On Marxian Utopophobia

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ABSTRACT: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels hold a surprising view about socialist design. They recommend that socialists refrain from serious and sustained reflection on the institutions and ethos of the ideal (socialist) society that they seek to bring about. Marx and Engels insist on the need for detailed and persuasive accounts of the failings of capitalism, but deny the need for similarly detailed and persuasive accounts of what might replace it. The grounds for this surprising view are not well understood. The present article identifies three different foundational Marxian arguments against utopian blueprints: a normative claim that they are "undemocratic"; an epistemological claim that that they are "impossible"; and an empirical claim that they are "unnecessary." As foundational arguments against utopianism, none of these three lines of reasoning are judged persuasive. However, reconfigured as non-foundational objections, they might contribute to a more productive dialogue between Marxian socialism and utopianism.

KEYWORDS: Marx, Engels, utopia, socialism, socialist design and planning.

1. Introduction

"Utopophobia" is a diverse and long-established phenomenon. Recent discussion of the notion of "realism" in political philosophy has illuminated one form that the fear of utopia can take – namely, suspicion and disapproval of normative standards that are unlikely ever to be achieved – but has not exhausted all that is of interest here.[1] The present paper is concerned with a different variety of utopophobia; namely, the historically influential but not well-understood hostility of Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) towards the provision of plans and blueprints of the ideal (socialist) society of the future.[2]

There seems little doubt about the existence of this Marxian utopophobia. (Note that I use the term Marx*ian* here to refer to the theoretical ideas shared by Marx and Engels, and not to those of later Marx*ists*.)[3] Marx himself explicitly characterizes their variety of "German communism" as "the most determined opponent of all utopianism."[4] Yet the very existence of such a phenomenon is remarkable. After all, the socialist tradition looks to be an unlikely environment in which a considered hostility towards the detailed description of an (as yet) unrealized ideal society might develop. Pre-reflectively, it seems obvious that, in order to achieve their goals, socialists would require not only detailed and persuasive accounts of the failings of contemporary (capitalist) society, but also detailed and persuasive accounts of what an alternative ideal (socialist) society might look like.[5] Devoting at least some time and energy to developing *both* of these kinds of account would appear to be a necessary and worthwhile activity for those hoping to bring such a society about.[6]

Marx and Engels reject this seemingly obvious view in favor of a curiously asymmetrical attitude towards what we might call the critical and constructive

dimensions of socialist advocacy. They accept the need for socialists to possess detailed and persuasive *critical* accounts of what is wrong with contemporary capitalist society, but they deny the need for similarly detailed and persuasive *constructive* accounts of what the future socialist alternative might look like. Consequently, they do not typically criticize those socialists who do engage in socialist design for the inadequacy and implausibility of their particular plans and blueprints, they criticize them for supposing that we need plans and blueprints at all. The remarkable Marxian recommendation is that socialists refrain from engaging in this kind of forward planning, that they forego serious and sustained reflection on the institutions and ethos of the ideal (socialist) society of the future.[7]

It is widely recognized that Marx declined to write "recipes" for the "cook-shops of the future" – the metaphor is from the "Afterword" to the second (German) edition of *Capital* – but the Marxian rationale for this deliberate refusal is not well-understood.[8] Some years ago, John Plamenatz identified the existence of Marxian utopophobia as both striking and problematic, but he tended to treat this rejection of ideal description as pure evasion: "it is as if," he wrote, "[Marx] were pointing with one hand in the direction in which he wanted men to go, and with the other were throwing dust in their eyes."[9] As an initial reaction to the Marxian position, this expression of puzzled frustration is understandable, but it will not do as a considered account of the foundational arguments here – arguments which are, or so I maintain, worthy of further investigation.[10]

It is precisely the character and plausibility of the rationale for this surprising Marxian reluctance that forms my subject here. Why on earth, we might ask, would Marx and Engels recommend that socialists refrain from developing comprehensive and considered accounts of the ideal society of the future?

2. Some Working Definitions

In what follows, I identify and interrogate three lines of Marxian argument against providing detailed descriptions of the socialist future. These arguments usually appear in the context of the critical engagement of Marx and Engels with other (that is, non-Marxian) socialists, and especially often with those others that they identify as "utopian socialists."[11] (Note that, despite much commentary, these two categories – "utopian" and "non-Marxian" socialists – are not co-extensive.)[12] However, before looking more closely at those arguments, some ground clearing may be helpful. Not least, I should say a little more about three ideas – of "utopia," of "detailed" description, and of "foundational" argument – which have already played a part in these introductory remarks.

Since the definition of "utopia" is much contested, I should clarify the working understanding that is adopted here. As may already be apparent, by utopia I have in mind a detailed description of an (as yet) unrealized ideal society, and by utopianism I mean the activity of providing or promoting such descriptions. This understanding of utopia is consistent with some common usage, it also maintains the distinction between Marxian and utopian socialism, and it is broadly consistent with some of Marx and Engels's own usage (see below).[13] I am happy to allow the coherence and utility of other definitions of utopia – alternatives which, for example, might not maintain that distinction (between utopian and Marxian socialism), and which might identify Marxian views as utopian in some

alternative (and here unspecified) sense – but this is how I am using the word and its cognates here.

Note also that I intend this working definition to be agnostic on the tricky question of just how "ideal" an ideal description must be to constitute a "utopia." In particular, I take no stand here on the thorny issue of whether utopias – or even socialist utopias – should be constructed to reflect considerations of accessibility and feasibility in addition to those of desirability.[14] (Nor do I take any stand on whether Marx had a view on this issue, and – if he did – on what his view on this issue might have been.) Readers are free to read "the ideal society", in what follows, as connoting variously the institutions and ethos which are "the best we can imagine", "the best that are feasible", or "the best that can be reached from where we are currently situated."

In addition, it is important to realize that, on the present account, what utopians embrace, and what Marx and Engels reject, is the *detailed* description of the ideal society. Marx and Engels obviously have some broad vision of their ideal socialist society – however much they might have disliked that kind of language (talk of their having a "vision" for instance) being used to describe what they so obviously have – but they never flesh out that vision with anything like the degree of institutional and other detail that is found in utopian literature.[15] It might be helpful to explain that I refer here to utopian "plans and blueprints" precisely because those terms suggest a level of detail – by comparison, say, with a "vision" – and not for any other reason. Note, in particular, that I do not intend the phrase "plans and blueprints" to presuppose any specific account of how *stipulative* such detail should be; that is, in using those terms I do not mean to prejudge the question of whether, and to what extent, we should think of these detailed descriptions of the ideal society of the future as having to be followed to the letter.

