Denys Turner, MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY

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Recommended Citation
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told me a secret.

I will close by noting that one important aspect of the relation between faith and evidence is entirely ignored in these papers. I concede that the papers are (as I have said) a miscellaneous collection, and that it would be absurd to fault such a collection for failing to be a comprehensive treatment of any topic. Still, I think the point is worth remarking on. One finds no mention in these papers of the fact that various people have attempted to disprove the beliefs of Christians and other theists. Unbelievers have, for example, attempted to demonstrate that the existence of God is incompatible with pain and suffering; or that religious beliefs are the products of depth-psychological or economic forces; or that religious beliefs are incompatible with known scientific fact; or that critical studies of central Biblical texts show these texts to be corrupt or historically unreliable or to have been intended by their authors in senses that do not support the theological superstructure that later generations have raised on them. I cannot discover in these papers any suggestion as to how a Christian should respond to arguments offered as disproofs of theism or as evidence of the scientific or historical untenability of Christian belief. Let me offer a rather extreme example. Suppose a Christian is assured by a freethinking acquaintance (who has read it in *Godless Sunday at Home*) that the Gospels were made up out of whole cloth by unscrupulous priests circa 400 A.D. Shall he say, “Maybe so, but I still intend to regard them as a promise of eternal life and a call to obedience?” No, he can’t say that. He may, of course, assume that his acquaintance is lying or mistaken and put the matter out of his mind. That’s all right. One who felt obliged to investigate every challenge to his convictions would be hard-pressed to find the time to act on his convictions. But if he finds he can’t put the matter out of his mind, or if it looks to him as if there might really be something to his acquaintance’s thesis, then it would seem that he must search out evidence and evaluate it.


Reviewed by WILLIAM LEON MCBRIDE, Purdue University.

Both Turner and Dupré are at home in the large border area that lies between, or more correctly is overlapped by, contemporary philosophy and religious studies. Both see in the work of Karl Marx, though not in much of what goes
by the name of "Marxist" movements today, material for profoundly positive insights into the condition of modern society. Beyond these basic similarities, however, their books exhibit a considerable divergence in philosophical and scholarly styles, in principal areas of interest, and in the degrees to which they express (whatever may be the states of their respective authors' \textit{fora interna}) a sense of moral outrage and concomitant commitment to radical protest of some sort. Together, in other words, they make for a study, a potentially very interesting one, in complementarity and contrast.

I shall proceed to undertake such a study, attempting in the process to actualize this potential, in three parts: (1) a brief summary of each book in turn, indicating its main themes; (2) an account of some of their complementarities and contrasts, with special emphases on their respective broader philosophical frames of reference and their respective treatments of the concept of ideology; and (3) an analysis, of necessity rather perfunctory, of Turner's central claim, "Morality is Marxism," since no other important contention in either book is so likely to attract the attention of so many of the readers of this journal.

(1) Turner begins by disclaiming theological pretensions in this book and by highlighting his two theses, that of the "identity" between morality and Marxism already mentioned, and that of the "strong compatibility" between Marxism and Christianity, which "are in asymmetrical relations of dependence on one another." (p. ix) He identifies himself as one who "feels crushed between the moral cynicism of a Brezhnev and the moral hypocrisy of a Reagan." (p. xi) Part I, consisting of six chapters, develops the theme of ideology, raising the question as to how a set of \textit{lived but false} beliefs is possible at all. Turner regards Marxism as a science of society which permits this question to be answered, although in elaborating upon this science he considers "Marx's writings \textit{as such}" to be "unimportant." (p. 3) Beginning with a wide-ranging and somewhat unfocused discussion of praxis, he narrows his inquiry into the nature of ideology to the point of identifying it as "a praxis which internalises a systematic performative contradiction" (p. 31)—an entire language of lived contradictory meanings, hence not conspiratorial in the way in which propaganda is. He makes extensive and interesting use of the nineteenth-century English expression, "one's betters", to illustrate the systematic ambiguity of ideological language. He then goes on to argue that the sustained denial that there exists class-conflict contributes to the dominance of the class in power and shows how the principle of \textit{toleration}, as advanced by the theorists of interest-group pluralism and instanced in another way in R. M. Hare's insistence that no specific set of moral beliefs is entailed by his own analysis of "moral" language, has consequences within contemporary society which are in fact by no means morally neutral. This final chapter of Part I is the best and most fascinating.

