THE DREAM OF ENLIGHTENMENT:
AN ESSAY ON THE PROMISE OF REASON AND FREEDOM IN MODERNITY.

by

Richard Ian Wright

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Department of **Anthropology and Sociology**

The University of British Columbia

Vancouver, Canada

Date *April 30, 1999*
ABSTRACT

This thesis utilizes a methodological reading strategy of intertextual comparison in an attempt to explicate certain conceptual convergences within modern thought. Basically I attempt to defend the values of reason and freedom while trying to avoid the authoritarian discourses that these concepts have been historically implicated within. Throughout, I follow three themes centred around what I have called “the dream of enlightenment.” The first theme examines the optimism within enlightenment thought examined through the texts of Rousseau, Kant, and Marx. The second theme explores certain pessimistic critiques of enlightenment thought through the texts of Freud, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche. The final theme views the dream of enlightenment as an ongoing critical process perhaps requiring an awakening of consciousness. In order to explicate this theme I draw upon certain textual convergences between the optimistic dream and the pessimistic dream especially through the work of Marx and Nietzsche. In the end, against Kant’s motto “dare to know,” I propose an alternative motto for the post-modern age. This motto is “dare to dream.”
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Raskolnikov lay ill in the hospital during all the latter part of lent and Eastertide. Whilst returning to health, he called to mind the dreams which he had during the period of delirium. The whole world was desolated by an unknown and terrible plague, which, coming from the interior of Asia, spread over all countries; all perished except a few elect. Parasites of a new character, microscopical beings fixed their home in the human body. But these animalculae were breathing creatures, endued with intellect and will. Persons affected became immediately mad. But, strange to say, the stricken were, at the same time, imbued with a strong sense of their own good judgement, never did they believe themselves so strongly endowed with wisdom and intellectual vigour or scientific conclusions and moral perceptions so correct as now. Whole villages and towns, the entire population became tainted, and lost their reason. They were incapable of understanding one another, because each believed himself the sole possessor of truth, and looking upon his unenlightened neighbours, beat his breast, threw up his arms and wept. They could not agree upon any point, knew not what to consider evil, what good, and they fell upon one another in anger and killed, they formed great armies, but, once in motion, they tore each other to pieces.

Dostoevsky- Crime and Punishment.
Introduction:

Dostoevsky's prophetic rendering of Raskolnikov's dream conveys to us the sense of uneasiness often found within modernity. It makes one feel as if an invisible cataclysm has been raised above the heads of those living in the modern world. Dostoevsky sees within modernity a condition of sickness and degeneracy; rather than progress and enlightenment the rationalization of modern civilization leads to anxiety, despair, and an overall sense of nihilism. From such a perspective modern individuals are trapped within a monolithic juggernaut which reduces their capacity to find a sense of meaning and dignity within a mechanistic social structure. And while the modern attitude has perpetuated the belief that people are now more intellectually sophisticated and ethically enlightened than ever before, Dostoevsky sees that this may in fact pertain to a deluded and vane sense of egoism which contains the capacity to violently implode upon itself.

In the contemporary scene social development seems to be entangled in a proliferation of increasingly incommensurable world views. It sometimes feels as if the contemporary generation is witness to the development of as many perspectives on truth and falsity, right and wrong as there are individuals. The policies, issues, and practices that once offered up hope in the past, and around which people could orient their definitions of self and others, seem to be involved in a tumultuous process of incessant fragmentation. What has been touted as the "age of information" is perhaps increasingly becoming the age of miscommunication. Contemporary society seems to be developing the aura of a modern day "ship of fools" with everyone walking about with the secret feeling that their fellow human beings are for the most part peculiarly irrational or insane.
It becomes difficult to find agreement, within this growing range of ideas, as to who is
telling the truth and who is trying to deceive, nor can one determine where the truth really
lies, assuming there is any truth to be found at all. A strong faith in the pursuit of truth
has metamorphosed into an acknowledgment that beliefs are relative perspectives with
many people increasingly adopting beliefs that are isolated and subjective. The so-called
"communication gap" which once spanned generations now appears as an
intergenerational separation of individuals to an historically unprecedented degree. In a
world where everyone seems to be developing their own particular agendas, there is no
one with the legitimacy to speak for anyone else. As such, modern conditions could
develop towards a communicative impasse in which everyone is speaking only for
oneself and no one is willing or able to listen. Such a development runs the risk of
creating for humanity a modern day version of the biblical "Tower of Babel." The
essence of this contemporary scene is elucidated by C. Wright Mills:

Our basic definitions of society and of self are being overtaken by new realities. I
do not mean merely that never before within the limits of a single generation have
men been so fully exposed at so fast a rate to such earthquakes of change. I do not
mean merely that we feel we are in an epochal kind of transition, and that we
struggle to grasp the outline of the new epoch we suppose ourselves to be
entering. I mean that when we try to orient ourselves—if we do try—we find that
too many of our old expectations and images are, after all, tied down historically:
that too many of our standard categories of thought and feeling as often disorient
us as help to explain what is happening around us; that too many of our explanations are derived from the great historical transition from the Medieval to
the Modern age; and that when they are generalized for use today, they become
unwieldy, irrelevant, not convincing. I also mean that our major orientations—
liberalism and socialism—have virtually collapsed as adequate explanations of the
world and of ourselves.¹

What Raskolnikov sees, in his feverish delirium, is a vision of a world in which the potential for reason and communication have turned in upon themselves, with escalating conflict and violence as the inevitable result. Conflict, through critique, argument, and polemical debate, has always been an integral part of modern communication. But when communication continuously fails to achieve resolutions, material forms of conflict, such as physical coercion and violence, are frequently the result. Throughout history conflict and violence have been basic aspects of historical development; however, technology, in its development from the rock to the A-bomb, has seen to it that destruction is increasingly becoming total in its scope. As a result, the hope for any valid and functional resolutions, mutual understandings or even agreements to disagree can only be sustained through faith in the potential of communication and its forms of polemical conflict to find such agreements and resolutions. Otherwise, resolutions are enforced and a general instability, justified under the old adage that "might makes right," becomes the norm. Such a situation is certainly atavistic and increasingly unsustainable in the contemporary climate. Without an arena for open dialogue and communication—which at least requires some minimal level of mutual understanding—conflict could escalate unchecked, finding its final resolution in increasing misunderstanding and violence. The dissolution of any rational means towards common dialogue and understanding, in an increasing climate of misunderstanding and miscommunication, could become the catalyst towards irresolvable escalating conflict and the eventual crumbling of modern society.

Such a condition is perhaps partially responsible for what I perceive as the attitude of detached cynicism so prevalent as the dominant Zeitgeist of recent decades. My
experience has led me to believe that most people seem to be "out for themselves," with social responsibility and a concern for others on the wane. When one reflects upon the ascendant public attitudes visible throughout popular culture it sometimes seems as if the motto of an age perched on the brink of a new millennium is: "get what you can." Even those who profess to care about humanity are ridiculed as idealistic and naïve and find that their disagreements are intensifying when it comes to determining what programs and practices to pursue. It is this fragmentation of society into increasingly isolated ideological camps, which then proceed to fragment further still, and the inability of these fragmented perspectives to communicate with one another, that I see as the modern day legacy reflected so ominously in Raskolnikov's dream.

In coming to terms with this legacy I embrace an epistemological perspective which accepts that we all live encased within an individual consciousness, but one enmeshed within a socially constructed fabric imparting to us our sense of social reality. Woven within the minds of all those we see around us are particular perceptions invoking a complex intermingling of ideas and emotions which taken together constitute the individual's particular world view. There is a sense in which one's subjective capacity for agency tends to organize a conscious web of perceptions by acknowledging some experiences while ignoring others, by synthesizing ideas and obscuring contradictions, by finding patterns where patterns may not exist at all. As a result, people tend to feel that they hold an understanding of the world that is functional, realistic, and makes sense, an understanding that enables them to go about their day-to-day business, concerned with the details of their own private affairs, searching for meaning and comfort, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. For most people most of the time a mental balance is
maintained and a sense of security sustains their awareness of their existence within the world.

Of course, throughout our life's journey we continuously encounter events and experiences which conflict with our internal world views. These occurrences often cause confusion and disorientation, but generally the mind is capable of taking these experiences and synthesizing them with one's knowledge of reality so that the world again begins to make sense. It is my understanding that these feelings of comprehension and security are facilitated partially by the mind's faculty for reason and interpretation, but sometimes involve suppressing or even ignoring events in order to maintain a balance between an individual's sense of security and his or her feelings of anxious disorientation. There are, however, those occasions when we sense more deeply that our normative perceptions may not be as secure as we would like to think. We may set ourselves upon a particular course of action, striving to attain certain goals and aspirations, believing them to be important and worthwhile, while an uneasy doubt lurks in the recesses of our consciousness. Most people are able to overcome these doubts and to continue their pursuit of a meaningful life without too much "undue" concern. Others sometimes get caught in a particular frame of thought which stubbornly refuses to yield to their desire for security and sensibility. For some poor souls this situation results in feelings of nihilism and/or madness. But even for those who manage to sit comfortably with their perceptions of reality, a vague sense of wonderment at the precariousness of their accepted notions may persist. One may glimpse an awareness that underneath the dreams, desires, wishes, and illusions that sustain "commonsense" perceptions, "reality" may not
offer up any comforts, solaces, or meanings beyond those that human creativity has fashioned.

Even in the face of possible annihilation, a false sense of security usually persists as the normal state of consciousness. The world has become so interconnected, and individuals have become so isolated and alienated from its larger processes, that it is only when disaster is immediately tangible, when destruction is certain and immanent, that anxiety takes sweeping possession of the mind. This is problematic for several reasons. While no one wants to have to face feelings of insecurity and anxiety, in many instances they prove beneficial by alerting us to dangers, they tell people when action is required to preserve themselves and to defend or struggle against their fellow human beings. But in the modern world, where problems seem so complex and truth so ineffably opaque, it seems as if one’s “everyday” perceptions can no longer be trusted. Being formed in an environment where immediate dangers were a person’s main concern, such perceptions are no longer in sync with the diffuse and often incomprehensible feelings of danger coming from invisible global forces. Outwardly the modern world can sometimes impart to us a general day-to-day feeling of security and vitality while underneath this glossy surface one may sense a vapid condition of anxiety and malaise.

So far I have looked at things from a rather subjective and interpretive perspective. But a more direct macro-sociological approach would consist in trying to comprehend the connections, the links between an individual’s subjectivity and the more general social processes. While each individual lives within her or his own particular perspectival world-view—and this is a truism due to the mass of experience and thought that everybody encounters within their own unique biographies—the general perceptions
that an individual has of reality, that imbue one’s mind with a subjective sense of meaning, security, anxiety or despair are not necessarily products of one’s autonomous construction. While each of us may feel strongly that our ideas are our own, arrived at through our particular ingenuity, there is an irreducible socially mediated element in all subjective ideas and perceptions. As such, I want to acknowledge the degree to which many of an individual’s ideas and beliefs are actually shared and learned as intersubjective cultural phenomena. Each person’s consciousness is not one formed in isolation or in a vacuum. People share many similar experiences with others within their communities and cultures, as well as by virtue of a common humanity. I think one has to contend with the way countless cultural relations and institutions impart to us ideas and practices which have been sculpted by a collective history but which then become absorbed as pervasive elements within a relatively free and autonomous consciousness.

Part of my epistemology views language, in its various discursive forms, as the predominant method through which perceptions and cultural values are accomplished and communicated between individuals. On a general level, human beings use language not just to communicate, but also to formulate a conscious awareness of themselves as individuals and as social beings. While language allows the mind to perceive experiences in a form that is comprehensible and to communicate these experiences to a certain degree to others, language is also the method whereby perceptions of the world are given to people not as absolutely free choices but as discursively and historically determined forms of thinking. Thus language is far more than just a method of communication; it is a means through which general structures of power and authority proliferate. Language is the medium through which a general cognitive capacity to create textual systems of
knowledge comes into being. These textual systems take on particular historical and cultural forms through which people are able to make sense of the world. While each of us play a small part in creating the discursive themes that we use, for the most part these themes are given to us by history and become a part of who we are and how we view the world without our necessarily ever being consciously aware of their effect on us.

But language (text) is only one part of a complex picture. As material creatures trying to survive and reproduce ourselves in a material world, many problems of day-to-day existence are shaped by all human beings. While language can create the perceptions of reality and the discursive cages within which individuals become trapped to varying degrees, people are also embodied beings who are subject to material forces, both in how they reproduce their own existence and in how they are physically coerced and manipulated by others. The reality of this situation can be obscured by idealist or linguistic theories which view thought and language as the only formative processes through which various perceptions of reality take shape. But such theories run the risk of overlooking what Marx was well aware of, that people still remain rooted as practical creatures existing in a real physical world:

The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a practical question. Man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice. The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which is isolated from practice is a purely scholastic question.²

While perceptions of reality can be altered through a change of consciousness, especially by discursively changing or controlling the linguistic forms and concepts that
people use to understand things, fundamentally, underneath the surface of these perceptions, elements of a material reality can persist unaltered. In other words, the way people perceive things in their outward appearance does not necessarily coincide with the way things actually are in their essence. This fundamental thematic is perhaps one of the cornerstones of Marx’s philosophy and is expressed in the introduction to *The German Ideology*:

[Our] aim is to debunk and discredit the philosophic struggle with the shadows of reality, which appeals to the dreamy and muddled German mind.

Once upon a time a valiant fellow had the idea that men were drowned in water only because they were possessed with the idea of gravity. If they were to knock this notion out of their heads, say by stating it to be a superstition, a religious concept, they would be sublimely proof against any danger from water. His whole life long he fought against the illusion of gravity, of whose harmful results all statistics brought him new and manifold evidence.\(^3\)

The example of gravity used in this passage stands as a reminder that an awareness or acceptance of the theory of gravity is not necessary for people to drown in water. No amount of theoretical maneuvering is capable of altering this essential material fact. In its broader implications this passage imparts to the reader the sense in which an essential material reality persists irrespective of its obfuscation through ideological manipulation. It is this presupposition of an ontological materiality that allows Marx to maintain his faith in a systematic critical analysis that can uncover of the real processes functioning beneath the appearances of the social world. Of course the problem then becomes how to


determine the way things actually are and to avoid the "dreary and muddled" "shadows of reality." If social reality can only be perceived subjectively through ideas and perceptions, which are largely mediated by language, one seems to be faced with the paradox that any knowledge constructed about the social world can never be certain. But this does not mean that an ontological material reality has to be denied; while it can never be proven to exist absolutely in countless ways everyone goes about their practical day-to-day activities presupposing its existence. What one ends up with then is not an unshakable truth that unequivocally represents reality, but rather with the textuality of certain experiences and perceptions (such as gravity) which are accepted by masses of people as reasonable and which guide and structure the way they conceptualize society and themselves.

Keeping in mind the epistemology outlined above, throughout the following work I will attempt to develop an inter-textual reading of several modern thinkers with the intention of explicating certain discursive patterns discernible within the historical matrix of western thought. These patterns revolve around an Enlightenment ethos which asserts that the accumulation of knowledge guided by reason will lead the human race towards emancipation. I want to situate my understanding of this particular ethos historically, against the backdrop of the global impact and hegemony of western discourse. Thus, I want to reassess the value of the concepts of reason and freedom without confining my analysis to the strictures of the Enlightenment project. I find, however, that my thoughts are unable to escape entirely from these strictures, and as such my argument remains largely within the contextual confines of a complex "theme of modernity." As I see it, this textual theme is a prevalent idea from which both to examine the western perception
of individuality and to locate my perspective as knower within larger social/historical processes.

The concept of "modernity" is fraught with problems, and there is no simple definition as to what the word "modern" actually refers to. As Nietzsche aptly states, "[a]ll concepts which semiotically summarize an entire process defy any definition. One can define only something which has no history." And yet, heedless of this lack of clarification, most contemporary attempts to understand the social world seem to be entangled somewhere within the scope of this concept of modernity. Within today's mainstream public discourse—particularly in the industrialized world—when someone speaks about the world modernizing they usually invoke the idea of a universal humanity progressing towards a more advanced stage of existence. But every time the expression modernity is used, several hundred years of historical development (with all the events, experiences, intellectual perspectives, and theoretical ideas that correspond to this cultural development) are appropriated and an attempt is made to distill from this mass of human experience the essence of an era. "Modernity" seems to express in one neat, simple, conceptual package what would otherwise seem to be inexpressible. And yet, as much as one may want to escape from the dominant ideology, not to speak of modernity seems to deny that one can obtain any coherent understanding of modern Western history at all. Thus one uses the concept of modernity in order to situate an understanding of a complicated problem and in order to communicate that situation in a coherent fashion. In any event, sociological theory has developed a way of talking about the history of

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western development that inextricably includes the legacy of the uses of the term modernity. Discussing the legacy that modern terms carry with them, Gayatri Spivak insists that, although one must remain alert to a word's paleonomic associations, perhaps it is "better not to construct new words that seem clean." As suspect and reductive as the expression "modernity" may seem as a reconstruction of historical reality, it has taken on a meaning of its own in terms of how one thinks about the world, and thus one has to acknowledge this effect.

The term "modernity" is certainly not "clean" and over the last two hundred years its theoretical implication with the historical development of western domination has not gone unnoticed. As far back as the early Enlightenment era, Rousseau was providing a critique of modernity, and in the last century Marx, Dostoevsky and Nietzsche were all skeptical of the virtues that so-called modern progress was imparting to humanity. Within contemporary sociological thought, critical theory has viewed the concept of modernity as a part of the ideological ruling apparatus of the dominant capitalist class, as a concept which conditions the public's consciousness to absorb and internalize perceptions of reality that support the interests of the ruling elite. Similarly, from a feminist theoretical perspective modernity has been viewed as a patriarchal concept helping to disguise and perpetuate conditions of male cultural dominance. The concept brings to mind ideas concerning the inevitable progress of history and as such could be seen as advocating conformity to the status quo which is after all "progressively modern." Thinking oriented

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around modernity has so shaped the commonsense understanding of history that incorporating it into one’s understanding of reality often appears to be the only rational way to think. Being so entrenched within the contemporary consciousness, abandoning the concept of modernity would in many ways appear to be irrational.

Alternatively, the concept of modernity also offers the possibility of sites of resistance for emancipatory projects. Modernity also means perpetual change, doubt, skepticism, always questioning what one is supposed to believe to the extent that to be truly modern is paradoxically to be anti-modern within the same moment. Grappling with this effect, Michel Foucault identifies modernity more as an attitude than a real historical event:

Modernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment... being modern does not lie in recognizing and accepting this perpetual movement; on the contrary, it lies in adopting a certain attitude with respect to this movement; and this deliberate, difficult attitude consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it.

In response to this modern attitude I would argue that the pertinent questions today should reflect where contemporary theoretical projects stand at our present historical juncture in terms of their orientation in thought towards the consequences and meanings of political actions. As such, I aim to uphold the legitimacy or utility of the Enlightenment idea that no historical process can exist without the conscious or unconscious practice of individuals, while simultaneously avoiding a blind faith in any

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value system—as in the Enlightenment faith in the value of reason for its own sake—to lead social development towards emancipation. Conceptually, I cannot escape the feeling that all too often contemporary theory (in its various modern, post-modern, post-structuralist, or post-colonialist forms) tends towards a breakdown of the connection between theory (knowledge) and practice (action) and that this contributes to the construction of an authoritarian discourse, or alternatively, to an esoteric pursuit of details which obscures any attempt to comprehend totalizing social structures. Reflecting upon such conditions, Mills insists that “ Intellectual ‘conviction’ and moral belief are not necessary, in either the rulers or the ruled, for a structure of power to persist and even to flourish. So far as the role of ideologies is concerned, the frequent absence of engaging legitimations and the prevalence of mass apathy are surely two of the central political facts about Western societies today.”  

Employing Mills’s concerns, if one takes seriously the Enlightenment claim that people are capable of critical self-reflection and that the actions of individuals form the structures and institutions within which human beings must live out their lives, one could argue that each individual is in part responsible for the development of society and history. If individual actions affect the life chances of real people in an actual world, both in the present and in posterity, and one is going to maintain that life is important and that people matter, then it would seem reasonable to assert that those who hold to such values have a responsibility to take account of their attitudes, their actions, and their interrelation with more general historical processes.

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9 C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, pg.41.
This orientation towards responsibility requires faith in another dream which runs counter to Raskolnikov’s and which attempts to uphold what could be called the promise of humanity. Through this alternative dream one can ask: Could it be that the apparent confusion proliferating in the world today is merely symptomatic of the birth pangs of a new era of enlightened understanding? Throughout history people have been chained in silence, their struggles stifled and their suffering ignored. Many of the current conflicting social attitudes could be viewed as aspects of a continuing struggle to shake humanity free from the yoke of perpetual oppression and to achieve emancipation. It could be that the world appears to be falling apart because for the first time a plurality of previously silenced voices are making serious attempts to legitimate their struggles against oppression that has long been ignored. Perhaps the age of information is challenging the status quo, daring people to acknowledge things at a rudimentary level that early modern thinkers only vaguely imagined. What appears to be cataclysmic may be merely the replacement of something old with something new—or at least the reinvigoration of the old with the new. Within this age of “informational anarchy” any search for social emancipation certainly encounters many pitfalls and dangers, but there are also many promising avenues for advance as well. It still remains within the grasp of human potentialities, as rational beings, to create a meaningful social world.