The claim that the Marxian vision of the ideal (socialist) society of the future lacks the *detail* of utopian alternatives is occasionally denied in the surrounding literature, but it is hard to see how anyone familiar with utopian writings could reasonably contest it.[16] Marx and Engels never flesh out their vision with the kind of elaborating detail that the utopians favor. The following random but representative examples of such detail are taken from the writings of the first generation of writers and activists identified by Marx and Engels as "utopian socialists": Charles Fourier (1772-1837) provides an hour-by-hour account of the work schedule of different representative members of a typical future "Harmonian" community at different times of the year;[17] Robert Owen (1771-1858) outlines the various divorce procedures, complete with carefully specified "cooling off" periods, appropriate to the rational society of the future;[18] and Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) sketches the membership rules of the maritime council which would be responsible for the naval budget of the forthcoming new industrial order.[19] Note that these specific examples, although they suggest the level of detail involved, do not adequately convey the amount of that (level of) detail that these utopian writings contain. It is important to realize that, for each of these utopian authors, hundreds of examples of this kind of detail could be produced. And I maintain that there is nothing comparable with this level of elaborating detail, and with that extent of this level of elaborating detail, in any Marxian account of the ideal (socialist) society of the future.[20]

Marx and Engels not only deliberately resist providing this kind of elaborating detail, but also see such elaboration as paradigmatically and problematically utopian; thereby confirming that some Marxian usage is consistent with the

working definition of utopia adopted here.[21] They hold that it is not utopian to invoke some particular feature of one's broad vision of socialism, but that it becomes so as soon as one tries to explain in institutional and other detail how that feature might actually be realized in a future socialist society. Thus Engels insists that it is not utopian to maintain that socialism will have to overcome the contemporary and problematic antithesis between "town and country," and goes on to explain that the utopia "begins only when one ventures, 'from existing conditions,' to prescribe the *form* in which this or any other antithesis of present-day society is to be resolved."[22] Marx and Engels do not provide, so far as I can see, a wholly consistent account of the precise point at which a vision becomes *too* detailed – that is, the point at which it becomes problematic and "utopian" – but it seems clear that the threshold here is set very low. That is, on the Marxian account, it takes very little detail to make a claim about a future socialist society regrettably "utopian." Indeed, at times, Engels suggests that the relevant dividing line is crossed once we go beyond a "negative" account of the problematic features of existing society which will be replaced in the future ("what will vanish") to say *anything* positive about what will replace it.[23] I do not suggest either that Marx and Engels always had this particular boundary in view, or that they were always successful in respecting it.[24] Nonetheless, Engels's proposed distinction between what will disappear (which we can legitimately discuss) and what will replace it (which we should refrain from discussing) reinforces the interpretative claim that, on the Marxian account, the point at which a description of a future socialist society becomes regrettably "utopian" is reached very quickly.

Lastly, it is important to realize that I am primarily concerned here with what I have called the "foundational" arguments against utopianism to be found in the writings of Marx and Engels. Marxian complaints about utopian socialism are many and various, but, for present purposes, they can usefully be divided into two categories. *Non*-foundational complaints about utopian socialism are those targeted at views which utopian socialists hold, more or less widely, but which are not constitutive of their utopianism. In short, the veracity of these complaints could be accepted by utopian socialists without thereby having a reason to abandon utopianism as such. In contrast, *foundational* complaints about utopian socialism are precisely those which if accepted would provide a reason to reject utopianism as such. (Of course, that reason might not be decisive, all things considered, but it would, nonetheless, count against utopianism per se.)

Many of the arguments against utopian socialism put forward by Marx and Engels are best characterized as *non-foundational*. Two examples might suffice.

The first example of a non-foundational Marxian objection maintains that utopian socialists have a mistakenly paternalistic attitude towards the proletariat as a class. Utopian socialists are said to view the proletariat as lacking "historical initiative [*geschichtliche Selbsttätigkeit*]," as a passive and suffering entity which forms merely an appropriate object of humanitarian concern from without (on the part of suitably-motivated non-proletarian others).[25] According to Marx and Engels, this paternalistic view is mistaken because the proletariat is better understood as, at least potentially, an active and powerful collective agent capable of understanding and changing the course of history. This complaint is non-foundational in character since it seems possible to accept that this paternalistic view of the proletariat is mistaken, and that it was held by many utopian socialists, without thereby having a reason to abandon utopianism as such. That is,

one could, without incoherence, adopt a *non*-paternalistic view of the proletariat and yet remain a utopian as understood here. Indeed, it turns out that there were some contemporary "utopian *communists"* – such as Étienne Cabet (1788-1856) in France and Wilhelm Weitling (1808-1871) in Germany – who came close to subscribing to precisely that combination of views; both endorsing the need for detailed descriptions of the future ideal (socialist) society, and understanding the proletariat as a powerful historical agent which could bring that future about.[26]

The second example of a non-foundational Marxian objection maintains that, because they lack a sense of historical development, utopian socialists mistakenly see the failure of humankind to reorganize society along more rational and humane lines as a timeless reflection of a wholly contingent and easily remediable failure of rationality. Consequently, they imagine that once the relevant utopian "genius" has appeared – which might crucially, on this account, have happened at any point in time – and revealed the precise institutional requirements of "pure reason and justice" to the rest of us, these new social arrangements can, with comparative speed and ease, be put into practice.[27] On the Marxian account, such a view is flawed, not least, in its neglect both, of the existence of certain "objective" conditions (such as a certain level of productivity) for the feasibility of socialism (conditions which are the result of historical development and which might or might not yet exist), and of the existence of what might be called "extra-rational" obstacles to social and political change (such as "ideology" in the Marxian sense). This second complaint is non-foundational in character since it seems possible to accept that this neglect of objective and extra-rational constraints is flawed, and that it was held by many utopian socialists, without thereby having a reason to abandon utopianism as such. As before, one might, without incoherence, adopt a more realistic understanding of historical and "extra-rational" constraints and yet remain a utopian as understood here. Indeed, to take the first strand of the complaint, it might turn out that there are some utopian socialists – Fourier could, on closer inspection, prove to be an example – who hold theories of historical development which identify "objective" preconditions for socialism, and consequently exempt them from the full force of this Marxian objection.[28]

In what follows, I am concerned with *foundational* (rather than *non*-foundational) Marxian objections to utopianism. That is, those objections which would provide a reason to refrain from describing in relevant detail the ideal (socialist) society of the future. There are three types of foundational argument that appear in the writings of Marx and Engels: a *normative* claim that utopian plans and blueprints are undemocratic; an *epistemological* claim that that utopian plans and blueprints are impossible; and an *empirical* claim that utopian plans and blueprints are unnecessary. I do not insist that there are only these three kinds of argument in the Marxian corpus, merely that these are the only three which seem to be central to that body of work. In what follows, I examine these three types of foundational complaint in turn. In each case, I provide some textual evidence to sustain the attribution of these lines of argument to Marx and Engels, before examining their success as foundational objections to utopianism (whoever might or might not subscribe to them).[29]

3. The "Undemocratic" Objection

The first of these three foundational objections to utopianism invokes the normative claim that plans and blueprints are somehow "undemocratic." Some care is needed here, since this objection might easily be misunderstood. It might mistakenly be thought that this "undemocratic" complaint concerns the content of utopian plans and blueprints. For example, the objection might appear to be that the institutions and ethos described in the relevant socialist plans and blueprints fail to respect political equality in some important respect. However, such an objection – about the utopian advocacy of undemocratic institutions and ethos – would fall into the non-foundational category. After all, it appears possible to imagine utopian plans and blueprints which contain only the most impeccably democratic institutions and ethos (on whatever your preferred criteria for impeccably democratic institutions and ethos might be). It seems then that the objection must concern not the content of utopian plans and blueprints, but rather the role that such plans and blueprints play in bringing about the ideal (socialist) society of the future. Again, however, some care is needed. If this objection is to be a foundational one it must impact, not on particular strategies that utopians might or might not endorse, but rather on the use of plans and blueprints as such. Not all utopian strategies insist, for example, on the need for autocratic leadership in order to ensure the transition to socialist society.[30] What would a sufficiently general "democratic" objection to the use of utopian plans and blueprints in bringing about the ideal (socialist) society look like?

The suggestion here is that Marx and Engels object to utopian plans and blueprints on the grounds that they somehow necessarily, and regrettably, foreclose the future. Such plans and blueprints are portrayed as undemocratic in that they inappropriately restrict the freedom of individuals to determine for themselves the kind of society that they want to live in. That is, the "democratic" thought here concerns what is often called "self-determination" or "autonomy" – the attractive but slippery idea that human agents can be "part-author" of their own lives, making meaningful choices about, and being (partly) responsible for, the shape that those lives take.[31] The democratic objection assumes both that self-determination is of value, and that utopia and self-determination necessarily conflict – that the provision of utopian designs somehow limits the capacity of future generations to be autonomous, to live their own lives in their own way.