Part II, the focus of the "Morality is Marxism" theme, is the shortest. To be
very brief, since I shall be returning to this, I may summarize the direction of the argument by recalling Turner’s views of Marxism as scientific, hence in a sense factual, and of ideology as systematically ambiguous, and then pointing out that he sees scientific Marxism’s critical analysis of capitalism and of the ideological language in which capitalism is justified as constituting, *eo ipso*, a moral position—indeed, the only correct moral position—in contemporary society. Marxism, according to Turner, thus presents itself as “the ‘rescued truth’ of bourgeois ideology” (p. 128), but not as a rival set of answers, a picture of some presumably better economic future. Moreover, since under capitalism a full-fledged lived morality is impossible, it is not surprising that Marxism is not expressed in moral language; for “to speak morally under capitalism we must refuse to moralise.” (p. 152)

There are moments in Turner’s Part III in which the reader finds him playing the role of theologian *malgré lui*, with results that are not always, in my view, very satisfactory. The argument for a “strong compatibility” between Marxism and Christianity, with which this section begins, is actually a continuation of the previous discussion of morality and of Marxism as a moral force in the contemporary world. Here, Turner seems more defensive than he needs to be on the basis of that earlier discussion. He assures us, for example, that he is not claiming here that Christianity is true or that it is the source of distinctive insights of which Marxism must take account, but only that it “is a praxis which is situated in the terrain of the same problematic as Marxism is.” (p. 159) But he also takes pains to distance himself from liberation theology, which he takes to be asserting too close a compatibility between Marxism and Christianity, and to reply to possible objections to his “strong compatibility” thesis from ontological and historical points of view. In subsequent chapters he attacks Louis Althusser’s version of Marxism for its polemic against human subjectivity, discusses a “weak-compatibility thesis” which turns out to be much less easily defensible than that of strong compatibility (the latter “merely” asserts a dialectical interdependence between Marxism and Christianity, whereas “weak compatibility” demands that there be no formal inconsistencies between them, a claim that could be refuted by a single counter-example), and further reveals his own deep discontent with all varieties of contemporary Christianity that maintain that either love or a Church *community* is possible under the conditions of capitalism. He speculates that the eventual achievement of a true human community entails, simultaneously, the Church’s becoming a community and the Church’s ceasing to exist, “which is why, for the Christian, the beginning of all criticism is the criticism of religion.” (p. 223) He concludes that “what Marxism ‘knows’ it cannot know the true name of, that is God” (p. 249)—a notion that he has previously (pp. 230-31) identified with a “future state of affairs” outside history. In short, these concluding pages are not Turner’s best from a logical point of view.
Dupré's book consists of five chapters together with a short introduction and conclusion. The topics of the chapter, to oversimplify somewhat for the sake of brevity, are alienation, nature and history, dialectic, economics, and ideology. Rather than to consider these topics in order, it will be more illuminating to summarize some of the book's principal themes, which are interwoven throughout. One theme is suggested by the book's title: to wit, that Marx's work has important implications for Kulturkritik, both in his own time and today. There is much about the contemporary 'culture industry' that Dupré, quite properly, loathes; it is far worse than Marx would have dreamed, Dupré points out, but unfortunately Marx undercut the potential force of his own critical stance concerning culture by overemphasizing the socio-economic basis of commodity fetishism and alienation (pp. 50-51). This remark points to what I regard as Dupré's single most important and cogently argued thesis, or set of theses, in the book: that the general according of primacy to the economic sphere, which Marx rightly deplored but identified strictly with capitalism, unfortunately shows signs of surviving with full force in post-capitalist societies, and that Marx's own critique of capitalism erred grievously by depicting this primacy as being too overwhelming and hence in conceding too much to what he set out to criticize. On the other hand, Dupré sees much of value in Marx's treatment of human labor, a topic that some would-be Marxian economists, as well as many others, regard as an embarrassment.

