

The Death And Birth Of A Dream ¹

Howard B. Radest

1. Preliminaries and Prejudices

Given the failures of Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism and a command economy, we dismiss socialism. Other claimants for the socialist title, however, existed before Karl Marx who called them "utopian" or "bourgeois." Still other socialisms have evolved like democratic socialism and social democracy. More recently, "self-governing socialism" developed in Yugoslavia² although the failure to find a successor to Marshall Tito and the break-up of Yugoslavia has clearly aborted the effort. In other words, the story of socialism is by no means summed up in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the USSR.

Symptomatic of its Enlightenment sources-and socialism like Humanism is a child of the Enlightenment-socialism tried to develop a scientific sociology and political economy modeled after the physical sciences. The effort did not succeed. Its predictions, for example, often came after the fact as vindications and not as verifications. Nevertheless socialist "science" did exhibit the turn to reason over authority, to inquiry over tradition. If not "scientific," it had at least the merits of moral relevance.

Although Marxism, unlike some other socialisms, claimed a sense of "history," it was a history that *philosophes* like Condorcet³ would have found congenial. Following Hegel, it was a history that claimed the progressive working out of "spirit," of the "idea," in actual time and place. Of course, "spirit" for the Marxist was transubstantiated, became "material," as in the "forms of production"

and as in Marx's claim to "stand Hegel on his head." So it was as recently as the 1960s that USSR Premier Krustschev informed the West, "We will bury you." This was not so much a threat-which is the way we read it-as a typically historicist conclusion. This historicism continued right up until the break-up of the USSR. Thus, in 1986, Ivan Frolov, former President of the Council of Philosophic Societies in the Soviet Union and Editor of Pravda in 1990, described a new Marxist Humanism.⁴ In his review of Frolov's work, Paul Kurtz wrote,

Although Frolov wishes to draw upon science to understand humanity, the problems of life are far more complex than any limited scientific conceptions allow, for human beings are full of contradictions and passions; hence we need art to complete us and must cultivate creativity. Frolov remains throughout the book a socialist and insists that the "representatives of socialist culture consciously proclaim themselves to be recipients of the lofty Humanist legacy of the past, and advocate real Communist Humanism.."..

According to Frolov, "Man has kept the Promethean fire of creativity and preserved Hope, the leading virtue given to him by Prometheus...We affirm the principle of new (real) Humanism as the moral foundation of the scientific philosophy of man."s

Turning, now, to my biases and given the partisanship which has surrounded my subject for more than a century, it is only fair to alert the reader. I am still a creature of the left although I did not embrace a "united front," romanticize "Papa Joe" (Stalin), or flirt with near-communist options like the 1948 Henry Wallace presidential candidacy. I believe that the American Communist Party had neither substance nor integrity. On the other hand, socialists

like Norman Thomas (does anyone remember him or Eugene Debs?) and more recently Michael Harrington contributed to the polity in ways that we scarcely appreciated then or recall today. And I am not unmindful of the fact that many American communists—certainly before the Hitler-Stalin pact but not only then—came to their loyalties out of a deep sense of moral idealism.

Of course, it is possible to be a Humanist and stress liberty over solidarity and individuation over equality, i.e. to avoid a social agenda. I think this results in a truncated Humanism but I am mindful of the dangers of prescriptive definition. Whoever we are, however, events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union force us to re-consider our political and economic ideas. With the disappearance of the ready-made friends and enemies and arguments that the "cold war" so conveniently provided even to libertarians, the political economic question once again becomes a serious question for all of us.

I cannot conceive a Humanism that is not seized with the question of a Humanist political-economy. To be sure, I know Humanists who claim that politics and economics are irrelevant to Humanism. They would, in a secular reincarnation of the Gospels, "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's." I know too, that the political and economic spectrum suggests more than one conceivable partner for Humanism. Nevertheless, there are limits—I know of no Humanist fascists—and so even pluralists cannot be excused from considering the political-economic question. I know still other Humanists who simply will not engage in the messiness of political economy. These are views that I call Humanist parochialism, Humanist pluralism, and Humanist opportunism and in their rejections they lead us to social irresponsibility. I am grateful then that events have denied us permission to rely uncritically on time-worn, shop-worn notions taken from another place, another time.

2. It Was A Famous Victory

I recall our gleefulness at the fall of the Berlin Wall, the drama of Solidarity in Poland, the *glasnost* and *perestroika* of Mikhael Gorbachov, the liberation of East European states, and finally the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Glee, sadly, has now given way to horror and frustration with "ethnic cleansing" in the "former Yugoslavia," near-civil war in the "former Soviet Republics" and the rise of Orthodoxy and Islamic Fundamentalism in the East. With the successful election of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his party to a sizable plurality in the Russian Parliament in 1994, radical nationalism has seduced millions of Russians with the promise of a new adventurism reminiscent of the "glories" of the Czar. Nor have we heard the last of the "old communist left," now ironically known as "conservative." Yet, American "triumphalism" persists. So-as long as it doesn't get overly expensive-we boast that we are the only "great power" left on the face of the earth. Were I Aeschylus or Sophocles, I would surely hear echoes of that *hubris* which announces the fall of princes and principalities.

It is not surprising-but it is surely troubling-that the "victory" of the forces of "freedom" reinforces a certain blindness to our own failures, to the obvious problems of poverty and exploitation, of environmental and societal decay. The "free market" which suddenly seems to be everyone's salvation, is, as we shall see, neither as free nor as effective as its proponents claim. Our "victory" becomes, therefore, a way of hiding from what is going on in the homes of the victors, a circus, an amusement. What is lacking above all is a decent sense of human solidarity, a sense of shared fate and shared concern. Indeed, even as we announce that we will aid Eastern Europe and Russia in their effort to build a new society, we insist that its shape must be determined by the virtues of the "free market," i.e. by our virtues. Our "generosity," then, masks an exercise of self-interested power. And further, even as we grudgingly release dollars-more often we

content ourselves with giving advice-we find ways of making those dollars work more for us than for our putative beneficiaries.⁶

