

# MINIMUM UTOPIA: TEN THESES

NORMAN GERAS

I OFFER HERE SOME REFLECTIONS on utopia. I make no extravagant claim for them. They do not trace out a history of the concept, nor do they attempt to explore its thematic range and variety. They are simply one person's thoughts on the subject as we approach a new century and millennium. I have arranged them into ten summary theses.

## 1. SOCIALISM IS UTOPIAN

As a goal socialism is, and it always has been, utopian, including in its most influential version to date, namely Marxism. This is despite Marx and Engels's attempt, in the *Communist Manifesto* and elsewhere, to take their distance from utopia as mere abstraction or speculation, to ground their own thinking in present tendencies, in an analysis of real historical possibilities and of the social and political agencies for bringing them about. Everyone knows that in this sense the Marxist tradition sought from the beginning to be resolutely *anti*-utopian. Re-read the relevant passages from the *Manifesto*. Of some of their predecessors – Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen – Marx and Engels say that, faced with a proletarian class not yet sufficiently developed, faced likewise with material conditions still insufficient for the emancipation of the proletariat, these thinkers could but invent in place of what they lacked, and so they invented 'fantastic pictures of future society'.<sup>1</sup>

This was not to be the way of the founding thinkers of historical materialism. Indeed it was the source of one of classical Marxism's great strengths that, committed to the goal of a fundamentally different kind of social order, it sought to provide a political economy, a sociology and a politics of the present and the emergent future. This is, too, what its numberless detractors have most deeply begrudged it. For, whatever the changing fortunes of the movement for

socialism, taken all in all there is still no more compelling theory of society than historical materialism, even once all the necessary qualifications to it have been made.

Notwithstanding any of this, however, it remains true that from the outset socialism was utopian. It was a distant land, another moral universe. It was radically *other vis-à-vis* the order of things it aspired to replace. And that is what it still is. A society beyond exploitation is in the realm of the ideal. Furthermore, so far from being any kind of inevitability, its achievement is an unsolved problem and – not to beat about the bush – the very possibility of it is in question. In this way socialism partakes also of one of the pejorative meanings of utopia. Until its realization establishes otherwise, it partakes of the meaning of being an unattainable ideal. We may hope that it can be achieved, but we do not yet know that it can. Nor do we yet know how.

## 2. WE SHOULD UNASHAMEDLY EMBRACE UTOPIA

We should be, without hesitation or embarrassment, utopians. At the end of the twentieth century it is the only acceptable political option, morally speaking. I shall not dwell on this. I will merely say that, irrespective of what may have seemed apt hitherto either inside or outside the Marxist tradition, nothing but a utopian goal will now suffice. The realities of our time are morally intolerable. Within the constricted scope of the present piece, I suppose I might try to evoke a little at least of what I am referring to here, with some statistics or an imagery of poverty, destitution and other contemporary calamities. But I do not intend to do even this much. The facts of widespread human privation and those of political oppression and atrocity are available to all who want them. They are unavoidable unless you wilfully shut them out. To those who would suggest that things might be yet worse, one answer is that of course they might be. But another answer is that for too many people they are already quite bad enough; and the sponsors of this type of suggestion are for their part almost always pretty comfortable.

## 3. THERE HAVE BEEN TWO INGREDIENTS OF SOCIALIST UTOPIA

I distinguish from within the Marxist tradition two broad elements of the socialist vision, which, simplifying, I style maximum and minimum ingredients. Informing discussions of the socialist future there has been, on the one hand, a dream or promise of ultimate liberation, one not generally filled out in very much detail but present nevertheless in certain pregnant words and phrases. It might be, from Marx's early works on, the dream of disalienation, of all-round individual self-development. Or it might be the promise in the slogan 'to each according to their needs', lavishly interpreted. It might be the implicit vision of a world of peacefully resolved conflicts without any need of policing or enforcement, or an anticipation of what used to be called 'fraternity'.

