A position which we are all tempted into is that of moral critic of Stalinism. One point to begin thinking about socialism from is that of dissatisfaction with this figure. This dissatisfaction may force us into a rereading of the Marxism which such a critic rejects. What I want to ask is whether our dissatisfaction with the moral critic and a contemporary rereading of Marxism may not together suggest a new approach to moral issues. It is worth mentioning that this is what I want to do, because this is so much a question to which I still lack an answer that even as a question what follows may seem too tortuous and indefinite. Moreover I cannot even say with certainty from what standpoint I ask this question. And this, I suspect, is not merely a matter of my own private confusions: the various characters who walk through these pages, the Stalinist, the moral critic, the revisionist and so on, if they succeed in being more than lay figures do so not just because they are present in the real world, but also because they represent moments in the consciousness of all of us, masks that we each wear or have worn at some time or other. The need to overcome and transcend their

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limitations and mistakes, their ‘false consciousness’ in moral matters, is the need to find a way out of our own wilderness.

Don Quixote long ago paid the penalty for wrongly imagining that knight errantry was compatible with all economic forms of society. (Karl Marx)

The ex-Communist turned moral critic of Communism is often a figure of genuine pathos. He confronts the Stalinist with attitudes that in many ways deserve our respect – and yet there is something acutely disquieting about him. I am not speaking now, of course, of those who exchange the doctrines of Stalinism for those of the Labour Party leadership, the Congress for Cultural Freedom or the Catholic Herald. They have their reward. I mean those whose self-written epitaph runs shortly, ‘I could remain no longer in the Party without forfeiting my moral and intellectual self-respect; so I got out.’ They repudiate Stalinist crimes in the name of moral principle; but the fragility of their appeal to moral principle lies in the apparently arbitrary nature of that appeal. Whence come these standards by which Stalinism is judged and found wanting, and why should they have authority over us? What disturbs me in the character of these moral critics of Stalinism is not just their inability to answer this question. It is that this inability seems to me to arise from a picture of their own situation, a picture profoundly influential among ex-Communists, which is at the root of much contemporary self-deception.

What is this picture? It is a picture of independence regained, of a newly won power to speak with a voice of one’s own, instead of being merely a gramophone for the Stalinist bureaucracy. What this picture conceals from those whose minds and imaginations it informs is the extent to which they have merely exchanged a conscious dependence for an unconscious. The form of their appeal to moral principle is largely the outcome of the pressures upon them both of Stalinism and of the moral liberalism of the West, pressures which produce a surprisingly similar effect. So far as Stalinism is concerned, it provides a pattern which the moral critic simply inverts. The Stalinist identifies what is morally right with what is actually going to be the outcome

\[2\] Marx 1976, p. 176, note 35.
\[3\] Hanson 1957, p. 79.