Much of Dupré's book is concerned with tracing affinities and oppositions within the philosophical tradition in which Marx's thought developed. Feuerbach, in particular, emerges in this book as something of an intellectual villain, or at least an intellectual adulterator, both for his reduction of the concept of "alienation" to its religious dimension, a move which deprives it of the rich cultural significance that it enjoyed in Hegel's Phenomenology and other works, and for his having refocused the notion of "dialectic" away from issues concerning the intrinsic relatedness of moments in a given conceptual whole, the principal concern of Hegelian dialectic, towards more extrinsic and even purely factual issues about the old opposition between speculative thought and sensuous reality, mind and nature (pp. 114-115). As Dupré traces it, the reduction of dialectics to a strictly empirical method achieves maximum entropy, so to speak, in the later tradition epitomized by Stalin, in whose writings the original revolutionary power of Marx's thought is lost. Dupré's careful studies of the evolution of such key concepts as alienation and dialectics from before Marx's time through Marx to later Marxisms permits him to shed new light on such fundamental questions, within this broad tradition, as that of the nature of historical necessity (it cannot be very strong, once one has abandoned the Hegelian hypothesis of Spirit) and that of the extent to which human beings, rather than blind, impersonal forces, make history.
I shall postpone consideration of themes in Dupré’s Chapter Five, “The Uses of Ideology,” until I can draw comparisons with Turner’s ideas about the same concept in the next section. However, no summary of Dupré’s book should be neglectful of his short concluding chapter, in which he steps further outside of the texts than has been his wont in order to articulate his own very balanced perspective on Marx’s overall contribution to the critique of culture. Here, Dupré pays less attention to Marx’s alleged overemphasis of economic considerations and of Ricardian “production for production’s sake” (p. 280), which he has already discussed, and more attention to Marx’s attribution of primacy to praxis over theory. This move, too, according to Dupré, was excessive on Marx’s part, but at the same time our author does not wish to restore the primacy of theory so characteristic of pre-Marxian philosophical traditions.

(2) The contrasts between the two books, even when their authors are attempting to deal with very similar themes, are striking. While neither is satisfied with the present state of social affairs, Turner exhibits outrage, whereas Dupré’s tone is one of forceful but circumspect criticism. Turner flaunts his insouciant attitude towards the actual Marxian texts, whereas Dupré is first and foremost a careful textual scholar. Turner writes in nearly complete disregard of the philosophical tradition that was Marx’s in his youth—Hegel receives at most three allusions, Feuerbach none throughout Turner’s entire book—, whereas it is always against the background of that tradition that Dupré passes his judgments on Marx. Turner makes use of only a handful of other contemporary writers on topics related to his own—Terry Eagleton and Steven Lukes are perhaps the most frequently invoked, and they are not invoked very often—, whereas Dupré’s list of secondary sources from the now rather broad methodological spectrum of discussants of Marx’s thought, upon which he draws extensively, is exceedingly impressive.