One should take care not to exaggerate. The influential thinkers of Marxism were serious people, not fools. They did not believe – as, in that caricature of

the ‘smiling Marxist’ so dear to many critics, they are often represented as having believed<sup>2</sup> – in the possibility of a world free of all limitation and difficulty. They did not expect heaven on earth. Still, the image was there of a condition of uncoerced social peace and of free and ample individual self-realization, with the sign against it of the radically, the incomparably different. Not as in an ‘end of time’ or a realm of concurring uniformity; this is merely part of the same caricature. But as in a fundamentally new beginning, the self-conscious history of humankind as opposed to a previously opaque prehistory.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, there was also – a mark, this, precisely of the materialism – the conception of a simple *sufficiency* of the means and conveniences of life. It was contained in the socialist demand for a release from extreme want and toil, a demand based on the elementary fact (which pro-capitalist liberals typically disguise from or soften for themselves) that the possibility of individual flourishing is seriously undermined by poverty and grave need, as it is by the tedium of a lifetime of unwanted forms of labour. Within, or perhaps behind, any greater was this more modest objective: of providing everyone with the proper platform for a life of free self-development. Might each member of our species one day rise to the level of an Aristotle, a Goethe or a Marx? I don’t know, although Leon Trotsky famously asserted so.<sup>4</sup> But the hypothesis was predicated on having to bring about an underlying sufficiency for all.

#### 4. MAXIMUM NOTIONS OF UTOPIA HAVE THEIR INDISPENSABLE PLACE

People will continue to long for what may be beyond their reach. Yearnings of this kind are merely the other face of finitude and limitation, of the regular troubles and the harsher oppressions of the world. As, in the normal way of things, fear of death, protracted pain or illness, close bereavement; and loneliness, disappointed love, personal betrayal or other inner hurts; more generally, excessive burdens and wretched long-term predicaments, are a cause of suffering, so do they also prompt ideas of a release from it. Here the reconstructive capacities of human thought – abstraction, projection, imagination – can always move through various levels of conceivable improvement right up to the furthest negation. Hence, eternal life, ultimate redemption and the like, as well as some of the more common fictions of many a personal existence. Hence, the most ambitious utopias.

At the same time, elements of the transcendent are lodged within mundane experience, thereby nourishing in a more positive way, too, visions of a radically different human realm. For if the extraordinary is already within the ordinary, why may it not be extended? And why may it not be extended again? Great art – or just good music, of all kinds – could be invoked at this point to exemplify the way in which the aesthetic, the elevating or powerfully affective, inhabits the quotidian world. But another less often used example demonstrates as tellingly how even within the ordinary, at the most seemingly unremarkable sites, there are moments of grace, joy and excitement capable of lifting those

present and transmuting the quality of their experience. I refer to the example of modern sport, not much reflected on in meditations about utopia. It is a mistaken neglect, in my own view, since sport today gives as much genuine and memorable pleasure to millions upon millions of people as can be claimed for most other human pursuits. In the unexceptional context of what are no more than idle games, and for all of the accompanying ugliness currently to be found there – abusively exaggerated hatreds, boorishness, the corruptions of a rampantly invasive commodification – there is a communal enjoyment of competitive effort, and there are feats of impressive, sometimes breathtaking skill, and uniquely specific moments of great beauty under pressure not reproducible in any other setting. This is on top of the more common enjoyments of time passed shooting the breeze with friends. C. L. R. James already said it many years ago: ‘the popular democracy of our day, sitting . . . watching Miller and Lindwall bowl to Hutton and Compton [or, for that matter, watching Edwards, Bennett and J. P. R. Williams, or Cantona, Beckham and Giggs] . . . in its own way grasps at a more complete human existence’.<sup>5</sup>

