voller geologischer Schnitzer, viel Mangel an literarisch-historischer Kritik, enthält es—with all that and all that—einen Fortschritt über Darwin.” Marx to Kugelmann, 9 Oct., 1866.

¹⁸ Frederick Engels, “The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man,” in *Dialectics of Nature*, 281. Compare Engels’ view with that of Edward Aveling, Marx’s son-in-law and a popularizer of Darwin’s works in socialist circles. Aveling argued that the gap between the highest and lowest human races was much greater than that between humans, in general, and apes—in fact, that certain human races cannot interbreed. See, for example, his *The People’s Darwin: Or Darwin Made Easy* (London, n.d.), esp. 20-22. An interesting article on later socialist attitudes toward blacks is Robert C. Reinders, “Racialism on the Left: E. D. Morel and the ‘Black Horror on the Rhine,’” *International Review of Social History*, 13 (1968) Part I, 1-28.

diet, have a smaller brain than the Indians at the lower stage of barbarism, who eat more meat and fish.¹⁹

Engels was probably influenced in this view by Lewis Henry Morgan about whose book *Ancient Society: Or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization* Engels wrote: "On the original states of society there is a *definitive* book, a book as definitive as Darwin's for biology: it has, of course, been discovered by Marx; Morgan, *Ancient Society*, 1877."²⁰ Marx made extensive excerpts with notes from Morgan and, to a lesser extent, from the works of the anthropologists Henry Maine, John Lubbock, and John Phear.²¹ Engels later used Morgan's book as the starting-point for the *Origin of the Family* . . . whose subtitle is "In the light of the Researches of Lewis Henry Morgan." In *Ancient Society*, Morgan expresses the view that those Indian tribes which domesticated animals, and hence were able to incorporate meat and milk into the diet, developed larger brains as a result. He goes on to suggest:

. . . the Aryan and Semitic families owe their preeminent endowments to the great scale upon which, as far back as our knowledge extends, they have identified themselves with the maintenance in numbers of the domestic animals. In fact, they incorporate them, flesh, milk, and muscle into their plan of life. No other family of mankind have done this to an equal extent, and the Aryan has done it to a greater extent than the Semitic.²²

It is worth noting in this context that Morgan held, in relation to blacks, extreme racist views. In fact, although he is usually described as a monogenist, Morgan believed the black race to be so backward as to refute the notion that all human races have a common origin. He was, still, a fervent abolitionist, at least partly on the grounds that the black race would die out if emancipated. As he said to William Seward: "It is too thin a race intellectually to be fit to propagate and I am perfectly satisfied from reflection that the feeling towards this race is one of hostility throughout the north. We have no respect for them whatever."²³

¹⁹ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (New York, 1972), 91. This view is discussed in greater detail in "The Part Played by Labour. . . ." 287-88.

²⁰ Engels to Karl Kautsky, 16 Feb., 1884.

²¹ These have been published as *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, transcribed and ed. Lawrence Krader (Assen, 1972).

²² Lewis H. Morgan, *Ancient Society* [1877] (Chicago, 1909), 25. Marx appears to have been impressed with Morgan's general views about the relationship of types of subsistence to levels of culture but not by the specific link between animal protein and brain size.

²³ Quoted in Harris, 139.

Morgan's views on race were most clearly expressed in *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity*, a book familiar to both Marx and Engels.²⁴ In this work, blacks are characterized as follows:

Unimportant in numbers, feeble in intellect, and inferior in rank to every other portion of the human family, they yet centre in themselves, in their unknown past and mysterious present, one of the greatest problems in the science of the families of mankind. They seem to challenge and to traverse all the evidences of the unity of origin of the human family by their excessive deviation from such a standard of the species as would probably be adopted on the assumption of unity of origin . . . In the light of our present knowledge the negro is the chief stumbling block in the way of establishing the unity of origin of the human family, upon the basis of scientific proofs.²⁵

That Marx and Engels failed to disassociate themselves from Morgan's racial views in itself proves nothing. It acquires meaning only in the context of their overall views. In this regard it is worth noting that both Marx and Engels accepted Ernst Haeckel's theory that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" (that individual development repeats the evolutionary history of the species). It was certainly possible in the late nineteenth century to be a recapitulationist without being a racist. However, Haeckel's views had come to be so closely associated with racism that it might be expected that Engels at least (since he was far more concerned with Haeckel than was Marx) would separate himself from that aspect of his theory, especially since he was critical of Haeckel's general political, and to some extent philosophical, opinions.²⁶

Both Marx and Engels sometimes used the English term "nigger" to refer to blacks and to others for whom they had contempt (e.g., the frequent references in their correspondence to "the Jewish nigger Lassalle"). It is amusing to note that the Soviet English-language edition of their letters includes the following explanation: "With reference to the use of the word "nigger" which occurs in this book: Marx used the word while living in England, in the last century. The word does not have the same connotation as it has now in the U.S. and should be read as "Negro" whenever it occurs in the text."²⁷

²⁴ Engels refers to Morgan's *Consanguinity and Affinity* in *The Origin of the Family*. . . . Marx also refers to that book in his notes on Morgan's *Ancient Society*.