Is it naïve to believe that Western societies, with the creation of liberal democratic governments and the institution of constitutional rights and civil liberties (among other things) are the most advanced and sophisticated social arrangements yet historically realized, or, alternatively, does the naïveté actually lie in the belief that they
are not? This was a question considered by Max Weber in the introduction to the 
*Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In the opening paragraph he writes,

[a] product [or son—Sohn] of European civilization, studying any problem of 
universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances 
the fact should be attributed that in western civilization, and in western 
civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) 
lie in a line of development having universal significance and value.\(^{10}\)

Weber was articulating a dilemma which, far from being solved, has only been intensified 
in the interim since he wrote that introduction. Today the problem still remains: how does 
one attempt to create any authentic system of knowledge which conceptualizes universal 
concerns and yet addresses the relativistic critique of ethnocentrism?

The problem of ethnocentrism sheds light on the prevalent tendency for people to 
understand their own cultures, social arrangements, and ways of viewing the world as 
more valid than the world-views and social systems of other peoples. As a result, the 
historical literature of Western civilization seems to posit each distinguishable era in its 
history as representing the pinnacle of human development. Individuals within every 
historical epoch and culture have faced the tendency to become entrapped within the 
scope of their own ethnocentric biases, failing to see the often irrational reasons that blind 
them to the worth of alternative systems of thought and bind them to the unreasonable 
rationale of their own system.

Many claim that the ideas espoused by the Enlightenment project speak directly to 
the very essence of a universal human struggle towards reason and freedom. Notions

\(^{10}\) Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, transl. Talcott Parsons, Charles 
such as democracy, inalienable human rights, and the individual pursuit of happiness, are often put forth as the most advanced progressive ideas to date around which society should be structured. From this perspective other societies with different social values and arrangements are seen as backward systems hanging on to traditions which restrict the ability of humanity to develop, to evolve, and to progress.

But what if the dominant ideas which guide social, economic, and cultural development today are fundamentally at odds with the realization of the satisfaction of human needs which are not met by the established system? What if pervading public views are clinging to certain principles which actually achieve opposite effects to those desired? Is the world improving along some progressive line of development? Is humanity overcoming its social problems as a species and creating a better mode of existence for all? Or alternatively, is the world spinning out of control and dragging humanity towards a tragic and destructive end? To quote from Weber's famous introduction once again, "each one of these fields may be rationalized in terms of very different ultimate values and ends, and what is rational from one point of view may well be irrational from another." With this in mind one can ask: is the desire to achieve some sort of universal human emancipation not itself a part of the problem? Perhaps the whole idea of a "common humanity" is a part of the hegemonic structure of traditional western discourse which privileges one dominant voice to speak universally for the welfare of all people everywhere?

I would argue that the possibility of realizing some form of a truly human democracy and of conceptualizing a common humanity is not inevitably authoritarian and
should not be abandoned just yet. But this possibility can only be sustained through a continued struggle for rational communication. This means not being afraid to challenge the ideas of others when one feels they are invalid but also trying to remain open to the possibility one’s own beliefs may themselves be invalid. The established order is not always authoritarian simply because it partakes in the reconstruction of the apparatuses of power. Likewise, oppressed and subjugated voices are not more authentic or valid by the mere fact of having been unjustly persecuted. Attempts to foster communicative understanding must struggle on two fronts: one is to allow for those who have previously been silenced to be heard while realizing that their ideas should be held under critical scrutiny; the other is to maintain a vigilant critique of established ideas even as they grow and shift as new ones are embraced. An understanding of the forces and power structures working against such a development may help to make it a real possibility. But one thing is for certain: if everyone believes such a realization to be impossible, if everyone gives up the dream for a better world, then the situation does indeed become impossible. This impossibility arises because without a teleological historical process within which to place our faith, human beings—individual actors—become the repositories of any faith one has in emancipatory development. In other words, human conditions will not improve according to a plan of nature; only human practice can affect any changes aimed at ameliorating oppressive conditions.

The Enlightenment held to the understanding that human practice should be made self-conscious in order that social development might be brought under rational human control. Such control has proved ineffably elusive, and, contrary to Enlightenment

11 Ibid. pg. 26.
optimism, modern attempts at social engineering have provided a rather sordid and disturbing history. But there is more to the idea of humanity overcoming its "self-incurred immaturity" than this reductive conceptualization of a rationalistic, socially engineered system. In discussing the Enlightenment ethos, Foucault argues that "for the attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is."\textsuperscript{12} Thus, for Foucault, the attitude of enlightenment is one that problematizes the present in a critical attempt to overcome the "limits of necessity" and to provide a autonomous subject with conceptual spaces for "possible transgressions."\textsuperscript{13}

The particular textual themes inscribed in this Enlightenment attitude make up a large part of how modern thought is historically conditioned even when one is not consciously aware of their effects. Throughout this paper I will examine certain modern thinkers who—with the exception of Marx—do not lie predominantly within the sociological canon. I will read their texts in an attempt to highlight three prevalent themes which can be used to conceptualize modern thought and which coincide with certain epistemological viewpoints that are still involved in the historical formation of subjective identities today. Respectively, these themes concern an optimistic dream of enlightenment, certain anti-enlightenment or nightmare visions of modernity, and an attempt to transcend the dream of enlightenment through a self-conscious process of critical awakening. I find that breaking modern thought into these three categories creates

\textsuperscript{12} Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?," pg. 41.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. pg. 45.
a conceptual clarity through which I can situate the particular epistemological orientations of these thinkers. While a wide range of interpretive readings can be used to situate particular texts within any of these themes, certain texts seem to function more explicitly within one or another. Realistically, however, the texts of modern thinkers cannot be neatly divided up and all three themes are usually found throughout the texts I have chosen. Furthermore, since the epistemological orientations of the authors I consider can be explicated without using the dramatic imagery of the dream, the uses of my analytical strategy are of course limited. I am merely attempting to construct a specific perspective on modern thought and the way it seems to flow around the image of a dream of enlightenment.

The dream of enlightenment espouses a direct connection between truth and freedom, and a belief that the pursuit of reason for its own sake will lead history towards a progressive telos. Here the idea of a dream is that of a desire or goal, something one hopes to achieve through action and struggle. By contrast, counter-enlightenment themes envision modernity as a process of human degradation and see the Enlightenment with its faith in reason and freedom as inherently destructive and violent. This perspective views the idea of a dream as something fanciful, something along the lines of the wishful thinking of the dreamer. In other words, a dream of enlightenment is more of a fantasy or an illusion rather than a possible representation of reality, and in the worst case scenario dreams of enlightenment actually disguise dystopian nightmares. The third theme represents an attempt to overcome modern narratives which concern themselves with dreamlike visions of historical progress or regress by moving beyond them altogether. In many ways this particular theme seems to anticipate the contemporary post-modern
condition. It views enlightenment dreams as occurring in a state of unconsciousness. In other words, the act of dreaming implies an understanding of the possibility (or necessity) of some sort of conscious awakening, the idea that modernity has been struggling to attain something of which it is not yet fully conscious.

It is this third theme that I believe allows one to maintain faith in the promise of humanity. From our historical perspective we only half glimpse a possibility which holds out the potential of becoming a reality, but first we must clarify this vision and become conscious of the goals and possibilities we are chasing. But whether this awakening will show the promise to be an illusion or show us how to better realize emancipation is an issue for discussion and its realization through the process of history remains to be determined. However, just as thought must precede any goal-oriented action, in the struggle to realize a better world dreams must precede reality. Since most of the world must now contend with a modern attitude, which is characterized by a “desperate eagerness” to grasp the eternally altered present, it becomes all the more important to try to understand these themes in the hope that they can help us to determine the direction of contemporary development within modern history.
Chapter one: A Dream for Humanity.

I should clarify a distinction at the outset of this chapter between the Enlightenment as a particular historical movement and the dream of enlightenment which is a particular critical attitude or theme found throughout the work of a variety of thinkers both within and preceding the modern era. My main concern in this thesis is less with the Enlightenment itself, than with this dream of enlightenment and the way it persistently permeates various aspects of modern thought. In this chapter I will examine the work of Rousseau, Kant, and Marx not to determine their particular views on society, history, or politics exclusively—although this will of course be a part of the exercise I am engaged in—but to explicate the dream of enlightenment as a theme found throughout their texts. I will use their ideas which illustrate this dream in order to frame it historically and theoretically and to see how they each attempt, in their own way, to overcome many of the obstacles which make its realization or its transcendence problematic. My aim is to distill the essence of an historical theme, a theme which continues to be part of a vast array of contemporary world-views but one which is largely contingent upon a definite set of historical constructions. As Marx once wrote, “it will transpire that it is not a matter of drawing a great dividing line between past and future, but of carrying out the thoughts of the past. And finally, it will transpire that mankind begins no new work, but consciously accomplishes its old work.”\(^\text{14}\) In keeping with such sentiments I maintain the view that some of the essential ideas of these thinkers are still relevant and can provide

Theoretical spaces within which to conceptualize realistic promises which have yet to be fulfilled.

The dream of enlightenment provides a thematic framework which can be overlaid upon the thinking of Rousseau, Kant, Marx in order to grasp certain historical continuities in their thought. However, not all the ideas espoused by these thinkers reflect the dream, and at times their ideas represent its antithesis. As unique individuals intellectually engaged with a complex array of ideas the degree to which their work represents any particular theme often varies. As a result, when trying to situate their thought within a particular conceptual framework (such as the dream of enlightenment), one always runs the risk of reducing their work to a kind of thematic mediocrity. To choose any attitude as typically representative of the thought of any of these writers involves making contentious choices which are never comprehensive enough to do justice to the richness and complexity of their discourse. For example, when Marx wrote that “everything that exists has this much worth, that it will perish,” we could use this idea to frame either an optimistic or pessimistic viewpoint. In light of such qualifications, part of my goal involves a hermeneutic claim that the dream of enlightenment may have provided these thinkers with a sense of ontological security which enabled them to avoid a relativistic nihilism. Thus they were able to continue their projects with the optimistic feeling that what they were striving for was worthwhile.

While the dream of enlightenment has been indicative of modern thought, its roots lie buried deep within the traditional and religious history of a western *Weltanschauung*. There is a philosophical aspect of the dream which goes back to the classical traditions of
ancient Greece. The Hellenic school of philosophy initially provided the western scholastic world with a theoretical model to emulate. But increasingly modern thinkers tried to overcome this reliance on, and reverence for, this classic tradition by reformulating questions from their immediate perspectives.\textsuperscript{16} This characteristically modern focus on the present also affected traditional ideas concerning spirituality and the power of divinity. Judeo-Christian scriptures address not only the human fall from grace—through eating the forbidden "fruit of knowledge"—but, also the possibility of recovering this grace by expiation through the light of God. This recovery of God's grace represents a sort of spiritual enlightenment or awakening in which the human soul will be released from darkness and sin and shown the true path towards eternal salvation in an otherworldly realm. This salvation is envisioned as an end to human suffering and doubt and its particular form varies according to the specific religious ethos adopted.

In the modern era certain residual aspects of these traditional versions of the enlightenment dream can be identified through a variety of secular forms. These forms generally conceptualize a human struggle to find release from historical forms of subjugation and bondage and to realize a state of happiness within this world, if not in this lifetime then for the sake of posterity. That human beings suffer and that human action is partly responsible for this suffering has been the concern of many thinkers throughout western history. The conflict between the way things are and the way we can imagine them to be has led people to dream of a time when human suffering, both collectively and individually, will be alleviated. The dream of enlightenment represents

\textsuperscript{15} Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte", from, \textit{The Marx-Engels Reader}, pg. 599.
this essential struggle to conceptualize and achieve emancipation from suffering and degradation not in an otherworldly spiritual realm—as this is seen as deluded wishful thinking—but here on this earth for real living human beings. It generally envisions the eventual release of humanity from the bonds of beliefs concerning a divinity which guides human events (beliefs which are viewed as superstitions) and a substitution of human reason and critical self-reflection as the means through which we can understand the world. The Enlightenment ethos takes up such a dream and fashions for humanity a moral purpose. This purpose maintains that a struggle for emancipation from social, economic and political conditions which strangle the life-chances of masses of people through dehumanizing and despotic practices is a valid and noble endeavor.

The word “enlightenment” symbolizes first of all the idea of coming to know or apprehending an awareness of “true” understanding. It was Kant who claimed the motto of his age was *sapere aude* (dare to know)\(^\text{17}\), and later Marx expressed his favorite motto as *de omnibus dubitandum* (doubt everything)\(^\text{18}\). These sensibilities in many ways characterize the modern attitude towards knowledge in reference to the dream of enlightenment. They express a sense in which the modern attitude involves an attempt to understand the world by constructing knowledge about it even as modern thinkers are critical of the very themes and methods available to reach this understanding. The acquisition of knowledge, it is said, will make human beings more civilized, less brutish; more compassionate, less violent; and more sophisticated, less simplistic.

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In previous eras, traditional knowledge was given authority by virtue of its lasting potency as a means to affect people's world-views. The modern outlook seeks to question traditional assumptions and to provide a vigorous critique of ideas that have heretofore been taken for granted, but it also seeks to build upon knowledge of the past. Essentially, people must learn to think for themselves, but this learning involves education and "it is essential to educate the educator himself." The Enlightenment attitude envisions a struggle to escape from the shackles of our "self-incurred immaturity," and this is not seen merely an individual choice but as the collective struggle of the entire species.

The dream of enlightenment, then, understands itself as a fundamental quest for knowledge and understanding. The dream focuses on the pursuit of knowledge through the human capacity for reason in the hope that humanity can accomplish an awakening. It maintains a hope that through the use of this capacity for reason humanity will develop a stock of knowledge that can be used to awaken the human consciousness and thereby foster emancipation through an enlightened understanding of the actual conditions of human existence.

In general, most proponents of the dream espouse faith in both empiricism and intellectual progress but they also tend to qualify this faith by expressing an awareness of the limitations of both empiricism and the human capacity for rational thought. Referring to empiricism, Marx tells us, "natural science will in time subsume under itself the science of man, just as the science of man will subsume under itself natural science: there

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20 Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", from, *Kant's Political Writings*, pg. 54.
will be one science." 21 And Kant, referring to the potential of rational philosophical discourse writes, "a philosophical attempt to work out a universal history of the world in accordance with a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind must be regarded as possible and even as capable of furthering the purpose of nature itself." 22

Both Kant and Marx saw enlightenment as in part the progress of (scientific) reason pursued through critical thought. They held an understanding of a bond between nature and the human capacity for reason, and as such they believed that any realization of enlightenment could only be found within this connection. Human understanding, itself being a part of the natural world, is in part a material capacity that enables individuals to investigate and comprehend the world around them and give meaning to their actions within it. Kant’s "Idea" refers to this capacity for understanding which has been formed through natural processes and not through conscious human invention. The task now is to become conscious of the "Idea" and to bend it towards the rational satisfaction of human needs—in Kant’s terms, to achieve "the perfect civil union."

But whereas Kant expresses his disillusionment with an empiricism which could not overcome the limitations of being fundamentally based on an examination of specific places and times, Marx, by contrast, is critical of the capacity of reason to remove itself from any empirical grounding. From Kant’s perspective, anyone attempting an understanding of any universal criterion for right or justice will fail “unless he abandons such empirical principles for a time and looks for the sources of these judgments in the

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22 Kant, "Idea for a Universal History", from, Kant’s Political Writings, pg. 52.
realm of pure reason alone." But for Marx, reason abstracted into consciousness cannot
give us real understanding; and as he tells us:

Enlightenment cannot be achieved through knowledge alone. It must be realized
through practice... it will be shown how subjectivism and objectivism,
spiritualism and materialism, activity and suffering, only lose their antithetical
character, and thus their existence as such antitheses in the social condition; it will
be seen how the resolution of the theoretical antitheses is only possible in a
practical way, by virtue of the practical energy of men. Their resolution is
therefore by no means merely a problem of knowledge, but a real problem of life,
which philosophy could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as
merely a theoretical one.

For Marx the separation of the human and the natural is an artificial abstraction.
Like the separation of the material and the ideal this abstraction obscures the relation
between human thought and a practice oriented towards a real material world. When
knowledge is abstracted subjectively into the realm of “pure” thought, it is separated from
material reality and enlightenment dreams remain unrealized as idealistic fantasies. Thus,
for Marx, it is not mere philosophical knowledge, but life itself that provides the
possibility of enlightened understanding. Traditional philosophy is, in effect, blinded to
true conscious enlightenment because it remains trapped within an intellectual realm of
abstract thought which fails to acknowledge the actual world of human practice. Marx is
convinced that while anything is conceivable in the imaginative theoretical world of
abstract philosophical thought, in the real material world, which consists of “the practical
energy of men,” social conditions have real consequences for actual living, feeling,
suffering human beings.

23 Kant, “The Metaphysics of Morals”, from, Kant’s Political Writings, pg. 132.
Enlightenment thought can be broken down into three essential categories which I want to examine, concerning respectively, knowledge, human nature, and the process of history. Within the dream of enlightenment, knowledge is generally seen as cumulative and progressive, a way of explicating for us a better understanding of the essence of human nature and the dynamic of the historical process. The "enlightened" conceptualization of human nature essentially holds that people are basically rational and struggle for freedom. This idea of humanity was early on conceived of as an innate capacity of the human spirit refined through Christianity and civilization, but modern critical thought has increasingly viewed human nature as behavior that is socially mediated. Enlightenment views typically see the historical process as progressive, moving towards the accumulation of knowledge through the human capacity for reason and the refinement of the best aspects of human nature. Historical progress, it is believed, moves towards better forms of social and cultural existence which enable humanity to realize its ideal essence more completely allowing for ever greater levels of freedom and human satisfaction.

Rousseau: The "Noble Savage" Trapped in Civilization.

"Man was born free but is everywhere in bondage."25 This simple statement by Rousseau perhaps captures the essence of the dream like no other. It proposes that the nature, the desire, and the struggle of the truly human will is to recover an "innate" freedom—to be acknowledged, individually, as a free and valuable creature within

society by our fellow human beings. This idea of a struggle for freedom can be found throughout the work of all three thinkers examined here. Rousseau, Kant and Marx all express the idea that historical development essentially involves the human struggle for freedom, but each of them arrives at his perspective from a vast array of different and sometimes incompatible ideas. For Rousseau, humanity essentially developed in a primeval condition of freedom, and the desire to recapture this condition has been thwarted for the majority of people throughout recorded history.

Rousseau's concept of “natural man” existing in an original state of freedom was not meant to refer to an historical reality but rather to express an idea or an approximation of what the human creature would be like if we could strip away all our cultural trappings. This “natural man” exists within history beneath culture in a manner similar to Freud's understanding of early childhood before cultural repression. But while an analogy to childhood can be clearly read throughout Rousseau’s discourse his concept is meant to be interpreted more figuratively than Freud’s. In this natural state “man” exists as a kind of “noble savage.” Rousseau believes that humans in nature live as individuals striving to satisfy their own personal self-interests, to realize their own basic needs and animal desires. For natural humans, others do not exist as objects to be exploited; instead these natural isolated individuals maintain an air of disinterest towards their fellow human beings.  

If humanity is capable of realizing some sort of awakening, some sort of enlightened societal existence, then perhaps there is some element within human nature which strives to achieve such a goal. It could be said of Rousseau’s conceptualization of
“natural man” that he upheld the notion of the innate “goodness of man” in order to allow for such a hope. In many ways this concept of “natural man” was a reaction against the ideas of earlier thinkers such as Hobbes who proposed that early human beings were nasty and brutish and that their existence entailed a war of all against all. From such a perspective civilization offered humankind its only refuge from a savage and hostile existence.27

But according to Rousseau, the “evil” which can be seen in humankind, from any cursory examination of the surrounding world, does not arise from human nature; in actuality it is caused by society and, more specifically, by civilization. In Daniel Bell’s understanding, “[m]odern society, as Rousseau was the first to see, was a movement from nature to culture, the imposition, so to speak, of a second nature on an original human nature.”28 It is civilization (culture) which leads humanity from a state of natural innocence into situations of inequality in which some people are in a position to exploit and abuse others. Rousseau writes, “it is easy to see that among the differences which distinguish between men that several are taken to be natural which are solely the product of habit and of the various ways of life that man adopts in society.”29 This notion—that it is society and not nature that causes inequality—is a formative one for modern theories of enlightenment. Subsequently, it is not the overcoming of human nature which is required for civil society to become more humane; rather, it is the cultural retrieval of human freedom that is necessary.