We scarcely think to ask: who wins and who loses when a dream goes awry? Surely, we can criticize the naivete of those, like Lincoln Steffens in the 1920s, who believed they had "seen the future and it works." But, the event also asks for a certain humane sympathy. Instead, we indulge the satisfaction of "I told you so." Surely, communism is the "God that failed." But, a Humanist's response to any loss of faith should be less interested in gloating and saddened by the hopes that are, once again, betrayed. We need to remind ourselves that many Marxists were moral dreamers. Of course, they costumed the dream in the turgid polemics of "dialectical materialism" and dubious claims of "science." But this should not blind us to their idealism. In a world filled with poverty and exploitation and inequity, they committed to the achievement of globe-wide political and economic justice. As Calvin Schrag notes,

Marx's introduction of *praxis* as the more inclusive frame for his anthropological reflections is of critical importance, for it is precisely this notion that provides the occasion for the merging of anthropological and ethical concerns...The importance of the ethical comes to the fore in Marx's dramatic proclamation in the celebrated eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, which makes it clear that Marx is as much, if not more, concerned with the *liberation* of man as he is with the *definition* of man...This, of course, was already implicit in Marx's analysis of alienated labor and private property in his Manuscripts, which conclude with an appeal to an emancipation of universal humanity through the establishment of authentic communal life-relationships...⁷

The ideal remains before us still unfulfilled. A dream betrayed then is a cause for sadness and not for rejoicing.

The sorry condition of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (and of Latin American communism too) should not lead us to ignore the achievements of socialism. Of course these were flawed—what intellectual or moral achievement has ever been merely perfect! Yet, with their moral outrage at an industrialism indifferent to human beings, socialists did not let us forget a sense of social justice. Theirs was an attempt to re-work "liberty, equality, fraternity" in the new social and industrial framework which 18th century democracy had not encountered.^s For example, we cannot dismiss the critical import of "alienation"⁹ as a feature of an unreconstructed industrialism. To this day industrial organization has difficulty recognizing that human beings are present in a workplace that is too often designed and continues to be designed for robots.

We need reminding that under conditions of concentrated wealth and power, distributive justice and political freedom remain near empty promises. Marx, like Adam Smith, knew that the reform of social life had to rely on the reform of political economy. We instead divide these from each other, as if we could have participatory democracy in politics and ego-driven anarchy in economics.

Of course, the notions of "class consciousness" and "false consciousness" became mere tools of bureaucratic *aparatchiks*. At the same time, the notion of "class" still has its analytic power and, despite an American blindness to class and caste, should not simply be thrown away.¹⁰ The socialist effort to transcend class, to locate human solidarity in the natural world—again a reprise of the universalism of the Enlightenment project—had never before been attempted in a secular political economy. The Roman Empire, after all, excluded women, slaves, and aliens. The catholicism

of the Church left this world to its miseries as it proclaimed membership in the community of the faithful for all the "children of God." Finally, in a world that demeaned both work and worker, the effort to legitimize and not merely sentimentalize the "dignity of labor" remains a necessary ideal.

It is not unimportant to read the signs of what lies ahead in Eastern Europe before we celebrate. The replacement of the institutional anti-semitism of communist Moscow with a more traditional anti-semitism is already evident. When coupled with the Church's maneuvering for power as in Poland or Rumania and an aggressive Eastern Orthodoxy and Islam, the repression that follows the fall of Communism should not be underestimated. As Barbara Stanosz, professor emeritus in the philosophy department at Warsaw University writes,

The influence of the Catholic Church is widespread, and the position of its parliamentary arm, the Christian-National Union has strengthened (It) has secured itself the role of ideological supervisor of the legislature and many of the departments of state administration...

The legislative and executive branches have provided enormous benefits to the Church: special tax privileges and property rights not accorded individuals; privileged access to television and radio frequencies; dispensation to engage in political propaganda; introducing even stronger provisions of teaching the catchism in public schools; adopting legal provisions that open the way for religious censorship in the media...; and adopting legislation that penalizes abortion (both patient and doctor) and restricts divorce.

...the army has been clericalised, with priests now playing the role of the former political commissars; the

Church hierarchy is regularly "consulted" on the filling of state posts...; religious symbols and icons have been introduced into the building of all public institutions...¹²

And, another typical report reads,

With Moscow disintegrating...Mr. Marupov says it's time to carve out a fundamentalist religious state like neighboring Iran. It would encompass a vast area-inhabited by 50 million Moslems-that borders on Iran, Afghanistan, and China. Mullahs would preside over restored religious courts outlawed since Lenin's day.¹³

The West is in trouble too. Fundamentalist religions and neo-fascist adventurism are on the rise; liberalism is in retreat and the name itself is scarcely used in respectable company; conservatism is trapped by the right-wing populism of its putative allies; efforts to limit freedom of expression and of conscience grow more and more frequent. And the market economy has yet to deal with problems of poverty, the mal-distribution of social goods, and the decay of what is called the "infra-structure" of society. In short, "it was a famous victory" but it is surely possible to interpret the current scene in Manichean terms. Good has not triumphed nor is evil vanquished.

3. Humanism and Socialism

Both Humanism and socialism are children of the Enlightenment. It is helpful, therefore, to recall their historic affinity. Examples abound: e.g. the informal connections of Humanism with Fabian socialism in late 19th century England; the social democratic commitments of most of the founding leadership of the Dutch Humanist movement that grew from the Resistance to Nazi occupation after World War II; the "radical" Humanism of M.N. Roy, founder of the Radical Humanist Association in India;

the critical Marxism of the Humanist "philosophic section" in Yugoslavia; and by no means least of all, *Humanist Manifesto I* (1933) in the U.S. which said,

Fourteenth: The Humanists are firmly convinced that existing acquisitive and profit-motivated society has shown itself to be inadequate and that a radical change in methods, controls, and motives must be instituted. A socialized and cooperative economic order must be established to the end that the equitable distribution of the means of life be possible. The goal of Humanism is a free and universal society in which people voluntarily and intelligently cooperate for the common good. Humanists demand a shared life in a shared world.

I think it fair to say that Humanism never did have an affinity for Leninism and certainly not for Stalinism both of which may even be seen as anti-socialisms. Humanists also never really took Marx's claim to be "scientific" all that seriously.