²⁵ Lewis H. Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (Washington, D.C., 1870), 462.

²⁶ On Haeckel's racial views and their influence see Daniel Gasman, *The Scientific Origins of National Socialism: Ernst Haeckel and the German Monist League* (New York, 1971) and Stephen Jay Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), Ch. 5.

²⁷ *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*. Trans. Dona Torr (New York, 1942), vi.

This explanation does not accord with that of the Oxford English Dictionary or with a great deal of other evidence. For example, when John Stuart Mill replied to Carlyle's infamous 1849 essay in *Fraser's Magazine*, "Occasional discourse on the nigger question," he pointedly titled his answer "The Negro question." If the word "nigger" was not so jarring in mid-nineteenth century England as it is in England or America today, it nevertheless was a term of abuse.

Marx's and Engels' public writings on the American Civil War are certainly sympathetic to the cause of "Negroes."²⁸ It is predominantly in their private correspondence that one finds references to "niggers" and, in relation to Jews, "Yids," "Itzig" [Ikey], "the Jew so-and-so," mimicking of Jewish speech patterns, disparaging references to Jewish physical characteristics, and so forth. To some extent, Marx and Engels both have public and private personae. This will become even more evident when we consider their opinions of Jews.

What Marx and Engels Said About Jews

Marx's and Engels' writings on the Jews have been discussed at length by others (although this has certainly not resulted in anything like general agreement about the nature of their views). In spite of the large literature which already exists, it is perhaps worth making a few points relevant to the debate from the perspective of this paper. First, whether or not Marx and Engels were anti-semitic, they were clearly not racist in the modern sense of holding Jews to be biologically distinct (at least from Aryans as they typically refer to "Aryans and Semites" as one in comparison with other races). However, the question of their attitudes towards Jews is hardly exhausted by that statement. In fact, a close examination of their writings, including correspondence, indicates that no simple characterization of their views is possible. There have been a number of recent attempts to portray Marx, and to a lesser extent Engels, as proto-fascists. George Watson has found in Marx's writings the intellectual origins of the Red Army Faction, one of whose leaders, Ulrike Meinhof, publicly blamed the failure of the German left on its blindness to the fact that

²⁸ However, abolition for Marx presumably depended upon a certain level of civilization. In a letter to Engels (14 June 1853) Marx writes: "He [Henry Charles Carey in *The Slave Trade, Domestic and Foreign*] shows how the main stock of Negroes in Jamaica, etc., always consisted of newly imported barbarians, since the English treatment of Negroes was such that their numbers not only failed to remain steady but actually declined to two-thirds of the annual slave import; whereas the present generation of Negroes in America is a native product, more or less Yankeeized, English-speaking, etc. and therefore *capable of emancipation*." Quoted in *Karl Marx on America and the Civil War*. Ed. by Saul K. Padover (New York, 1972), 39.

“anti-semitism is really a hatred of capitalism.”²⁹ Hugh Lloyd-Jones comments that “[Marx’s] remarks about Lassalle sometimes recall the tone of Goebbels.”³⁰ W. H. Chaloner and W. O. Henderson claim that Marx “detested his own race.”³¹ Max Geltman writes that Jews “never knew that Marx had called for their utter disappearance from the face of the earth.”³² And Robert Payne remarks that Marx’s “solution of the Jewish question was not very different from Adolph Hitler’s.”³³