This democratic objection strikes me as more popular with commentators than with Marx and Engels themselves, but I do not want to deny that it is related to claims that are found in Marxian writings. It is certainly easy enough to find texts in which Marx and Engels contrast their own emphasis on the "self-emancipation of the working class" with the utopian endorsement of what is sometimes called "socialism from above."[32] For example, Marx commends the Paris Commune because, instead of seeking to establish a "Phalanstère" or an "Icarie" – that is, an intentional community modelled after the designs of Fourier or Cabet, respectively – the popular mass of the French capital took the "actual management of the revolution into their own hands."[33] And, elsewhere, Marx accuses his anarchist critics of not recognizing that, unlike their utopian counterparts, Marxian socialists were associated with a "social movement created by the people itself."[34] Similarly, Engels, explaining his unwillingness to say very much about the shape of relationships between the sexes in a future socialist society, insists that this issue "will be settled after a new generation has grown up," a generation who "will not care a damn about what we today think they should do."[35] It is not certain that these various comments, although identifying

utopian socialism with an "undemocratic" approach to social change, constitute much of a foundational argument against ideal description. However, since commentators are keen to interpret the Marxian complaint about utopia in this way, I will, for the purposes of argument, follow them here.

Examples of commentators identifying, and endorsing, this foundational Marxian objection to utopianism as undemocratic are easily found. For instance, Lawrence Crocker suggests that the "chief and best reason that Marx had such a low opinion of utopianism was his deep-seated belief that the task of designing and constructing the socialist society properly belongs to those who will create and live in it."[36] Vincent Geoghegan maintains that one of the principal Marxian "objections to utopianism was precisely that it could foreclose the future by substituting past and present obsessions for the creative novelty of the proletariat."[37] And Andrew Collier insists that Marx's objection to the provision of utopian blueprints is that they "pre-empt the freedom of future generations to make history in their own way."[38]

It seems possible to construct a foundational argument generating the relevant conclusion; namely, that it is undesirable, on these broadly "democratic" grounds, to provide a detailed description of an ideal socialist society. The following is not taken from any single source, but is intended as a sympathetic reconstruction of a line of reasoning which captures the spirit of this democratic objection to utopianism.

1. It is undemocratic to limit the self-determination (autonomy) of individuals.

2. To provide a detailed plan or blueprint for a future ideal (socialist) society is to limit the self-determination (autonomy) of individuals.

Therefore:

3. To provide a detailed plan or blueprint for a future ideal (socialist) society is undemocratic.

Moreover, given that:

4. Undemocratic means are (to that extent) undesirable.

We can conclude:

5. It is (to that extent) undesirable to provide a detailed plan or blueprint for a future ideal (socialist) society.

This stepwise reconstruction of the argument not only clarifies the status of the objection (namely, that it is broadly normative in character), but also helps to identify what makes this an unpromising argument. Let us allow the important (normative) premise that undemocratic (autonomy constraining) means are undesirable – perhaps because human beings are morally entitled to an autonomous life – although the "obviousness" of such a view is both of relatively recent historical provenance and open to challenge. More problematic is the claim that it is undemocratic (autonomy constraining) to provide a detailed plan of a future ideal (socialist) society. It seems hard to sustain the crucial assumption that

the self-determination (autonomy) of individuals is limited by the mere existence of plans and blueprints for the ideal socialist society. That assumption is crucial because without it, or something very close to it, the Marxian resistance to plans and blueprints *as such* – as distinct from resistance only to those plans and blueprints which advocate undemocratic institutions, or which form part of an undemocratic political strategy – looks hard to sustain.

To "pre-empt" something is, of course, to act in advance in such a way that this thing is prevented from subsequently happening. And the claim that utopias necessarily undermine self-determination (autonomy), preventing future generations from being able to live their own lives in their own way, looks implausible.

The idea of persons as self-determining or autonomous may be a familiar one in political philosophy, but it is also complex and contested (raising many intractable questions about the philosophy of action and the nature of freedom). At the risk of doing violence to that complexity, we can characterize autonomous persons as being able to develop and pursue their own goals and relationships. So understood, autonomy would appear to have what we might call subjective and objective conditions for its exercise. The "subjective" conditions for autonomy might, for instance, include the cognitive and practical skills that characterize a self-determining person, an agent whose decisions and actions are in the relevant sense their own. The "objective" conditions for autonomy might, for instance, include the availability of certain courses of action, perhaps the existence of an adequate range of options for that agent to chose between. So understood, autonomy might typically be open to disruption in two kinds of ways. Your ability to lead an autonomous life might be hampered, not only (subjectively) by your being "brainwashed." manipulated, and so forth, but also (objectively) by certain kinds of coercive interference which result in relevant options or opportunities being removed, restricted, and so on.

The central reason for doubting the democratic objection to utopianism is that providing a detailed description of an ideal (socialist) society does not obviously undermine any plausible (subjective or objective) condition for self-determination (autonomy). As a result of my drawing up socialist plans and blueprints, you (and others) are not, for example, "brainwashed" in a way which casts doubt on the self-determining character of your beliefs, desires, or preferences. Nor does the mere existence of my plans and blueprints seem to remove or obstruct any meaningful opportunities or options that would otherwise be available to you (and others). In short, the suggestion that utopian plans and blueprints necessarily prevent others from determining their future actions for themselves looks implausible.

Of course, you (and others) might be rationally persuaded of the merits of my plans and blueprints, and, as a result of the consequent conviction, seek to put those plans and blueprints into practice (insofar as that is within your control). However, such an outcome scarcely deprives you (and those others) of self-determination. Indeed, I am inclined to think that something like the latter process – being rationally persuaded of the desirability of some course of action and subsequently acting on that conviction – constitutes a perfectly familiar and acceptable form that self-determination (in both individual and collective forms) can and does take.

This last thought suggests the heretical possibility – "heretical," that is, on the Marxian account under consideration – that, far from hindering any ability to

make history in our own way that we would otherwise have, utopias might actually facilitate the self-determination (autonomy) of individuals and groups. Consider an analogy with the detailed maps of, and guidebooks to, present geography rather than to future society. The analogy here works, not least, because the chronological dimension is not crucial to the democratic objection; the relevant worry is not that these are future plans, but that their content is designed by someone other than the people who will live under it, just as the guidebooks in the present analogy are written for and not by the tourist. Yet we can plausibly think of the detailed maps and guide books that I might read in advance, and then take with me on holiday, as promoting rather than restricting my self-determination. They can be treated as playing a largely educational role, helping me to think about where I want to go, and how I might get there. Of course, a reader's interaction with the relevant maps and guidebooks *might* be of a different (and more limiting) kind, but it seems hard to see this as a necessary result of the detailed recommendations being offered in these texts. Indeed, if I were to come across an individual mindlessly following the advice of their guide book, my own inclination would be to find fault with the tourist rather than the author. The guide book might tell me that no trip to Paris is complete without a trip up the Eiffel Tower but my own horror of both cliché and heights will mean that the recommendation goes unheeded. The heretical suggestion here is that we might think of descriptions of ideal social arrangements in the same way. That is, utopias might be thought to play a broadly educative role, expanding our horizons and helping us to think about alternatives, but still allowing us to choose our destinations for ourselves. If utopias can be read in this way, then they are not necessarily autonomy restricting.