There could be other examples still: of feelings of deep or intense love, outstanding acts of friendship, compassion, courage. But from both kinds of cause, whether the psychological and moral needs arising from suffering, or possibilities faintly discerned within the lived experience of the real, we will continue to long for what may be beyond our reach. We not only will continue to, we also should. For, set against this wider human-natural background, maximum notions of utopia can be seen to have their value. This value is in the very dream of deliverance. It is in the liberating fantasy that yields a different vantage point from the one confining us and claiming the privilege, all too often, of being the sole *realistic* reality. We have to think about the seemingly impossible in order to be able to discriminate what is genuinely possible. There are few things as bizarre anyway, as Terry Eagleton observes elsewhere in this volume, as the futurist vision trapped within assumptions of a putative realism. ‘Those with their heads truly in the sands or the clouds are the hard-nosed realists who behave as though chocolate chip cookies and the International Monetary Fund will be with us in another three thousand years time.’

##### 5. POLITICALLY, WE SHOULD BE GUIDED AS SOCIALISTS BY THE AIM OF MINIMUM UTOPIA

These above considerations notwithstanding, the political thought of socialism should now be centred, not on notions of ultimate liberation or of other too distant ambition, but on a world cured of its worst remediable deprivations and horrors. The goal should be modest or minimum utopia. This is a thesis I have suggested in passing once before in the pages of *Socialist Register*, defining minimum utopia as a form of society which could generally provide for its members the material and social bases of a tolerably contented existence, or (put otherwise) from which the gravest social and political evils familiar to us have been removed.<sup>6</sup> Several reasons can be

offered for thus limiting the horizon of left programmatic thinking for the time being.

The first and most important of these is simply that, could it but be achieved, minimum utopia would be a remarkable good in itself. To me the most compelling thing in Marxism – along with the broad truth of historical materialism – has always been, not its most far-reaching perspective, but its most basic one. Today more than ever it provides a good enough vision to be getting on with. The world as it is and as it has been presents us with a picture of cruelty, slaughter, gross forms of exploitation and oppression, dire need. If we could hope to achieve merely – *merely* – a condition in which people had enough to eat, adequate water, shelter, health care, and the fundamental rights of expression, belief and assembly; and in which they were free from arbitrary imprisonment, torture, ‘disappearance’, threat of genocide; now wouldn’t *that* be something. Even to articulate the thought is to bring home how remote this objective is. But why should any human being have to settle for less? Remote therefore as it may be, it is indeed the minimum, even while being utopia in a more than powerful enough meaning of the concept. To have only this: it would be humankind’s most magnificent accomplishment. Note that insisting on minimum utopia as a political guideline, a sufficient practical objective, does not in itself entail any renunciation of the more maximal ingredients of the socialist vision. These can either wait, or some of them may take care of themselves more or less. Others may turn out to have been misconceived. The question can just be left open. Relatively, it is of less importance.

A second reason is that we should not frame our projection of possible futures in terms that exclude the less benign, the more troublesome, features of the human make-up as it has revealed itself historically. Since I have argued this point before at length, I will be brief about it here. It is not a matter of denying the extent to which human beings can and do change – individually, historically, culturally – nor the scope there might be, consequently, for a radically different human type, with different social and moral traits, in the dwellings and on the streets of a better future world. It is only a matter of cautioning against a too presumptive optimism in this regard: of drawing attention to how much there is in ordinary and extraordinary experience alike, from the most familiar situations of daily life to the torture chambers and the killing fields, to suggest some enduring human limitations such as could continue to blemish and unsettle even the best-placed social order.<sup>7</sup>

Third, there is a more general reason for scepticism towards any vision composed only of shades of light and nothing darker. For it comes to us from the two extremes of reflection about the social world, both from thinking about utopia itself and from thinking about the lowest depths humanity has sunk to, that we cannot fully comprehend an idea of perfect or complete happiness, let alone deliberately aim for it. This is why pure utopias can seem so flat and dull, whatever the intentions of those designing them. They lack the necessary contrasts that in any actual world make the goods of life what they are, to be

valued and striven for against the bads. It is a point that was argued by George Orwell in a pseudonymous essay about notions of utopia recently traced to his authorship: happiness is scarcely conceivable except by way of its juxtaposition – in life as in thought – with more problematic and ambiguous states.<sup>8</sup> At the same time Primo Levi, pondering for his part on his experiences at Auschwitz, expressed a similar truth in terms of mundane finitude and complexity. Perfect happiness and perfect unhappiness are equally unattainable, he wrote, the obstacles to them deriving from the human condition itself ‘which is opposed to everything infinite’.