²⁹ Quoted in George Watson, “Race and the Socialists,” *Encounter*, 47 (Nov. 1976), 23. It is perhaps worth quoting at some length the newspaper report of Meinhof’s speech before a German court in 1972. She is reported to have said: “Auschwitz heisst, dass sechs Millionen Juden ermordet und auf die Müllkippen Europas gekarrt wurden als das, als was man sie ausgab - als Geldjuden! Finanzkapital und Banken, ‘der harte Kern des Systems’ des Imperialismus und Kapitalismus, hätten den Hass der Menschen auf das Geld und die Ausbeutung von sich ab und auf die Juden gelenkt. Diese Zusammenhänge nicht deutlich gemacht zu haben, sei das Versagen der Linken, der Kommunisten gewesen. Die Deutschen waren antisemitisch, also sind sie heute Anhänger der RAF. Sie wissen es nur nicht, weil man vergessen hat, sie vom Faschismus, vom Judenmord, freizusprechen und ihnen zu sagen, dass Antisemitismus eigentlich Hass auf den Kapitalismus ist.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Dec. 15, 1972), 6. I would like to thank the author of the article, Dr. Peter Jochen Winters, and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for their permission to quote from their report of Ulrike Meinhof’s speech. Watson translates “als was man sie ausgab” as “for what they were” whereas “for what they were presented as” would be more correct. Disturbing as Meinhof’s speech is (especially given the at least passive support of the Red Army Faction by many German university students), it is also, taken as a whole, confused and even in places incoherent. Watson’s translation and analysis make Meinhof’s point appear to be much clearer than in fact it is, and his charge that she “spoke up publicly in the Good Old Cause of revolutionary extermination” is not obviously supported by the text. Watson, 22.

³⁰ Hugh Lloyd-Jones, “The Books that Marx Read,” *London Times Literary Supplement* (Feb. 4, 1977), 188.

³¹ W. H. Chaloner and W. O. Henderson, “Marx/Engels and Racism.” *Encounter*, 45 (July 1975), 20. They also remark that Engels “. . . had no prejudices against coloured peoples. He rejected the view commonly expressed by explorers and missionaries in his day that native peoples were ‘heathen savages’ who were obviously inferior to white races,” 21. The only evidence adduced to support this view is Engels’ account, based on his reading of Morgan, of the “wonderful child-like simplicity” of Iroquois life, *ibid.* Had Morgan’s and Engels’ attitude toward the Iroquois Indians been as totally admiring as Chaloner and Henderson suggest (it was in reality far more complex) it could hardly support such a broad generalization. Moreover, there exists directly conflicting evidence in the *Dialectics of Nature*, “The Role Played By Labour . . . ,” and personal correspondence, among other sources.

³² Max Geltman, “Socialist Anti-Semitism: Marx, Engels, and Others,” *Encounter*, 45 (March 1976), 94.

³³ Robert Payne, *The Unknown Karl Marx: Documents* (1972), 14-15. Quoted in Watson, 19.

Sometimes the view of Marx as virulently anti-semitic is based on a particular reading of his two well-known review essays, published in 1844 under the general title *Die Judenfrage* (On the Jewish Question), one of which emphasizes Marx's prediction that Judaism will disappear ("the Jew will become *impossible*," in Marx's phrase) in a socialist society. But the view of Marx as anti-semitic rests much more frequently on his disparaging comments about Jews as a race and as individuals than on a particular interpretation of the *argument* of *Die Judenfrage*. These unflattering remarks appear primarily in the second essay of *Die Judenfrage*; in *Herr Vogt*, the manuscript of 1860 still untranslated (into English) with its extraordinarily tasteless attack on Joseph Moses Levy, publisher of the London *Daily Telegraph* (the length of whose nose provides the focal point for three pages of abuse); in several articles which appeared in *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, the newspaper edited by Marx and Engels in 1848–49; and in their private correspondence.³⁴

The remarks in their private correspondence, especially Marx's comments on the character and appearance of Ferdinand Lassalle, are frequently cited in support of the thesis that Marx was a self-hating Jew. Eduard Bernstein edited these remarks out of the original edition of the Marx-Engels correspondence (1913), and for many years the most famous letter was said to be forged. Its inclusion in the official East German edition of the collected works of Marx and Engels effectively ended that debate. The letter, which is actually more insulting to blacks than to Jews, reads as follows:

The Jewish nigger Lassalle, who fortunately left at the end of the week, had, again fortunately, lost 3000 Thaler in a bad speculation. The fellow would rather throw the money in the gutter than lend it to a "friend" even if the interest and capital were guaranteed. At that, he gives out the impression