To be clear, utopias are defined here – consistent, I have suggested, with Marxian usage – by their detail and not by their "stipulativeness." Moreover, the utopian authors that Marx and Engels are most interested in – the first generation of utopian socialists – vary in how "stipulatively" they viewed their own institutional and other recommendations. Fourier was famously insistent on every tiny detail being followed to the letter, whilst Owen was more open to the idea that future generations would work out the best way of doing things for themselves. Furthermore, whatever the view of a particular author on this issue, we are not required to treat their writings in a stipulative manner. As a result, if a version of the democratic objection were mounted against what we might call stipulative plans and blueprints, it would seem bound to be a non-foundational objection (since plans and blueprints need not be stipulative).

In rejecting this foundational Marxian objection to utopian plans and blueprints, I do not mean to suggest that democratic concerns have no relevance to the issue of how best to think about socialist design. Democratic concerns might reasonably lead us to place restrictions both on the content of utopian plans and blueprints (so that they include democratic institutions and ethos), and on the kind of political strategies intended to move society closer towards the relevant goal (so that they avoid, for example, autocratic leadership arrangements). Moreover, democratic concerns might also impact on how we should read and reflect on utopian plans and blueprints, encouraging us to adopt a critical and flexible attitude towards their recommendations. However, these look like non-foundational concerns – about the appropriate content of, and attitude toward, utopias and the political strategies intended to realize them – not foundational worries about utopian plans and blueprints as such foreclosing the future. The first

foundational Marxian objection, that democratic considerations make it undesirable to provide detailed descriptions of an ideal (socialist) society, remains implausible.

4. The "Impossibility" Objection

The second foundational Marxian objection to utopian plans and blueprints is not that they are "undemocratic," but that they are "impossible." What this might mean is not immediately obvious. The suggestion is presumably not that we are unable to draw up plans and blueprints of an ideal (socialist) society; after all, Marx and Engels were familiar with a wealth of past and present examples which suggested otherwise. Rather the objection turns out to be an *epistemological* one: namely, that all these utopian plans and blueprints presuppose a kind of knowledge that cannot be had (is "impossible") and that this epistemological failing makes them useless (or, at least, useless for strictly socialist purposes).

An example of this kind of objection can be found in Marx's interesting correspondence with the prominent Dutch socialist Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis (1846-1919).[39] Marx offers a critical response to a Dutch proposal that delegates at a forthcoming socialist Congress in Zurich should discuss the question of what economic and political legislation should be passed once socialists had come to power. Marx insists that it would be a grave mistake to raise this question at the forthcoming Congress, and, in explaining why, he observes that the only correct response to such a question (about what socialists should do once they hold political power) is "a *critique of the question* as such;" that is, an exposure of its faulty assumptions.[40] The faulty assumption that I am interested in here concerns the availability of knowledge; simply put, Marx suggests that in order to answer that question properly, we would need to know things about the future that we cannot now know. "What is to be done, and done *immediately* at any given, particular moment in the future," Marx remarks, "depends, of course, wholly and entirely on the actual historical circumstances in which action is to be taken."[41] Yet accurate and precise knowledge of these future historical circumstances is something that we cannot now have, because the relevant detail is not discernable at this distance. I take it that the impossibility of possessing accurate and precise knowledge of future historical circumstances is a result, not of any narrowly socialist predicament, but of broadly universal conditions – presumably encompassing certain facts about both human nature (including, for example, our lacking omniscience) and human society (including, for example, its complexity and contingency). Marx certainly suggests that a parallel epistemological difficulty would have faced anyone in the eighteenth century trying to anticipate the future actions of the bourgeoisie once it assumed political power. He claims that, although the general demands of the bourgeoisie were known before 1789, no-one in eighteenth-century France could have had "the least idea of the manner in which the demands of the French bourgeoisie would be implemented."[42] Just as today (Marx is writing in 1881), we are led to infer, no-one can have the least idea of the precise ways in which the general demands of European socialism will be implemented. In short, the Dutch socialists are putting forward a question of the kind that simply cannot be answered. They are effectively asking us to solve an unsolvable equation, where the unknown factors cannot be discovered through manipulation of the known

factors. “We cannot,” Marx remarks, “solve an equation that does not comprise within its terms the elements of its solution.”[43]

Marx’s comments clarify the impossibility here. To do (with success) what they intend – namely, to describe accurately the ideal society of the future – utopians would need a kind of knowledge (detailed knowledge about future society) which is not available to any human being. Utopians, of course, purport to have this knowledge, but Marx suggests that, in reality, they substitute *speculation* (about the future) for the *knowledge* (about the future) which they do not and could not have. This is why Marx insists, in the letter to Nieuwenhuis, that the utopian attempt to anticipate “a future revolution’s programme of action” is “*of necessity* fantastic.”[44] Given the impossibility of accurate and precise knowledge of future circumstances, the only resource that can provide the content of the detailed plans and blueprints is the human imagination.

A broadly epistemological objection to utopianism is also attributed to Marx and Engels by some modern commentators. For example, Shlomo Avineri maintains that, for Marx, “the main trouble with the utopians is ultimately epistemological,” in particular that their detailed plans and blueprints “can be neither verified nor falsified; hence they are ultimately useless.”[45] Darren Webb also identifies an “epistemological critique” of utopianism in Marx’s work, a critique which insists, against certain competing socialisms, that “one cannot know the form that the future will take.”[46] And Steven Lukes says that Marx and Engels “criticise the Utopian Socialists for drawing up utopian *blueprints*, just because in doing this they laid claim to a type of knowledge, social forecasting, that could not be had *now*,” and Lukes clarifies that the type of knowledge that we cannot have now is knowledge “of the shape of future society.”[47]

So we have a Marxian claim – that it is not possible to construct accurate plans and blueprints of the future ideal (socialist) society – which is thought to support a foundational objection to utopianism. Note that, on its own, this claim does not yet constitute such an objection, because it says nothing about why this lack of accuracy might be fatal. However, with some additional assumptions, an example of a line of reasoning can be constructed which captures the spirit of the impossibility objection to utopian plans and blueprints.

1. To be of any use a plan or blueprint must facilitate the construction of a future ideal (socialist) society.

2. To facilitate the construction of a future ideal (socialist) society a plan or blueprint must be accurate.

And we can say that:

3. A plan or blueprint is accurate only if it predicts all the relevant circumstances that will determine the character of that future ideal (socialist) society.

However:

4. It is not possible – given the structure of the social world (including its contingency and complexity) and the limitations of human nature (including

our lack of omniscience) – to predict all the relevant circumstances that will determine the character of that future ideal (socialist) society.

Therefore:

5. Plans or blueprints for a future ideal (socialist) society are of no use.

This reconstruction confirms that the objection here is a broadly epistemological one, but it does not provide an especially promising line of reasoning. I am happy to accept the claim that we are unable to construct completely accurate plans; after all, the suggestion that human limitations, taken together with certain facts about the social world, rule out the possibility of accurately predicting the detail of future circumstances, looks compelling. Instead, I will focus my initial critical response on the second assumption of the argument; namely, that only accurate plans are of any use in constructing the ideal (socialist) society of the future. That assumption – or something very like it – seems to be needed in order to get from the claim that the detail of future circumstances remains unpredictable, to the conclusion that plans and blueprints are useless. As before, in order to cast doubt on that assumption, I pursue a homespun analogy.