Our ever-insufficient knowledge of the future opposes it: and this is called, in the one instance, hope, and in the other, uncertainty of the following day. The certainty of death opposes it: for it places a limit on every joy, but also on every grief. The inevitable material cares oppose it: for as they poison every lasting happiness, they equally assiduously distract us from our misfortunes and make our consciousness of them intermittent and hence supportable.

The elusive nature of happiness, Levi also wrote, arises from an incomplete knowledge of ‘the complex nature of the state of unhappiness’:

so that the single name of the major cause is given to all its causes, which are composite and set out in an order of urgency. And if the most immediate cause of stress comes to an end, you are grievously amazed to see that another one lies behind; and in reality a whole series of others.<sup>9</sup>

The point of adverting to these observations is emphatically not one of fatalistic pessimism: as would seek to encourage, on account of run-of-the-mill facts of daily life, a resigned countenancing of the vaster avoidable evils that have plagued humankind. The point is only to get more sharply into focus that it is eliminating *these* evils, or levelling them as far as we can, that should be the prime contemporary objective of socialist thought and politics, and this does not require any whitened vision of a future existence frankly unrecognizable to us, if it is indeed desirable. Enough, for now, the known and more easily imaginable forms of human fulfilment.

#### 6. MINIMUM UTOPIA IS A REVOLUTIONARY OBJECTIVE

The use of the language of ‘minimum’ and ‘maximum’ in the present context makes it necessary to forestall one possible misunderstanding that could arise from an older meaning of that distinction. Minimum utopia, as here envisaged, entails so fundamental a transformation of the existing structures of economic wealth and power and of the distributional norms relating to need, effort and reward that it is revolutionary in scope. This must be made explicit against an argument I anticipate roughly as follows: that formulated within, for example, a discourse of human rights, minimum utopia loses all socialist specificity; there is nothing in it that speaks against capitalism as such. For the achievements of

capitalism, it will be said, and the reforms it has already accommodated, when set against the disasters witnessed in this century under the banner of socialism, make capitalism the better ground for minimum utopian aspirations.

Different lines of response are possible here, among which these. First, the comparison reverses an admonition of J. S. Mill's by contrasting actual (so-called) socialism with an idealized capitalism.<sup>10</sup> The latter's undoubted achievements are given to us as admirable and wholesome by the simple ruse of editing out of the picture the rolling catastrophe that capitalism has been for uncounted numbers of the world's population and continues to be to this day. It in no way minimizes the moral and political calamities for which the left – broadly, and despite its many currents and subdivisions – is answerable, to say that capitalism and its apologists are answerable for as much and of their own. Second, the presentation of this socio-economic form, virtually always by well-shod beneficiaries of it, in the guise of achievement and reformability is a piece of rank complacency that should be a cause for shame. Indeed it would be a cause for shame for most of them if its defenders ever had to stand naked, so to say, justifying their apologetic view to an audience of severely disadvantaged others, without benefit of the mediations and distances that usually protect them from this sort of encounter. So much, at least, is the force of contemporary 'discourse ethics', whatever its other problems. Third, with the complacency goes a manifestly one-sided form of patience: I mean patience towards a type of economic relation that has been with us for a few hundred years, unceasingly dealing out human misery together with its achievements, when the prospects of socialism, on the other hand, are discounted after one inauspiciously-placed and historically much briefer experiment gone wrong.

For the rest, the crucial issue here, concerning feasible economic models of minimum utopia, is one I cannot handle and so leave to others. The claim that there could not be, even with all the burgeoning facilities of today's information technology, anything better than capitalist economic organization and capitalist markets, I am content to meet with a simple counter-assertion. I don't believe it.