³⁴ Marx's and Engels' articles in *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* include a number of very disparaging comments about Jews, esp. in Poland. See their articles of June 8, July 8, July 9, August 9, August 12, August 22, September 1, November 29 (all 1848) and January 8, February 21, March 18, April 29 (1849). The most virulently anti-semitic articles to appear in that newspaper were, however, published by others. Of particular note is the series of five articles by Ernst Drönke (one of the publishers of the *N.R.Z.*) which appeared in July 1848. Mr. Lev Golman of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CC CPSU writes: "There is no doubt that the point of view represented in this article, as in other articles by Drönke on the Polish Question, expressed the general position of the editors of the *N.R.Z.* including its chief editor Marx." Letter to the author, Feb. 20, 1979. I am very grateful to Mr. Golman, who edited the *N.R.Z.* articles for the new English-language edition of the Marx/Engels *Collected Works*, for his help in sorting out the authorship of the articles on the Polish question. Only Marx's and Engels' articles in the *N.R.Z.* are easily accessible in German, Russian, and now in an English edition of their works. There is, however, a German facsimile edition of the *N.R.Z.*

that he must live as a Jewish baron or as a baronial Jew (probably through the countess). . . . Now it is completely clear to me that, as his head shape and hair growth prove, he is descended from the Negroes who joined Moses on the journey out of Egypt (if not, his mother or grandmother on his father's side crossed with a nigger). Now this combination of Judaism and Teutonism with a negroid basis must produce a strange product. The obtrusiveness of the fellow is indeed negroid. . . . One of the great discoveries of our nigger—which he shared with me as a 'most trusted friend'—is that the Pelagians stemmed from the Semites. . . .³⁵

In spite of this and similar letters, and comments in some published works, some Marx scholars insist that Marx was not, and given his general philosophical outlook could not have been, anti-semitic. They base this claim upon a particular reading of *Die Judenfrage*, especially the first essay, and to a lesser extent, *The Holy Family*. None of Marx's defenders (that I know of, at least) denies that Marx equated Judaism with the spirit of commercialism and self-interest; the message of *Die Judenfrage* is plain enough:

Let us consider the actual, wordly Jew, not the *Sabbath Jew*, as Bauer does, but the *everyday Jew*.

Let us not look for the secret of the Jew in his religion but let us look for the secret of his religion in the real Jew.

What is the secular basis of Judaism? *Practical need, self-interest.*

What is the worldly religion of the Jew? *Huckstering.* What is his worldly God? *Money.*

Very well then! Emancipation from *huckstering* and *money*, consequently from practical, real Judaism, would be the self-emancipation of our time.³⁶

Nevertheless, the counter-argument claims that *Die Judenfrage* is not anti-semitic in spirit for the following reasons. First, Jews had become, as a result of their exclusion from guilds, professions, and agriculture a commercial people, buoyed by a commercial religion, who historically played a central role in the development of capitalism, so Marx's "economic-Jew" stereotype may be exaggerated but contains a large element of truth. Moreover, given that Marx was writing at a time before sociological and historical studies exposed the exaggeration of the stereotype—one held by many Jews themselves—Marx at the least ought not to be singled out for special blame.³⁷

³⁵ Marx to Engels, 30 July 1862.

³⁶ Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works*, Vol. 3 (New York, 1975), 170.

³⁷ For example, see Hal Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: State and Bureaucracy* (New York, 1977), 591-608. Although Draper presents a strong defense of Marx, his argument that everyone on the left, including Jews, accepted the same stereotype as did Marx is greatly exaggerated. It ignores, for example, the highly negative reaction on the part of many Jews to the Portrait of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, a reaction to which Dickens himself was sensitive.

Second, and more important, the counter-argument continues, the spirit of *Die Judenfrage* is anything but anti-semitic. However offensive its tone to twentieth-century ears with their experience of Hitlerism and other anti-semitic movements, the central thesis of the essays is that political emancipation of the Jews ought not to wait upon general social emancipation. It is, such scholars insist, an argument (directly largely against the Left Hegelian, Bruno Bauer) in favor of granting full political equality to the Jews in the here and now, not in some liberated future. To be sure, political equality represents only a limited step on the road to full social emancipation, for it leaves untouched those property relationships from which the most basic inequalities necessarily follow. Nonetheless, the emancipation of the state from religion (i.e., the separation of the state from all theological concerns) represents a genuine, even if limited, advance in human freedom. Political emancipation ought not to be confused with social emancipation, but they *are* interrelated. Indeed, the extent to which the state has divorced itself from religious concerns (of which Jewish emancipation is perhaps the best index) indicates the degree of a state's modernity. Therefore, those states which had not yet granted Jews political equality must be considered backward.³⁸ Engels is particularly clear in his condemnation of anti-semitism as reactionary: it "is nothing but the reaction of the medieval, decadent strata of society against modern society, which essentially consists of wage-earners and capitalists; under a mask of apparent socialism, it therefore only serves reactionary ends; it is a variety of feudal socialism and with that we can have nothing to do."³⁹

What is most striking about the sharply conflicting arguments over Marxist anti-semitism is that they are based on generally different sorts of evidence. The view that Marx and Engels were anti-semitic is based largely on their *style*, on the contempt they express for Judaism as a religion and for most Jews as individuals, especially (though not exclusively) in their correspondence. The opposed view is based on the *argument* of *Die Judenfrage* and, to a lesser extent, on *The Holy Family* and Marx's philosophical writings in general.