We are so used to thinking of socialism as some kind of state system that it's sometimes difficult to remember its full history and dimensions over time. Moral and political choices are never a true science, and yet we must make just such choices. Marx acknowledged as much when he quoted a Latin phrase that Hegel had also used and gave it a free translation: "Hic Rhodus, Hic Salta!" Here is the rose. Dance here!" Since the struggle for democratic socialism is also the struggle for reason and imagination against what Blake called "mind-forged manacles," this challenge must be extended to "scientific socialism." The entire libertarian left-radical Humanists and democrats, anarchists and socialists of varied kinds and hues~has always regarded Marxism-Leninism as a disastrous hybrid,

both in theory and in power' but democratic socialists feel free to make use of what's best in the work of Marx and his followers. And in that spirit, there are times when even that old blunderbuss of "vulgar Marxism," the last of the Theses On Feuerback, is appropriate: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it."14

Symptomatically, Humanists drew a line of development between Marx's 1844 manuscripts and *Das Kapital* and read Marxist political economy through the perspectives of liberation.¹⁵ Nor did notions like "economic determinism" and "dialectical materialism," terms of a later Marxist scholasticism, find a home in the Humanist vocabulary. Instead, Humanists, above all, responded to the sense of moral outrage that elicited the Marxist canon. Thus, we can still hear the Humanist song in these words of a contemporary socialist,

The ideal socialist, to say nothing of a good many real ones, has a fire in her belly and a moral hymn in her heart. Perhaps not so many can now remember the tune, and the words are long since forgotten, but the centrality of the normative cutting edge of socialism's critique of the status quo cannot be too heavily emphasised. Whatever else is distinctive of socialism it must have, centrally, a morally informed vision of a better life. It must have that cutting edge to its attack on Capital that comes from commanding the moral high ground...16

Humanists found in socialism a moral critique of industrial society. They could join in attacking a system that concentrated wealth and power in fewer and fewer hands and exploited the weak while claiming that these arrangements were alternatively necessary or ultimately moral and sometimes both. On the affirmative side, Humanists were committed to the dignity of labor, to the sup-

port of labor organizations in their pioneering moments at least, and to broad based programs of social welfare. Indeed, for some Humanists-and indeed for many of its critics too-"socialism" was only "Humanism" with another name. For others, with socialism in the field, Humanism had no need to do any basic political economic homework of its own.

Most Humanists in the United States, however, found the systematic character and ideological language of socialism simply incongenial and opted for the reformist's agenda.¹⁷ From time to time this even seemed to work out, particularly during the "age of reform," Teddy Roosevelt's "Bull Moose" and above all during Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal." But the reformers learned that reforms more often than not took an ironic twist. Nor was this only the result of the disappearance of a convincing reform program after the orgy of the 1960s. As Eric Goldman reminds us,

...rule by conservatives made...the very instrumentalities the progressives had set up work against reform. The conservative administrations of the Twenties abolished none of the regulatory commissions established before the war, and they did not call for the repeal of either the Sherman or the Clayton Antitrust Act. What the conservatives did do was to staff the commissions, the antitrust enforcement division, and the courts with men sympathetic to corporations-to "bore from within," in the angry phrase of Senator Norris. The result was not simply that the reform purposes of regulatory legislation were nullified; business was more immune than ever, as the shrewd railroad attorney Richard Olney had predicted long ago, because the paper existence of the laws mollified discontent...¹⁹

Reform, in other words, was often frustrated and frustrating not least of all because it left the reformer without intelligible

connections from event to event, issue to issue, and so with laudable sentiment but little reason. Today, the Clinton administration is more humanely minded than its recent predecessors, but the problem of "this reform or that" is quite visible. Practicalism-what can pass the Congress and appease the public at any given moment-leads to the unintelligible as in the efforts at punitive "welfare reform," a blindly rigid criminal "justice" policies and an ineffective national health program. By contrast, socialism grounded action in theory and provided a political economic reference which Humanism had not enjoyed since its origination.

To be sure, Humanists were "democrats" but they had failed to develop the commitment to democracy into an effective and distinctive Humanist politics. Instead, based in the moods and styles of American religious radicalism and liberal academicism, American Humanism tended to adopt the reformist habits of the former and the philosophic habits of the latter. A piecemeal Humanism was the outcome. Its European and Asian counterparts were, on the other hand, quite content to let their Humanism be one thing and their socialism another as long as the two were understood to be in partnership. Above all, a distinctive and independent Humanist social ethics and social theory did not emerge let alone their connection to the passions of the personal life. The emergence of the self interested labor union became an alibi for indifference to the "labor" question; the failures of socialist historic and economic predictions became an excuse for dismissal. The subversion of socialism today creates, finally, a void and unmasks a critical intellectual and programatic weakness in modern Humanism.

4. Humanism In The Shadows?

The "death of socialism" only makes more evident modern lines of Humanist development. For some decades, now, Humanism

has been tempted away from its Enlightenment roots. Today, more and more Humanists will be found loyal to intellectual elitism, ideological anti-religion, and sentimental communalism. In common, they follow Voltaire's satiric advice to *Candide*, "Tend to your own garden." Thus, an ideological Humanism feeds on a diet of anti-clericalism, anti-theism, and anti-religion and scarcely attends to the celebration of human powers and commitment to participatory democracy that witnessed the birth of Enlightenment. Thus narrowly interpreted, Humanism is almost exclusively committed to freedom of inquiry and conscience, and to the rationality said to be uniquely exhibited in the sciences. Actions derived from these premises, like preserving the separation of church and state, are legitimized; other social agendas are simply uninteresting. Indeed Humanism on these grounds can make common cause with all but fascism and totalitarianism. It is, however, quite likely to take on a libertarian coloration although without the radical ego-centered metaphysics of the "objectivism" of an Ayn Rand. And, in a reversal of Humanist habits, this ideological Humanism has suddenly discovered the virtues of capitalism and the ideal possibilities of the "free market."²⁰

The great Enlightenment trinity-liberty, equality, community- is reduced to a single ideal. From within this singularity, equality is viewed with suspicion and community is reduced to a contract for the delivery of services. To be fair, Humanists so inclined will justify their views by interpreting individualist freedom as the most likely way, "in the long run," to achieve a genuine solidarity and a genuine good life. That actual needs and actual sufferings exist is not denied either; what is denied is a Humanist's obligation to attend to them in the present. Implicitly, ideological Humanism echoes Adam Smith's faith in the benign outcomes of an "invisible hand" and surrenders the attempt to apply reason to the "problems of men." Humanism deserts the larger society and is best located in the academy or its near rela-

tives. It becomes an intellectualist Humanism. Humanism's engagement with the world is over and a new Humanism must take its place, a Humanism that makes no pretense to popular appeal or social concern and that represses the passion which gave birth to Humanism's affinity for socialism in the first place.