Consider the future plans that any of us might make as individuals, reflecting on the kind of life that we want to lead (and the kind of work, family, and other commitments, that this might involve) in, say, fifteen years time. And let us allow that the kind of life plans we might make now – concerning, as people sometimes say, "where we want to be" in fifteen years time – will fail to predict accurately all of the future events and circumstances that will disrupt the unfolding of those plans. For example, we might fail to foresee the chance job opening, the early death of a loved one, the subtle evolution of our background normative (religious, moral, political) commitments, and so on. However, from the unavoidable impact of these and other unforeseen events and circumstances it would surely be wrong to infer that we should not bother to make plans. It would be wrong, not least, because, in this context, it seems clear that forward-looking plans do not have to be completely accurate to be of any constructive use. In part, this is because such plans are *not* simply *predictions* of what will occur to us, but rather constitute one of the elements in the process whereby our lives can get to be, at least in part, our own.[48] Despite their epistemological limitations (that they will never be completely accurate), making such plans looks to be an integral part of developing and deploying the kind of control over our lives that is both possible and desirable.

By extension, from the fact that we lack knowledge of all the events and circumstances that might disrupt the realization of our plans or blueprints for an ideal (socialist) society, it does not follow that those plans or blueprints are without any constructive utility. Less than wholly accurate plans might still help us make our way through the world, forming part of the process whereby we determine the future for ourselves and others (insofar as that is within our control). Our plans and blueprints for social change, like our individual ambitions and resolutions, are not simply predictions of where humankind, or some part of it, will end up, but are rather, at least potentially, part of the process by which we help to make the future the kind of place where we would want to live.

At this point, it might be helpful to acknowledge that there is often a level of detail in utopian plans and blueprints that looks absurd to many modern readers.

(Consider the elaborating examples from the first generation of utopian socialists, quoted above; examples which were chosen, in part, because I thought the seemingly absurd detail that they involved might amuse the reader.) I suspect that the perceived absurdity here derives, in part, from a narrow reading of the constructive purpose of plans and blueprints; the utopians seem to give us far more detail than is strictly necessary for us to make progress towards the ideal (socialist) society. In this context, I think it is important to appreciate two points: that utopias have functions other than the constructive, and that the constructive function is a complex one. On my own account, the functions of utopian description might include: construction (helping us to build a new social world); clarification (functioning as thought experiments of various kinds); consolation (offering comfort at a time of difficulty); cheer (amusing us); context-revelation (revealing something of the historical circumstances in which they were written); and criticism (providing a very particular sort of "mirror to our failings"). As a result, it should be apparent that I would reject the first claim in the stepwise reconstruction of the epistemological objection; in short, I consider it a mistake to think that the "usefulness" of utopias is exhausted by their "constructive usefulness." Utopias have a variety of functions, and we should not uncritically assume that their descriptive detail has only a constructive purpose. In addition, I would suggest that the constructive purpose of utopias is itself complex. We might not need more detail in order to identify our destination, but rather in order to be motivated to pursue it; utopian description, we could say, potentially fleshes out abstract principles in a way that makes the goal more vivid. When the protagonist of William Morris's utopian novel, *News From Nowhere* (1890), temporarily exasperated by the seeming-futility of his day-to-day activism, declares of the socialist future '*If I could but see a day of it … if I could but see it!*', he is not asking for a magic plan to carry out to the letter, but rather voicing the hope that his desire for change be rekindled by a clearer appreciation of its possible outcomes.[49]

These reflections should lead us to reject the impossibility objection as a foundational argument against utopianism, but they might nonetheless generate some lessons for those engaging with questions of socialist design. For example, from the potential of contingent and unforeseen events and circumstances to disrupt our plans, we might reasonably conclude that any plans that we do make should be flexible and open to revision along the way. However, this is to reformulate impossibility concerns in a non-foundational manner (as leading us to reject only certain kinds of plans or blueprints). It still remains the case that, from the fact that utopian plans or blueprints cannot predict future events and circumstances with complete accuracy, it does not follow that we ought not to devote time and energy to their creation. The second foundational Marxian objection, that epistemological considerations make detailed descriptions of an ideal (socialist) society of no constructive use, remains implausible.

5. The "Unnecessary" Objection

The third of these foundational Marxian objections to plans and blueprints is an *empirical* one; it maintains, not that they are regrettably undemocratic, nor that they presuppose knowledge that is impossible to obtain, but that they are

unnecessary. Detailed plans or blueprints of a future socialist society are, according to this final thread, simply redundant.

This view builds on some central elements of Marx's theory of history. According to that theory, once a social order has exhausted its contribution to historical progress (perhaps roughly understood as a narrative about growing productivity), then not only is a new order happily available to replace the exhausted one and take progress further, but that new order is also to be found in the old society itself.[50] We might say that the *design* of the new order comes about "automatically," in the sense that it is not the result of intentional human action aimed at bringing it about. However, Marx and Engels also make forward-looking claims that go beyond this historical picture (which claims only that later forms of society emerge from earlier ones with an economic structure which is more productive). In particular, they maintain that the form of society emerging from capitalism will not only be more productive than the latter, but also lack its individualism, injustice, and so on (or, if those flaws sound insufficiently Marxian, its alienation, exploitation, and so on). It is the basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society of the future which is said to be growing up within, and will in due course emerge from, the existing capitalist order. The relevance of these claims to the Marxian dispute with the utopian socialists may already be apparent. They enable Marx and Engels to portray the utopians as failing to understand that the design of the ideal (socialist) society of the future does not need to be anticipated by thought, but rather develops automatically within the existing capitalist order.

In a letter published in *Der Social-Demokrat* (dated 24 January 1865), Marx compares his own view, whereby solutions to social problems emerge from the historical process, with those of a utopian bent who think that solutions need "to be devised."[51] The contrast here, between solutions emerging from the historical process and solutions needing to be devised, is Marx's own, and confirms the Marxian view that historical solutions do not require us to design them. As Engels would subsequently explain, the "solution" which earlier utopians "attempted to evolve out of the human brain," in reality "lay hidden [*verborgan*] in undeveloped economic conditions."[52] The contribution of human agency, on this account, is not to design the future but to liberate the emerging socialist solution from, what Marx calls, its "capitalist integument [*Hülle*]" and ensure its subsequent flourishing.[53] Both authors are reluctant to identify the content of those emerging socialist solutions, but their writings do contain some tentative efforts in this direction. For example, Marx portrays producers' cooperatives as representing "within the old form the first sprouts of the new," and he insists that, notwithstanding their many limitations, they "show how a new mode of production naturally grows out of an old one" once historical development has reached the appropriate stage.[54] Whereas utopian socialists seek to devise a solution and then apply it to the world, it seems that Marxian socialists deliver, and subsequently nurture, the solution that is already developing within the social world.

Commentators have also recognized the relevance of something like this claim, about the emergence of historical solutions to social problems, for the Marxian critique of utopianism. Bertell Ollman, for example, contrasts the utopian approach, which attempts to construct the future simply out of the desire for a better world, with Marx's insistence "that communism lies 'concealed' inside capitalism."[55] Similarly, Darren Webb maintains that Marx sought to "ground the

future existence of communism in the real movement of the present" precisely in order that "the need for utopian *descriptions* of communism evanesced."[56] And R.N. Berki suggests that the utopians, amongst others, are criticized "on account of their, in Marx's view, erroneous understanding of the nature of the good society and its relationship to the existing world"; on the Marxian account, as Berki observes, communism is the necessary outcome of capitalism "because communism is *already here*."[57]

It is important to realize the strength of this Marxian claim about the historical development of socialism. The suggestion is not merely that history produces various ingredients that we then have to work out how to put together into a satisfactory (socialist) solution. That claim would be optimistic enough – suggesting, as it does, that historical development happily provides us with all the ingredients of a solution – but it would still leave work for socialist design to do. The Marxian claim is rather that the historical process somehow makes the design approach redundant. At no point is there a need for us to devise socialist solutions to social problems, because satisfactory solutions will themselves emerge from the unfolding of the historical process.