Both kinds of evidence are relevant, and together they indicate that no simple characterization of Marx's and Engels' views is defensible. They did hold a general philosophical position which led them

³⁸ Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1968), 43-46.

³⁹ Engels to an unknown correspondent, 19 April 1890, published in the Vienna *Arbeiterzeitung*, 9 May 1890. The letter is included in *Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, trans. D. Torr, 469-72. Engels also criticizes anti-semitism in *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science*. trans. by Emile Burns, ed. C. P. Dutt (London, 1934) though his remarks have perhaps the character of a stick with which to beat Dühring who was a rabid anti-semite.

to support full political rights for Jews. It is therefore absurd to imply, as some writers do, that Marx looked forward to “a world without Jews”⁴⁰ as though he espoused their physical extermination. On the other hand, it is equally clear that Marx was highly sensitive about his Jewish origins and that he and Engels both disliked most Jews personally and accepted every current anti-Jewish stereotype, including those which from their own personal experience and knowledge of history they should have had reason to doubt.⁴¹ Julius Carlebach has recently shown how little merit there is in the claim of some scholars, such as David McClellan, that Marx’s use of the term “Judentum” in *Die Judenfrage* is essentially devoid of religious and racial content.⁴² Marx himself asserted that “not only in the Pentateuch or Talmud but also in present society we find the nature of the contemporary Jew, not as an abstract nature but as a supremely empirical nature,” and he certainly makes empirical claims about Jewish religion and Jewish history, claims which Carlebach shows to be “even more contemptuous and certainly less well-informed than those of his predecessors” (such as Feuerbach and Bauer).⁴³ Moreover, both Marx and Engels disapprove of what they take to be every characteristic of contemporary Jews. From Marx’s comments in the second essay of *Die Judenfrage*, other published material by Marx and Engels, and especially their private correspondence, we know that they believed Jews to be selfish, interested only in money-making, capable of determining the fate of Europe through their control of international finance, clannish—even greasy.⁴⁴

Taking into account all of the available evidence, I think that the

⁴⁰ Dagobert D. Runes, *A World Without Jews* (New York, 1959), all but a few pages of which is a translation of *Die Judenfrage*.

⁴¹ Yvonne Kapp’s biography of Eleanor Marx contains an interesting anecdote in this regard. At the death of Marx’s wife, an obituary notice appeared in *La Justice*, a journal for which Marx’s son-in-law, Charles Longuet, was an editor. It noted that Marx’s Jewish origin created prejudice against the marriage, a remark which angered Marx who wrote to his daughter the same day: “I suppose I am not mistaken in crediting Mr. Ch. Longuet’s inventive genius with this literary embellishment . . . Longuet would greatly oblige me in never mentioning my name in *his* writings.” Yvonne Kapp, *Eleanor Marx*, Vol. One (New York, 1972), 221. Marx never referred to his Jewish origins and showed extreme sensitivity about the comments of others.

⁴² Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London, 1978), esp. 148-84. Carlebach’s is certainly the most thorough and closely-reasoned analysis of the argument of *Die Judenfrage* and is especially valuable in providing a historical context in which to locate that essay. ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁴ A few examples: “. . . the loan-mongering Jews derive much of their strength from these family relations, as these, in addition to their lucre affinities, give a compactness and unity to their operations which ensure their success”; Marx in the *New York Tribune* (4 January 1856), quoted in Chaloner and Henderson, 20. On Engels’ club, the “Schiller Anstalt”—“What has happened is what always happens when Jews are about. At first, they thank God that they had a Schiller Anstalt, but

attitude of Marx and Engels toward Jews can be reasonably characterized as follows. As a result of their particular historical situation, Jews have developed a wide range of unpleasant characteristics all directly or indirectly associated with money-making. These historically-conditioned traits will inevitably disappear in a society where money-making is not possible; when Judaism loses its practical basis, the Jew as we know him will cease to exist and the Jewish "problem" will simply dissolve. However, it follows that in the present, as opposed to the socialist future, Jews as a class are the kind of people with whom one would not much want to associate. That it is not their fault and that it will not always be thus does not alter the fact that for Marx and Engels almost all Jews were characterized by highly undesirable traits. Though they rationalized their attitude toward particular Jews, they accepted as true this characterization which if accepted by others, could not help but create a socialist attitude of contempt toward the "actual, worldly" Jew. That is the real basis of socialist anti-semitism, the link connecting Marx with the disgraceful position of almost all socialists in the Dreyfus affair and the anti-semitic views of at least a portion of the modern European left.⁴⁵