If ideological Humanism moves in the direction of "rugged" Humanist individualism, other Humanists-and particularly in the United States-opt for the continuation of left liberalism. This is the Humanism of alliances and coalitions, the Humanism that participates as one of many "interest" groups. There is a striking unoriginality in such a Humanism. Apart from a generalized sentiment of humanity, little that is identifiably Humanist as such characterizes it. In fact, for the sake of alliances, Humanist ideas are often muted lest allies be offended. For Humanist liberalism, the personal presence of the reformer is surrendered too. In its place we find the typical paraphernalia of the interest group: resolution-passing, meeting-going, letter-sending, and money-raising. And, as with interest groups generally, action is delegated to agents and surrogates. Such a Humanism of alliances appears as a shadow of its origins in a vigorous and personal Humanist reform impulse. Because its concerns are problem oriented, we may also call it a technocratic Humanism. The vision of a "good life" is reserved to the private attentions of Humanists by themselves. Just as ideological Humanism narrows the range to intellectuals, technocratic Humanism narrows the range to the "like-minded" and this "like-mindedness" is defined in the shallowest possible terms.

As Humanists lose confidence in the believability of a widely shared moral vision, a localized communal Humanism joins the individual with others in gathered communities of belief. Often miscalled "religious," this Humanism builds upon psychologies of growth and an unspecified notion of "spirituality." It is, however, a retreat from universal Humanist ideals: cosmopolitanism,

anger at social injustice and passion for social redress. The center of this communal Humanism is affect and not cognition. To the annoyance of ideological Humanists, communal Humanism borrows the language of faith and the forms of congregational religion. It turns into a self-serving community of the faithful. And to the annoyance of technocratic Humanists, communal Humanism seems blind to the urgencies of social conscience. But, whatever their differences, these three Humanisms do not confess the departure they have made from the Enlightenment project: the restriction of Humanism to a select population and the surrender of the Humanist claim to address the needs and hopes of all persons in all places and for all time.

With these moves, the significance of the "death of socialism" becomes even more apparent. Humanism's kinship with socialism kept political economy in play in the Humanist arena and lent Humanism a compatible and credible political economy. With socialism's "death," however, Humanism descends into sectarianism. Bereft of a political economy, Humanism loses its hold on a broadly conceived social reality. It becomes only another "saved community."

s. Why Not The Free Market?

Many Humanists-and not only those with a libertarian bent-see in the "free market" and in modern capitalism a likely partner for Humanism. After all in the choice between communism and freedom, the Humanist must opt for freedom. And in the struggle against overwhelming government, the Humanist finds virtue in the defense of privacy. In short, many of the values Humanists hold seem to be advanced by the free market. As Richard Schmitt summed it up,

According to the Secular Humanist Declaration: a free society should also encourage some measure of economic freedom...This means that individuals and groups should be able to compete in the marketplace...The right to private property is a human right without which other human rights are nugatory. If that appears to be a strong claim, it is by no means unusual. In fact there is a solid consensus among political philosophers that agrees with the Secular Humanist Declaration. Thus, Ronald Dworkin believes that in the eyes of the liberal, the best society, one that is genuinely free, allows each member to follow his or her conception of the good life as long as all others are allowed the same freedom. Milton Friedman echoes this claim: "Capitalism is a necessary condition for political freedom." Rawls agrees with that as does Nozick. A free society, everyone seems to believe requires a free market- that is a capitalist economic system.

But it is well to recall "free market" history. Capitalism entered the lists proudly confessing that morality was only a personal matter. In public life, as Bernard de Mandeville put it, in *The Fable of The Bees*, "private vices, public virtue." Self interest was the best guide to social policy, the rational center of public life and the engine of social development. Of course, we might see the "free market" with Lord Keynes as the celebration of "greed." And, in the background-at least for Adam Smith and others as well-was a conviction that there was a "moral sense" at work in persons which would set limits to market adventurism. An abiding faith in the mechanics of the "invisible hand" taught that over time and in the end it would all come out right, a magnificent confidence in the final rationality of the world. But again, Keynes reminded us, "In the long run, you're dead."

Led by an ode to ego, the early and middle story of capitalism is a story which is ambiguously one of great achievement and great misery. In the end, the worker was indeed freed of the chains of tribe and church, but he was also free to starve and many did.²² The release of new economic powers by capitalism was coupled with the rise of great fortunes based in corruption and thievery and the accumulation of wealth and power in fewer and fewer private hands. If the tyranny of kings and priests was successfully undermined by the new political economy, another tyranny took its place. Indeed, its very impersonality made oppression all the more inhumane, for now people were told that their misery was simply the outcome of natural social laws against which there could be no appeal and with which there could be no interference. As much ask the sun to stand still or gravitation to suspend as expect the inexorable rule of the market to give way.

It may be claimed that modern capitalism-whatever the horrors of the past-is a differently evolved creature. Today we correct the extremes of the free market with the countervailing powers of law and labor organization. So, the wild days of capitalist buccaneering are over. Capitalism has been tamed by prudential considerations. For all his conservatism, even President Reagan accepted the notion of a "safety net." So, the "free market" can be permitted to proceed on its own, can be "de-regulated." Moreover, it is claimed, much of the failure of the free market is due precisely to the interference of non-market values imposed by misguided liberals and sentimental social workers. Let things alone and all will turn out well, a claim, by the way, that even Adam Smith did not make when it came to disadvantaged labor, the schools, the military and other non-economic but necessary services. Of course, this turn to the "private sector" reduces social values to economic rationality and self interest, dismisses as publicly irrelevant moral and esthetic values. So, this renewed

romance of the private world needs a critical eye before we agree that capitalism is the best of all possible social worlds.