27 Ibid.
29 Rousseau, A Discourse on Inequality, pg. 105.
History for Rousseau involves a complex understanding of the way in which civilization (culture) in essence robs the human creature of its natural freedom and subjects individuals to hardships and restraints. But in the end, Rousseau was not an advocate for any idealistic return to the natural state and in fact he saw virtue not only in future improvements upon the civil state, but in the very idea of civilization in its broadest sense. For Rousseau, civilization was a process of human maturation, a process in which people were shedding their childlike existence and animal simplicity and growing into cultured and developed adults. Rousseau tells us that in the “natural” human condition, “there was neither education nor progress; the generations multiplied uselessly, and as each began afresh from the same starting-point, centuries rolled on as underdeveloped as the first ages; the species was already old, and man remained eternally a child.” Such an understanding points to the inherent ethnocentric bias within much enlightenment thought. For Rousseau, the idea that western civilization represents the pinnacle of a primordial evolutionary process is in many ways a taken for granted assumption. Even when he is critical of many of modernity’s facets he still assumes his present to be only one moment on a scale of linear progress.

For Rousseau the best approximation of human freedom available in civil society can only be realized through the institution of a “social contract.” This is essentially the idea that in order to protect individual freedom everyone has to submit to the authority of the social whole, i.e. the civil state (or sovereign), which will then protect the individual freedom of everyone by sanctioning those who would subdue and exploit others.31

30 Rousseau, *A Discourse on Inequality*, pg. 105.
Individual self-interest is an important dynamic factor in the development of civilization, but individuals must become enlightened as to where their true interests lie. For Rousseau, true self-interest lies in the development of a social order in which individuals submit to the greater good of the general will in order that the interests of each is protected by the community as a whole.

Rousseau's concept of the social contract is directed towards a problem that is still a part of sociological discourse today—that is, social order. The classical theory of the social contract seems to have been surpassed in sociology being seen as too simplistic and failing to adequately account for such things as consensus, values, and norms which were more extensively examined by later sociologists such as Emile Durkheim. But Rousseau's conceptualization points to several contradictory issues that are still debated within sociology today and as such he can be "regarded as a forerunner of sociology." His examination of the role of individual self-interest and its dynamic connection to larger social processes is especially pertinent to modern social theory.

Kant: The Only Way Out for the Philosopher.

According to Kant, Rousseau was misguided about the essence of human nature. Kant argues more along the lines of Hobbes that human beings in their natural state were "nasty and brutish." It was civilization, or more specifically, the evolving civil society, which enabled humankind to rise above its dark and animal existence and to realize what was truly the goal of human development—the cultured, educated, and rational

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cosmopolitan existing within a civil political arrangement. It was only within such an arrangement that any degree of rational freedom could be realized and maintained. Like Rousseau, Kant believes that humanity is involved in a process of maturation, he sees the development of civilization as a socially progressive movement from simplicity to complexity, and he associates this with the growth of the individual progressing from childhood to mature adulthood. For Kant, nature has endowed the human creature with a natural capacity for reason and the fulfillment of this potentiality requires overcoming our natural tendency towards simple animal ignorance and primitive barbarism.

Kant thus arrives at an understanding of an historical process in which natural forces are at work underneath the actions and intentions of individuals. He puts forth the basic propositions of this concept in his article “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose.” For Kant this “Idea” is not something that he believes can be proven to exist with any degree of empirical certainty. He merely makes the argument that history, and thus human existence, can only make sense within the framework of some larger purpose or process, that history can only make sense if there is a higher goal or reason for human development. Thus, in trying to rationally conceptualize the intentions of nature with regards to the development of the human species, Kant writes:

But if we assume a plan of nature, we have grounds for greater hopes. For such a plan opens up the comforting prospect of a future in which we are shown from afar how the human race eventually works its way upward to a situation in which all the germs implanted by nature can be developed fully, and in which man’s destiny can be fulfilled here on earth.33

33 Ibid., pg. 52.
The essence of Kant's entire concept of a "universal history" revolves around this idea of a "plan of nature" inherent in the historical process. This whole concept is the quintessential expression of the dreamlike quality of Enlightenment thought. When Kant uses key phrases such as "greater hopes," "comforting prospect," and fulfillment "here on earth," he is struggling to form the basis of an epistemological faith in historical progress. And he states the consequences of any failure to achieve this understanding quite clearly.

The seemingly senseless course of human events must have a higher purpose, for "if we abandon this basic principle, we are faced not with a law-governed nature, but with an aimless, random process, and the dismal reign of chance replaces the guiding principle of reason."\(^{34}\) Further on, he elaborates:

Nature's original intentions... and the point in time at which this degree of development is reached must be the goal of man's aspirations (at least as an idea in his mind), or else his natural capacities would necessarily appear by and large to be purposeless and wasted. In the latter case, all practical principles would have to be abandoned, and nature, whose wisdom we must take as axiomatic in judging all other situations, would incur the suspicion of indulging in childish play in the case of man alone.\(^{35}\)

It is within his intellectual struggle to overcome the perception of human existence as purposeless that Kant conceptualizes a teleological process in which inherent "natural laws" govern historical development. "Nature does not work without a plan and purposeful end, even amidst the arbitrary play of human freedom."\(^{36}\)[...]. "The only way out for the philosopher, since he cannot assume that mankind follows any rational 'purpose of its own' in its collective actions, is for him to attempt to discover a 'purpose

\(^{34}\) Ibid., pg. 42.
\(^{35}\) Ibid., pg. 42.
\(^{36}\) Ibid., pg. 52.
in nature’ behind this senseless course of human events, and decide whether it is after all possible to formulate in terms of a definite plan of nature a history of creatures who act without a plan of their own.’’\textsuperscript{37} The full realization of our human capacity for reason Kant sees as the original intention or plan of nature, and the goal of history is to actualize this potential through historical development. Kant turns to “the only way out” because he is struggling against the consequences of a purposeless history. From such a perspective, if humanity cannot be shown to follow a rational “purpose of its own” then such a purpose must be sought elsewhere, and Kant finds this purpose in nature.

But Kant is well aware of the difficulty of sustaining such a proposition in the face of the apparent and abundant irrational activities of individuals. “Since men neither pursue their aims purely by instinct, as the animals do, nor act in accordance with any integral, prearranged plan..., it would appear that no law-governed history of mankind is possible.”\textsuperscript{38}

We can scarcely help feeling a certain distaste on observing their activities as enacted in the great world drama, for we find that, despite the apparent wisdom of individual actions here and there, everything as a whole is made up of folly and childish vanity, and often of childish malice and destructiveness. The result is that we do not know what sort of opinion we should form of our species, which is so proud of its supposed superiority.\textsuperscript{39}

To avoid drawing nihilistic conclusions from such observations, Kant holds faith in the idea that human vices essentially serve a higher purpose, one which we may not be consciously aware of as individuals. Kant surmises that the process of human maturation is in part slowly being realized through the very antagonisms which seem so vile and

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., pg. 42.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., pg. 41-42.
petty to our everyday conscience. For Kant the reality is that we do not exist without certain "asocial qualities." These qualities are prevalent aspects of human behavior; referring to them as "[t]he unsocial sociability of men," Kant tells us that "this propensity is obviously rooted in human nature." Nature did not impart to humanity virtue or goodness as the essence of human desire; rather, people are essentially petty, vain, and childish. But if there is no virtue in these qualities, they are at least valuable in that they serve a purpose. This value lies in the fact that even though these human characteristics may seem reprehensible, they actually foster the further development of a rational civil society. This is the case because, "through the desire for honour, power or property, [nature] drives [man] to seek status among his fellows, whom he cannot bear yet cannot bear to leave."[...] "Nature should thus be thanked for fostering social incompatibility, enviously competitive vanity, and insatiable desires for possession or even power. Without these desires, all man's excellent natural capacities would never be roused to develop." Competition, ambition, and egoistic self interest are, in the larger picture, beneficial because they engender the growth of civil society and reason and thus provide the impetus for the maturation of the human species. Kant writes:

Without these asocial qualities (far from admirable in themselves) which cause the resistance inevitably encountered by each individual as he furthers his self seeking pretensions, man would live an Arcadian, pastoral existence of perfect concord, self sufficiency and mutual love. But all human talents would remain hidden for ever in a dormant state, and men as good-natured as the sheep they tended, would scarcely render their existence more valuable than that of their

39 Ibid., pg. 42.
40 Ibid., pg. 44.
41 Ibid., pg. 44.
42 Ibid., pg. 44-45.
animals. The end for which they were created, their rational nature, would be an unfilled void.\textsuperscript{43}

If it is not the wants or desires of the individual which drive the more general historical forces, if nature has entrenched its own desires within the development of the species, then it would appear that the individual is a helpless pawn whose desires and actions basically do not matter. If it is true that “Man wishes concord, but nature, knowing better what is good for his species, wishes discord,”\textsuperscript{44} this would seem to negate the idea of the free human will showing us to be creatures whose fate is determined by factors outside of or independent of our own actions. However, this is fundamentally \textit{not} Kant’s intention. He goes on to say that “man wishes to live comfortably and pleasantly, but nature intends that he should abandon idleness and inactive self-sufficiency and plunge instead into labour and hardships, so that he may by his own adroitness find means of liberating himself from them in turn.”\textsuperscript{45} This statement provides the necessary qualifications of the apparently deterministic tendency of Kant’s historical theory as it points towards his reaffirmation of the role of the individual actor within historical processes. For Kant, the intentions of nature involve the development of the human capacity for rationality. This potential for rational thought that allows for human freedom of action and enables humanity to create “its own purpose” through the intentions of nature. Kant explains this in his “third proposition”: “nature gave men reason, and

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pg. 45.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., pg. 45.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., pg. 45.
freedom of will based upon reason, and this in itself was a clear indication of nature’s intention as regards his endowments.\textsuperscript{46}

Nature working behind the scenes of the historical drama functions to shape humanity’s way of thinking. This manner of thinking tends towards increased rationality and knowledge, towards the realization of higher principles both in action and in thought. But humanity, generally, does not directly acknowledge these inherent dynamics for they function in a manner which makes this development appear as if it is the result of our own choices and capacities rather than being rooted in a developmental dynamic existing independently of our wills. “It seems as if nature had intended that man, once he had finally worked his way up from the utmost barbarism to the highest degree of skill, to inner perfection in his manner of thought and thence (as far as is possible on earth) to happiness, should be able to take for himself the entire credit for doing so and have only himself to thank for it.”\textsuperscript{47} Fundamentally, the purpose is not our own, the purpose is in nature, but the form it realizes makes it appear as if its realization were the result of our own intentions. While Kant tells us that “man was not meant to be guided by instinct or equipped and instructed by innate knowledge; on the contrary, he was meant to produce everything out of himself,”\textsuperscript{48} even this aspect of our own responsibility for this development is still rooted in Kant’s teleological notion of the “intentions of nature.”

The full development of these natural intentions is not meant to be restricted to the individual—although the individual consciousness is where they exist both potentially and actually—but is rather meant to be realized in the development of the human species

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., pg. 43.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., pg. 43.
as a whole. As each generation passes on what it has gained to the next generation, this generation will progress a little further along this line of development towards the realization of our full potential for reason. In the end, for Kant the goal of this historical development is the attainment of "a civil society which can administer justice universally." This, he tells us, is "the greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels [us] to seek." 

Kant begins from the abstract "idea" of a rational "purpose in nature" and ends up with the development of these intentions culminating in the "perfect political constitution" to be realized in a rational cosmopolitan civil society. In essence, he moves from the abstract to the concrete, so that his "idea" eventually arrives at a practical political formulation. "The history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose also externally—perfect political constitution as the only possible state within which all natural capacities of mankind can be developed fully."

Within the sociological cannon the Enlightenment faith that the modern world is developing in a continuous and progressive manner towards human perfection has been widely contested. In Anthony Giddens’ view, "[m]odernity turns out to be enigmatic at its core, and there seems no way in which this enigma can be ‘overcome.’ We are left with questions where once there appeared to be answers, and I shall argue subsequently that it is not only philosophers who realize this. A general awareness of the phenomenon filters

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48 Ibid., pg. 43.
49 Ibid., pg. 45.
50 Ibid., pg. 45.
51 Ibid., pg. 50.
into anxieties which press in on everyone.”\textsuperscript{52} In a pre-sociological era, Kant was sensitized to the enigmatic qualities of modern development, his basic question being: how can we have emancipation without progress? From a contemporary historical perspective we can see more clearly than Kant how the modern idea of progress contains within it an ethnocentric and authoritarian bias. And while we want an understanding of progress that is more historically situated than the abstract “Idea” provided by Kant, his lasting contribution is that he points towards the pitfalls of going without one. “The only way out for the philosopher” is to find some theoretical justification for emancipatory endeavours, and within the contemporary theoretical climate such justification is in many ways still lacking.

\textbf{Marx: Against the Dreary and Muddled Shadows of Reality.}

For Marx, history was a riddle, and he believed he had discovered the solution to the modern capitalist version of this riddle. Unlike previous modern thinkers, such as Kant, who tended to approach the subject of history by first postulating abstract universal “Ideas” as underlying the historical process and then from this abstract theoretical realm moved towards more concrete practical constructions such as the cosmopolitan civil state, Marx attempts to reverse this process by starting from the concrete material conditions of production which he tells us “can be determined with the precision of a natural science,”\textsuperscript{53} and by using these to frame more general abstract processes.

\textsuperscript{52} Anthony Giddens, \textit{The Consequences of Modernity}, Stanford University Press, California, 1971, pg. 49.
\textsuperscript{53} Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”, from, \textit{The Marx-Engels Reader}, pg. 5.
Marx tries to distance his understanding of historical development from speculative and abstract theoretical ideas which he describes as “an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence,”\(^\text{54}\) and to ground this understanding in the actual specific historical and material conditions in which real individuals reproduce society and themselves. He wanted his theory to be seen as an examination of modern industrial capitalism specifically in its proper historical context, and did not wish to be mistaken as attempting to uncover any “master-key” for explaining the historical process in all forms of society.

Whenever we speak of production, then, what is meant is always production at a definite stage of social development—production by social individuals. It might seem, therefore, that in order to talk about production at all we must either pursue the process of historic development through its different phases, or declare beforehand that we are dealing with a specific historic epoch such as e.g. modern bourgeois production, which is indeed our particular theme.\(^\text{55}\)

In the end, however, his understanding still contains within its framework a dynamic process of historical progress as well as a commitment to humanistic values; and it is through these elements of his thought that his “historical materialism” provides a poignant illustration and elaboration of the dream of enlightenment.

Notwithstanding major qualifications, it can be asserted that Marx’s primary concern with the previous formulations of political economy and philosophy is to loosen up the rigid mindset they created in their proliferation of certain “bourgeois” illusions. These illusions consist of misguided notions in which modern capitalist forms of production and their corresponding social relations are “presented as governed by eternal


natural laws independent of history, and then bourgeois relations are quietly substituted as irrefutable natural laws of society _in abstracto._” Marx’s desire is to make visible the obscurantism through which these abstractions from real historical conditions set up a tautological rationale in which “latter history is made the goal of earlier history.”

Following this line of reasoning, Marx is also critical of Rousseau’s concept of human nature. From Marx’s perspective, Rousseau’s concept of “natural man” is a bourgeois construct which functions in an ideological sense to obscure the historical development of economic _laws_ by basing them on abstract concepts such as “human nature.” Marx rejects the idea of the natural individual producing in isolation, in part because such a notion appears to substantiate bourgeois claims that current social relations are in fact natural and therefore immutable. On the contrary, Marx sees this concept as an illusion. In his introduction to the _Grundrisse_, Marx tells us that “Man,” for those who espouse the idea of the isolated “natural man,”

appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. Not as a historic result but as history’s point of departure. As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature. This illusion has been common to each new epoch to this day.

The idea of the individual in nature contradicts the historical evidence in that most of those social forms closest to nature seem to be more (and not less) socially integrated than ours. In Marx’s words, “the more deeply we go back in history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to

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56 Marx, “General Introduction to _Capital_”, from, _Readings from Karl Marx_, pg. 36.
57 Marx, “The German Ideology”, from, _Readings from Karl Marx_, pg. 35.
a greater whole.” It was only with the advent of bourgeois civil society that the idea of
the isolated individual became the orthodox understanding of human nature.

Only in the eighteenth century, in ‘civil society,’ do the various forms of social
connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private
purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that
of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed
social (from this standpoint general) relations. The human being is in the most
literal sense a zoon politicon [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal,
but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production
by an isolated individual outside society... is as much of an absurdity as is the
development of language without individuals living together and talking to each
other.99

Under the reign of modern capitalist production, it is possible therefore to imagine
individuals producing for their own needs and not as a part of the social whole. And this
imaginative construct can then be used to justify bourgeois relations in which individuals
are said to be responsible for their own fortunes—and misfortunes. But in reality
precisely the opposite method of production has come about. In modern capitalism, the
individual is not more independent of society, but is rather more completely dependent on
socio-economic relations as a means towards securing the material necessities of life.

If our critical understanding can develop an awareness of these kinds of
ideological illusions and the ways in which they function to make present historical
conditions appear as natural and inevitable, then we have taken a long stride towards
emancipating ourselves from these conditions. Marx, who apparently had such a goal in
mind, shows us that rather than following any “eternal natural laws,” the relations and the
forces of production, as well as the ideas that entrench their legitimacy, are in a constant

88 Ibid., pg. 222.
89 Ibid., pg. 223.
state of fluctuation, and "thus these ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products... There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement—mors immortalis [immortal death]."\(^{60}\)

But if we adhere to this understanding of history in its strictest sense, it becomes increasingly difficult to hold on to any concept of historical progress whatsoever. What at first glance seems to be a liberating theory which allows us to overcome the apparent immutability of existing productive relations can alternatively be seen, by virtue of its potential to be bent towards theoretical relativism, as a fetter placed upon any future attempts to alter the social structure. If productive forces are socially and historically constructed, while at first this might seem to empower the individual by virtue of a praxis which knows no concrete limitations, there is the danger of becoming lost in a sea of potential social formations without any foundations with which to affirm alternatives. Towards what goal should we orient our practice? In what direction should we struggle to guide social development?

Marx overcomes these problems by proceeding along two lines of argument, both of which are indicative of the enlightenment dream. The first entails a humanistic commitment in which he advocates a struggle for human freedom through the full development of our human potential. The second in a sense backs away from the potential relativism of his critique and reintroduces the concept of social progress, but in a radical and revolutionary form.

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\(^{60}\) Marx, "The Poverty of Philosophy", from, Readings from Karl Marx, pg. 30.
Marx's *first* formulation for theoretically transcending a senseless historical process involves the commitment found throughout his work to a fundamental humanistic struggle. This commitment is at the core of his re-conceptualization of "human nature." Marx still held on to the dream of human freedom, but he envisioned this freedom less as an abstract *natural* or intrinsic human capacity and more as a potential for humanity to fulfill its promise of becoming more completely human through a productive dynamic between nature and humanity. What this *becoming* would entail cannot be worked out in advance but can only be discovered through the historical process itself. For Marx, bourgeois social relations, which are supported by abstract ideas such as "human nature," must be overcome because they hold humanity down by stifling our inner human potential. These relations promote a social system in which narrow economic ends are the paramount goal and human beings become *alienated* from themselves and one another. Marx essentially envisions the formation of social relations which would develop a fully integrated human being in which the human potential of each individual could develop and flourish for the mutual benefit of all.

Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen, and as an individual human being has become a species-being in his everyday life, in his particular work, and in his particular situation, only when man has recognized and organized his *forces propres* [own powers] as social forces, and consequently no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.61

Each individual's development is directly linked to the development of society, to the degree that even one's own private thoughts are a social product. And so the development of the individual towards freedom, towards becoming more fully human in
terms of the potential found within the human species, is dependent on the development of society in a direction that will allow for the full human integration of what are at present isolated and fragmented conditions of existence. "All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself."  

This emancipation can only be achieved through the revolutionary change of society itself, through the overcoming of the narrow and dehumanizing aspects of the present social relations and a shift towards an existence which realizes each individual's existence as fully human social existence: "all history is the preparation for 'man' to become the object of sensuous consciousness, and for the needs of 'man as man' to become (natural, sensuous) needs."  

This change is not achieved through a change of ideas or consciousness alone, although this may be a necessary precursor to actual change; it occurs through the actual alteration of real material conditions, a change in the way human beings relate to nature and to each other. To realize that humanity is nature and that nature is humanity, i.e. to be truly whole human beings, we must overcome the individual isolation imposed upon us and embrace a new form of social existence. For Marx, society has to become the synthesis of humanity and nature if human beings are to become fully human and free. Humankind must appropriate all those productive forces and social relations that alienate people from themselves and one another. We have to make the practical political and economic forms of this world—which presently justify their existence in an abstract form outside of ourselves—an integral part of our human selves.

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61 Marx, "On the Jewish Question", from, Readings from Karl Marx, pg. 125-126.
63 Ibid., pg. 90.
The transcendence of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and attributes, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, human. The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object—an object from man for man. The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man, and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their egotistical nature, and nature has lost its mere utility by use becoming human use. 