The drawbacks of some aspects of Turner’s approach, as I have sketched it, become evident when one contrasts his use of the term, “dialectic,” with Dupré’s. (A number of other fundamental concepts in the Marxian tradition could serve a similar purpose for me here.) When, in the course of developing a sustained comparison between Aristotle’s and Plato’s morality and politics, Turner makes a rare reference to the notion of dialectics, his grasp of it appears highly superficial: “If Plato’s science is non-dialectical because it bypasses ordinary experience, Aristotle’s is non-dialectical for the opposite reason, that it merely offers an inductive resolution of inconsistencies at the level of that ordinary experience.” (p. 99) (I leave to others a judgment concerning Turner’s understanding of Plato and Aristotle as exhibited in this facile comparison.) His entire discussion of “Morality and the Science of Society,” the chapter near the close of which this passage occurs, would have profited greatly from a brief allusion, at least, to the special sort of “science,” by contrast with more usual contemporary meanings of “science,” that a dialectical science must be. Likewise, his “strong-compati-
bility” claim of a “dialectical” relationship between Marxism and Christianity (p. 211—it is here that he introduces the adjective, “dialectical,” significantly enough in scare quotes, by way of characterizing this relationship in contrast to the formal logical requirements of the “weak-compatibility” thesis) might well have been rendered more plausible if he had somewhere provided an analysis of just what he might mean by “dialectical” in this context. In Dupré’s book, on the other hand, both the richness and the plurality of meanings of “dialectic” and of the key related notion of “dialectical contradiction” are explored at length (in Chapter Three) in such a way as to deepen the reader’s comprehension in preference to avoiding complexity; it is clearly the historical background that Dupré brings to bear which makes this possible.

There is something to be said in favor of Turner’s more “creative” scholarship (using this term in a way that is roughly similar in meaning to the expression, “creative bookkeeping”), however, when one contrasts his and Dupré’s treatments of “ideology.” What Dupré has to say about this notion, the topic of the last regular chapter of his book, suffers under the burden of the fact that, while it is of very great importance for understanding Marx and later Marxisms particularly with respect to the critique of culture, Marx said very little explicitly about it. Moreover, as Dupré himself well documents, the infrequent usages of the term by Marx and Engels themselves were inconsistent; in fact, Dupré argues, Engels’ reductionist epistemology (the view that ideological structures simply depend upon or “reflect” existing productive forces in some way) had the effect of removing any basis for adequately distinguishing the false from the true, so that “Henceforth ‘ideology’ came to mean a socially determined, rather than a false, ideal complex.” (p. 240) Turner, on the other hand, comparatively unburdened as he is by scholarly judgements about this loss of critical bite in the evolution of the connotations of “ideology” in “mainstream” Marxism (a loss which, by the way, I do not believe to have been as great as Dupré does within other currents of the Marxian tradition), is able to generate new insights into possible uses and implications of the term by means, in large part, of a nostalgic but refreshing resurrection of some of the old techniques of linguistic analysis, specifically by applying them to typical nineteenth-century talk about “one’s betters.” What emerges is a clearer understanding of what Marx should have meant by ideology as a praxis, given the value of this concept as a tool of radical social criticism. My principal regret about this otherwise very worthwhile part of Turner’s book is that in it he makes no use, as he might very profitably have done, of Sartre’s famous analysis of “bad faith” and of the abundant Anglo-American literature about “self-deception” that that analysis helped feed. But then, when Turner does refer very briefly to Sartre, by way of citing a passage from Nausea as it is cited, in turn, in a book by Iris Murdoch (pp. 10-11), his reference shows a degree of understanding of his subject that I would find intolerably low
in a high school student, and so it may be just as well that he did not attempt to make any efforts in this direction. As I have indicated, scholarly accuracy is not Turner's forte.

What is Turner's forte is what might be termed "prophecy" in a quasi-Biblical sense: the articulate expression of intense anger at the practices of a profoundly immoral society. It may therefore be of interest to conclude this review of the two very different books by examining briefly Turner's identification of Marxism with the moral point of view.