In fact, despite the ministrations of welfare capitalism, the present condition of millions of human beings has, if anything, deteriorated. Thus, a recent photographic essay in *The New York Times* was introduced with the description, "A hundred years ago, the social reformer Jacob A. Riis documented the bleak underside of life in the city. Today, only the faces are different."²³ And *The Wall Street Journal* reported,

"The number of Americans below the poverty line increased in 1990 by two million, or nearly 6% according to the Census Bureau. In addition, inflation-adjusted median household income declined for the first time since 1982.

The official poverty line, which varies according to such factors as family size and age, averages \$13,359 for a family of four and \$6,652 for an individual. Furthermore, a study released this week by the congressional Joint Economic Committee suggests that the poor no longer benefit from economic recovery to the degree that they once did...

Conservatives have long criticized the Census Bureau's annual poverty survey for failing to take non-cash income and welfare benefits into account when calculating how many Americans are in poverty. A separate report issued yesterday by the Census Bureau found that several "experimental estimates" of non-cash income and benefit showed a significant increase in poverty rates from 1989-1990.²⁴

In other words, in the United States more than 33,000,000 people (as of 1990) are poor even by the miserly standards of the official definition. More recently, President Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors described a widening gap between rich and poor. In its report, it blamed technology, the decline of unions, a lagging minimum wage, and immigration.²⁵ A review of a book on the Democratic Party²⁶ noted,

...When Mr. Reagan declared in 1983 that he wanted the United States to remain "above all...a country where someone can always get rich," that someone was invariably a Donald Trump or a T. Boone Pickens, not an assembly line worker from Akron or Detroit. As it turned out, the President's "just folks" *persona* masked a huge bias in favor of those at the very top. Indeed, the Edsalls point out that the policies of the Reagan Administration regarding taxes, wages, unions, banking and anti-trust produced one of the most dramatic redistributions of wealth in our nation's history.

"In terms of income alone," they write, "those at the high end of the distribution experienced huge gains during the decade of the 1980s, as the top one percent saw average family income grow by 75 percent, from \$313,206 in 1980 to \$548,970 in 1990 (both figures in 1990 dollars); while all those families falling in the bottom 90 percent saw average income grow by just 7 percent, from \$27,451 to \$29,334." Not surprisingly, the lower one went on the income scale, the worse things became. Families at the bottom 10 percent saw their average incomes *decline* during the 1980's, frp, \$4,791 to \$4,295.²⁷

And the situation gets worse.²⁸ The number of homeless people on the streets increases; the costs of medical care are prohibitive;

earning an income above the poverty level requires even the "prosperous" middle class to have more than a single wage earner—a relatively new phenomenon in contemporary industrial America although long familiar to rural families and to the poor. The effects on "latch-key" children—a growing group whose existence began to be remarked during World War II—have scarcely been explored. And it is commonplace that young people these days envision a less than prosperous future and dream less than glorious dreams. The fact is that the "free market" fails where it is supposed to succeed while welfare capitalism is inattentive to welfare except under crisis conditions.²⁹

I suspect that some—particularly those in power—indulge in "free market" rhetoric as a device for manipulating public opinion. After all, who would oppose "freedom" and who cannot have anything but warm feelings toward a "market" where buyers and sellers who know each other exchange the goods and services they need. But, this cozy language ignores the size and impersonality of things. The mega-corporation gives every evidence of behaving in a distinctly Hobbesian manner, a "war of each against all." Efforts at national and multinational control are more likely than not self interested agreements like The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Common Market and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), i.e. agreements that can only be enforced by the collective power of mega-corporations themselves. It is the latter who sit at the table although they wear the costume of the state.

A dilemma of a modern "free market" is the emergence of mega-governments themselves which behave just like mega-corporations. Bureaucratic indifference to persons appears in all corporate structures emerging under the banner of a "free market." Moreover, the distinction between private and public institutions is less than evident as capitalist societies evolve.³⁰

And, it is worthwhile asking whether government in the interests of and with the consent of the governed is really possible as such structures develop.

Not the least of the illusions about the "free market" is the utopianism of many of its advocates. But, we are reminded that,

...there is no such thing as a free lunch-Capitalist Lesson No. I-and many countries are learning that the "free market" is in large measure shorthand for transitions involving cultural dislocation, unemployment, production problems and economic and political confusion. This is true in Poland...where the unemployment rate is above 10% and in Argentina and Mexico where...politicians are preaching free markets in place of the state capitalism that was once the popular solution to Latin America's chronic hard times.

It is also true to some extent in the place that holds capitalism's patent, the United States of America. A still developing but highly critical view of Reagan and Bush Administration economic policies, driven partly by conservative scholars, says that America's free market has shown it cannot deal by itself, with such explosive problems as rising poverty, the urban underclass and inadequate public schools...31

Finally, we must notice a "free market" view of persons. Illustrative, is an essay by Robert Schaeffer who writes,

Thus it should not surprise us that, in any society, when the most productive people are systematically arrested and murdered (or, under diluted forms of socialism, driven elsewhere by high taxes and expropriation),

productivity *must* fall dramatically. When the value system of disciplined achievers is declared to be "exploitative" and criminal, no one dares to follow their example: people learn instead to emulate the irresponsibility that characterizes the proletariat, whose value system has been declared politically "correct." (After all, under capitalism the proletariat had to *earn* its place at the bottom!)

And when in any society absolute power is seized by the angriest failures, it should surprise no one that what follows is plunder, instead of productivity, and revengefulness instead of magnanimity...the resentful seek not merely to confiscate the wealth of those they envy, but to punish them for having enjoyed it.³²

This "Calvinist" disregard of *fortuna*, as if all of one's fate were "deserved," ignores much too much of human experience. And the division of the species into the successful-who may or may not choose to be charitable-and the envious-who live lives of resentment-might well give any Humanist pause. Still we hear about the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, repeat the Calvinist view of wealth as a token of God's grace, and verify the Nietzschean critique of Christianity as a philosophy of resentment. Only now, although with a more secular vocabulary, the Humanist joins in, blaming the victim and applauding the ultimate reasonableness of institutionalized self-seeking.