Perhaps the clearest affirmation of this striking claim is found in the obstetric metaphors that appear throughout the Marxian corpus, but especially often and emphatically when utopianism is the critical target. (This obstetric model of political practice, and its relevance to Marx's anti-utopianism, has been discussed with characteristic brilliance by G.A. Cohen.)[58] Marx famously insists, in writing about the Paris Commune, that the working class "have no ideals to realise" – in particular, that they "have no ready-made utopias" to introduce by decree – but rather that their task is "to set free elements of the new society with which old collapsing bourgeois society itself is pregnant."[59] (This particular text, *The Civil War in France*, was written by Marx in English, but Engels was careful to preserve the obstetric metaphor when he translated it into German.)[60] The link between the obstetric model of political practice and the redundancy of utopian blueprints should be clear. The solution is already being produced by the historical process, but it remains hidden, as Engels has it, emerging only when the time is ripe. At that moment, the role of the proletarian midwife, to pursue the obstetric metaphor, is to deliver and not to design the contents of the historical womb.

As that last remark suggests, this obstetric picture illuminates the disagreement here about the scope of human agency. Both Marxian and utopian socialists hold that human agency is needed to bring about socialism. However, on the Marxian account, human agency is restricted to facilitating the delivery of the solution that is being produced by historical circumstances (and does not extend to the design of solutions to historical problems). Let us imagine that babies are never safely delivered without human agency, perhaps involving – according to the conventions of mid-twentieth century Hollywood – the procuring of copious quantities of clean towels and boiling water in order to avoid miscarriages and stillbirths.[61] As a result, human agency is needed for the safe delivery of the child, but it is not needed for the design of the child (which is provided for elsewhere). Whatever might be the case now – given developments in the modern science of genetics – it seems certain that the original Marxian appeal to obstetric metaphors is intended to suggest that, whilst human agency may play a necessary role in the delivery and subsequent nurturing of the new-born socialist society, it is not required for its design. Marx and Engels disagree with the utopians not about the

need for human agency, nor presumably about its intensity (historical midwifery might turn out to be damned hard work), but rather about its proper scope.

(The obstetric metaphor can also help clarify why I previously described the socialist solutions that emerge from historical development as satisfactory, rather than, say, "idyllic" ones.[62] Marx is always keen to insist that communist society "*emerges* from capitalist society," and consequently that it will initially, at least, bear – economically, morally, and intellectually – "the birth marks [*Muttermalen*] of the old society from whose womb it emerges.")[63]

The insistence of Marx and Engels that – whilst utopian socialist criticisms of contemporary society are often relevant and powerful – there is little to learn from utopian plans and blueprints of the socialist future, is not a product of a belief that they can come up with better designs themselves, but rather comes from their conviction that such plans or blueprints are unnecessary. It will already be apparent that the status of this objection to utopianism is broadly empirical; that is, that underpinning this Marxian account are some large and complex claims about the nature of the social world and the historical process. It is because satisfactory solutions to social problems emerge from the historical process, without needing to be designed, that plans and blueprints are redundant. A sympathetic example of a foundational argument against utopianism constructed from these ingredients might look something like this:

Let us assume that:

1. Utopian plans or blueprints design the basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society of the future.

And that:

2. Utopian plans or blueprints are necessary iff the basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society of the future cannot come about without such designs.

Yet, on the Marxian account:

3. The basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society of the future develops automatically (that is, without its design being the intended result of human action) within existing capitalist social arrangements.

4. Successfully liberating the basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society of the future from its capitalist integument is not automatic, but only happens as the intended result of human action.

Therefore, whilst:

5. The ideal (socialist) society only comes about as the intended result of human action.

We can conclude that:

6. Utopian plans or blueprints are redundant (not necessary).

This reconstruction of the redundancy argument makes clear its dependence on complex empirical claims (especially 3.), but does not make it any more plausible. The most pertinent worries revolve around the idea that the basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society develops automatically within existing capitalist society and needs only to be delivered (not designed) by human agency. Given that reliance on complex empirical claims, it is hard for a brief discussion to cover the plausibility of the argument with enough thoroughness. Nonetheless, I will mention two, briefly described but decidedly non-trivial, reasons for not accepting the Marxian claim that socialist design is unnecessary.

In the first place, this claim about the redundancy of socialist design is not warranted by the writings of Marx and Engels. The Marxian account emphasizes that satisfactory socialist solutions – like babies in the obstetric metaphor – are not designed by human agency, but says remarkably little about how those solutions do get to be designed. The literal babies, we might assume, are designed either by "nature" or by "God," but the analogue of either candidate in the case of the metaphorical socialist infant is scarcely obvious. The writings of Marx and Engels provide no clear and sustained account of, either a "hidden-hand" mechanism within capitalism, or of an extra-human design intelligence, that would guarantee the emergence of satisfactory socialist institutions (without the design interference of humankind). That lack is a striking one. The confidence that Marx and Engels have in satisfactory socialist solutions emerging automatically from the historical process does not seem to be underwritten by a coherent explanation, in their own writings, of the social mechanism(s) which guarantee that the basic structure of socialism will develop without the design efforts of intentional human agency.

In addition, the Marxian claim about the redundancy of socialist design is not warranted by the subsequent development of capitalist societies. The complex empirical claims at the heart of their account – about the basic structure of the ideal (socialist) society of the future developing automatically, needing human agency only to release it from its capitalist integument – have been rendered less, rather than more, plausible by the evolution of capitalist societies since the deaths of Marx and Engels. There is scarcely room to argue that case in any detail here, but it looks overwhelming to many of us. Living in the shadow of what has plausibly been described as the morally worse century in human history, we can be justifiably skeptical of any claims which would make our liberation from the failings of capitalism automatic in the sense indicated.[64] Whatever Marx and Engels – or, indeed, others in the nineteenth century – may have thought, from our own vantage-point we can have no justified confidence in satisfactory (socialist) solutions to the problems of contemporary capitalism simply emerging from the historical process without the design intervention of human agency.

These significant, albeit briefly sketched, doubts about the plausibility of the Marxian claim that utopians plans and blueprints are unnecessary should lead us to reject this foundational argument against utopianism. Which is not, of course, to claim that reflections on that objection might not generate lessons for those engaging with questions of socialist design. The historical process might not be guaranteed to create satisfactory socialist solutions to the problems of contemporary capitalism without the design intervention of human agency, but it does generate some of the constraints and possibilities within which that agency might attempt to design and implement such solutions. So understood, the historical process would not make socialist design redundant, but would provide some of the parameters within which such design efforts have to operate. It might

well be that *some* utopians underestimate the importance of the "historically created conditions of emancipation," even if utopianism as such need not.[65] However, the original Marxian claim – that socialist solutions to the relevant social problems emerge automatically from the historical process, needing human agency only for their delivery and not their design – should be rejected. The third foundational Marxian objection, that broadly empirical considerations make detailed descriptions of an ideal (socialist) society redundant, remains implausible.

6. Concluding Remarks

I have concentrated here on criticising the foundational Marxian case against engaging in socialist design. I have said little to make a positive case for the "commonsense" view that, in order to achieve their goals, socialists require detailed and persuasive accounts of what an ideal (socialist) society might look like. I think a positive case can be made, but I have not sought to develop it here beyond a few remarks in passing.