hardly had they got inside than they wanted to build a bigger club house—a true temple of Moses—to which the Schiller Anstalt could be moved"; Engels to Carl Siebel, 4 June 1862, *ibid.* On Lassalle—"a real Jew from the Slav frontier . . . a greasy Jew disguised under brilliantine and flashy jewels"; Engels to Marx, 7 March 1856, *ibid.*, 21. "I begin to understand French anti-semitism when I see how many Jews of Polish origin with German names intrude themselves everywhere to the point of arousing public opinion in the ville lumière . . ."; Engels to Paul Lafargue, 22 July 1892, *ibid.* "So long as they are making money it is a matter of complete indifference to the English middle classes if their workers eat or starve. They regard hard cash as a universal measuring rod. Anything that yields no financial gain is dismissed as 'stupid', 'impractical', or 'idealistic.' That is why these petty Jewish chafferers are such devoted students of economics—the science of making money. Every one of them is an economist"; Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (London, 1892), 312. "We discovered that . . . the German national simpletons and money-grubbers of the Frankfurt parliamentary swamp always counted as Germans the Polish Jews as well, although this meanest of all races, neither by its jargon nor by its descent but at most only through its lust for profit, could have any relation of kinship with Frankfurt"; Engels in the *N.R.Z.* (29 April 1849), in *Marx/Engels, Collected Works*, 360. On Joseph Moses Levy, publisher of the London *Daily Telegraph*—"But of what use is it for Levy to attack Mr. Disraeli . . . , so long as Mother Nature has inscribed, with the wildest black letters, his family tree in the middle of his face? The nose of the mysterious stranger of Slawkenbergious (see *Tristram Shandy*), who fetched himself the finest nose from the promontory of noses, was merely a week's talk in Strasbourg, whereas Levy's nose constitutes a year's talk in the City of London . . ."; Marx in *Herr Vogt*, quoted in Saul K. Padover, "The Baptism of Karl Marx's Family," *Midstream*, 24 (June/July, 1978), 44.

⁴⁵ For the most part, socialists were either indifferent or active anti-Dreyfusards.

A Note on the Irish

There is a striking parallel between Marx's and Engels' opinion of the Jews and of the Irish. The Irish also, as a result of historical circumstances, possess many undesirable traits, traits almost the reverse of those which characterize the Jews. The Irish are stupid, addicted to drink, coarse, dirty, passionate by nature, brutal when drunk though otherwise light-hearted and happy, in short, at their best they have the virtues of small children, but at their worst they are animal-like. (However, even in their most degraded condition the Irish rise above the level of savages, another indication of the nineteenth-century Marxist view of non-Western societies.) Lest this seem an exaggeration, a few excerpts from Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* will serve to illustrate the point:

One worker needs more than another, because the former is accustomed to a higher standard of living, than the latter. The Englishman, who is not yet wholly uncivilised, needs more than the Irishman, who goes about in rags, eats potatoes, and lives in pigsties. This does not prevent the Irishman's competing with the Englishman and gradually dragging down his wages and standard of living to his own level. Certain jobs can only be performed by workers who have reached a certain degree of civilization and practically all industrial employment falls into this category.⁴⁶

Two things make life supportable to the Irishman—whiskey and his lively, happy-go-lucky disposition. He drinks himself into a state of brutish intoxication. Everything combines to drive the Irishman to drink—his light-hearted temperament, akin to that of the Mediterranean peoples, his coarseness, which drags him down virtually to the level of a savage, his contempt for all normal human pleasures, which he is incapable of appreciating because of his degraded condition, combined with his dirty habits and his abject poverty.⁴⁷

The actual manner in which poverty strikes the Irish may be explained by the history, traditions and national characteristics of the people. The Irish have a strong affinity with the Latin races such as the French and the Italian. The resemblance to the Italians is particularly strong. . . .

In Ireland passions and sentiment rule supreme and reason takes a back seat. The sensuous and excitable nature of the Irish prevents them from undertaking tasks which require sober judgment and tenacity of purpose.

Eleanor Marx was a striking exception; see Aileen Kelly, "Eleanor Marx, Heroine," *New York Review of Books*, 24 (Jan. 26, 1978), 29-30. The French socialist leaders Jules Guesde and Jean Jaurès issued a manifesto supporting "nonparticipation in the Dreyfus affair, on the ground that while the reaction wishes to exploit the conviction of one Jew to disqualify all Jews, Jewish capitalists would use the rehabilitation of a single Jew to wash out 'all the sins of Israel.'" Quoted in Geltman, 92.