6. The Ethics Of The Matter

This is not the place for a comprehensive discussion of Humanist ethics.³³ However, reference to ethical values is in point in order to grasp more fully what happens under "free market" inspira-

tion. Ethics, surely, has to do with relationships of trust, relationships between persons who are truthful and who keep their promises. And, indeed, many business practices at the level of individual exchange exhibit just such relationships. But, such relationships acquire moral status only when entered into voluntarily and the conduct between parties in such relationships has moral status only when freely chosen. By contrast, the institutions of the "free market" tends, covertly, to coerce human behavior while accruing the power to do so to a smaller and smaller number of market players. That is, after all, the moral import of the corporate attack on labor organization in the name of the "right to work," of the development of monopoly and oligopoly, and of formulating information and using language so that only experts, e.g. lawyers and technical consultants, can understand it.

Trust in the traditional market place was a matter of personal knowledge and was enforced by the evolving law of contracts. The former has almost vanished and the latter now require specialized (and expensive) interpreters as the parties to such relationships grow larger and more abstract, e.g. in collective bargaining, in buying and selling between corporate producers and individual consumers, in dealing with worker health and safety in a more and more complex technical environment, etc. It is no accident that in the United States-where these developments have reached their height-we tend to blur the distinction between legality and morality, i.e. between forced and autonomous conduct. Our lawyering culture and a litigious society are by no means surprising. At the same time, legal services become prohibitively costly and so cease to be available to all but the very entities which create the need for such services in the first place. An appeal from coercion thereby becomes inaccessible. The equality of the contracting parties, which shaped the notion of contract itself, becomes problematic.

Resisting coercion comes to depend on interest groups who are seldom all that effective and ultimately on the continuous expansion of mega-government as an alleged "countervailing" power. To be sure, as we have seen in regulatory agencies and defense procurement for example, this power is often compromised by the fact that the same persons who populate the corporation populate the government and that the expertise needed to respond to corporate misconduct is usually available only to those already embedded in corporate reality. Apart from the resulting cynicism that subverts trust at the most basic level, the "free market" thus contains its own contradiction, i.e. it must generate an unfree environment in which to operate. The freedom of the "free market" turns out to be a self interested claim on behalf of a finite number of corporate entities and not a broadly conceived social and moral value. As the "free market" operates it fosters institutions on all sides that engage in coercive activities. Freedom for persons is quickly lost in this give and get of powers no matter which side wins. At best, persons live in the gaps not yet filled by corporate realities.

I am not suggesting a corporate conspiracy nor am I suggesting that people who work in corporate environments are any more or less moral than those who do not. Indeed, it is striking that many persons in the marketplace maintain their integrity against the odds. But, they are trapped by impersonal and often irresistible market tendencies. Only a very few "whistleblowers," and then at great cost and with dubious effectiveness, fight these tendencies.³⁴ For most, a certain moral blindness develops while inner disquiet persists. The "free market" claim, then, to be the voice of freedom does not, on the record, have *prima facie* believability or legitimacy.

Ethics calls for fairness, the notion that human beings should be treated equitably, that as such they have rights which cannot be compromised and needs which cannot be ignored. It is a com-

monplace of such justice ideas that justice delayed is justice denied. Of course, we cannot expect all human needs to be met immediately and adequately. That is the import of human fallibility and a finite universe. However, the intentional delay of fair treatment is another matter. The inordinate time lapse between the bringing of a law suit and its resolution may serve as a metaphor of such intentional delay. Indeed, delay is often a matter of deliberate legal strategy based on the obvious fact that the corporation can afford the time and costs which individual persons cannot. In some instances of medical malfeasance, moreover, time even permits mortality to turn off the search for justice. The reliance of the "free market" on the mechanisms of "efficiency," i.e. expertise and "deep pockets," thus entails the deliberate choice of unjust behavior.

A policy of induced scarcity is no stranger to the "free market," i.e. production is intentionally restricted despite manifest human need. We talk of "effective demand." Typically, language is used here as elsewhere to mask reality. Only those who can afford it are entitled to goods and services and only those goods and services are to be made available which someone can pay for. Needless poverty in the midst of plenty and "conspicuous consumption,"^{3s} remain still as unanswered challenges even to the "long run" claims of the "free market." The emergence of a permanent underclass in industrial nations and in the "third" world is a further outcome of the "free market" under global conditions. The mega-corporation is guided by judgements of self interest and uncontrolled by judgements of harm. In a global environment it shifts to locations where needy workers are plentiful, where wages are low, and where worker protections are minimal. Once again, on moral grounds, the "free market" does not seem to be a *prima facie* candidate for a Humanist partnership.

Characteristic of Humanist ethics is a concern for the "other." Under capitalist tutelage this is transformed into "enlightened

self interest." However, the notion of human solidarity—a morality of care³⁶—finds little place in a "free market" as such and is reserved instead for personal relationships in family and family-like settings. The latter, however, tend to vanish as witness complaints about the "decay" of the family and as many of the purposes they once served are transformed after the public model of *quid pro quo* relationships. Virtue is replaced by prudence and prudence knows only one guiding rule, survival of the corporation. Values like loyalty, idealism, obligation, kindness, mutuality are reduced to mere preferences. Claims of wider loyalties, e.g. to the public good, are unintelligible. Where loyalty to the firm is invoked—typically in industrial public relations—prudence dictates public acquiescence. At the same time a not so hidden cynicism evolves. Manipulative technique is perfected in order to induce certain kinds of conduct, e.g. in wartime, in the competitive struggle for market share. Social life develops an inhering dishonesty while personal life is impoverished.