Marx’s second means of overcoming irrational or meaningless approaches to history develops out of this humanistic commitment and involves a revitalization of the concept of social progress. According to Marx, the abstract concepts and illusions of the political economists and philosophers before him functioned to obscure the real conditions which kept the mass of humanity subdued under relations of bondage. Marx envisions an historical process which provides a path towards the eventual negation of these conditions. These real conditions are located in the social relations of capitalist production and they function as restraints upon the actual potential for emancipation inherent in the developing material forces of modern industrial society. Marx eloquently expresses this position in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

The general result at which I arrived and which, once won, served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows: In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary,

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64 Ibid., pg. 87.
their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their
development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the
existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same
thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto.
From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their
fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the
economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly
transformed.\(^65\)

A cursory glance at this novel conception of historical development might lead
one to assume that Marx has set up an inherent contradiction within his theory. While, on
the one hand rejecting the idea of immutable laws of development, he seems, on the
other, to postulate them as material facts inherent in productive forces. His writings can
sometimes appear to further this complication when we compare certain statements, such
as “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary,
their social being that determines their consciousness”\(^66\) to other statements, such as:

Man himself is the basis of his material production, as of any other production
that he carries on. All circumstances, therefore, which affect man, the subject of
production, more or less modify all his functions and activities, and therefore too
his functions and activities as the creator of material wealth, of commodities. In
this respect it can in fact be shown that all human relations and functions,
however
and in whatever form they may appear, influence material production and have a
more or less decisive influence upon it.\(^67\)

In order overcome these apparent contradictions, we have to turn to Marx’s
reformulation of the classical concept of materialism and see how this relates to his

\(^{66}\) Ibid., pg. 4.
\(^{67}\) Marx, “Theories of Surplus Value”, from, *Readings from Karl Marx*, pg. 24.
concept of a "social being." While Marx wants to discover the real material forces underlying social development he never relinquishes the idea of human freedom as an aspect which is integral to the historical process. For Marx, the human will is neither a product of a determined objective material world nor is it the product of abstract ideas existing only in consciousness. A fundamental aspect of Marx’s historical theory is that people, real living individuals, are an integral part of the “material productive forces” and therefore provide an essential subjective element within the process of production. In this way, Marx blends the objective aspect of material production with human subjectivity. He clarifies this distinction in his “Theses on Feuerbach”:

The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism... is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective activity.68

Practice, “real human sensuous activity,” provides the link between the objective material world and the human subjectivity. As a result, historical development is not fatalistically determined by objective laws but is rather the result of human activity. Such activity is not isolated from the material world of objects, as this is hardly possible for “real sensuous activity,” but is practice directed towards the material reality of this world. Practice involves the activity of real individuals creating the actual material conditions of their existence. Individuals are fundamentally free to act within the scope of their given social conditions and can thus set about to alter these conditions by ordering them to
facilitate a greater level of freedom. But we are never completely free to think and to act however we please since we are also constrained by the given historical conditions of our particular epoch. “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.” Thus the direction in which we can attempt the alteration of social conditions is basically limited in scope by the prevailing conditions of the material productive forces and the form of alteration is determined largely by the given social relations.

In the end we have to orient our understanding towards the practical conflict between the “existing relations of production” and the “material productive forces” of society. This is where Marx’s materialist conceptualization of history maintains its dynamic thrust, and it is within this understanding that the essence of his reinvention of the historical aspect of the dream of enlightenment lies. The laws of historical development for Marx are not immutable laws but general tendencies. While Marx frequently used the model of biological development or evolutionary laws to frame his theory, the problem with using any analogy for clarification is that it invites interpretations which confound comparison with identification. For Marx, the “material forces of production” do not follow any universal or inherently natural system of development, but they still tend towards “progressive” development to the degree that within each historical epoch a “higher form” of development is generally achieved.

Through the historical development of material forces of production—and it must be remembered that the human agency is a vital part of these forces—human beings construct better, more efficient ways of creating their material means of subsistence. Each generation takes the forms of production handed down to it by the previous generation and then adds to them. This development leans towards expanding the general sophistication and complexity of productive forces; in this way, Marx connects the individual to larger social conditions which allow the human will to retain its capacity to struggle against and develop these conditions. It is in this context that the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* should be read as an expression of Marx’s understanding of general historical progress:

In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production—*antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals*; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism. This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close.\(^{70}\)

The difficulty for Marx lies not so much in the idea that productive forces progress but that their corresponding social relations often lapse by failing to keep abreast of material developments. Hence masses of people become alienated from the productive forces which sustain them. Instead of being able to fulfill their needs through the production of their material necessities, production begins to degrade and dehumanize the producers in both an objective and subjective way. But this situation can be overcome by

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revolutionizing the relations of production. These relations are not natural or immutable, since they have been developed socially and historically: if they fail to provide for human needs, if they lead to suffering and degradation rather than to human satisfaction, then it is within the scope of human activity to change these conditions. The riddle of history which had so confounded philosophers before Marx thus finds its solution in the transformation of the productive relations of modern capitalist society.

Communism as a complete naturalism is humanism, and as a complete humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution to the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution.  

Marx still wants humanity to realize the promises of the enlightenment dream as put forth by politically liberal Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Rousseau. He is still engaged in an intellectual struggle to conceptualize a form of historical development that will allow for the proliferation of a true democracy which will protect and nurture human freedom. But whereas Kant saw this possibility existing within reforms to a rational political state which he saw as synonymous with a cosmopolitan civil society, Marx identifies a split between the political formations of modern states and the individual's existence within civil society. For Marx, human perfection and freedom are only abstractly idealized within the democratic constitutions of the liberal state, while real people exist within a harsh civil society which has its existence outside of this abstract political realm. The liberal state, while politically and ideologically claiming to represent
the political embodiment of human freedom, is really only a chimera which provides individuals with the illusion of freedom in an abstract political sphere, while in their actual civil existence they are more enslaved than ever. Because the liberal system appears as the result of accidental and natural immutable laws, "in imagination, individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental; in reality, of course, they are less free, because they are more subjected to the (violence) of things." Thus for Marx, it is not a matter of the political reformation of the liberal state. If human freedom is to be achieved humanity needs to overthrow the given productive relations in a revolutionary manner. This would entail the negation of capitalist productive relations, specifically private ownership of property, and the establishment of a system based upon the social appropriation and ownership of the means of production.

It is vital to note that, for Marx, human development does not end with communism. "Communism is the position as the negation of the negation, and is hence the actual phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and recovery. Communism is the necessary pattern and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development—the structure of human society." As such, he views communism as a dynamic process rather than a definitive or final product of history. Marx’s communism is merely the overcoming of the subjugation and degradation imposed upon humanity by

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72 Marx, The German Ideology, pg. 84.
capitalism. But at any point in history people exist within a balance between emancipation and subjugation, thus the process never arrives at completion but is rather a continuous flow of human struggle and social refinement. In Marx's vision, the end of capitalism will allow humanity to develop its human potential free from the unnecessary and antiquarian shackles imposed upon it by modern bourgeois relations, but the potential for regression or sublimated forms of subjugation are always a possibility. However, Marx holds out the hope that once the progressive step towards communism has been accomplished, humanity will begin to create a new image of itself and for itself in a new productive epoch which increases the freedom of human activity and expression.

Chapter two: The Death of Dreams?

The Enlightenment has often been conceptualized synonymously with modern thought and western discourse in general. But part of my goal is to point to certain ruptures in modern thinking by viewing the Enlightenment as only one diverse variant of western thought. Chapter one provides an attempt to show the diversity of Enlightenment thought and, particularly through the ideas of Marx, some of the ways it has facilitated forms of resistance against capitalist domination. In the present chapter I will examine certain thinkers who are more overtly critical of the humanistic values which often form the presuppositions of Enlightenment thought. In summary, these thinkers attempt to explicate the irrational or “dark side” of modern history.

Even in Marx’s time, international capitalism was exhibiting the early signs of its expanding potential for global domination. Today capitalism, accompanied by a dominant western ideology, has crept across the globe and become entrenched even in regions that not too long ago entertained a diversity of isolated and autonomous economic practices. Today’s ruling ideology attempts to justify this domination by upholding a particular version of the dream of enlightenment. This version often rests upon a moral foundation of universal humanism, a belief that world history moves towards social progress, and the idea that knowledge and reason lead inevitably to increased human freedom. Within this perspective, civilization is viewed as a process in which humanity is coming into its true potential by realizing ideas such as reason, justice, democracy and emancipation on a level never achieved before. Correspondingly, modern developments in the fields of politics, science and technology, ethical and moral human rights, formal juridical processes, and organization through rational planning and increased
communication are often believed to represent the progress of the human species en masse. This progress is seen as the result of a long struggle with forces of irrationality, domination, and oppression which threaten enlightened thought and retard humanity's ability to develop towards better modes of existence.

But if faith in such conditions proves unrealistic as modern history unfolds it may be that this contemporary dream of enlightenment is itself merely the illusory ideology of the ruling elite, the wishful thinking of dreamers who have no pragmatic relation to the "real" world and its actual historical tendencies. Throughout modern thought there have been many challenges to the legitimacy of Enlightenment foundations and presuppositions, some of them building upon the tradition and others more directly opposed to it. Critical responses to the ruling ideology have focused, in part, on the role that Enlightenment thought has played in facilitating conditions of oppressive servitude.

Beneath the investigations of many modern thinkers lies the idea that there is a truth to be uncovered or discovered and that it is the goal of human understanding to slowly make this truth apparent to the intellect, to create a conscious awareness of reality. Modern thought has exalted the value of critical doubt in the search for truth and in a quest to release the human consciousness from illusions. This awakening of consciousness, through the overcoming of illusion, is seen as a means towards the improvement of the human condition, towards the refinement of modern civilization so as to better reflect human needs and goals. From such a perspective knowledge is seen as having a positive value leading humanity towards increasing enlightenment and emancipation. According to this ethos every belief and value must be subjected to ruthless inspection and justification, it being no longer acceptable to hold on to "modern"
presuppositions without subjecting them to the same critique that other more “traditional” ideas and values have undergone. Foucault identifies this “attitude of modernity” as one in which “a permanent critique of our historical era” is undertaken in order to grasp the present moment in what it is.\(^1\) The ultimate result of any such critical project may be that it is not merely Christian morality that is undermined but all morality; it is not merely bourgeois goals and interpretations of history that take on illusory qualities but any and all goals and interpretations of history.

From certain “anti-enlightenment” perspectives the dream of enlightenment appears to contain the seeds for the rational negation of all values and dreams, that is, for the destruction of any theoretical orientation towards meaning, purpose, or optimism. This perspective transforms the dream of enlightenment into a nihilistic cage from which there seems no escape and in which all hopes for social improvement seem destined to end in failure and frustration, that is, in nothingness. We are left to grapple with certain modern paradoxes similar to Weber’s acknowledgment that “it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who fails to see this is, indeed, a political infant.”\(^2\) Contained in the enlightenment search for truth a certain antithesis emerges: in striving for a reasonable understanding of the world we may alternatively be led to the reasonable conclusion that beneath our own constructions there is nothing concrete or reasonable to understand. As Nietzsche puts it, "The destruction of an illusion does not produce truth but only one more piece of

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\(^1\) Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” pg. 42.
ignorance, and extension of our 'empty space,' an increase of our 'desert.'"3 Perhaps the attempt to extricate the human consciousness from its traditional illusions through a perpetual re-constitution of the present will lead increasingly towards a loss of meaning and a sense of purposelessness within the modern Weltanschauung.

Following modern theory from the dream of enlightenment to the death of the dream, one’s thought undergoes a gestalt switch from reason focused on the quality of human existence to instrumental rationality utilized to bolster organized domination. This shift requires an adjustment of focus away from the faith in humanistic freedom and historical progress towards the belief in ethical relativism and an overall irrational or accidental historical process or even historical degeneration. As a result, a question arises whether the dream of enlightenment is dead or, on the contrary, whether the dismantling of illusions provides a road towards new forms of understanding increasingly free from the presuppositions of Christianity, patriarchy, and western ethnocentrism which pervasively haunted the theoretical constructions of enlightenment thought.

Throughout the following chapter I want to examine the ideas of Freud, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche, to see how they each attempt to push the critical attitude of Enlightenment thought further than many of their modern forbears in the attempt to overcome many modern illusions. And yet, to a certain extent they also provide a program for overcoming the pessimistic conclusions that can often be the result of such an endeavor. I believe their ideas have particular resonance for emancipatory projects which often find theorists engaged in debates over the relativity of all knowledge. If one

surrenders the idea of a historical teleology or of a universal humanistic morality, then on what ground can the struggles for emancipation be justified? The challenge they provide to many doctrinal elements of the Enlightenment is also a challenge to many of the epistemological tenets of sociology and as such, they provide a means for seeing where many contemporary theoretical debates have come from as well as providing a sense of the reasoning by which certain of these issues have been, and remain to be, addressed.

Freud: A Doctor’s Diagnosis for the Modern Neurosis.

In several ways Freud sits on the fence of the Enlightenment, struggling for optimism but giving strong voice to his doubts. Freud is in many ways an heir to the Enlightenment, but his doubts present us with a critique of modern civilization to the extent that he sees modernity as an experiment that may indeed be failing. Freud sees in modernity a condition of psychological sickness and disease. On several occasions in his more sociologically oriented works (*Civilization and its Discontents*, *The Future of an Illusion*) Freud uses a form of indirect communication where he lets his detractors speak through him. Within such passages one can sense the depth of his pessimism. Frequently his expressed faith in the virtues in the process of modernization seems far less tangible and convincing than his doubt.

In examining the similarities between Rousseau’s concept of “natural man” and Freud’s ideas of pre-historical human development we see that both conceptualize a natural human creature who lives outside of society. Whereas for Rousseau, human nature is formed in isolation, for Freud it develops in what he views as the earliest and simplest form of society—the family. Both thinkers, however, view this pre-historical
condition as one in which humans exist in a state of freedom. As such they are critical of civilization for taking away this natural freedom and for in many ways enslaving human beings.

But the chief difference between the two lies precisely in this: for Rousseau the virtue of "natural man" is corrupted by civilization which puts people into bondage and perpetuates the hostility of "man against man." However, for Freud, pre-historical humans are not virtuous; they are aggressive and derive satisfaction from destroying one another. Part of Freud's pessimism can be traced to his understanding of human nature as rooted in a natural human tendency towards aggression. Freud's critique of civilization follows two lines of thought: the first is that it allows humans to subjugate and debase one another, thereby causing suffering and unrest; the second is that it represses people's true instinctual desires and thereby instills in them a sense of guilt, frustration, and anxiety in the interest of securing the perpetuation of society. Following this second line of thought, civilization is a problem for humanity because it suppresses our desires towards violence and destruction and it therefore does not allow for true human happiness and satisfaction:

In all that follows I adopt the standpoint, therefore, that the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man, and I return to my view that it constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization... Man's natural aggressive instinct, the hostility of each against all and of all against each, opposes this programme of civilization.\(^4\)

As a result of this violent and destructive human compulsion, there is a constant tension within the individual that strives towards the dissolution of civilization. Like Kant

\(^4\) Ibid. pg. 69.
before him, Freud accepts the "unsocial sociability of man" as an indispensable part of
the human constitution. Freud writes, "One has, I think, to reckon with the fact that there
are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, trends and
that in a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behavior in
human society." Unlike Kant, however, who finds virtue in the human capacity towards
aggressiveness through his concept of a teleological historical process, Freud has
dispensed with any metaphysical view of primordial historical development: "We have
been careful not to fall in with the prejudice that civilization is synonymous with
perfecting, that it is the road to perfection preordained for men." As a result, these
antisocial attitudes are as likely to lead to the dissolution of civilization as they are to
further its development: "In consequence of this primary mutual hostility of human
beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration. The interest of
work in common would not hold it together; instinctual passions are stronger than
reasonable interests." As a consequence, there are no guarantees that humanity is
destined to realize any rational cosmopolitan society in the Kantian sense, and Freud
would argue that we have to accept that such a goal may turn out to be an impossibility:

The urge for freedom, therefore, is directed against particular forms and demands
of civilization or against civilization altogether... a good part of the struggles of
mankind centre around the single task of finding an expedient accommodation—
one, that is, that will bring happiness—between this claim of the individual and
the cultural claims of the group; and one of the problems that touches the fate of
humanity is whether such an accommodation can be reached by means of some
particular form of civilization or whether this conflict is irreconcilable.

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6 Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, pg. 43.
7 Ibid. pg. 59.
8 Ibid. pg. 43.
According to Freud, even in a society that managed to eliminate economic scarcity for the majority, cultural institutions would still be necessary to constrain the impulses that tend towards the dissolution of society in order to ensure security and social harmony:

Hence, therefore, the use of methods to incite people into identifications and aim inhibited relationships of love, hence the restriction upon sexual life, and hence too the ideal’s commandment to love one’s neighbour as oneself—a commandment which is really justified by the fact that nothing else runs counter to the original nature of man. In spite of every effort, these endeavors of civilization have not so far achieved very much.9

In The Future of an Illusion Freud sets out to refute all religious systems, to show them to be an illusion, a psychological attempt at wish fulfillment. He reaches the conclusion that religious ideas, “which are given out as teachings, are not precipitates of experience or end-results of thinking: they are illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest and most urgent wishes of mankind.”10 But Freud does not stop here; he goes on to follow this insight to its logical consequences; it is in this sense that Freud most strongly promotes critical thought and echoes the “death of the dream:”

Having recognized religious doctrines as illusions, we are at once faced by a further question: may not other cultural assets of which we hold a high opinion and by which we let our lives be ruled be of a similar nature? Must not the assumptions that determine our political regulations be called illusions as well? And is it not the case that in our civilization the relations between the sexes are disturbed by an erotic illusion or a number of such illusions? And once our suspicion has been aroused, we shall not shrink from asking too whether our conviction that we can learn something about external reality through the use of observation and reasoning in scientific work—whether this conviction has any better foundation. Nothing ought to keep us from directing our observation to our

9 Ibid. pg. 59.
10 Freud, The Future of an Illusion, pg. 47.
own selves or from applying our thought to criticism itself. In this field a number of investigations open out before us, whose results could not but be decisive for the construction of a 'Weltanschauung'.

Through the voice of his fictional protagonist Freud raises several common arguments against his position: “if men are taught that there is no almighty and all-just God, no divine world order and no future life, they will feel exempt from all obligation to obey the precepts of civilization. Everyone will, without inhibition or fear, follow his asocial, egoistic instincts and seek to exercise his power; chaos, which we have banished through many thousands of years of the work of civilization, will come again.” The issue is not so much that there is no almighty God, but more disturbingly that there is no ultimate justification for any values, nor for any purpose or meaning within human existence. Critical thought may eventually lead to the speculation that all values and ideas, even those which ground the pursuit of knowledge, a faith in science, or the struggle for emancipation, may in fact be illusions. Following these ideas one might draw the conclusion that the concepts of reason and freedom—essentially the essence of Enlightenment optimism—are groundless illusions.

In Civilization and its Discontents, Freud rejects any universal legitimacy for values which claim to be rooted in an innate human capacity to recognize right from wrong:

We may reject the existence of an original, as it were natural, capacity to distinguish good from bad. What is bad is often not at all what is injurious or dangerous to the ego; on the contrary, it may be something which is desirable and

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11 Ibid. pg. 55.
12 Ibid. pg. 56.
enjoyable to the ego. Here, therefore, there is an extraneous influence at work, and it is this that decides what is to be called good or bad.\textsuperscript{13}

Freud argues that a rational defense of ethics is to some extent based upon an illusion. But he sees this illusion as itself an attempt to devise a rational ethical model—one that is not permanent but that is responsive to critical investigation as society changes and develops. There is a valuable insight in Freud’s contention that the regulations and precepts of civilization are of purely human origin and that this awareness will allow them to lose their rigidity and resistance to change. In other words, the values and laws which have previously been seen as given through divine proclamation are now, under the modern ethos, seen as negotiated and temporary constructs which can be acted upon and changed according to human will. Freud holds out the hope that through knowledge and rational communication we can come to an understanding of an ethics that serves human interests and we can attempt to avoid those which subjugate people and unnecessarily repress human desires. To this effect he sees religion as a part of the human neurosis impeding further advancement towards enlightened thought:

But what of other men, who have been sensibly brought up? Perhaps those who do not suffer from the neurosis will need no intoxication to deaden it. They will, it is true, find themselves in a difficult situation. They will have to admit to themselves the full extent of their helplessness and their insignificance in the machinery of the universe; they can no longer be the centre of creation, no longer the object of tender care on the part of a beneficent Providence. They will be in the same position as a child who has left the parental house where he was so warm and comfortable. But surely infantilism is destined to be surmounted. Men cannot remain children for ever; they must in the end go out into ‘hostile life.’ We may call this ‘education to reality.’\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Freud, \textit{Civilization and its Discontents}, pg. 71.