⁴⁶ Engels, *The Condition of . . .*, 89-90.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

Obviously such a people are not able to engage in industry as it is carried on today.⁴⁸

It is less clear with the Irish (than it is, say, with the Jews) that their distinctive national characteristics, particularly the “sensuous and excitable nature” which they share with the Latin races, will entirely disappear in the course of historical development. There is an ambiguous quality to Engels’ comments on the Irish which, as noted early in this paper, is typical of nineteenth-century discussions of nationality. Nonetheless, whatever their peculiarities as a “race,” the problems of the Irish are primarily the result not of their nature but of an oppressive social structure.

That social structure is internal; Engels does not believe that the degraded condition of the Irish can be attributed to English rule, a fact which will become abundantly clear after that rule has ended. Nonetheless, both Marx and Engels are fairly consistent supporters of Irish independence (and apparently not just for tactical reasons). As with the Jews, therefore, the Irish are viewed as having a wide variety of unpleasant characteristics, characteristics which will not be altered by Irish independence. Nonetheless, as with the Jews, political emancipation is not made to wait upon general social emancipation.

What Marx and Engels Said About the Slavs

We have already seen in their discussion of Pierre Trémaux something of the attitudes of Marx and Engels toward the Slavs. Their letters indicate a willingness on Marx’s part to adopt, at least temporarily, a biological explanation for the course of Slavic history. While Engels dismisses the book initially as bad science (later admitting that soil may have some influence on race), nothing in his replies indicates disagreement with Marx’s characterization of the Slavs. Their letters and published articles, particularly in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*, reflect a life-long preoccupation with the “Slavic question” and a personal distaste for Slavs on the part of both men. In fact, their opinion of the Slavs is so low that beside it their portraits of the blacks, Jews, and Irish appear almost flattering. And in Engels’ case, the ultimate solution to the Slavic question is to be found not in general social emancipation but in the extermination of the Slavs as a people. This solution follows from Engels’ view of historical development in general and Slavic history in particular, not, at least obviously, from any belief in “natural” Slavic inferiority.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 308-09.

The objections of Marx and Engels to Pan-Slavism have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere.⁴⁹ What is of interest for this paper is that first, Marx tried to buttress his anti-Slavic views with geographical arguments and that second, although Engels did not, his characterization of the Slavs and solution to the Slavic question were considerably harsher than Marx's, a good indication of the difficulty (and perhaps futility) of distinguishing "racial" from purely "cultural" views of inferiority in the nineteenth century. At the least, the difficulty provides a warning against the too easy twentieth-century assumption that cultural theories of human differences are necessarily more benign in their implications than are those based on nature. Not only German hegemony over the Slavs but also American expansionism was defended by Engels "in the interests of civilization." The striving for self-determination on the part of peoples "without a history," peoples who have not followed that course of historical development leading to capitalism, is viewed with contempt. Engels' remarks on American expansionism (in an article denouncing Slavic nationalism) illustrate this attitude. As part of an argument with Bakunin he writes:

How does it happen then, that between both these republics [the U.S. and Mexico] which according to the moralistic theory should be "brotherly" and "federated," a war broke out over Texas, that the "sovereign will" of the American people, supported by the bravery of American volunteers, for "geographic, commercial and strategic necessities" moves a boundary line drawn by nature a few hundred miles further south? And will Bakunin reproach the American people for waging a war which to be sure deals a severe blow to his theories based on "Justice and Humanity," but which none the less was waged solely in the interests of civilization? Or is it perhaps a misfortune that the splendid land of California has been wrested from the lazy Mexicans who did not know what to do with it? Is it a misfortune that through the rapid exploitation of the gold mines there the energetic Yankees have increased the medium of circulation, . . . have built great cities, have opened up steamship lines, are laying railroads . . . ? Because of this the "independence" of a few Spanish Californians and Texans may suffer, occasionally "Justice" and other moralistic principles may be injured, but what do they count compared to such world historic events?⁵⁰

The Czechs and South Slavs, like the "lazy Mexicans" and assorted other peoples, lack the historical requisites for independence; their nationalisms are necessarily counter-revolutionary:

Except for the Poles, the Russians, and at best the Slavs in Turkey, no Slavic people has a future, for the simple reason that all the other Slavs lack

⁴⁹ A good summary of their views is provided by Joseph A. Petrus, "Marx and Engels on the National Question," *Journal of Politics*, 33 (Aug. 1971), 797-824.