Moral reflection reminds us too of the distinction between the "desired" and the "desirable." For my present purpose, I note the blurring of the market distinction between "wants" and "needs." A market economy relies on exploiting people's "wants" built on strategies of "need creation." Entire industries—advertising, marketing, poll-taking—are committed to the process. Of course, an effort to reduce political economic life to "basic needs" would invite totalitarian control of personal life. There is wisdom still in Jefferson's "the pursuit of happiness" which deliberately avoided a substantive definition of "happiness." But an anarchy of things is not moral freedom either. Neither Jefferson nor his 19th century liberal successors like John Stuart Mill could have imagined the materialist orgy which characterizes modern industrial society. In fact, each had in mind an implicit standard—Jefferson's honest farmer, Mill's educated British gentleman—that set the shape of the "pursuit." of happiness. Without such shaping—other than that which is imposed by market values them-

selves like affordability-the "pursuit" becomes a lesson in the triviality of everything but the values of consumption itself. The "free market," in other words, undermines the meaning of choice itself by its inventive consumerism. Paradigmatically, a visit to a supermarket-once the initial impression of color and light and busyness vanishes-reveals the indifference of the objects chosen: soap is soap is soap; soup is soup is soup. Of course there is plenty of everything and this should not in itself be sneered at as visitors from less well endowed societies invariably remark. But our kind of plenty also teaches tastelessness, is reinforced by "impulse" buying, and ultimately cheats us in its superficiality. Some "price competition" exists, to be sure, but this is a matter of pennies at best. And it is a fact of the "market" that such competition is more likely to be found in middle class rather than in poor neighborhoods where higher prices are the rule. Even more radically, freedom of choice loses most of its content and becomes a mere incantation of a political economy turned magical.

A glance-and that is all I have permitted myself-at the fate of moral values in a "free market" context suggests, therefore, the moral dubiousness of the proposed partnership. Of course, the viciousness of Stalinism was indefensible on any ground. The vices of capitalism however, although more subtle and less brutal, are no less a matter of moral concern. The Gulag was unmitigated evil, but the persistent capitalist habit of supporting totalitarianism in the Middle East, and in Latin and Central America is not deserving of moral defense either and there has been enough of it to suggest that it not merely incidental. The privileges of the commissar are no more and no less worthy than the privileges of the speculator. And all of this must be seen against the "free market" invitation to racketeering which in recent memory has nearly destroyed the banks, corrupted the government and filthied the environment. To be sure, adventurism is by no means a unique event in "free market" history. And if, in mitigation, it is claimed

that after all capitalism is not yet perfected in experience, this is as believable as the counter claim that socialism wasn't really tried either.

¹ This essay was originally prepared for the Faculty Colloquium of The Humanist Institute and will be expanded as Chapter 2 of my forthcoming book, *Intimacy, Humanism With A Human Face*, scheduled for publication in 1995 by Praeger Publishers.

² See, for example, *Self-Governing Socialism, A Reader*, two volumes, edited by Branko Horvat, Mihailo Markovic, and Rudi Supek, White Plains, New York, International Arts and Sciences Press, 1975.

³ The Marquis de Condorcet was a mathematician and philosopher who played an active role in the French Revolution and who was one of the first victims of the Terror. His master work was *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progresses de L'esprit Humain* (*Historical Sketch of the Progress of The Human Spirit*), a book on which my Master's Essay at The New School For Social Research (New York, 1951) was based.

⁴ Ivan Frolov, *Man-Science-Humanism: A New Synthesis*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1986.

⁵ Paul Kurtz, "The New Humanism In The Soviet Union," Free Inquiry, Volume 10, No.2, Spring 1990, p. 55.

⁶ In a revealing series of articles in The Wall Street Journal. (February 23-24, 1994) the point is made that much of the aid the West and the United States claim to be providing is more often than not beneficial to us. Thus,

By early 1993, the 24 richest nations of the West had made paper pledges of \$70 billion to East European countries from Estonia to Albania. Poland alone got a chit for \$25 billion.

What happened to it? Fair question, given that the West now must decide whether to toll billions more into Russia's maelstrom.

The answer is discouraging. Aid has been fired like scattershot at a flitting bird. Replacing communism with capitalism has been far trickier than the bricks-and-mortar salvaging of post-war Europe. Many aid dollars benefit donors more than donees. And many, laden with conditions, sit unused.

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Barry Newman, "West Pledges Billions of Aid to Poland-Where Did It All go?", The Wall Street Journal, February 23, 1994, p. 1.

⁷ Calvin O. Schrag, *Radical Reflection And The Origin Of The Human Sciences*, West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University Press, 1980, p. 37.

⁸ Jean Amery rightly, I think, identified Marx with of a clear line of Enlightenment development. Thus, he wrote,

...All the freedoms we enjoy and are obliged to pass on are fruits of the bourgeois Enlightenment. Here we stand, critically minded intellectuals, and whatever intellectual freedom we possess, we owe to the Enlighteners: from Montesquieu to Freud, from Locke, Condorcet, and Diderot to Marx, Feuerbach and Russell. Whatever insights we have acquired that have helped us to know ourselves and gain assurance in the world, we would not possess without the scientific world view of the Enlightenment. That applies to the little things of our daily life as well as to tremendous macro- and micro physical phenomena. We need only to go back for a moment to the condition of the world and the mind before the onset of the Enlightenment and with horror we will perceive fear: fear of the unleashed powers of nature, fear of bodily pain, for which there was no relief, fear of the evil eye, of gods, idols, and demons, fear of the rulers whose sadistic exercise of power was not curbed by law, fear of one's own fear, which arose from the unconscious and made man the slave to his "id." (p. 137).

And he added,

.I see in Marx today less the dialectician and successor to Hegel than the prophet of a *new morality*, the direct descendent of the very same Bourgeois Enlightenment that in the eyes of modern Marxists-who wish to know nothing more of the human being-is but an unwieldy instrument of the ruling classes. (p.140)

Radical Humanism, Selected Essays by Jean Amery, edited and translated by Sidney and Stella P. Rosenfeld, (Indiana University Press, 1984). I am indebted to Michael Werner for calling Amery's work to my attention.

⁹ The idea is not confined to philosophic texts. See, for example, "If The U.S. Work Ethic Is Fading, Alienation May Be The Main Reason," Bob Davis and Dana Milbank, The Wall Street Journal, February 7, 1992, p. 1.

¹⁰ "Class" is not simply an intellectualist category. For example, an article called, "Working Class Culture Erodes Britain's Rank In A Unified Europe" (The Wall Street Journal, February 11, 1992, p. 1) describes the social reality and the consequences of what might appear as merely an abstraction.