(3) I have already attempted summarily to explain what Turner's "morality is Marxism" thesis amounts to—no easy task. Turner is, of course, aware that at least a few contemporary moral philosophers and Christian theologians may find this claim somewhat provocative and perhaps even implausible. To reconstruct Turner's position in different terms, the view amounts to the assertion that Marxist theory has accurately described the fundamental structural elements of the capitalist system and the (ideological) mechanisms whereby this system perpetually "sells" itself to enough members of our society in order to keep itself in business, so to speak. But to engage in such description, if it is indeed accurate, is to carry out properly the enterprise of moral thinking. (Moreover, given the radical immorality of a society governed by capitalist practice, it is probably, Turner seems to be saying, the most that we can expect from this enterprise at the present time.)

This position requires, of course, a stipulative definition of "morality" (in the sense of moral thinking) that differs from some of those that are still more commonly held. Turner insists, in fact, that "it is not just a matter of words. It is an error of substance to call by the name of 'morality' what has been done under that name by philosophers from Kant to Hare." (p. 85) He evokes Classical views of ethics and maintains that Marx should be located within the Classical tradition (i.e., Plato, Aristotle) in this regard. I agree in large measure with Turner on this last-mentioned point. While the spectre of Alasdair MacIntyre (whom, in fact, Turner invokes in a slightly different context in an earlier chapter of his book) necessarily haunts contemporary philosophical discussions of the meaning of "morality," and there is much in MacIntyre's more positive theses about the nature of virtue with which neither Marx nor Turner nor I could possibly agree, there is considerable validity to MacIntyre's point of view that what counts as the mainstream approach to ethics in the Anglo-American philosophical world today is primarily a product of certain late-eighteenth-century turns of thought and by no means paradigmatic of all possible types of rational thinking about morality. It is a failure to appreciate the far-reaching implications of this observation that skews and weakens a large proportion of the recent spate of literature, much of it by philosophers with "analytic training" (whatever that now means), about Marx and justice, Marx and rights, Marx and morality in general. It is
something of a paradox that Turner, who from this volume appears to be virtually
innocent of familiarity with recent Continental European philosophy (characteris-
tically, for example, his own reference to Habermas is to an essay by the latter
that was published in London in an anthology edited by Emmett and Maclntyre),
advances a perspective that is just about as radically antithetical to the still
dominant one on the nature of morality as it is possible to imagine.

Clearly, he goes much too far if one takes him literally. To demonstrate just
why his central thesis on Marxism and morality, as he states and explicates it,
is indefensible would require a detailed discussion for which there is insufficient
space in a brief critical review. To begin with, contrary to the Turnerian assertions
that I cited in the previous paragraph, the question of what “morality” means is
partly “a matter of words,” a question of “stipulation,” as I expressed it, as well
as being partly a matter of substance; and to call the view that Kant and even
Turner’s bête noire, R. M. Hare, to say nothing of the thousands of thinkers in
between them within this broad tradition, were doing morality “an error of
substance” is to rewrite the history of thought (which rightly identifies many
important continuities between Aristotle and Kant, Aristotle and Hare, etc.) more
violently than even the most dedicated deconstructionist has envisioned in his
or her wildest dreams. But Turner should not always be read very literally. What
he intends to convey through his argument that “morality is Marxism” is, I
repeat, a prophetic sense of extreme outrage—born in large measure from a
Christian vision, the various contemporary institutionalizations of which continue
hypocritically to support what they are in principle committed to oppose—at the
systematic injustices that are ingredient in capitalism; it is these injustices that
Marxist theory, as the radically critical perspective par excellence on capitalism,
has most comprehensively described. Understood (somewhat reconstructed,
perhaps, if one prefers) in this way, Turner’s viewpoint is one that I share.

A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Take Care of the Earth, by Wesley Granberg-
Reviewed by PAUL FABER, Fort Hays State University.

“Sin, salvation, service.” When I was growing up, the pastor of my family’s
church was fond of alliterative triads. This triad was his way of describing the
entire message of Christ; it could be used, however, to describe A Worldly
Spirituality by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson as well.

Granberg-Michaelson is known, at least by name, to many in the evangelical
community. He spent eight years as the chief legislative assistant to Senator
Mark Hatfield, and he has written for periodicals such as The Other Side and