\textsuperscript{14} Freud, \textit{The Future of an Illusion}, pg. 81.
Here Freud echoes similar sentiments to Kant’s assertion that “enlightenment” involves humanities struggle to overcome its “self-incurred immaturity.” While he has doubts, Freud also maintains faith in the potential of reason to lead towards better modes of existence. The maturation of humanity is frequently a prevalent theme within conceptualizations of modernity. Enlightenment thinkers often propose that the use of science and reason, in helping us to understand reality, are making the species progressively wiser. Freud accepts such ideas but maintains a pessimistic awareness of what he calls “the great necessities of Fate.” But it is interesting to note the ironic schism within Freud’s thought, how his pessimism at times leads him to overly optimistic conclusions:

You are afraid that they will not stand up to the hard test? Well let us at least hope they will… and, as for the great necessities of Fate, against which there is no help, they will learn to endure them with resignation… by withdrawing their expectations from the other world and concentrating all their liberated energies into their life on earth, they will probably succeed in achieving a state of things in which life will become tolerable for everyone and civilization no longer oppressive to anyone.¹⁵

Freud presents us with his own struggle between his desire to negate modern illusions through critical thought and at the same time to maintain some sense of meaning through the avoidance of nihilism. But along this path towards the deconstruction of illusions reason can become irrationality, freedom as a value can be recognized as an irony of opposites, and “enlightenment” can lead one to an awareness that perhaps a better world is more untenable than was previously thought. Enlightenment becomes established knowledge, knowledge of our servitude, knowledge of the vicissitudes of
historical development, and an awareness that there is no guiding force leading humanity inevitably towards better modes of existence.

Dostoevsky’s Prophecy: The Crystal Nightmare Infecting the Modern Dream.

While Freud attempts to uphold many of the tenets of Enlightenment thought, several decades earlier a morose Dostoevsky was willing to abandon them in an attempt to explicate a more pessimistic sense of the irrational within modernity. As a novelist, Dostoevsky is not attempting to outline a unified or coherent system of social or philosophical thought; rather he lets certain ambiguities stand for themselves. However, speaking through many of his fictional characters he still provides us with a sociological sketch of modern development. This sketch is far less optimistic than that of many modern observers and it is through its skepticism that Dostoevsky challenges certain cornerstones of Enlightenment thought such as the ideas of human perfectibility, emancipation, and social progress. Dostoevsky’s literary imagery explicates the antithesis of the dream of enlightenment by articulating problems inherent in the modern capacity for reason and freedom in a manner which still has resonance today.

One of the major themes found throughout Dostoevsky’s work is that of the lonely isolated individual cut off from all traditional culture and community. His view of the modern world gives us the impression that modern development presents us with a meaningless monolithic structure which the individual must confront by struggling against tremendous odds for acknowledgment, identity, and dignity. Gigantic social forces such as urbanization and mechanization threaten to sweep away the individual’s

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15 Ibid. pg. 82.
sense of autonomy and importance and to destroy any sense of purpose or meaning within modern life spheres.

In “The Grand Inquisitor” episode of The Brothers Karamazov, Dostoevsky’s inquisitor, in questioning Christ asks, “In place of the rigid ancient law, man was hereafter to decide for himself with a free heart what is good and what is evil, having only Your image before him as his guide. But did You not think he would at last dispute and reject even Your image and Your truth, if he were oppressed with the fearful burden of free choice?”\(^{16}\) Dostoevsky grapples with the idea that, for humanity, a knowledge of good and evil will lead to the understanding that their are no answers to many “human” questions, and to the anxiety caused by the realization that, “beyond the grave they will find nothing but death.”\(^{17}\) Hence, many people will tend to reject knowledge and reason in favor of something like Christianity because, as his inquisitor tells us, “we [the church] will have an answer for everything. And they will be glad to believe our answer, for it will save them from the great anxiety and terrible agony they now endure supplying a free, individual answer.”\(^{18}\) Modern rational thought can lead to “great anxiety and terrible agony” in that it increasingly destroys communal faith in general rules so that nothing is recognized as sacred and everything becomes permissible. Such is the nihilistic condition within which Dostoevsky’s “anti-heroes” are situated.

In his Notes from Underground Dostoevsky makes perhaps his clearest attempt to outline his theoretical outlook through a fictitious author. This work functions on many

\(^{17}\) Ibid. pg. 135.
\(^{18}\) Ibid. pg. 135.
complex layers and although Dostoevsky provides us with a disclaimer at its beginning which is intended to distance himself from his “author” it is clear that on a certain level his voice retains a heavy presence throughout the story, often making it difficult to distinguish Dostoevsky’s views from those of his narrator.  

As an individual within modern society, the character of the “underground man” is incisively revealing. With very modern sociological sensibilities, Dostoevsky peers deeply into the nature of the human psyche, often resonating contemporary insights. He sees the historically situated character of what is often considered “human nature.” One of the major thematic overtones permeating his work conveys the idea that human beings are adaptable and malleable creatures. He promotes the notion that human subjectivity can change as surroundings and historical circumstances are altered: “People like the author of these notes may, and indeed must, exist in our society, if we think of the circumstances under which that society has been formed. It has been my wish to show the public a character of the recent past more clearly than is usually shown. He belongs to the generation that is now rounding out its days. In the excerpt entitled ‘The Mousehole,’ this man introduces himself and presents his views, trying to explain why he has appeared, and could not help but appear, in our midst.”

While Dostoevsky claims that this type of character is “rounding out its days,” it is not at all clear how he sees new circumstances as directing people’s subjective development. While he does hold forth the hope that some form of religious faith,

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developed through suffering, can redeem the individual, even in the face of modern development his faith never seems quite as convincing, nor as relevant from a contemporary perspective, as do his concerns about the circumstances of the underground man’s formation.

In a sense the underground man could be seen to represent larger modern processes than those specific to nineteenth century Russia, processes that have accelerated since the time of the narrator’s construction. While he expresses a type of character specific to nineteenth century Petersburg, from a wider view, the underground man is also a symbol of what Dostoevsky views as the degeneracy latent in the modern world as a whole. Through his narrator Dostoevsky challenges what he views as the oversimplified ideas of more optimistic Enlightenment thinkers by presenting us with a much darker and more irrational side to human behavior and modern historical development:

Let me go on record and declare that all these lovely systems, all these theories that explain to man what is to his true advantage so that, to achieve it, he will forthwith become good and noble—all these are, in my opinion, nothing but sterile exercises in logic. Yes, that’s all there is to it. For instance, propounding the theory of human regeneration through the pursuit of self-interest is, in my opinion, almost like... saying ...that man mellows under the influence of civilization and becomes less bloodthirsty and less prone to war. He appears to be following logical reasoning in arriving at that conclusion. But men love abstract reasoning and neat systematization so much that they think nothing of distorting the truth, closing their eyes and ears to contrary evidence to preserve their logical constructions... You have only to look around you to see the blood being spilled, and in the most playful way, just as if it were champagne... and what is it in us that is mellowed by civilization? ... through this development, man will yet learn how to enjoy bloodshed. Why, it has already happened. Have you noticed, for instance, that the most refined, bloodthirsty tyrants, compared to whom the Attilas

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and Stenka Razins are mere choirboys, are often exquisitely civilized?...Civilization has made man, if not always more bloodthirsty, at least more viciously, more horribly bloodthirsty.\(^{22}\)

In several aspects of this passage Dostoevsky expresses an attempt to overcome an ethnocentric European bias in which all that is western is seen as civilized and progressive. His underground man sees that western civilization, for all its talk of civility and peace, is still brutally violent—as much as, if not more so than other so called “savage” or “barbarous” peoples. When we reflect upon the genocidal horrors of the modern twentieth century it is no wonder that some have called Dostoevsky a prophet. While many, more optimistic, nineteenth century observers predicted that in the future a new order of peace and prosperity would be spurred on by reason and technological advance, the underground man seems to display an uncanny prescience for the modern blood baths that were yet to come in the name of “civilization.” Consider the following passage which expresses what is typical of this ethos:

Today, though we consider bloodshed terrible, we still practice it—and on a much larger scale than ever before. It was said that Cleopatra... enjoyed sticking golden pins into the breasts of her slaves, delighting in their screams and writhings. You may object that this happened in relatively barbarous times; or you may say that even now we live in barbarous times (also relatively), that pins are still stuck into people, that even today, although man has learned to be more discerning than in ancient times, he has yet to learn how to follow his reason.\(^{23}\)

But essentially, Dostoevsky doubts whether it is possible for humanity to follow its reason. He ponders whether the attempt is merely once again the proliferation of an illusion. Referring to Enlightenment dreams of a social utopia his protagonist reacts scornfully. Seeing in them an untenable idealistic illusion he remains critical of the entire

\(^{22}\) Dostoevsky, pg. 107.
Enlightenment program with its struggle towards the “man” of reason in pursuit of “the
good and the beautiful.” Alternatively people are often capricious, violent, and irrational
and he believes no amount of enlightenment is going to ameliorate these conditions. In
this vein he writes,

But these are just golden dreams. Who was it that first said that man does nasty
things only because he doesn’t know where his real interests lie, that if he were
enlightened about his true interests, he would immediately stop acting like a pig
and become kind and noble? Being enlightened, the argument goes on, and seeing
where his real advantage lay, he would realize that it was in acting virtuously.
And, since it is well established that a man will not act deliberately against his
own interests, it follows that he would have no choice but to become good. Oh,
the innocence of it![24]

In the view of the underground man, people tend not to act virtuously in a rational
manner towards goals which will fulfill their own “self interests.” It is important to note
that here Dostoevsky is identifying “self-interest” with larger common social goals in a
manner similar to Rousseau’s social contract. In other words, what is good for the
community is in the individual’s own self or real interest. What most people commonly
refer to as “self-interest” in terms of selfish or personal desires at the expense of the needs
of the larger community, he refers to as irrational and emotional. But the underground
man realizes that “self-interest” in the Rouseauian sense of communally rational conduct
for the greater good is not always advantageous, rational, or desired from the perspective
of the individual: “if you’ll allow me to speak quite openly, what makes you so sure that
abstention from acting contrary to one’s interests, as determined by reason and arithmetic,

23 Ibid. pg. 107,108.
24 Ibid. pg. 105.
is always to one’s advantage and that this applies to mankind as a whole?” On the contrary, sometimes what is considered to be in one’s own interests from a social perspective may be at odds with the interests and desires, be they rational or irrational, of the individual. Therefore any attempt to set up strictly logical systems of rational social conduct is doomed to failure because individuals will continuously see that frequently their personal interests involve the pursuit of more selfish and capricious desires and they will pursue such goals even at the expense of the “social good.”

Dostoevsky’s underground man identifies modern reason with the rational progress of science and its optimistic struggle towards uncovering universally applicable laws for all natural and social events. Faith in the idea that history follows a rational plan over and above the conduct of its component individuals and the belief that this process is accessible to scientific investigation can be seen throughout many aspects of Enlightenment thought. Such ideas were clearly developed by Kant in his treatise “Idea For a Universal History With a Cosmopolitan Purpose.” And even today we can see the tendency of science to instill in many the sense that it can uncover the motivations behind all human conduct. Dostoevsky wants to stress the point that even though some adhere to the contrary, human behavior is on a fundamental level not conducive to prediction based on empirical quantification. He believes that such optimism is a phantasm that is not practically realizable. Furthermore, even if empirical laws can be found human beings will rebel against them if for no other reason than to assert their own freedom. And of course this will directly affect the historical process, which is essentially made up of the actions of countless individuals, for if the individual does not act reasonably, then

25 Ibid. pg. 116.
according to the narrator how can history be expected to follow any reasonable discernible pattern? "You can say anything about world history—anything and everything that the most morbid imagination can think up. Except one thing, that is. It cannot be said that world history is reasonable. The word sticks in one's throat."\(^\text{26}\) Such an idea posits the exact opposite of the type of metaphysical historical process envisioned by Kant in which history follows its own rational process irrespective of the irrational actions of individuals. For the underground man, when it comes to uncovering the historical causes of human development, all that remains for us is to accept that in many instances we cannot know them, or that if there are causes they are often irrational ones which have no logical explanation.

Dostoevsky's narrator goes further with his claim that humans are irrational in arguing that even the realization of our desires is often not enough to satisfy the human psyche. In his words, modern "man" "loves the achieving, but does not particularly enjoy what he achieves."\(^\text{27}\) Human beings do not necessarily desire to be satisfied, they actually desire the quest for satisfaction, or even the agony which is sometimes a component of satisfaction: "Maybe he likes suffering just as much. Maybe suffering is just as much to his advantage as well-being."\(^\text{28}\) He is not advocating suffering or well-being as the ideal state of things; he is merely pointing out that one is a necessary component of the other. Humans exist within a continuous play of struggle, achievement, dissatisfaction with achievement, and an eventual self destructive orientation towards what they have achieved. Under such conditions it becomes difficult to see how any improvement of

\(^{26}\) Ibid. pg. 114.
\(^{27}\) Ibid. pg. 117.
social conditions could be achieved. In what direction would the search for a social system which was geared towards human satisfaction move? Maybe people merely want to create for the sake of creation, “building roads which go nowhere.”Perhaps all the attempts of the modern world to construct better political systems, to create more material goods, to have a world that functions more efficiently, perhaps these are after all merely effects, merely empty guises within which the futility of modern existence pours itself. Underneath all the glitter it could be that there lurks an immense dissatisfaction, one that can never be met by the methods of modernization, methods which provide us with empty forms of freedom existing within all-enveloping forms of mechanical control.

Because Dostoevsky sees constant and eternal doubt as an inextricable part of the human condition, no matter what social formations or cultural ideas history unfolds before us, doubt—and with it a certain modicum of suffering, chaos, and destruction—will always be with us. He believes that it is through the process of doubt that humanity develops, that in the end people realize that it is human beings themselves who determine what is proper conduct, what is right and wrong. The result of such a process may be that modern existence may become increasingly intolerable as a way of life that is either rewarding or sustainable. There are at root no metaphysical guarantees that any historical development, even one guided by science, will lead to a way of life satisfactory or secure enough for the comfort or even the perpetuation of the human species. Against the idea that modern development is leading towards the development of a social utopia, Dostoevsky writes:

28 Ibid. pg. 117.
29 Ibid. pg. 116.
I know, for instance, that suffering is inadmissible in light stage plays. In the utopian crystal palace, it’d be inconceivable, for suffering means doubt and denial, and what kind of crystal palace would that be, if people had doubts about it? Nevertheless, I’m certain that man will never give up true suffering, that is, chaos and destruction.  

The motif of the crystal palace is not to be overlooked. A real architectural structure built for an international exhibition in London in 1851, it represented for many critics the ultimate possibilities attainable through modern development. But in the eyes of Dostoevsky it was a monstrosity, an expression of the horrific qualities latent within modernity. In Dostoevsky’s view, social progress is not inevitable and much of what has been touted as valuable and good in modern development he views as dehumanizing and degenerative. The symbol of the crystal palace serves a twofold meaning. On one level it represents a very real concrete achievement of architectural engineering. As a real structure it was meant to represent the progression of modern development towards ever greater technological achievements. On a figurative level it is a symbol of western modernity’s overly optimistic pride and vanity presumably representing all that was beautiful and sublime in the modern historical journey from barbarism to civilization. While on the surface it represents grand splendor and exquisiteness, it disguises the prison like conditions that any of its inhabitants in practical reality would have to face: “it is a symbol of western rationalism, materialism, and the mechanical view of the world.”

The modern world offers humanity incredible and astounding achievements while at the same time it creates the conditions for more determined forms of servitude, organized

30 Ibid. pg. 118.
31 Berman, pg. 220.
domination, and global destruction than ever dreamt of before. As each decade passes things that would have been unbelievable only decades earlier become modern realities. And while this process was evident in Dostoevsky’s time it is a process that has only accelerated since and continues today.

In the historical development of mass urban societies, which are the ever prevalent setting for the lives of the modern masses, people were uprooted and thrown together for the sake of economic efficiency and political control. Under such conditions the average person becomes an almost insignificant part of a massive rational economic and bureaucratic machine. When people come together in such an artificial manner without traditional community or common bonds there is often a clash of different world-views. This theme is echoed in Raskolnikov’s dream quoted at the outset of my thesis. Increasingly the ethos of rationality which guides modern development, as well as conditions of alienation, lead individuals to rationalize arguments for what are essentially non-rational codes of ethics and modes of behavior. As well, the increasing obliteration of communal identity within the urban world causes individuals to form their own distinctive modern world-views. Dostoevsky’s modern individuals ironically struggle against what they cannot do without, that is, the acceptance of their fellow human beings within a social structure they themselves cannot accept. This is the sense in which “to be fully modern is to be anti-modern.” Cosmopolitan existence means that experiences become broader, more diverse, with fewer shared meaningful experiences becoming the norm. Formed in urban isolation, world-views begin to grow further apart becoming ever more incommensurable. The unknown and terrible plague which desolated Raskolnikov’s
visionary world could be seen to represent several aspects of the mechanization and rationalization inherent in modern development. The plague, you will remember, has intellect and will. In Raskolnikov’s modern world the ruling elite have intellect and will, science and technology have the appearance of intellect and will, and the mechanisms of capitalism itself, being based upon rational conduct in economic matters, behave in a manner seemingly having intellect and will. All of this culminates in a mass urban environment in which the individual will is crushed and negated. People become more isolated than ever before, struggling for their freedom as a faceless part of a mechanistic collective. Whereas serfs may have had it bad, in terms of poverty and hardship, at least they had tradition and each other. The modern urban dweller must face his growing alienation alone—in a kind of psychological isolation. Hence a futile struggle arises driving people together in a desperate effort to find meaning, purpose, and identity only to splinter them apart again in frustration as they agonize over their differences which they cannot surmount. And yet this “plague” of modernity moves on unconcerned about the struggles of its individual parts. People are just cogs in a rationalized machine which is destroying their humanity in the name of capitalism and progress. The inhumanity of the entire structure is symbolic of destruction and death. In the end the effects such a situation will have on historical and social development can only be seen as grim.

For Dosteovsky, the dreams and values of the Enlightenment ethos remain unduly optimistic. They may, in fact, be asking too much of humanity. When human beings attain “enlightened” consciousness, when they acknowledge the realities and consequences of reason and freedom of choice, they may fail to find significance or

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meaning within the scope of their existence. In this sense, humanity exists between the tensions of a struggle for "truth" and escape from illusions while at the same time it embraces illusory dreams in new and often disguised forms. Hence the historical movement from traditional Christianity towards a secular humanistic morality rests upon a tenuous enlightenment appeal to reason and freedom. In the end Dostoevsky presents us with a historical projection of the dream of enlightenment in which people reject critical self-reflection because of its nihilistic consequences, and instead opt for some form of consolatory illusion. For Dostoevsky, we have to recover our dreams in order to retain some sense of purpose or meaning for our suffering and our very existence. In the words of his inquisitor, "Did You forget that man prefers peace, and even death, to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive for man than his freedom of conscience, but at the same time nothing is a greater torture."^{34}

Nietzsche: The Dream of Freedom at the End of Nothingness.

Comparisons have often been made between the ideas of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. While both thinkers provide theories in which a pessimistic sense of nihilism permeates their discourse it is Nietzsche who grapples with nihilism more directly. Whereas Dostoevsky, in the face of modern nihilism, laments our inability to return to some form of traditionalism, Nietzsche views this lament as a self-deception that must eventually be superseded. However, an embrace of nihilism it is not Nietzsche's final word. He goes on to posit nihilism as a condition that must be accepted if we are to move beyond it: "For why has the advent of nihilism become necessary? Because the values we

^{34} Dostoevsky, pg. 129.
have had hitherto thus draw their final consequences; because nihilism represents the ultimate logical conclusion of our great values and ideals—because we must experience nihilism before we can find out what value these 'values' really had.”

Nietzsche’s ideas are valuable from a sociological perspective because they contain a critique of certain core enlightenment values, values which have provided many of the presuppositions, themes, and structures which have permeated traditional sociological thought. Like Dostoevsky before him, Nietzsche sees in modern development a certain degeneracy. Whereas traditional Enlightenment thought tends to see modernity as a process of progressive social development nurturing emancipation through reason and rationalization, Nietzsche sees the modern world as one which increasingly embraces values which are detrimental to humanity’s “vital instincts.” Rather than social progress he sees the modern world offering us mediocrity, regimentation, and the rule of the herd with its “slave mentality.”

Within certain of its thematic structures the dream of enlightenment often bestows a positive value upon knowledge. Many modern thinkers in the tradition of the Enlightenment tend to believe that the pursuit of knowledge will lead to the discovery of “the good” inherent within history and humanity, and by extension these discoveries will lead to social progress. But for Nietzsche the representation of reality is much more complex than this. He sees the very concept of knowledge as problematic because for him conscious thought does not in itself provide any direct link to reality let alone guide us towards what is objectively good or evil. For Nietzsche, the Enlightenment orientation towards knowledge takes formal theoretical concepts and treats them as if they are the

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35 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pg.4.
ultimate revelation of reality while practical sense experience is devalued. Accordingly, this represents not a desire for truth but a need for illusions:

We are in fact fundamentally inclined to maintain that the falsest judgments (to which belong the synthetic a priori judgments) are the most indispensable to us, that man cannot live without accepting the logical fictions as valid, without measuring reality against the purely invented world of the absolute, the immutable, without constantly falsifying the world by means of numeration. That getting along without false judgments would amount to getting along without life, negating life.

For Nietzsche reason and freedom are concepts which are more ambiguous and problematic than Enlightenment thinkers had heretofore imagined. He is critical of Enlightenment thought and engages its rationale in order to extend what he sees as its latent nihilism in an attempt to move beyond it.