¹¹ Mary Rossabi, a teacher at the Ethical Culture Fieldston Schools, reported on her experience as a visiting instructor in Leningrad.

As Gorbachev opened Pandora's box, freedom of expression emerged in various guises. People could worship more freely in the churches and synagogues, and a convent had just opened in Leningrad. But the negative side of *glasnost* also surfaced in the anti-Semitic, pro-Russian group Pamiat or Memory. This small but vociferous group held its meetings in front of Kazan Cathedral on the Nevsky Prospekt. It attributed to the Jews many of its country's social ills, and though few regarded its diatribes as particularly threatening, others saw them as a portent or symptom of future difficulties-pogroms, civil wars, or revolution. One family spoke of their fears for the future of their son: "Our life is over, but Lonia has his whole life ahead of him. What will happen we do not know."

"The Six Paradoxes of Socialism," Independent School, Winter 1991, p. 32.

¹² Barbara Stanosz, "Poland: Emerging Democracy Or Religious State?" International Humanist News, Volume 1, No.4, December 1993, p. 6.

¹³ "Moslems Seek Theocracy In The USSR," Craig Forman, The Wall Street Journal, October 9, 1991, p. A12.

¹⁴ Scott Tucker, The Good Fight, The Humanist, Volume 54, No.2, March/April 1994, p. 20.

¹⁵ For example, see Gajo Petrovic, *Marx In The Mid-Twentieth Century*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1967, particularly "The Continuity of Marx's Thought," pp. 35-51.

¹⁶ Michael Luntley, *The Meaning of Socialism*, Illinois, Open Court, p. 3.

¹⁷ To be sure, Felix Adler, the founder of the Ethical Culture Societies, warned of the dangers of unintelligible reform, of "this reform or that" without theory and a comprehensive view of social reality. But, he was an exception and his idealist theory of "vocationalism" did not capture the interest or loyalty even of those in his own Ethical Culture movement.

¹⁸ For fuller discussion of this theme, see *The Devil and Secular Humanism*, Chapter 6, "Doing Good, The Liberal Temptation."

- ¹⁹ *Rendezvous With Destiny*, New York, Vintage Books, 1955, p. 237.
- ²⁰ A helpful and revealing discussion of this theme can be found in Free Inquiry, Fall 1989, Vol 9, No.4, "Libertarianism or Socialism: Where Do Secular Humanists Stand?"
- ²¹ Richard Schmitt, "Humanism and Socialism," Free Inquiry, Fall 1989, Vol. 9, No.4, p. 16.
- ²² It is important, here, to re-examine descriptions of 19th century England and the United States. For example, we would do well to look again at Frederick Engels, *The Condition of The Working Class in England* (1892), London, Panther Books, 1969. Lest this source be considered too partisan, reports of the various British Royal Commissions of the period can be consulted. Within the Humanist tradition, it would repay us to look again at the motivations of those who founded the settlement house movement in the United States, e.g. the Ethical Culture movement's Stanton Coit and John Lovejoy Elliott.
- ²³ "New York In The Nineties," contemporary photographs by Fred R. Conrad, text by Sam Roberts, The New York Times Magazine, September 29, 1991.
- ²⁴ Timothy Noah, "Number of Poor Americans Is Up 6%, Real Income Is Off 1.7%, Agency Says," The Wall Street Journal, September 27, 1991.
- ²⁵ Paulette Thomas, "Widening Rich-Poor Gap Is a Threat To the 'Social Fabric,'" White House Says, The Wall Street Journal, February 15, 1994, p. 2.
- ²⁶ Thomas Edsall Byrne with Mary D. Edsall, *Chain Reaction, The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics*, New York, Norton, 1991.
- ²⁷ David Oshinsky, "What Became Of The Democrats?", *The New York Times Book Review*, October 20, 1991, p. 26.
- ²⁸ Despite the election of a new administration, structural features of our social system do not show many signs of changing. Thus, we speak of a "recovery" without an increase in employment, of increases in "productivity" while wages lag behind the inflation rate, etc. And the "poor" now include many once thought securely in the middle class. See, "Whose Welfare? The Poor, They Are Different and in '92, Ever More Invisible," Gwen Ifill, *The New York Times Week In Review*, January 19, 1992, p. 1.
- ²⁹ See, for example, *Rethinking Social Policy*, Christopher Jencks, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1992.

30 Rhetorical and ideological distinctions only mask these structures. So, for example, an article in The Wall Street Journal, with barely a nod to the capitalist/ communist distinction points out that "Money Managers Pick China Over India For Investment," Michael R. Sesit and Robert Steiner, January 12, 1993. p. B 1.

31 Louis Uchitelle, "But Just Who Is That Fairy Godmother?" The New York Times, September 29,1991.

32 Robert Scheaffer, "Socialism Is Incompatible With Humanism," Free Inquiry, Fall, 1989, Vol 9, No.4, p. 20.

33 A helpful anthology on this subject is, *Humanist Ethics*, Morris B. Storer, editor, Buffalo, Prometheus Press, 1980.

34 As Marcy Mason writes,

And historically, whistle-blowers have paid a very high price for their good deeds. Of the 1,700 whistle-blowers interviewed by Edna Ottney, a quality assurance engineer who has investigated employee concerns in the nuclear power industry since 1985,90% experienced negative fallout. Other studies concur-including the most recent, a survey of 35 Australian whistle-bloers published in the British Medical Journal last September. The study found eight of the whistle-blowers had lost their jobs as a result of their actions, 10 had been demoted, 10 had resigned or retired early because of ill health related to victimization, 15 were taking prescribed medication to deal with the stress, and 17 hhad considered suicide.

"The Curse of Whistle-Blowing," The Wall Street Journal, March 15, 1994, p. 18A.

35 The phrase is, of course, Thorstein Veblen's. A modern parable may be found in Connie Bruck, *The Predators' Ball* (The Inside Story of Drexel Burnham and the Rise of the Junk Bond Raiders), New York, Penguin Books, 1988, 1989.

36 Labor unions in their formation spoke of "worker solidarity." Marx described the human being as a "species being." For a significant modern rendering of the theme for which we can be grateful to feminist thought, see, Nell Noddings, *Caring, A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley, University of California, 1984.