⁵⁰ Engels, "Der demokratische Panslawismus," *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (Feb. 1849). Trans. as "Democratic Panslavism" in Paul W. Blackstock and Bert F. Hoselitz (eds.), *The Russian Menace to Europe* (Glencoe, Ill., 1952), 70-71.

the most basic, historic, geographic, political and industrial prerequisites for independence and vitality.

Peoples which have never had a history of their own, which from the moment they reached the first, crudest stages of civilization already came under foreign domination or which were only forced into the first stages of civilization through a foreign yoke, have no vitality, they will never be able to attain any sort of independence.⁵¹

Or as expressed in a different essay:

There is no country in Europe which does not contain in some corner one or several ruins of people, left-overs of earlier inhabitants, pushed back by and made subject to the nation which later became the carrier of historical development. These remains of nations which have been mercilessly trampled down by the passage of history, as Hegel expressed it, this ethnic trash always becomes and remains until its complete extermination or denationalization, the most fanatic carrier of counterrevolution, since its entire existence is nothing more than a protest against a great historical revolution.

Such in Scotland were the Gaels, the supporters of the Stuarts from 1640 to 1745. Such in France were the Bretons, the supporters of the Bourbons from 1792 to 1800. Such in Spain were the Basques, supporters of Don Carlos. Such in Austria are the Panslavist South Slavs, who are nothing more than the waste products of a highly confused development which has gone on for a thousand years.⁵²

Moreover, Engels' solution to the Slavic question comes at least close to what some scholars have (I argued earlier, mistakenly) seen as Marx's solution to the Jewish question. A few brief excerpts from Engels' articles in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* illustrate his fanaticism:

Then it is war. 'A ceaseless fight to the death' with Slavdom, which betrays the Revolution, a battle of annihilation and ruthless terrorism—not in the interests of Germany but of the Revolution!⁵³

The next world war will cause not only reactionary classes and dynasties but also entire reactionary peoples to disappear from the earth. And that too would be progress.⁵⁴

Among all the nations and petty ethnic groups of Austria there are only three which have been the carriers of progress, which have played an active role in history and which still retain their vitality—the Germans, the Poles and the Magyars. For this reason they are now revolutionary.

The chief mission of all the other races and peoples—large and small—is to perish in the revolutionary holocaust.⁵⁵

Conclusion. Marx and Engels are said by some to have been extreme racists, by others anti-racists. They were neither. The only

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵² Engels, "Der Magyarische Kampf"; trans. as "Hungary and Panslavism" in Blackstock and Hoselitz, 63-64.

⁵³ Engels, "Democratic Panslavism," 84.

⁵⁴ Engels, "Hungary and Panslavism," 67.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

thing striking about the racial views of Marx and Engels is their ordinariness. Their attitudes were the typical attitudes of nineteenth-century Europeans who, regardless of their ideology, thought in terms of a hierarchy of cultures with their own at the top and who occasionally used biology to provide a scientific basis for their categorization of societies into higher and lower forms. The use of biology by Marx and Engels, like that of many of their contemporaries was sporadic, *ad hoc*, and sometimes inconsistent (as in Marx's geo-biological explanation of Slavic history, which, however, evidently did not apply to the Poles for whom both he and Engels had the highest regard). Moreover, for them biological differences were, in some cases at least, capable of amelioration. As Engels' view of the Slavs indicates, in the nineteenth century the judgment that a people lacks "a history of its own" may be harsher than the opinion that, as a result of soil, diet, or other natural factors, a people is biologically degenerate.

There is a widespread, and I believe unfortunate, tendency to transform Marx and Engels into progressives on every issue of twentieth-century concern. It was Marx who wrote:

With the same right with which France has taken Flanders, Lorraine and Alsace, and, sooner or later, will take Belgium, with that same right Germany takes Silesia: with the right of civilization against barbarism, of progress against stability . . . this right is worth more than all treaties, for it is the right of historical development.⁵⁶

Yet the anti-colonialist image of Marx and Engels is hardly affected by this and other contrary evidence. They were not consistent anti-colonialists, and they were not progressive about race either; they were simply no better or worse than most of their contemporaries.

More than fifty years ago, Georg Lukács wrote in *History and Class Consciousness* that all philosophies, including Marxism, reflect certain assumptions of the age in which they were born.⁵⁷ The important question today is to what extent Marxist categories are informed by the nineteenth-century cultural prejudices of Marx and Engels.

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⁵⁶ Karl Marx in *Die Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (Aug. 12, 1848): cited in Bertram D. Wolfe, *Marxism: One Hundred Years in the Life of a Doctrine* (New York, 1965), 26.

⁵⁷ Georg Lukács, "The Changing Function of Historical Materialism," *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).