Enlightenment thought has traditionally held that there is a direct link between the development of reason and the realization of human emancipation. But Nietzsche realizes that many aspects of this search for emancipation are grounded in apparently transhistorical metaphysical concepts. For Nietzsche, freedom is merely a word which has been misused throughout modernity in order to legitimate conditions of servility, to facilitate the birth of a social reality in which human beings exist under conditions of strict domination. While enlightenment inspired doctrines have provided a theoretical rationale which functions to make freedom a formal legal reality, in actuality real substantial freedom does not exist in any practical form. In fact the formal concept of freedom is used to disguise conditions of subjugation and to subdue the thought of those

who would like to truly transcend modern cultural repression. But ironically, the general ethos of Enlightenment thought also involves a critical attempt to uncover the illusory qualities of such transhistorical evaluation by showing us that all of our concepts, ideas, and values are historically conditioned. It is through this critical self-reflective process that Nietzsche believes an eventual awareness of the nihilism permeating Western knowledge is bound to occur.

With the advent of the Western concept of reason beginning in Hellenistic times then developing through Christianity towards modern Enlightenment thought, Nietzsche asserts, an implicit nihilistic connection with an other-world has been maintained. Classical philosophy created a metaphysical world of reason, an ontological realm of the thing-in-itself in which reality was supposed to exist, our perceptions and experiences being relegated to mere appearance. This classical epistemology posited a real world beyond this world knowable only through a formal theoretical world of concepts and ideas. In Nietzsche’s view, the modern concept of reason has led historically to the theoretical split between mind/body, subject/object, and theory/practice. But essentially, for Nietzsche, behind all these theoretically constructed systems of knowledge, which give people comfort and seem to make sense out of existence, there lurks an immense cultural lie—a will to deception.

The historical development of philosophical knowledge has also been intertwined with the development of Christian theology. In Nietzsche’s view, Christianity also creates otherworldly fictions such as the concept of life after death and the schism between the

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body and soul—the former being a sinful and wicked human shell whose desires are to be rejected, the latter the essence of true “spiritual” existence. Within such fictions this world is devalued in favor of an other-world which is said to be superior to earthly existence and towards which our life goals should be directed. But according to Nietzsche, since these other worlds do not exist, in actuality the Christian way of life is directed towards non-existence—a will towards nothing. Thus there is an implicit nihilism inherent in orientations towards other-worlds which western religion and philosophy have manifested in the forms of God and reason respectively.

Nietzsche believes that throughout the preponderance of Enlightenment thought a rejection of the ultimate revelation, that modern values such as reason and freedom are founded upon nihilism, is rejected. For Nietzsche, the irony of modern values is that nihilism exists behind them and must eventually be acknowledged. Deriding those who do not accept such a view by sarcastically reproaching those who do, Nietzsche disdainfully cautions,

Who dreams of it is a fool or worse; the things of highest value must have some other, indigenous origin; they cannot be derived from this ephemeral, seductive, deceptive, inferior world, this labyrinth of delusion and greed! Their basis must lie in the womb of being, in the Eternal, in the hidden God, in the ‘Thing in Itself’—here and nowhere else!—this type of valuation stands back of all their logical methods; this is the ‘faith’ that enables them to struggle for what they call ‘knowing’—a something which at last they solemnly christen ‘truth.’ The basic faith of all metaphysicians is faith in the antithetical nature of values. It has never occurred to the most cautious of them, even though they had taken the vow to ‘doubt everything,’ to pause in doubt at the very threshold where doubt would have been most necessary.40

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39 Antonio, pg. 8.
40 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pg. 2.
Nietzsche attempts to take critical doubt to what he views as its ultimate and necessary extreme. In "Book one: European Nihilism" of The Will Power he spells out what he sees as the three paths through which the self-critical ethos of enlightenment leads us inevitably by its own reasoning towards nihilism. He categorizes them under the concepts of "aim," "unity," and "being."41

The first path towards nihilism is that of "aim." It occurs, "when we have sought a meaning in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged."42 This leads to the realization that history does not follow any goal. It involves an awareness, through self-reflective critique, that existence has no external purpose or meaning. Thus, the search for such a purpose or meaning is an untenable illusion:

This meaning could have been: the 'fulfillment' of some highest ethical canon in all events, the moral world order; or the growth of love and harmony in the intercourse of beings; or the gradual approximation of a state of universal happiness; or even the development towards a state of universal annihilation—any goal at least constitutes some meaning. What all these notions have in common is that something is to be achieved through the process—and now one realizes that becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing.43

The second of Nietzsche's paths towards nihilism he calls "unity." This refers to the modern position with regards to a search for some sort of universal whole. It represents the desire to discover the process of the entirety of events where everything is contingent upon everything else, where all events have causes, and then to locate the position of humanity, society, and the individual within this unified whole. This concept gives individual existence value and meaning within a larger process of which the

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41 Nishitani, The Self-overcoming of Nihilism, pg. 73.
42 Nietzsche, The Will to Power, pg. 12.
43 Ibid. pg. 12.
individual is a contingent part. Nietzsche explains, “this faith suffices to give man a deep feeling of standing in the context of, and being dependent on, some whole that is infinitely superior to him, and he sees himself as a mode of the deity—‘the well-being of the universal demands the devotion of the individual’—but behold, there is no such universal!”

Nietzsche’s third path to nihilism he calls “being,” and he refers to it as “the last escape.” As a result of the realization that human development follows no goal and that the universe does not offer them a place within a unified whole, a person’s only remaining defense is “to pass sentence on this whole world of becoming as a deception and to invent a world beyond it, a true world.” But Nietzsche views this attempt at escape as an atavistic remnant of the combined heritage of platonic metaphysical philosophy with Christian morality and its belief in an ideal afterlife. If people are to overcome illusions and become conscious of reality in a critical and historical manner, then, says Nietzsche, even this last escape must eventually become antiquated. Nietzsche believes that modern thought will overcome such antediluvian world-views so that those possessed of a truly modern outlook will see the real world clearly for what it is, i.e. as valueless.

For Nietzsche, nihilism has become the next necessary stage of history. What the modern world is coming to terms with is the acceptance of the reality that there is no other-world; that human existence is based upon nothingness and has no purpose or

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44 Ibid. pg. 12.
46 Ibid. pg. 13.
47 Nishitani, The Self-overcoming of Nihilism, pg. 35.
meaning beyond those created through human will. In this sense nihilism becomes overt. This nihilism represents the root cause of the anxiety of the modern age. Religious and metaphysical concepts gave people comfort but they were at base dishonest and geared human activity towards nothingness. Now modern thought has reached a stage in which one must reject everything that was previously revered because its truth rests upon the foundation of an abyss. As a result, what comes to be seen as true no longer holds any value and likewise what has value is no longer seen as true. From such a perspective, says Nietzsche, humanity can now begin to reevaluate all values from a position of true freedom: freedom from the domination of ideas that have no ultimate merit and hide their legitimacy behind the false shadows of an other-world, be it the authority of religion, philosophy, or even modern science.

The Nietzschean Zeitgeist, in proposing that the advent of true nihilism is upon the modern world, maintains that it is only through embracing nihilism, immersing oneself in it, that it can be overcome. According to Nietzsche, any dream of enlightenment that does not embrace nihilism ensures that the modern world remains steeped in illusions and provides an impediment to the next step forward. If people maintain a commitment to such atavistic ideas then they perpetuate the degeneracy and futility of modern existence. Such a commitment facilitates the orientation of human activity towards goals which have as their ultimate end an immense nothingness and it disguises this fact behind all manner of formal theoretical concepts such as reason and emancipation. A practical example of this can be seen within the discipline of sociology in the work of Max Weber. In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Weber traces the development of an ascetic religious idea oriented towards the attainment of
salvation in an other-worldly spiritual realm—the kingdom of heaven. Rational conduct and a strong work ethic involve the rejection of life for its own sake in favor of pursuing material wealth as a sign of God’s grace. People who act according to this ethic do not work in order to bring pleasure of comfort to their lives; they work in order to convince themselves that they are chosen to enter the kingdom of God, wealth being a sure sign of this salvation. Even when the religious trappings of this rationale are thrown aside, the process continues promoting rational conduct and material gain for their own sake as values which have no orientation towards earthly existence or quality of life. This ascetic negation of life is indeed a will to power but it is an irrational will that negates life. In seeming anticipation of Weber’s research Nietzsche writes,

> We can no longer conceal from ourselves what exactly it is that this whole process of willing, inspired by the ascetic idea, signifies—this hatred of humanity, of animality, of inert matter; this loathing of the senses, of reason even; this fear of beauty and happiness; this longing to escape from illusion, change, becoming, death, and from longing itself, it signifies, let us have the courage to face it, a will to nothingness, a revulsion from life, a rebellion against the principle conditions of living. And yet in spite of everything, it is and remains a will.⁴⁸

This life negating will, being geared ultimately towards nothing, becomes a form of irrational nihilism lurking behind the so-called rationality of modern economic and cultural activity. From Nietzsche’s perspective we have to see and accept the nihilism behind this whole modern endeavor and try to reorient existence towards life affirmation and away from its negation.

Perhaps the most difficult and misunderstood aspects of Nietzsche’s critique of modernity involve his rejection of Enlightenment concepts such as democracy, equality,

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and humanistic values. Nietzsche sees Christian morality with its emphasis on pity and weakness as the nihilistic foundation for these attempts at social improvement. With the historical development of Protestantism coinciding with a redirection of philosophy towards secular reason, Enlightenment thought led to the concepts of reason, freedom, and progress being utilized towards the ideal construction of a social utopia—in Nietzsche's view, a secular heaven here on earth. Nietzsche believes that this whole endeavor still posits a fictitious other-world as the goal of human struggle. Again this entire apparatus disguises an innate nihilistic orientation. Being geared towards the illusory world of a utopian future it is actually directing life activity towards nothingness and as such represents a negation of actual life. It recreates the same slave morality of Christianity only using secular rationalizations while all the while undermining opportunities to realize a real human centered existence and freedom.

Along with this critique of Enlightenment values, Nietzsche views the vices of humanity, the tendency of people to harm one another and to be ruthless and "evil," as a fundamental part of what it is to be human. He is critical of "virtuous" enlightenment thinking which strives to uncover a better world and to alleviate human suffering:

What they would like to strive for with all their power is the universal green pasture—happiness of the herd: security, lack of danger, comfort and alleviation of life for everyone. Their most frequently repeated songs and doctrines are 'equal rights' and 'compassion for all that suffers.' Suffering is taken by them to be something that must be abolished.49

As a result of such thinking Nietzsche decries modern Enlightenment thought which privileges the needs of the poor and suffering. He considers the struggle for

49 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pg. 50.
democracy and equality as misguided and illusory, based as they are upon the resentment of the masses who want to take vengeance upon the elite. From Nietzsche's point of view, rather than being detrimental to human development, "hardness, violence, slavery, peril in the street and in the heart, concealment, Stoicism, temptation, and deviltry of every sort, everything evil, frightful, tyrannical, brutal, and snake-like in man, serves as well for the advancement of the species 'man' as their opposite."50 In a manner reminiscent of Dostoevsky, Nietzsche views suffering as an indispensable element of being, and argues that in truth, life could not exist without suffering, that furthermore, human beings derive pleasure not only out of their own suffering but especially out of the suffering of others. In examining the historical formation of law, he asks: "in what sense could pain constitute repayment of debt? In the sense that to make someone suffer was a supreme pleasure."51 [...] "To behold suffering gives pleasure, but to cause another to suffer affords an even greater pleasure. This severe statement expresses an old, powerful, human, all to human sentiment... there is no feast without cruelty, as man's entire history attests."52 Following such views, Nietzsche questions the sentiments of previous enlightenment "dreamers" who struggled to find a way towards democratic freedom and reason. Nietzsche comments, "they are unfree and absurdly superficial, especially in their basic inclination to see the cause for all human misery and failure in the structure of society as it has been up to now."53

50 Ibid. pg. 50.
52 Ibid. pg. 198.
53 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pg. 49.
However disturbing we may find Nietzsche's assumption that humans are by nature cruel and enjoy inflicting pain upon each other, he comes to this conclusion only by observing the historical evidence. While his theory does not surmise that cruelty is an "inevitable" human response, Nietzsche does not see it as one that needs to be overcome either. People are often nasty and brutish, but this is fine for Nietzsche because, as he sees it, you cannot have nobility without savagery, joy without suffering, or ultimately, life without death.

But Nietzsche does maintain a commitment to at least one core enlightenment value—the value of freedom. This commitment can be seen in his assertion that people are not trapped within their value systems, that we can choose to create alternative values if we so desire. Nietzsche declares that what humanity will become is determined by a "will to power." From this perspective all the struggles of the dream of enlightenment for emancipation, freedom, reason, and equality amount to this much: that those with power rule and determine what is designated as truth. For Nietzsche, if we go beyond the presuppositions on which all "morality" is based, we will see the illusions of religion, metaphysics, and humanistic morality for what they truly are—foundationless principles, set up as eternal values through a will to power, but without any fundamental justification in and of themselves once the cloak of illusion has been thrown aside.

The consequences of such an outlook seem in many ways foreboding. It removes all justifications for any moral stance above and beyond the ephemeral. With each perspective on right and wrong, truth and falsity, as valid as any other in its own terms, we cannot determine that any sort of belief or behavior is wrong in and of itself. Therefore any structural rules or ethics can only maintain their position of dominance at
best through communicative persuasion, obscurantism, or as is historically quite frequent, through force, coercion, or outright deception. In a conflict of values, the stronger will subdues or annihilates the weaker. That is, the ideas that attain the most legitimacy will be based upon power, not upon right (because there is no right), although the exponents of “legitimate” ideas will use the hubris of “right” to disguise the true basis of their legitimacy.

Nietzsche does not want us merely to realize nihilism as a final goal; he also wants us to overcome it. This becomes problematic for his theoretical outlook on several levels, one of which involves the sense in which nihilism, while offering humanity unparalleled freedom, also contains an equivalent capacity to paralyze attempts to move beyond it. In other words, it appears to remove any justification for positive assertions. In his most radical moods Nietzsche even went so far as to negate the possibility of critical self-reflection and by extension the possibility of knowledge itself. From such a perspective all that can be known is that our constructions of truth are our own creations and can never represent the discovery of any ultimate reality grounding existence and giving meaning or value to the human condition. In Nietzsche's view, the meanings that one seeks in the world do not exist, the only truths or meanings that do exist are the result of human ingenuity and will. One can easily see how such an outlook could be bent towards an extreme solipsism and a paralytic relativism. Nietzsche throws the paradox of modern nihilism directly at us and offers us no ultimate consolation. Or at least his consolation is so tenuous that it hardly provides much comfort. In many ways the theoretical problems that Nietzsche points out echo postmodern theoretical angst and are reflected in contemporary debates to this day.
As well, Nietzsche's overt program for overcoming nihilism often appears to suffer from certain ambiguities and self contradictions. In his concepts of the "ubermensch" and the "eternal return" he seems to rely upon reactionary ideas that an earlier and perhaps more honest Nietzsche would have rejected. I say this because these ideas in a sense call for the acceptance of an other-worldly illusion or a self deception which much of Nietzsche's work is directed against and attempts to overcome. Nietzsche's theoretical insights are most deeply acute when he is exposing the nihilism inherent in modern development and less relevant when he devises his own explicit methods for its secession. However, within his text one can find the means for at least the attempt to overcome the nihilistic predicament which haunts modern existence.

The argument that Nietzsche removes the ground upon which theoretical claims to certainty and practical programs of action can rest does nothing to weaken the validity of his assertions. Nietzsche is attempting to negate the humanistic values of the dream of enlightenment by showing that they have no ultimate foundation, no claim to absolute validity. He wants to make this argument not out of outright contempt for these values, but because he sees them as illusions obstructing the path towards honest critical thought. This is a fundamental element in Nietzsche's attempts to move "beyond" good and evil. When he points out that "happiness and virtue are not arguments... but that we like to forget—even sensible thinkers do—that things making for unhappiness or for evil are not counter arguments, either," we see that his position is not against humanistic values but rather for honesty in an attempt to overcome the nihilistic foundation which he sees modern values resting upon.
The seductions of a theory which shows us the possibility of a better more beautiful world are in a strange way similar to the seductive qualities of those ideas which preach destruction and annihilation. For Nietzsche, the one is a necessary counterpart of the other. But whether essentially utopian or dystopian, all theories which see in the world a goal, whether good or evil, are in fact a part of the larger illusion which posits for history a metaphysical or primordial meaning or purpose. With the loss of faith in a universal whole within which modern individuals can situate their lives, Nietzsche claims that those who once believed in certain collective modern fantasies will tend to lose all sense of the value of their own existence once they realize that their lives have ceased to have a point or purpose other than one that is humanly constructed. On several occasions Nietzsche reformulates this basic point. His claim is not that nihilism will lead to pessimism, but rather that nihilism is the inevitable result of humanity’s coming to terms with the reality of its cultural fictions. On the contrary, pessimism is the result of the illusions we have heretofore been subjected to and must now overcome. In other words, it is the belief in dreamy illusions that leads people to pessimistic despair. Nihilism can be nothing other than an acceptance of the way things have to be seen once we give up these illusions. In this sense, Nietzsche holds out the possibility of overcoming the pessimism which occurs when the modern mind must come to terms with a nihilistic reality: “Once we have devaluated these three categories [aim, unity, and being], the demonstration that they cannot be applied to the universe is no longer any reason for devaluating the universe.”\textsuperscript{55} In other words, it is not the fictitious nature of these categories that is

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid. pg. 45.
\textsuperscript{55} Nietzsche, \textit{The Will to Power}, pg. 13. Parenthesis mine.
responsible for pessimism, but rather people’s faith in these categories which “enlightened” thought cannot now help but reveal as illusory. They are the result of the “immature” wishful thinking of humanity, of “positing [humanity] as the meaning and measure of the value of things.”

A comparison of Nietzsche’s understanding of modern history with Marx’s reveals that these two thinkers are not as far removed as one might assume if we were to make only a cursory examination of their orientations towards humanistic values. Both Nietzsche and Marx want to stress the developmental or creative side of humanity in history, both struggle to avoid the idea that history follows any immutable laws, and both view critical thought as an essential component of historical change. However, both Marx and Nietzsche exhibit theoretical weaknesses which could be strengthened by incorporating certain insights of the other. Basically, from Nietzsche’s perspective it can be argued that Marx embraces Enlightenment values too strongly. In his desire to alter society so that humanistic values can be more fully realized, Marx is less critical of these values as an end in and of themselves. Alternatively, from Marx’s perspective, it can be said that Nietzsche remains rooted in abstract theorization having no connection to the real world of material practice within which individuals must live out their lives.

As Marx wrote in 1843, the year before Nietzsche’s birth, “for Germany the criticism of religion is in the main complete, and criticism of religion is the premise of all criticism.” By contrast, Nietzsche asserts, “residues of Christian value judgments are found everywhere in socialistic and positivistic systems. A critique of Christian morality

\[\text{Ibid. pg. 14.}\]
is still lacking." It is Nietzsche who attempts to follow the critique of Christian morality, and by extension Western values, to its furthest extent:

All great things perish of their own accord, by an act of self-cancellation: so the law of life decrees... Thus Christianity as dogma perished by its own ethics, and in the same way Christianity as ethics must perish; we are standing on the threshold of this event. After drawing a whole series of conclusions, Christian truthfulness must now draw its strongest conclusion, the one by which it shall do away with itself... the will to truth has been forced to examine itself. It is by this dawning self-consciousness of the will to truth that ethics must now perish.

We see here the idea of the "self cancellation" of ideas which echoes Marx's own ideas of historical development as a process of dialectical negation. However in pursuing his own "ruthless critique," Nietzsche is willing to set aside all desires for a better world, for hope, and even for the value of knowledge: "There is something about 'truth,' about the search for truth. If man goes about it too 'humanely,' if 'il ne cherche le vrai que pour faire le bien,' [he seeks the truth only in order to do good] I bet he will find nothing."

It could be argued that Marx attempts to overcome Christian morality and bourgeois ideology in order to set up a social structure that will allow the critical evaluation of values to continue free from the dominance of the established order. But it is also clear that he attempts to find in these very values their own negation. In other words, Marx attempts to refute liberal ideology according to its own moral standards, showing its hypocrisy in that it does not live up to its self-professed ideals. In doing so Marx holds on to the core humanistic values of the dream of enlightenment, negating them only in their liberal form, in the hopes that this negation will allow for their actual

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58 Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, pg. 7.
realization. But Nietzsche claims to have transvalued modern morality. At the risk of oversimplification, we could compare the two by saying whereas Marx’s method says, “They say they are good, but look, they are not good according to their own morality,” Nietzsche’s says, “Well, what is so important about being good anyways?” For Nietzsche, the only way to answer this question is to be truthful and admit that not only is our system not truly “good,” but goodness itself is something that can only coexist with evil, and is something that is culturally negotiated. It is only when people go beyond existing moral concepts that they can honestly evaluate them to see what value they have without the interference of illusory deceptions.