#### 7. MINIMUM UTOPIA IS TO BE CONCEIVED NOT ONLY AS SOCIALIST BUT ALSO AS LIBERAL

The aim of a minimum utopia is, then, anti-capitalist, but in so far as there are tenets of liberalism not indissolubly bound up with capitalism it should not be anti-liberal. This is a thesis likely to discountenance some socialists. Either they will associate it with an outlook that essentially redefines socialism as a reformed capitalism, an outlook, as I have just made clear, I do not share. Or they will have in mind other associations more repugnant still, thinking of liberalisms – the dominant ones in fact – with a tolerance for vast poverty and inequality, and which find it no problem that a footballer, rock musician or director of companies should be able to earn in the fraction of a life what most working people cannot hope for in a lifetime.

It has to be said, nevertheless, that liberalism historically has also been about trying to set limits to the accumulation and abuse of political power, about protecting the physical and mental space of individuals from unwarranted invasion, and about evolving institutions and practices, political and juridical, that contribute to such ends. That even here a concern for capitalist property has been amongst the motivating objectives does not undermine the more general value of these institutions and practices, and they should not be lightly set aside, whatever other institutional discontinuities may turn out to be necessary in achieving a more democratic and egalitarian social order. They should not be set aside, in particular, on the basis only of a present confidence in some future spontaneous harmony. The great evils we hope to be able to remedy include precisely evils against which liberal institutions have given some protection.

#### 8. EMBRACING UTOPIA MEANS EMBRACING AN ALTERNATIVE ETHICS

A different moral culture would be required to create and sustain a condition of minimum utopia. In some ways this point will seem so obvious as not to be worth stating. Inhabiting a world used by millennia of practice and acculturation to the 'normality' of some people being able to live by the efforts of others, used, and ever more used, to the most flagrant inequalities, the coexistence of widespread want and suffering with an overflowing luxury, we look towards the possibility of a different and better world, one that would have set its face against this kind of thing and whose watchwords would encompass at least a rough equality. How even to formulate the contrast without supposing a marked change in the moral culture?

The point is only less obvious to the extent of there having been a resilient left tradition, for which Marxism bears much of the responsibility, of diminishing the place of specifically ethical discourses and ethical advocacy within the wider struggle for socialism. It may simply be noted, therefore, that if attempts to reshape moral consciousness are likely to be by themselves insufficient – a thought that was at the heart of classical Marxism in giving the priority it did to analysis of the social tendencies and agencies which might bring socialism about – it does not follow from this that attempts to reshape moral consciousness are unnecessary. In fact the task of finding a path from where we presently are to a planet on which some moderately decent norms have at last come to prevail is unthinkable without a transformation of values. It is improbable, too, that that transformation could be wholly the effect, and not also a contributory cause, of other necessary changes, social, economic and political. This is too mechanical a supposition. The very business of trying to identify, persuade and mobilize the more likely social constituencies of wider change is bound to involve fostering new forms of social consciousness, given how much present forms of it are influenced by prevailing practices. How can it make sense to envisage the desired change of consciousness as not centrally including a change in moral thinking? No serious case for socialism can now bypass the most direct and careful effort of moral persuasion.

I go on, finally, to propose what I see as two components of a minimum-utopian moral philosophy.