That critical focus is partly motivated by an urge to clarify. The Marxian animus towards utopianism is emphatic enough, but its intellectual rationale is not well-understood. Foundational arguments are those which seek to provide a reason to reject utopianism as such, and I have identified three interestingly different kinds of reasoning here. Marx and Engels reject the "commonsense" view – that socialists require detailed and persuasive accounts of what an ideal (socialist) society might look like – on the grounds that the provision of such utopian plans and blueprints is: undemocratic (normatively undesirable); impossible (epistemologically unobtainable); and unnecessary (empirically redundant). These three objections are not always clearly distinguished and carefully elucidated in either the original Marxian texts, or the surrounding commentary, but they can be found in both literatures. In each case, I have sought to reconstruct sympathetically these lines of Marxian argument more fully, before engaging critically with the reasoning that they provide.

That critical focus is also motivated by a concern about the consequences – actual and potential – of Marxian anti-utopianism. The Marxian animus towards utopianism, even when not well understood, has had a problematic historical legacy. Marxian anti-utopianism embodies a dangerous combination of political radicalism and inattention to matters of socialist design; we are urged to change the world dramatically, but not to waste time now thinking about the kind of world we want to bring about. Yet the determination to revolutionize society, when combined with a failure to clarify our ends and the social and political arrangements that might best embody them, can have deleterious practical consequences. Indeed, it is not implausible to see certain threads in some of the more disastrous parts of twentieth century history as reflecting this kind of anti-utopianism, embodying a regrettable failure to think deeply enough about values and the kind of institutional and other arrangements that might best promote them. In addition, there are corresponding but forward-looking lessons here for those who would seek to engage in future social change. As G.A. Cohen once wisely observed, adapting Marx's (previously quoted) culinary metaphor from *Capital* for his own purposes: "Unless we write recipes for future kitchens, there's no reason to think we'll get food we like."[66]

My primary ambition is thus to have clarified and cast doubt on the foundational anti-utopianism found in the writings of Marx and Engels. A secondary aim is less developed but more clearly constructive; namely, to suggest that, whilst they might not work as foundational objections, these three lines of Marxian argument do not leave utopianism entirely unscathed. Indeed, once they are reconfigured as *non*-foundational concerns, these Marxian worries might have some positive impact on the question of how best to approach issues of socialist design. For example, whilst normative concerns about democracy do not make utopian plans and blueprints redundant, they might nonetheless impact on both the appropriate content of those plans and the attitude that we should adopt towards them. Similarly, epistemological concerns about the potential of contingent and unforeseen events and circumstances to disrupt our ambitions, whilst failing to undermine socialist design as such, might encourage us to ensure that any plans that we do make should be flexible and open to revision along the way. And finally, engagement with complex empirical concerns might remind us that whilst the historical process may not make socialist design redundant, it does provide some of the parameters which will frustrate or facilitate the design and implementation of potential socialist solutions to social problems. Such observations raise the possibility, at least, of a positive dialogue between Marxian theory and utopianism emerging once the former's foundational critique of the latter is abandoned.

In the writings of Marx and Engels themselves, there is, of course, little appreciation of the necessity or desirability of socialist design, and so little sympathy towards this kind of accommodation. The foundational Marxian hostility towards utopianism is not in doubt, although, as I have sought to establish here, the various reasons offered in support of it are unconvincing. We should not share the conviction of Marx and Engels that utopian plans and blueprints are undemocratic (normatively undesirable), impossible (epistemologically unobtainable), and unnecessary (empirically redundant).

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[1] I borrow the catchy term “utopophobia” from David Estlund, but shamelessly adapt it for my own purposes. Estlund uses the term to connote the “fear” of normative standards for politics that are very unlikely ever to be met, whereas I use it to connote the “fear” of detailed descriptions of an ideal society of the future (without restriction as to the demandingness of those descriptions). My use of “phobia” is, of course, expansive and non-technical; not least, I am primarily interested in reasoned forms of suspicion and disapproval (rather than in psychological fear and anxiety). For Estlund’s illuminating discussion of his version of the relevant fear, see Estlund, “Utopophobia.”

[2] I am grateful to seminar audiences at the University of Kent, the University of Oxford, and the University of Leiden, for responding to earlier versions of some of these arguments. I would also like to thank Lucinda Rumsey, and two anonymous referees for this journal, for their constructive comments.

[3] I include under this heading only such views as there is good reason to think that Marx and Engels came to share. I do not, of course, mean to suggest that Marx and Engels were always of one mind on these issues. For instance, the young Engels (before he threw in his lot with Marx) had a much more sympathetic attitude towards utopianism; not least, he endorsed the desirability and feasibility of communitarian forms of socialism. See Leopold, “‘All Tell the Same Tale’,” and Leopold “Socialist Turnips.”

[4] Marx, "The Débat Social" *MECW* 6:538/"Der 'Débat social'" *MEW* 4:512.
[5] The underlying rationale for this obviousness is not my subject here. That said, one might think that socialists need this kind of ideal description as a constructive target to help direct present efforts at social change, as a motivational aid to encourage such efforts, as a benchmark for criticism of contemporary society, and so on.
[6] That is not to deny the plausibility of a division of labor here. Not least, different individuals (with different aptitudes and interests) might well be better suited to one, rather than the other, of these two (critical and constructive) endeavors.
[7] The remarkable suggestion is, of course, that socialists in general should so refrain. It would not be remarkable to recommend that a particular individual refrain from engaging in socialist design, since they might – as previously noted – have no particular interest in, or aptitude for, that endeavor.
[8] Marx, "Afterword to the Second Edition" *MECW* 35:17/"Nachwort zur zweiten Auflage" *MEW* 23:25.
[9] Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*, 472.
[10] Worthy because they are both intrinsically interesting and historically influential.
[11] For an overview of the Marxian engagement with this variety of socialism, see Leopold, "Marx and Engels' Considered Account."
[12] See Leopold, "Marx, Engels, and Other Socialisms."
[13] See also Marx's description of utopianism as characterized by "the play of the imagination on the future structure of society." Marx, letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge (19 October 1877). *MECW* 45:284/*MEW* 34:303.
[14] Roughly speaking: by desirability, I mean whether the proposed arrangements are normatively preferable (not, for example, whether they are psychologically desired by anyone); by feasibility, I mean whether those arrangements are compatible with (what is known about) social design and human nature; and by accessibility, I mean whether those arrangements are reachable by us from where we are currently situated. On this account, arrangements which are desirable might or might not be feasible, and arrangements which are feasible might or might not be accessible. For adjacent distinctions, see Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination*, 38 fn. 44; and Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 20-25.
[15] For an example of Marxian resistance to this kind of language (when "one is 'a man of science,' one does not have an ideal"), see Engels, letter to Paul Lafargue (circa 11 August 1884), *MECW* 47:183/*MEW* 36:198.
[16] For an example of such occasional and implausible denial, see Paden, "Marx's Critique of the Utopian Socialists," 80. For attempts to identify as much detail as possible, see: Ollman, "Marx's Vision of Communism"; and Hudis, *Marx's Concept of the Alternative to Capitalism*.
[17] See the account of "Lucas" and "Mondor" in Fourier, *Le Nouveau monde*, 67-68.
[18] See Owen, "Appendix," 230-131.
[19] See Saint-Simon, "Considérations," 109.
[20] I briefly respond here to what some readers will think of as a counterexample; namely, the well-known passage, from a group of manuscripts (written in 1845-1846 but first published in 1924) usually known as *The German Ideology*, which refers to future individuals hunting on the morning, fishing in the afternoon, and

so on. First, this passage still falls well short of the level of detail that I have in mind, and have just illustrated with respect to the utopian socialists. Second, even if it did not fall short of that level of detail, it would remain one rather isolated example and so fall short of the extent of that level of detail that the work of utopian authors contains (this particular famous quotation is famous precisely because it *looks* like a rare exception to Marx and Engels usual reticence to describe socialism in any detail). Third, to count as a counterexample, the passage would have to be read as a serious description of the representative daily activities of future socialist citizens. Reasons to hesitate before endorsing that popular but unlikely interpretation include: that the productive activities here are wholly pastoral ones; and that the post-dinner activity mentioned in the passage – practicing "criticism" in the manner of Bruno Bauer (1809-1882) – is not one that Marx and Engels would ever recommend anyone engaging in. For the passage, see Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, *MECW* 5:47/*Deutsche Ideologie*, *MEW* 3:33. For its wider reception, see Carver, *The Postmodern Marx*, 97-107. And for an alternative to the popular but unlikely interpretation of the passage, see Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History*, 131-133.