So from Nietzsche’s perspective, the ideas of Marx could be seen as remaining rooted in the basic humanistic commitments of Enlightenment thought. Ideas such as freedom, democracy, reason, and to a certain extent the image of a social “utopia,” are all present in Marx’s discourse. Marx undermines the foundations of liberal ideology, often positing them as fictitious illusions, but he attempts to overcome the nihilistic implications of his theory through a commitment to the same core humanistic values:

The task of history, therefore, once the world beyond the truth has disappeared, is to establish the truth of this world. The immediate task of philosophy, which is at the service of history, once the holy form of human self-estrangement has been unmasked, is to unmask self-estrangement in its unholy forms. Thus the criticism of heaven turns into the criticism of the earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.61

From a Nietzschean perspective, such an attempt, to overcome “self-estrangement in its unholy forms,” must endeavour to overcome not just particular social forms but the very

60 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pg. 42.
values upon which the whole social complex is based. It is not just the "forms" which cause self-estrangement but the values behind the forms. Marx, alternatively, to a greater extent than Nietzsche, wants to hold on to these values, attempting to reach them through an alteration of social formations. But essentially these values can be negated by extending the same critical methods which Marx uses to negate earlier philosophical idealism and liberal bourgeois ideology. In other words, from a Nietzschean perspective, Marx's foundational principles are not sufficient to defend his humanistic values. Thus it can be argued that they still maintain the residue of the Christian ethics and Platonic metaphysics which have permeated western thought for several thousand years and which continue to provide modern thinkers with many of their illusory presuppositions. Nevertheless, one is justified in asking: Without such presuppositions, does not the critique of law, politics, or "this earth" lose its ultimate justification or meaning? How can one critique laws without holding on to a sense of justice? And herein lies the crux of the paradox of nihilism. If nihilism is the basis of human existence then all values are relative, and as such, particular values can only be maintained through a "will to power."

Therefore Marx's commitment to humanistic values, when considered within Nietzsche's theoretical framework, must be viewed as being based upon a "will to power," just as is the defense of the bourgeois values that Marx previously negated. And it does appear as if Marx was well aware of this issue. Marx wants the proletariat to be the prime movers of history, the class who will emancipate humanity from the class system itself. But this desire cannot itself be justified according to any ultimate transhistorical process, as this would directly contradict Marx's theory of history. In the

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61 Karl Marx, Readings From Karl Marx, pg. 137.
passage quoted above he speaks of the need to “establish the truth of this world.” Avoiding positivistic terms such as “uncover” or “discover,” he opts for “establish” (at least in this translation) and this would lead one to assume that he is referring to the negotiated and constructed character of any truth which will replace the religious “truths” of the world beyond or the bourgeois “truths” of capitalism. This would explain why in certain passages Marx gives the appearance of contradicting his own theory of history, giving us the impression that the movement towards socialism is an historically inevitable event. I suspect he does this not because he believes it is an absolute destiny—because according to his own theory there can be no inevitable transhistorical fact. Rather he argues from a sense of political expediency and urgency, i.e. if socialism is inevitable, then it is in every individual’s best interest to join sides with the proletariat movement, whatever their position in society might be. Behind Marx’s theory of history lies the shadow of nihilism explicated by Nietzsche, and a “will to power” that is implicit or under-emphasized for political reasons. Marx’s theoretical outlook upholds Enlightenment values, leaving the job of further defending, refining, or rejecting these values to posterity, and this is a process that Nietzsche engages as well as one that is still ongoing today.

Furthermore, Marx’s humanistic values are not quite as far removed from Nietzsche’s struggle for human freedom as one might be led to believe. It must be remembered that Nietzsche is not attempting to refute all Enlightenment values. His attempt is one of transvaluation. Throughout this entire process he maintains a fundamental commitment to the value of freedom and this commitment can also be seen

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62 Ibid. pg. 137.
as one of the cornerstones of Marx’s commitment to Enlightenment values. In a similar manner to Marx, Nietzsche criticizes modern society from the position that it reduces human freedom and subjects people to increasing regimentation and discipline directed towards goals which negate truly life affirming modes of existence. Much of Marx’s work is oriented to a similar problem, that is: how can we overcome concepts of abstract human nature which are used to justify the direction of human activity towards narrow economic ends? In this regard, Marx writes, “all emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself.”

Nietzsche views abstract Enlightenment conceptualizations of reason, knowledge, freedom, and emancipation as theoretical concepts separated from reality. As such they are all too often used to facilitate the perpetuation of the very situations they hope to override. The nature of these concepts is that they are moral illusions containing within them their own contrary, and Nietzsche claims that this opposition can never realistically be surmounted: “It is quite possible that the very value of those good and honored things consists, in fact, in their insidious relatedness to these wicked, seemingly opposite things—it could be that they are inextricably bound up, entwined, perhaps even similar in their very nature.” So for example, says Nietzsche, democracy strives for the virtue of equality but in fact it represents the rule of a herd mentality, the vengeance of the weak upon the strong. And while empathy is highly valued as a noble sentiment within the dream of enlightenment, Nietzsche contends it contains within itself the tendency towards vulgar pity. With this in mind, Nietzsche writes, “[t]here is too much charm and sugar in

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64 Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, pg. 3.
those feelings of ‘for others, not for myself’ for us not to feel the need of being doubly suspicious and asking whether they are not by any chance seductions!\(^{65}\)

As a result of these “seductions” the most seemingly innocuous concept such as “individual liberty” can be utilized as both a means against and a means towards further human subjugation. Such ideas are clearly demonstrated by Marx when he describes the manner in which nineteenth century bourgeois ideology used the concept of individual freedom to obscure the manner in which the proletariat were exploited under a system which all the while extolled the virtues of freedom. In a similar manner the idea of “cultural autonomy” is used today both to defend the freedom of disempowered groups and to provide an ideological means for legitimating the privilege of those who perpetuate injustices upon weaker members of certain groups.

In a manner similar to Marx, Nietzsche wants critical self-reflection to overcome illusions, especially modern transhistorical presuppositions. From such a position he offers a much more critical view of positivism and the natural sciences as means for uncovering reality than that put forth by Marx. For Nietzsche, even modern science contains within its own logic an inherent nihilistic orientation. However, Nietzsche’s thought has a complex relation to the concept of science. In one sense he sees it as the logical outcome of the Christian value of honesty and metaphysical philosophical inquiry. Eventually a meticulous search for truth negates the dreamlike illusions of previous religious and philosophical dogma. This scientific “will to truth” arose from the religious and philosophical search for enlightenment, and in its positivistic form science also constructs an other-world, itself a part of the ongoing process of nihilistic obscurantism,

\(^{65}\) Ibid. pg. 40.
and as such must eventually negate itself. Nietzsche does, however, see a certain value in the scientific "will to truth." It is here that we can see his influence on the sociological canon through the work of Max Weber.\(^6\) For Nietzsche, like Weber, the ideal science represents a form of ascetic investigation that can accompany clear thinking. The danger arises when science is promoted as a replacement for religion, when it is believed to contain an inherent ethical justification for its own activities. According to Nietzsche such justification cannot be found within the epistemological realm of science. It must be borrowed from the larger cultural complex. Nietzsche saw modern positivistic science as obscuring this event by disguising its value commitments within the deceptive notion of pure objective science.

However, Nietzsche's theory continues to display an implicit faith in certain of modern science's transhistorical concepts in several fundamental ways and these contradictions are weaknesses in his theory. Ironically, Marx, who held a less overtly critical attitude towards science, provides certain solutions to some of these weaknesses.

Nietzsche's uncritical positivistic leanings are evident in his transhistorical postulate of the aggressive and innately violent nature of humanity. From this understanding Nietzsche comes to the conclusion that these are indispensable and necessary elements in the human constitution, that "pity" is the contagion of powerlessness and the essence of suffering, and that it merely perpetuates the pessimism of weakness. He derides humanistic concerns because they negate life in the sense that they valorize the plight of the weak and suffering, and vilify the desires of the strong.

This conceptualization seems to be closely connected with the scientific idea of natural selection and the Darwinian ethos of the survival of the fittest, applying them out of context to social processes in general.

Nietzsche identifies democracy and socialism with Christian morality following his critique of the life-negating herd mentality of modern society. But it is not at all clear that the values upheld by democracy and socialism have to be inextricably tied to Christian values. Empathy and concern for others are not solely Christian or Western values and Nietzsche constructs certain tautological analogies when he gathers all these commitments under the rubric of western humanism. Essentially, Nietzsche favours a commitment to natural selection over a humanistic one. He is desensitized towards what Marx sees more clearly—that people are weak and unequal not because of innate biological flaws, but because of social power structures. While in nature the strongest survive, thereby insuring the biophysical viability of the species, in human society “the strongest” are not strong by virtue of their physical endowments. They are strong because of social forces which have been developed historically. To promote their interests above the needs of the majority is not to secure the viability of the species nor to “affirm life,” as Nietzsche asserts. It may in fact turn out that the interests of society’s “strongest” or most powerful are the most destructive life-negating interests, and that in order to secure the perpetuation of the species, their positions of power would have to be overthrown. Essentially, it is not natural selection but history which determines who has power, and therefore any promotion of evolution or natural selection as indispensable aspects of social development is untenable and can be discredited according to the very principles of Nietzsche’s own analytical method which is critical of transhistorical presuppositions.
According to this method we have to critically evaluate all values rather than accept them on blind faith, and in this process we can attempt to establish new values whose form can only be decided through the process of historical evaluation and not in advance.

Nietzsche's contradictory commitment to certain positivistic concepts is also evident in his critique of the "final escape" from nihilism with its attempt to posit a real world behind the world of becoming. For Nietzsche there exists only the world of becoming, i.e. the world as it is created by human beings through a will to power. The world of becoming is not something evident in and of itself and as such is subject to invention, but in a manner similar to the invention that Nietzsche disavows of the "world beyond." But Nietzsche's complex understanding of the world of "becoming" is implicitly based on a positivistic ethos in the sense that it maintains that only the world which is open to direct sensory experience has any reality for us, i.e., there is no world "beyond" this world. Although this may appear to be a truism it may also involve a certain reduction of reality and an exclusion of experiences which cannot be empirically observed or quantified. There are a vast array of human experiences or perceptions which defy empirical explanation, that seem to exist beyond the epistemological capacities of rational cognition. Interpretive techniques are often the only means towards insights dealing with human motivations and, as a result, Nietzsche's world of becoming will always be contested terrain. However, Nietzsche expresses an awareness of this even if he decides to downplay it when he writes, "today it is dawning on perhaps five or six minds that physics, too, is only an interpretation of the universe, an arrangement of it..., rather than a clarification. In so far as it builds on faith in sense-evidence, however, it is and
shall long be taken for more—namely for clarification.”

He goes on to ridicule as stupid all those who maintain that “where there is nothing for man to see and grasp, man has no business to look!”... “Yet, for a rough, industrious race of machinists and engineers of the future, who have nothing but rough work to do, it may just be the correct imperative.”

While in certain respects they can be seen as having complimentary theories, Marx attempts to set up a theory to enable society to accomplish through practice what Nietzsche only attempts in thought. But Nietzsche’s conceptualization of “becoming” can offer us a solution to the pessimistic inertia which sometimes results from nihilism. In other words, if human development is not constrained by any absolute universality then we are a product of our own making. As a result, through the application of human will, human nature in theory seems to be capable of becoming whatever human beings desire. This is not merely limited to an individual subjective becoming but also holds out the possibility or the promise of “becoming” for larger cultural groups and perhaps even the entire species. But Nietzsche still fails to overcome a tendency of modern thought of which Marx was critical, i.e. he still remains grounded in abstract philosophy providing no program for practical action for actual social change. Nietzsche seems to turn his thought inwards, towards subjective perceptions of self, and away from grand theoretical constructions of society and history. As such, he views any knowledge constructed about the material forces of society or history as illusions, a result of a “will to power.” However, it is this concept of the “will to power” which, although abstract, still provides

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67 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, pg. 15.
68 Ibid. pg. 16.
a profound critical device for those who struggle for social change. It is the paradox of Nietzsche's thought that while it appears to remove the ground upon which Enlightenment concepts rest, it also provides the capacity to move beyond the need for conceptual resting places. As such it provides a means towards ever increasing levels of critical evaluation as they are directed towards a continuous process of change and becoming in a struggle for human freedom.

69 Ibid. pg. 16.
Conclusion: Dare to Dream.

Through all he said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something—an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man’s, as though there were more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was incommunicable forever.

F. Scott Fitzgerald—The Great Gatsby.

No it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence, that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live as we dream—alone.

Joseph Conrad—Heart of Darkness.

There is a tendency within contemporary critiques of Enlightenment thought—arguably for the purposes of political expediency and conceptual clarity—to construct what I would call a mythical unity of western discourse. While I want to acknowledge the insights that have been elucidated through a variety of contemporary theoretical positions concerning the role that the Enlightenment has played in facilitating the hegemony of western thought, I also find myself grappling with the consequences of reducing such a diverse and complex array of discursive practices into one simplified conceptual paradigm (a reduction of which I am constantly guilty). In this regard I find Foucault’s article “What is Enlightenment?” in which he refers to what he designates as the “blackmail” of the Enlightenment especially helpful.¹ According to Foucault, a situation has arisen in which one feels compelled to be “either for or against the Enlightenment.”² As a result, Foucault, in his typically elusive Socratic style, attempts to find a theoretical space beyond such polemics. Thus, “we do not break free of this blackmail by

² Ibid. pg. 42.
introducing ‘dialectical’ nuances while seeking to determine what good and bad elements there may have been in the Enlightenment;” rather, for Foucault, we must try to understand “ourselves as beings who are historically determined, to a certain extent, by the Enlightenment.”³

I do not want to get involved in an in-depth analysis of Foucault’s prescription for a move beyond this “blackmail” and his attempts to avoid what he refers to as “the empty dream of freedom.”⁴ To be sure, I think the article, with impressive clarity considering Foucault’s sometimes oblique and somewhat impenetrable prose, conveys a succinct outline of what he has in mind as his own larger project. Unlike Foucault, however, I would leave open the question of whether one can determine the “good and bad elements” within the Enlightenment, although such an undertaking has not been the explicit focus of my thesis. What I have tried to take from my reading of this article, for the purposes of the explication above, is the idea of a refusal to be for or against the Enlightenment, and the understanding that modern thought has “to a certain extent” been historically conditioned by the Enlightenment. I think in many ways these simple considerations have framed the major impetus of the present work.

In an attempt to come to terms with the development of modern history one is, for a variety of reasons, compelled to contend with the legacy of whatever this thing is that we call the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment, as an historical concept, is interwoven with the creation of historical events that have escaped being limited to the occident alone, most importantly, the economic dominance of international capitalism and the

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³ Ibid. pg. 43.
⁴ Ibid. pg. 46.
development of a western discourse that has been implicated in the rise of a patriarchal, heterosexist, white European hegemony. For these reasons, if for no others, Enlightenment ideas have clearly had an effect in shaping modern thought and as such they can provide a conceptual interstice from which to orient one’s thought with regard to what sometimes seems an inaccessible and chaotic diversity of theoretical possibilities. Following from this position I have used the literary imagery of a dream of enlightenment as a hermeneutic device in an attempt to conceptually frame the grand visions discernible within the projects of certain modern thinkers.

I do not view the dream of enlightenment as an ontological presupposition more or less determining the development of modern thought. Rather, within certain optimistic variants of modern thought, the dream of enlightenment represents more of a latent cultural theme which is woven into the vast weave of western discourse. This theme is embroiled with other traditional themes, such as the belief that western civilization is the goal of world history or that the male voice is the paramount source of legitimate knowledge. A diversity of ontological orientations are historically connected with the teleological assumption of the primacy of European civilization and western patriarchy, as well as with positions that have struggled to resist such domination. A dream of enlightenment, however, is a part of a reflexive cultural heritage that has sometimes been appropriated in order to justify domination, and at other times it has been used to resist such domination.

What critical uses can we glean from the literary imagery of a dream? In the first place, the concept of a dream has positive connotations. Dreams represent desires, wishes, and hopes for a better day. One dreams that things can be other than they are, that
somehow, somewhere, a better more ideal situation is a possibility. Within western discourse Christianity offers us one of the most poignant examples of this kind of dream. But the Enlightenment also contains elements of this type of dreamy religious imagery with its grand notions of reason and freedom leading to a more peaceful, tolerant, liberated social arrangement free from the suffering and servitude which plague history. It has been argued that traditional western discourse has consistently taken up the same narrative only in a variety of different forms. This narrative begins with the human fall from grace and conceives of an eventual end point in history where humanity rediscovers the “garden of Eden” through its own redemptive struggle. In a rather uncritical idealistic form, this dream can be identified throughout the work of Rousseau and Kant. And even though Marx undertakes a more critical sociological analysis, a commitment to the dreams optimistic outlook is evident throughout his dramatic style.

One could also contrast this optimistic dream imagery with that of a pessimistic nightmare to the extent that human existence is filled with a history of brutality, destruction, and caprice, i.e. the irrationality of human history. Any dream of enlightenment could be said to contain its own “dark side” or, in other words, within the dream are the seeds for conceptualizing a rhetorical “death of the dream.” I envision this death from two related perspectives. One involves the idea that any attempt to construct the one true emancipatory discourse potentially leads to the construction of an authoritarian hegemonic discourse which hides if not facilitates the perpetuation of forms of subjugation. And secondly, with its emphasis on critical self-reflection, Enlightenment thought may eventually lead to an understanding that the twin goals of reason and freedom are themselves illusions. In other words, if there is no teleology, and if human
existence has no Archemedian point or purpose, then beyond the dreams which one's cultural inventory imbibes to one's consciousness there can be only a nihilistic abyss. While this alternative imagery is also present throughout the text of Rousseau, Kant and Marx, I have used Freud, Dostoevky and Nietzsche as its representatives mainly because they articulate this "death of the dream" more explicitly. As such, this latter group provides a stronger analytical contrast with which to offset the optimism inherently woven throughout the work of the former.

But perhaps this nihilistic void in not entirely abysmal. I have placed a question mark after "the death of the dream" in order to symbolize a contradiction within this imagery of the nightmare. Perhaps if modern thought can relinquish these dreamlike pretensions towards a divine purpose or a metaphysical primordial meaning behind history, it can envisage a certain emancipatory potential within this conceptual move. If human imagination and action create the social world then people are not necessarily hopelessly and eternally constrained by their own creations.

From this it follows that other uses can be made of the dream imagery. If Enlightenment thinkers in general embrace an illusory dream then one can attempt to overcome this ideological fantasy either by appealing to reality, or by de-legitimating the overall authority of Enlightenment thought in order to legitimate conceptual spaces for other ways of knowing. Such ideas present the possibility of a conscious awakening from the previous dreams of history, or in Marx's words, "the reform of consciousness consists in enabling the world to clarify its consciousness, in waking it from its dream about itself, in explaining to it the meaning of its own actions. Our whole task can consist only in
putting religious and political questions into self-conscious human form..." But Marx then adds, "the world has long been dreaming of something that it can acquire if only it becomes conscious of it." Here we can identify one of the fundamental problematics of modern thought, namely, on what basis can one justify the acquisition of this historical dream or, said differently, to what authority can one appeal once the dream itself has been deconstructed? In a sense we can awaken from one dream only to find ourselves of necessity within another, and in a new reality that is itself tentative and revisional. Is it possible to achieve true consciousness free from illusion, once and for all? If existence has no purpose outside of the abyss of nihilism, then dreaming in one form or another may be the only way for human action to have any value or meaning at all.

In part because Marx died in 1883 before he could fully develop his ideas in two or three more volumes of *Capital*, the body of work he left us has been interpreted by some as putting forth an economically determinist theory of history. This interpretation has led to huge debates within the schools of Marxist theory, and across a broad range of non-Marxist sociology concerning the validity of a theoretical approach which gives to the economy a primary function. It was left to Max Weber to provide us with some of the most nuanced descriptions of how historical events have been structured not only by the economy but by cultural, religious, and political concerns as well. Encouraged by such descriptions, part of my methodological approach has been to choose specific texts which are representative of some of the most important of these larger cultural ideas in

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6 Ibid.
7 Since the publication of the English versions of *The Grundrisse* and *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* it could be said that the terms of this debate have been reformulated.
the hope that they can shed light on the way these ideas have played a part in shaping modern thought and influenced the development of modern history. I argue that theoretical texts are a part of a larger economy of discourses and as such they are cultural constructs which are imbued with historical and social significance. Part of this significance lies in the role that texts play in providing a sense of meaning and purpose for human action. To the extent that theoretical texts try to make sense of the social world, they are part of the construction of the dreams that guide social development. There is a problem, however, in the potential for these constructs to become either uncritical and authoritarian, or esoteric and solipsistic. Thus, one must "dare to dream" by choosing texts which provide critical insights towards the deconstruction of the hegemony facilitated by previous enlightenment dreams. Simultaneously this dare to dream has involved an attempt to read texts as they conceptualize new dreams—or at least transform the traditional dream of enlightenment—enabling one to avoid (or transcend) nihilism.