9. THE MORAL UNIVERSE WE INHABIT IS (AS IF) GOVERNED BY A  
CONTRACT OF MUTUAL INDIFFERENCE

The first component is negative. It consists of a critical characterization of the existing state of affairs. Here I put forward the gloomy proposition that we live in a world not only replete with injustices large and small and the most appalling horrors, but, what is nearly as bad, also oversupplied with a tolerance for such things on the part of most of those not suffering from them. I have tried to encapsulate this idea – the great tolerance people have for the sufferings of others, the living comfortably with them, the attitude of practical unconcern – in the hypothesis of a *contract of mutual indifference*. According to this, the relationship holding between most of the earth’s inhabitants may be thought of as governed by the implicit agreement, ‘in exchange for being released by you from any putative duty or expectation calling upon me to come to your aid in distress, I similarly release you’.<sup>11</sup> The core argument for imputing this agreement to people may be stated as follows. If you do not come to the aid of others who are under grave assault, in acute danger or crying need, you cannot reasonably expect others to come to your aid in similar emergency; you cannot consider them so obligated to you. Other people, equally, unmoved by the emergencies of others, cannot reasonably expect to be helped in deep trouble themselves, or consider others obligated to help them. Imagine, as a limit position, a world in which nobody ever came to the aid of anyone else under grave assault or cognate misfortune. Even though no formal agreement had been made between the individuals of this world to the effect that they owed one another, under threat or misfortune, nothing in the way of aid or care, the case for imputing such an agreement to them would be compelling. For, given their bystanding dispositions, no one could reasonably entertain a contrary expectation towards the generality of his fellows: along the lines, for example, ‘even though I shall do nothing for others very unfortunately placed myself, nevertheless I think they would be obliged to help me and I shall look forward to their help should I ever need it.’ No one could persuasively defend such an expectation to other people.<sup>12</sup>

Now, I do not say that the actual world is exactly like the one just described. There are obviously qualifications needed to that description. The most important of them is that people do also act altruistically; they act, at times, in sympathy or solidarity with others; they come to their aid or rescue. I have myself written about some brave examples of this.<sup>13</sup> I claim, even so, that the idea of a contract of mutual indifference captures rather too well the moral logic operating in the world in which we live. Most people, most of the time, do not do enough to oppose or remedy the moral enormities and enduring forms of wretchedness which they know about.

This is not an uplifting thesis, and in proposing it at length I have made a

point of emphasizing that it is not.<sup>14</sup> Its unedifying character is evident from one type of response which it has elicited: namely, expressions of a plain scepticism and reluctance towards it. They are based – so far as any reasons have been articulated – on questioning the notion of an *imputed* agreement; and on questioning whether it is plausible to represent people as willing to accept a potentially self-damaging agreement like the one I hypothesize. Nobody venturing this response has yet troubled, however, to answer the argument set out above: to say how, doing nothing or very little to help others in grave difficulty when she could do something or a lot, a person might convincingly defend an expectation of help for herself when in grave difficulty.

The moral logic is discomfiting all right, but the mere discomfiture cannot show that it is not compelling in its way. Minimum utopia would have to rest upon an alternative moral logic.

#### 10. MINIMUM UTOPIA PRESUPPOSES A PERVASIVE CULTURE OF MUTUAL AID

To achieve a minimum utopia we would need to find ways of overturning, reversing, the contract of mutual indifference so that a different ethic, an ideal of multivicious care, could come to prevail. To be sure, some notion of this kind has always been implicit in socialist versions of utopia, whatever socialism's more unilaterally 'scientific' adherents might have reckoned to the contrary. The contrast between a society that would give proper weight to individual need and one regulated at every level by deep inequalities of wealth already tells us this to a degree. All the same, to the extent that the strategic focus of much socialist theorizing has been on economic and political structures and institutions and on how to change them, not enough attention has been devoted to exploring the specific contours of a socialist ethic. My final thesis is that the latter would have to incorporate – integrally – duties of aid and rescue, though I do not have space here to address the question of the scope and limits of such duties.<sup>15</sup>

We should not simply assume that the institutional framework, or a 'spontaneity' of attitudes arising from it, would suffice to result in the requisite behaviour on the part of individuals in a future utopia, all doing what was necessary to keep each other safe and well. Any set of projected minimum-utopian institutions is open to potential ruin if these are not actively supported and surrounded by a rich moral consciousness of the duty of care. This is in fact the principal burden of my hypothesis of the contract of mutual indifference: it brings out just how the structural and procedural provisions of a utopia, a projectedly good or well-ordered society, are rendered nugatory – actually ineffective, morally unconvincing – by the absence of a vigorous culture of reciprocal help to meet the threat and the incidence of violation. Such a vigorous moral culture will need a corresponding institutional framework in order to flourish, the framework of, among other things, a robust and self-active democracy; but the institutional framework will likewise depend upon the moral culture. Without it, it will either not come into being or not survive.

Intellectually, the road to minimum utopia goes by way of looking into the moral darkness.

#### CONCLUSION

In an essay composed now more than sixty years ago, Herbert Marcuse gave expression to a clear tension within left utopian thinking. Writing with Nazism triumphant in Germany, with Stalin's baleful regime consolidated in Russia as well as in the misguided loyalties of much of the international left, he posed a question that is unavoidable for anyone thinking inside the Marxist tradition, and so for 'critical theory', his chosen idiom there. 'What, however, if the development outlined by the theory does not occur?' Marcuse asked. 'What if the forces that were to bring about the transformation are suppressed and appear to be defeated?' He answered this question by continuing to insist, on the one hand, that critical theory 'always derives its goals only from present tendencies of the social process'; but by affirming also, on the other hand, that critical theory has no fear of accusations of utopia. It has no fear of them, he said, because what cannot be realized within the established social order 'always appears to the latter as mere utopia'. However, this very transcendence speaks in its favour rather than against it. 'Critical theory preserves obstinacy as a genuine quality of philosophical thought.'<sup>16</sup>

One must be careful, naturally. Obstinacy can be blind. But an obstinate utopianism is much needed against the potent forces of privilege and indifference. The issue – that is, the outcome between utopia and the brute persisting power of injustice – is ever uncertain. Still, Marcuse's answer remains more attractive half a century on than is a style of thought which, beginning from supposedly neutral general assumptions, ends by landing you in the thinker's own back yard. To be for hope.<sup>17</sup>

#### NOTES

1. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, volume 6, London 1976, pp. 514–5.
2. See my 'Seven Types of Obloquy: Travesties of Marxism', in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch (eds), *Socialist Register 1990: The Retreat of the Intellectuals*, pp. 1–34.
3. Karl Marx, 'Preface' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, London 1971, pp. 21–2.
4. Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, Ann Arbor 1960, p. 256.
5. C. L. R. James, *Beyond A Boundary*, London 1963, p. 206.
6. See Norman Geras, 'Socialist Hope in the Shadow of Catastrophe', in Leo Panitch (ed), *Socialist Register 1996: Are There Alternatives?* p. 259 (the essay's title is wrongly given on the cover and the contents page). Reprinted in my *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust*, London 1998 – see p. 116.
7. 'Socialist Hope in the Shadow of Catastrophe', pp. 239–63.
8. The essay appeared in *The Observer Review* for 28 June 1998. It was first published,

under the title 'Can Socialists Be Happy?', in the Christmas 1943 issue of *Tribune* and is included in Peter Davison (ed.), *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, London 1998.

9. Primo Levi, *If This is a Man, and The Truce*, London 1987, pp. 23, 79.
10. See John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, Book II, chapter 1, section 3
11. The present section draws on my *The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust* (hereafter *CMI*), especially pp. 25–48. For the quoted formulation, see p. 43.
12. *CMI*, pp. 28–9.
13. See 'Richard Rorty and the Righteous Among the Nations', in Ralph Miliband and Leo Panitch (eds), *Socialist Register 1994: Between Globalism and Nationalism*, pp. 32–59. Reprinted in my *Solidarity in the Conversation of Humankind*, London 1995, pp. 7–46.
14. *CMI*, pp. 1, 40–41.
15. See *CMI*, pp. 49–77, where I do address this question.
16. 'Philosophy and Critical Theory', in Herbert Marcuse, *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, London 1968, pp. 142–3.
17. The positions taken in this essay draw on long (mostly e-mail) discussions and disagreements with my friend Eve Garrard, whom I accordingly thank.