[21] To be clear, I claim that this is an important and frequent usage in Marxian writings, not that it is the only sense of "utopia" and its cognates that they contain. For example, "utopian" is occasionally used in another familiar sense, to characterize what we might call impossible to realize goals; thus the constructive ambitions of the petty-bourgeois strand of "reactionary socialism" are dismissed as "utopian [*utopistisch*]" in that they presuppose a past world that cannot be recovered. See Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," *MECW* 6:510/"Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei," *MEW* 4: 485.

[22] Engels, "The Housing Question," *MECW* 23:384-385/"Zur Wohnungsfrage," *MEW* 18:280. The same point is made, using a different example, when Engels subsequently remarks that it is *not* utopian to say that in the future "working people" will take effective control of the instruments of production, but it *is* utopian to say whether they will simply seize those instruments, pay immediate compensation for them, or gradually "redeem" the property through small payments. Engels writes: "To attempt to answer such a question in advance and for all cases would be utopia making, and that I leave to others." Engels, "The Housing Question," *MECW* 23:386/"Zur Wohnungsfrage," *MEW* 18:282.

[23] Engels, "Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State," *MECW* 26:189/"Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats," *MEW* 21:83.

[24] Indeed, it is already breached when Engels, for example, says that the "working people" will take effective control of the instruments of production in "The Housing Question" (see footnote 22). For an interesting example of Marx breaching it, see his comment that Robert Owen has shown us "the germ of the education of the future" combining productive activity and play with more cerebral instruction. Marx, *Capital* (volume one), *MECW* 35:486/*Kapital* (volume 1), *MEW* 23:507-508.

[25] See, for example, Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *MECW* 6:515/"Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei," *MEW* 4:490.

[26] The italics are mine, but the term is Engels's, who chose it to indicate a more working class orientation on the part of certain later utopians. See Engels,

"Preface" to 1888 English edition of "The Communist Manifesto," *MECW* 26:516 (written in English).
[27] See for example, Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," *MECW* 24:287-288/"Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft," *MEW* 19:191-192.
[28] As Engels, in some moods, recognized. See Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific," *MECW* 24:293/"Die Entwicklung des Sozialismus von der Utopie zur Wissenschaft," *MEW* 19:197.
[29] That these objections were held by Marx and Engels might help explain their historical influence, but it obviously does not make them better objections.
[30] For a sense of the autocratic leadership widespread in nineteenth-century communitarian socialism, see Leopold, "Socialist Turnips."
[31] I will continue to refer to "self-determination" and "autonomy" in the main text, but, as described, this idea might be closer to what Stanley Benn calls "autarchy." See Benn, *A Theory of Freedom*, chapter 8.
[32] Richard Hunt suggests that: "Perhaps the key distinguishing feature of Marx and Engels's thinking, among the diverse currents of early socialism, was precisely their conviction, their ultimate democratic faith, that the masses could and would educate *themselves*, organise *themselves*, liberate *themselves*, and rule *themselves*." Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels*, 341.
[33] Marx, "First Draft of *The Civil War in France*," *MECW* 22:498-499/"Erster Entwurf zum *Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich*," *MEW* 17:556-557.
[34] Marx, "Notes on Bakunin's Book *Statism and Anarchy," MECW* 24:520/"Konspect von Bakunins *Staatlichkeit und Anarchie*," *MEW* 18:636.
[35] Engels, "Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State," *MECW* 26:189/"Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats," *MEW* 21:83.
[36] Crocker, "Marx, Liberty, and Democracy," 34.
[37] Geoghegan, "Remembering the Future," 64.
[38] Collier, *Marx*, p. 54.
[39] Nieuwenhuis was the first socialist elected to the Dutch parliament (1881), and the author of, amongst other works, *Karl Marx. Kapitaal en Arbeid* (1881).
[40] Marx, Letter to Nieuwenhuis, *MECW* 46:66/*MEW* 35:160.
[41] Marx, Letter to Nieuwenhuis, *MECW* 46:66/*MEW* 35:160.
[42] Marx, Letter to Nieuwenhuis, *MECW* 46:67/*MEW* 35:161.
[43] Marx, Letter to Nieuwenhuis, *MECW* 46:66/*MEW* 35:160.
[44] Marx, Letter to Nieuwenhuis, *MECW* 46:67/*MEW* 35:161. [My emphasis].
[45] Avineri, "Marx's Vision of Future Society," 323. Shlomo Avineri seems to identify the utopian flaw as seeking to know the future without knowing enough about the present; whereas I understand Marx as insisting that however much we know about the present we cannot know the future in the kind of detail that utopians imagine. The epistemological problem here is thus deeper than Avineri, in places, suggests.
[46] Webb, *Marx, Marxism and Utopia*, 19.
[47] Lukes, "Marxism and Utopianism," 157-158.
[48] This is to insist on a distinction that is sometimes left unclear in Marxian texts. As Leszek Kołakowski astutely remarks, "the Hegel-Marx tradition" often blurs "the distinction between foreseeing the future and creating it." Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 3:435.

[49] Morris, *News From Nowhere*, 3.
[50] See Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian*, 69.
[51] Marx, "On Proudhon," *MECW* 20:29/"Über Proudhon," *MEW* 16:28.
[52] Engels, "Anti-Dühring," *MECW* 25:246/"Anti-Dühring," *MEW* 20:241.
[53] Marx, *Capital* (volume 1), *MECW* 35:750/*Kapital* (volume 1), *MEW* 23:791.
[54] Marx, *Capital* (volume 3), *MECW* 37:438/*Kapital* (volume 3), *MEW* 25:456.
[55] Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectic,* 159.
[56] Webb, *Marx, Marxism and Utopia*, 109, 116.
[57] Berki, *Insight and Vision,* 15, 90.
[58] See Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian,* chapters 3-4.
[59] Marx, *The Civil War in France*, *MECW* 22:335 (written in English).
[60] See Marx, *Der Bürgerkrieg in Frankreich*, *MEW* 17:343.
[61] The distressingly nineteenth-century – and assuredly non-Hollywood – feature of the Marxian use of the obstetric metaphor is that the mother's survival is incompatible with the child's survival.
[62] For the thought that socialism will initially be satisfactory rather than "idyllic [*idyllischen*]," see Marx, Letter to Nieuwenhuis, *MECW* 46:67/*MEW* 35:161.
[63] Marx, "Marginal Notes on the Programme of the German Workers' Party," *MECW* 24:85/"Randglossen zum Programm der deutschen Arbeiterpartei," *MEW* 19:20. (This text is often called the "Critique of the Gotha Programme.")
[64] For the seriousness of this claim, see Glover, *Humanity*.
[65] The quoted phrase, and associated charge, is from Marx and Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," *MECW* 6:515/"Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei," *MEW* 4:490.
[66] Cohen, *If You're an Egalitarian*, 77.