I have argued that while it is not possible, or desirable, to separate texts from the social and historical context within which they were formed, it is possible for the human imagination to address issues which speak to larger conditions than the immediately situated context of the writer would seem to allow. In this way, I have tried to provide a defense of human agency as it finds its conscious inception in the realm of possibilities imagined through the process of writing and action. Thus my epistemology has involved a reading strategy in which I have chosen particular texts whose authors all have in common the desire to transcend their epistemological traditions through a critical reflexive attitude. In remaining faithful to this attitude I have tried to avoid positing their
attempts at transcendence as in turn foundational principles, with the hope of maintaining a commitment to an ongoing critical process of reading. While Marx saw that, “the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living,” he also held to the understanding that people are not ultimately fated to relive these traditions and that it is possible to move beyond them.

The Enlightenment establishes a wealth of traditions that one can attempt to move beyond rather than a unified and authoritarian idea that one must decide to be either for or against. Domination is an old human story, not one confined to the Enlightenment in particular or even western thought in general. If we take seriously Nietzsche’s assertion that all knowledge partakes of a will to power in one form or another, then the dream of constructing an objective, value-neutral knowledge which can then be used to facilitate human freedom appears in many ways suspect. This problematic applies to the construction of all knowledges and not just of those implicated in the legitimation of western hegemony. Thus, it appears that the authority of all voices to speak to the truth is compromised, even those involved in the struggle to achieve emancipation from authoritarian ideologies. But does the implication that all knowledge is generated from a matrix of power relations and ideological legitimations mean that one must surrender the notion of truth, and that all knowledge must be considered subjective, relative, and the mere “effect of discourse?” I have argued Marx provides a conceptual departure from this particularly modern conundrum.

I have used the texts of Rousseau and Kant not in an attempt to explicate the Enlightenment as an ahistorical unified body of discourse, but rather for the more specific

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purpose of framing Marx's (and later Nietzsche's) thought within a particular cultural and historical context. While I believe that Rousseau and Kant have insights which can still provide value for contemporary sociological understanding, my aim is not to defend or refute their ideas by judging them as either good or bad. In particular, I am not claiming that Rousseau's attempt to develop a human idea stripped of all culture is either right or wrong, to be positively valued or negatively rejected. Likewise, Kant's attempt to conceive a teleological " Idea" within nature is certainly problematic, but a polemical attack upon the Idea is not my aim. My goal is to use such constructs to develop the particular epistemological background of early French Enlightenment thought and German Idealism, which can be shown to constitute one way—certainly not the only way—to situate how modern thought has developed in reaction to these constructs, specifically through the ideas of Marx and Nietzsche. To this degree, I have tried to view Marx as an heir to Enlightenment thought who in many ways manages to transcend certain of the core ideas that guided earlier thinkers. This context is certainly not "the" way of interpreting Marx's text, but it does provide a way of seeing Marx's thought as historically situated in earlier European traditions and of showing how he was able effect a partial escape from the strictures of the particular ontological and epistemological orientations that he inherited.

In the Grundrisse, Marx takes up Rousseau's idea of the natural individual detached from all social bonds and attempts to show how this construct fits in with the larger world-views of the political economists of his time. With his reference to the eighteenth-century "Robinsonades" we can see how Marx understands the formative role that cultural ideas play in historical development, in clear contradiction to the economic
determinist readings of Marx. These Crusoean constructs, Marx tells us, "in no way express merely a reaction against over-sophistication and a return to a misunderstood natural life, as the cultural historians imagine." Rather, such cultural constructs are imbued with much broader social and historical significance. In this instance, the idea of the isolated individual is precisely the view necessary for the ideological legitimation of capitalism—a system which views individuals as detached from social bonds and in free competition for social goods. However, Marx tells us that, ironically, "the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations." Thus, we see here an explication of Marx's understanding that the dominant ideas of any class-based society are those which legitimate the privileged position of the ruling elite. For Marx it is not just Rousseau's "Robinsonades" that are implicated in the production of bourgeois hegemony. His criticism encompasses wider cultural constructs that can be discerned within Enlightenment thought and German idealism generally.

Whereas Kant in the German idealist tradition—which was later to influence Hegel—was trying to understand the nature of the universe as a whole, Marx's aim is more sociologically focused in that he is trying to comprehend the human condition. In reaction against the grand ahistorical constructs of the idealists which proposed a teleological and primordial directive within nature—and which were all too often geared towards justifying the ascendancy of modern bourgeois production—Marx wants to

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10 Ibid. pg. 223.
ground historical development in the praxis of the human subject. In this direction, he endeavours to construct a synthesis between traditional idealism and materialism. In his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx outlines this approach. Materialism fails to acknowledge that objective “reality, sensuousness” must be grasped subjectively as “human sensuous activity, practice.” As a result of this conceptual oversight “the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism—but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such.” Thus, Marx overcomes the materialism/idealism dichotomy by constructing a synthesis of theory and practice through a notion of theoretical practice and practical theory.

Human thoughts, ideas, have their impact upon the world through “objective activity,” which some readings of Marx reduce to mean “human labour” exclusively. However, I would maintain that “objective activity” should be understood in its broadest sense to include the way in which thoughts or ideas can only be communicated once they have been transformed into a material form, or what Marx refers to as “thought objects.” Such “thought objects” can be as simple as the very words we speak, which essentially involve the physical manipulation of air molecules by the larynx in a manner comparable to the manual manipulation of the material environment through labour. In *The German Ideology* Marx makes clear this distinction between production and communication: “In the main we have so far considered only one aspect of human activity, the *reshaping of nature* by men. The other aspect, the *reshaping of men by men*...”

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13 Ibid. pg. 143.
14 Ibid. pg. 143.
15 Ibid. pg. 143.
Marx; intercourse and productive power.

117 Thus, the activity of communication is subsumed under Marx’s concept of material practice, but not in such a way as to reduce thoughts to a materialist ontology. Human ideas, consciousness, still exist in a subjective realm, but now human practice, through labour and communication, becomes the material means through which human subjectivity has an active impact upon the world.

It is in this direction that Marx provides a conceptual departure from the theoretical conundrum of the relativity of knowledge mentioned earlier. Contemporary theories which have been influenced by the “linguistic turn” in social theory are in many ways reactionary moves towards a pre-Marxian era in that they construct a neo-idealism which overlooks what Marx’s ontology presupposes, namely, the existence of a material reality. The existence or non-existence of a material reality, according to Marx, can only be contested as “a purely scholastic question” in an abstract theoretical realm removed from actual human practice. 17 In the world of human activity, embodied material beings must contend with the realities that sensuous experience places before them. Thus for Marx, “the problem of descending from the world of thoughts to the actual world is turned into the problem of descending from language to life.” 18

I do not want to detract from the valuable insights that have been imparted to sociology through this “linguistic turn.” I would merely point out that the material side of social life has often come up short in many contemporary debates, and that this ultimately robs linguistic theories of their critical force. Contemporary theories with this linguistic

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orientation have tended to focus on explicating knowledge in terms of the dichotomy of discourse (communication) and power (discipline and control) while subsuming a material reality within this dichotomy. The critique of knowledge then becomes reduced to a textual (discursive) analysis of the way power is facilitated through our textual constructs. From such a perspective, the truth claims of various discursive practices can appear to have no empirical validity, or to represent an actual autonomous reality. Thus, one representation of reality is deemed to be as valid as the next. Each representation is generated from an author’s particular perspective on reality, or as Seidman tells us, “[a]ccounts of the social world, no matter how much they are animated by a sincere desire for truth, are never more than stories we tell whose themes and meanings express the social positioning (e.g., class, gender, nationality, ideology) of the story teller.”

By contrast Marx insists on an ontology that maintains faith in the possibility of an empirical understanding of “the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, [and] which can be determined with the precision of a natural science” In other words, we can determine what is occurring in the social world with a greater or lesser degree of accuracy to the extent that a real world exists independently of our comprehension of it. Thus, Marx makes a clear distinction between material production and “the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic” forms which are not conducive to the same kind of empirical investigation. For Marx, the material significance of these other forms is open to interpretation and are contested as people

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21 Ibid. pg. 5.
“fight it out.” For my purposes, this means that while the social positioning of the author certainly influences his or her perspective on reality and the corresponding textual representations she or he constructs, at the same time material conditions also influence not only the author’s perspective but also his or her social positioning. That is, there is a reflexive relationship between the texts one constructs to know the social world and the actual material conditions from which one constructs a particular textual viewpoint.

Often this reflexive relationship is overlooked, and against the epistemological claim that discursive practices are mere reflections of an autonomous reality, a reactionary understanding of “text” is constructed in which all reality appears as the product of discourse (as in Seidman’s argument quoted above). However, this concept of “text” is so structured—text being not merely verbal but encompassing the historical and social matrix of real events—that it is virtually synonymous with “everything,” so that what one is really claiming with the assertion that “everything is text” is the tautological statement that “everything is everything.” I think such claims seem to forget what Marx saw clearly: that the individual exists not merely as a subjective textual construct (e.g. the invention of philosophers) but also as an embodied sensual being exposed to actual material forces. Thus, power is exerted over the individual not only through the textual manipulation or ideological control of thoughts, ideas, values and meanings but also through actual physical force and coercion of the material body. I believe Marx’s sociological sensibilities are directed towards conceptualizing the complex weave of textual events as simultaneously material events effecting really existing people.

22 Ibid. pg. 5.
Notwithstanding its critical force, Marx’s project maintains certain ties to several humanistic value commitments that he shares with liberal Enlightenment thinkers, even as he pursues the dialectical negation of their ideological project. To this extent, the irrational side of history is not as developed in Marx’s thought as is the case with his explication of the emancipatory potential of rational historical progress. This is not to claim that Marx held a naïve or one sided view of historical development, but rather that his attention was focused on fulfilling the promise of earlier liberal Enlightenment thought. Within such thought, Marx criticizes what he saw as the “mystical” dreams of the Enlightenment which could still be realized if only they were brought into “self-conscious human form.” As a result, Marx’s undertakes a humanistic commitment which attempts to bridge the specific historical gap between theory and practice, thus enabling a subjected proletariat to appropriate the same emancipatory promises touted by liberal ideologues in their legitimation of bourgeois rule. Marx wants to understand the human condition as it pertains to the “rational” development of capitalism within modernization, and as a result, he subordinates the “irrational” to the humanistic value commitments of his revolutionary project.

The irrational, however, has been the focus of a wide range of authors throughout western thought. Within the classical sociological canon, Weber is perhaps the most prominent figure who has endeavoured to construct a conceptual space for the irrational within sociological theory. But outside of the confines of the canon one can find a diversity of texts which provide a wealth of cultural material for conceptualizing the irrational and its influence on historical development.

23 Karl Marx, “For a Ruthless Critique of Everything Existing,” from, The Marx-Engels Reader, pg. 15.
Taking up once again the literary imagery of the dream of enlightenment, the texts that I discussed in chapter two focus on its irrational character as a far-reaching nightmare rather than on its promise as a progressive project. Such re-conceptualizations are often designated with the monikers “anti-modernism” or “anti-Enlightenment.” Such perspectives implicate the Enlightenment in the kind of modernization which has led to human degradation rather than progress. Thus, I have undertaken to read certain texts of Freud, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche in order to underscore how they have grasped this “dark side” of the Enlightenment. Rather than try to recapture the emancipatory promise of the Enlightenment they create arguments for a more rigorous suspicion of Enlightenment ideals and their corresponding humanistic values. I have argued therefore that they represent a symbolic “death of the dream.” For example, I have used the texts of Freud in order to map out a conceptual link between the imagery of a dream of enlightenment and this symbolic death of the dream.

In many ways, Freud is simultaneously a defender and a critic of Enlightenment thought. Freud resists not only the Kantian idea that modernization represents a teleological necessity, but also and more radically the idea that modernization provides indispensably valuable or humanizing contributions to social development. In a manner similar to Rousseau, Freud sees freedom as the telos of the human struggle. But, according to Freud, this struggle for freedom is directed by desires which are far from being rational and often involve destructive, aggressive, and sexual impulses pursued for egoistic satisfaction alone. Freud surmises that in order to survive every civilization has had to incorporate repressive measures in order to thwart these desires so that, as a result, people become filled with anxiety, guilt, and malaise. Thus, Freud problematizes the
entire western project of modernization as he sees that it inevitably leads to repression and human unhappiness.

But if Freud maintains a provisional faith in the potential of human reason to mediate the irrational, Dostoevsky provides a more skeptical view of the human capacity for reason and presents a darker more scathing attack on the so-called virtues of modernization. Like Marx and Freud, Dostoevsky rejects the idealist construction of a teleological purpose within nature. For Dostoevsky, history is anything but reasonable and its direction does not point towards any "rational cosmopolitan society." Even though history is made up of individual actions, Dostoevsky sees two main problems within modernity that mitigate against emancipation and so influence the pessimistic tone of his literary imagery. Firstly, he believes the individual, existing within the confines of a vast rational economic and bureaucratic machine, has lost the historical potential to effect revolutionary social change. And secondly, individuals are not at heart rational creatures. As much as they profess to desire peace and civility, Dostoevsky insists, people love bloodshed, brutality, and destruction.

Dostoevsky believes that for the individual living in the modern world, rebellion is confined to an internal psychological battle in which one struggles for meaning and dignity against an increasingly authoritarian and monolithic structure that is impervious to rational revolutionary change. To any realistic degree, revolutionary human practice has become impotent as individuals find that resistance to the process of modernization is futile and may only lead to their annihilation. On top of this, people are not predisposed to act in a rational manner to begin with, so that even if it were possible to discover the means to effect social revolution, most would reject such means simply because they are
selfish and brutal. To make matters even worse, Dostoevsky views the overall development of this oligarchic machine as itself irrational, such that modern history seems to be moving towards increasing chaos and destruction.

A similar Dostoevskian pessimism reverberates throughout Nietzsche's views of modern historical development. But unlike Dostoevsky, Nietzsche attempts to find a way out of the abyss of nihilism through an acceptance of it and a corresponding "transvaluation" of all values. For Nietzsche, Enlightenment thought is a part of a larger project within western discourse which is directed towards "other worldly" knowledge. In general, this knowledge is constructed around the belief that beyond this world there is another world (be it in the form of a religious, meta-physical, or a humanistic essentialism) that provides the basis for meaningful and purposive human action. But Nietzsche asserts that behind all these constructs is essentially a nihilistic reality that modern thinkers consistently avoid. In other words, there is no goal or purpose behind human history, and one has to accept that "becoming aims at nothing and achieves nothing." For Nietzsche, human beings create the "reasons why" and the "one-thing-after-another" (i.e. cause and effect) relationships which are used to make sense of historical development. As a result, he sees all values as the product of a human "will to power" and thus have no ultimate or transcendent justification in and of themselves.

For Nietzsche, Enlightenment thought, in promoting self-reflective criticism or what he often refers to as the "will to truth," ensures that the acceptance or rejection of nihilism has come to structure the fundamental ideological struggles of the contemporary historical moment. From such a perspective, "we have measured the value of the world
according to categories that refer to a purely fictitious world,” and as such Enlightenment concepts such as reason and freedom increasingly appear as empty illusions utilized by interested persons and groups to bolster the legitimacy of their particular ideological positions. But although the eventual acceptance of nihilism seems inevitable, Nietzsche insists this does not necessarily lead one to pessimistic despair. While “the faith in these categories of reason is the cause of nihilism,” Nietzsche insists that “once we have devaluated these categories, the demonstration that they cannot be applied to the universe is no longer any reason for devaluing the universe.”

It could be argued that Enlightenment thought, as it attempts to designate the one and only truthful discourse, constructs its own authoritarian hegemony in which alternative voices are de-legitimized by making them appear irrational in light of the very principles of reason needed to attain “enlightenment.” It is in this sense that Nietzsche understands that exposing the nihilism lurking beneath the Enlightenment concept of reason will promote freedom, freedom to re-evaluate all values with a critical consciousness free from the constraints of authoritarian discourse. Such an understanding offers the possibility of an emancipatory space within which authority may be potentially de-legitimized and therefore alternative voices can find room to speak. In other words, the death of the dream of enlightenment can possibly be seen to facilitate the historical overcoming of ideological domination.

Although theoretically it can be said that Marx and Nietzsche begin from different starting points, in several ways their ideas can be seen to converge. They both see within

25 Ibid. pg. 13.
modernity a hegemonic ideology which maintains its legitimacy in part by disguising its own presupposed rationalizations. This situation leads to the imposition of an ideological world-view which masks dissension and dissatisfaction with artificial ideals. In their own ways Marx and Nietzsche attempt to unmask the disguises of a certain Enlightenment ideology which makes claims to reason and freedom through a purely formal discourse disconnected from reality. Marx’s understanding is that this rupture can be reconnected through an explication of “human practice” while Nietzsche focuses on suturing it through the critique and transcendence of nihilism. Indeed, the conceptual freedom of Nietzsche’s “deconstructive” methodology is also the basis for Marx’s explication of the ideological obfuscation of bourgeois liberal thought. Thus, Marx takes up again the dreams of the Enlightenment, but he attempts to ground and realize them in “self-conscious human form”—precisely the kind of transvaluation that Nietzsche seems to advocate.

I think the methodologies of Marx and Nietzsche should be viewed as a common critical project which they never expected to complete themselves. Marx’s vision of a move away from capitalist values and towards more truly human and democratic ones should be viewed realistically as an historical process rather than a teleological goal. Likewise, Nietzsche’s project of a transvaluation of values must constantly be reconsidered from within the present moment, even when such a moment is tentative and tends toward atavistic or reactionary regress.

To borrow from Foucault’s article one last time, the Enlightenment is best considered as more of an attitude than an historical event or a “faith in doctrinal

26 Ibid. pg. 13.
elements.” For Foucault this attitude entails a permanent critique of the present in which “the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it, to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is.”27 In a manner reminiscent of the conceptual autonomy invoked by Marx’s concept of “human praxis” and Nietzsche’s notion of “becoming,” Foucault notes that “this modernity does not ‘liberate man from his own being;’” rather, “it compels him to face the task of producing himself.”28 As I see it, many contemporary cultural critics are involved in such a dialectical engagement with this present moment. In the work of Edward Said, for example, the present is conceived in a compelling and convincing manner that remains critical of the abuses of western hegemony without simply attributing them to their roots in the Enlightenment. In Culture and Imperialism, Said gives us this brief and yet poignant description of the contemporary scene:

In our wish to make ourselves heard, we tend very often to forget that the world is a very crowded place, and that if everyone were to insist on the radical purity or priority of one’s own voice, all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and the bloody political mess, the true horror of which is beginning to be perceptible here and there in the re-emergence of racist politics in Europe, the cacophony of debates over political correctness and identity politics in the United States, and—to speak of may own part of the world—the intolerance of religious prejudice and illusionary promises of Bismarckian despotism, a la Saddam Hussein and his numerous Arab epigones and counterparts.29

Many aspects of the dilemma of the modern moment can be discerned from this excerpt: the rational desire to understand, the despotism of an imposed authoritative understanding, the atavistic regress, the irrational, the horrific, the illusionary promises.

27 Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?,” pg. 41.
28 Ibid. 42.
But for my purposes here, I want to draw the reader's attention to the way Said's imagery seems to echo Raskolnikov's pandemic vision which is quoted at the beginning of this thesis. Where Said writes "if every one were to insist upon the radical purity or priority of one's own voice" we could substitute the words of Dostoevsky: "the striken were... imbued with a strong sense of their own good judgement, never did they believe themselves so strongly endowed with wisdom and intellectual vigour or scientific conclusions and moral perceptions so correct as now." And the consequences are equally disturbing. Likewise, compare Said when he writes, "all we would have would be the awful din of unending strife, and the bloody political mess, the true horror of which is beginning to be perceptible here and there..." with Dostoevsky's imagery: "they were incapable of understanding one another, because each believed himself the sole possessor of truth, and looking upon his unenlightened neighbours, beat his breast, threw up his arms and wept... they fell upon one another in anger and killed." From Said's perception of the "re-emergence of racist politics," the "cacophony of debates over political correctness and identity politics" and the "illusory promises of Bismarckian despotism," one can sense how history might remember the present era as one in which "they formed great armies, but, once in motion, they tore each other to pieces."

More than a century ago, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* described a splenetic anti-hero who upon waking from a fitful and feverish delirium relates his dream of a world "desolated by an unknown and terrible plague." Today one might imagine

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31 Ibid. pg. 399.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
that this plague is still among us, and that modern science is no closer to finding a cure than it was in Dostoevsky's time. Protected by the ideological comfort of its material advantages and economic dominance, the western world has slept and entertained the most fanciful dreams. But just as Weber understood that good comes not only from good nor evil from evil, so we have come to realize that the most delightful dreams have a way of turning into nightmares. Today these nightmares persist through the disturbing images removed from time and space which come to us from the ethereal world of television and various other electronic media. Some of us have tried to wake up from these nightmares in the hope that this plague would turn out to be a feverish illusion, or that in awakening from our sleep we could help to find its real cause and perhaps even its cures. Trapped within this nightmare, others of us perceive ourselves to be awake, only to awaken suddenly with a jolt, disturbed and disoriented, grasping for comprehension, perhaps even determined to struggle for change. But I think of Dostoevsky's grand inquisitor, and imagine that if he were there, he would sit by the bedside and soothingly whisper, "shh, its all right. There, there, go back to sleep now. After all...you were only dreaming."
Bibliography:


