This bold and unabashedly utopian book advances the thesis that Marx's notion of communism is a defensible, normative ideal. However, unlike many others who have written in this area Levine applies the tools and techniques of analytic philosophy to formulate and defend his radical political program.

The argument proceeds by filtering the ideals and institutions of Marxism through Rousseau's notion of the "general will." Once Rousseau's ideas are properly understood it is possible to construct a community of equals who share some vision of a common good that can be achieved and maintained through cooperation or coordination that is at once both voluntary and authoritative. The book engages with liberal theory in order to establish its differences from Rousseauean-Marxian political theory.

This provocative book will be of particular interest to political philosophers and political scientists concerned with Marxism, socialist theory, and democratic theory.

" . . . unrelentingly intelligent and innovative. . . . What gives this book its particular quality is the author's consistently sensible dealing with important and controversial questions, his ability to shape difficult claims persuasively to the argument in hand."
Alan Gilbert, *University of Denver*

The general will

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Rousseau, Marx, communism

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Preface

In the spring of 1988, when I formed the intention to write this book, (big-C) Communism reigned over more than a third of the world's population, the Cold War still simmered, and the prospect of nuclear annihilation continued to threaten. Then, in a remarkably short time, Communism was overthrown as an economic system and mode of governance in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the Cold War ended, and the threat of nuclear war receded dramatically. It is not at all clear what impact these events ought to have on philosophical reflections on politics or on social theory. But, by accelerating a process evident for some time and in varying degrees throughout the world, they have had a definite effect on our intellectual culture. By 1992, as I write these words, forms of theorizing linked, however tenuously, with the Bolshevik Revolution and its continuations, with Marxism, and even with socialism have fallen into greater disrepute than at any time in this century.

To set out to defend (small-*c*) communism at a time when the Gorbachev Revolution was unfolding was already to go against the current. In the present conjuncture, it may seem incomprehensible. I maintain, however, that doing so is reasonable, timely, and even urgent. The discussions of Rousseauean political philosophy and Marxian communism that ensue will, I hope, partly vindicate this contention. However, the reader should be aware at the outset that what I shall try to defend has at least two interconnected dimensions that I have purposely confounded. It was, in part, to signal this intention that I have made Rousseau the central figure in the chapters that follow, even more than Marx himself, and that I have made the *general will* its organizing concept.

At one level, I argue that Marx's notion of communism or, more precisely, his core idea bereft of some of the unrealistic (and

undesirable) claims he made in its behalf is a defensible normative ideal and that some ideas of Rousseau's about rational cooperation – understood in a way that renders them inoffensive to mainstream, liberal "individualism" – help to elaborate Marx's idea. Were I to have framed my positions exclusively in these terms, what I would go on to argue would be *politically* out of line with the current consensus but *theoretically* consistent with it. Then the general will, far from being central to my argument, would be, at most, an intriguing but inapt concept – from which a few useful insights could be teased out and reconstructed. For several years, in the course of an interminable and (for me) always illuminating debate, Erik Wright has urged me repeatedly to adopt this framework. He has convinced me, despite considerable resistance on my part, that most of what I have to say about Marxian communism can be accommodated within it.

However, in the end, I have not followed his advice. No doubt, in making the general will central, I do throw an extrapolitical obstacle in the way of acceptance of my principal claims, at least for some readers. Nevertheless, I believe that the advantages that follow from according the general will pride of place more than offset this loss. It will emerge that mainstream theorizing – which, in Rousseauean terms, acknowledges only *private* volition – is inhospitable to Marxian communism. It is so, I shall argue, in consequence of its tacit reliance on an underlying metaphor that depicts individuals, like atoms, as radically independent of each other. On the other hand, the general will, as Rousseau conceived it, rests on a different metaphor, according to which, as I shall go on to explain, individuals are related "internally." It may indeed be possible to translate, more or less "without remainder," from a theoretical framework based on one of these metaphors to one based on the other. But in political philosophy forms of expression matter – not least for what they suggest heuristically and, above all, for the kind of politics they promote, for what we might call their "political tendency." This is why I think it worthwhile to dislodge a metaphor that tends, as it were, in the wrong direction and to adopt, when appropriate, a more felicitous idiom, resting on a different metaphor, in its stead. Thus, at the same time that I offer a brief in defense of Marxian communism, I also argue for the coherence and possible applicability of Rousseau's notion of the general will.

It is, in the main, readers influenced by contemporary forms of economic modeling who will find the general will problematic. Others may feel that I pay too much attention to defending Rous-

seau's idea and wonder if what I say is not, in consequence, overly defensive. I shall go on to argue, however, that individualist challenges to Rousseauean political philosophy and Marxian political theory have merit and that no defender of Marxian communism can neglect them without peril. In the end, however, the general will withstands critical scrutiny and has a crucial if not strictly indispensable role to play in the normative theory of communism.

There is a sense in which the debate with mainstream "individualism" that runs throughout the following pages resembles the dispute between atheists and those liberal theologians who effectively concede the atheists' case against traditional believers but who nevertheless represent their views in a theistic idiom. It could be said that what is at issue between them is only a form of expression. But both sides would agree that this difference has momentous consequences – for both theory and practice – and that their respective positions can only be assessed in light of these consequences. Similarly, my quarrel with individualists who would dispute the coherence or applicability of the general will revolves ultimately on the consequences of taking up one or another form of expression. It is, in short, because I think the case for communism compelling that I opt for the idiom I do. The analogy, however, is not perfect – unless one believes, as some "postmodern" relativists do, that scientific naturalism is just one form of discourse among others with no particular purchase on truth. If we reject this account of science, as I think we should, a nontheistic construal of what, by hypothesis, both the atheists and the theologians believe has a clear mark in its favor. For reasons that I will not attempt to elaborate, I do not believe that the kinds of normative discourse deployed here can track truth with the authority that science does. In this instance, therefore, neither governing metaphor can be defended on a priori grounds; their heuristic implications and political tendencies are decisive.

I conceived the idea for this book in 1988, but it continues a line of inquiry that I have pursued intermittently since 1965 when, as an undergraduate at Columbia University, I attended a remarkable course on Rousseau and Marx taught by Professor Robert Paul Wolff. In the time that has elapsed since then, political philosophy has changed almost as dramatically as the political climate in which it operates. Until well into the 1970s, Marxism, for American philosophers, was still a barely naturalized European immigrant. With the rise of "analytical Marxism," that situation has

altered beyond recognition.[1] What follows here attests to these transformations. Twenty-five years ago, before *A Theory of Justice*[2] and all that has followed in its wake, the liberal egalitarianism that figures so prominently in some of the chapters that follow was more implicit than self-conscious. This too has changed profoundly; today, liberal egalitarian social philosophy is a flourishing and ongoing concern. Only Rousseau studies exhibit a certain continuity. However, in recent years Rousseau has not much engaged political philosophers, in contrast to scholars interested mainly in the history of political thought. It should be obvious that I consider this neglect unwise, and I will be pleased if what follows here helps in some small way to rectify it. In any case, I would note that, despite all the changes of the past quarter century, my thinking on Rousseau has remained remarkably constant. My lodestars remain Wolff's own investigations of Rousseauean political philosophy[3] and what seems to me, in retrospect, a European import that has held up remarkably well over the years, Louis Althusser's still little-known lectures on *The Social Contract*.[4]

I have not hesitated to draw on earlier work of mine on Rousseau, Marx, and Marxian communism. However, so far as possible, I have relegated references to my previously published writings to footnotes, and then only when assertions made in the text call for extensive argumentation that would be off-putting to rehearse in the present context. I trust that readers unfamiliar with what I have written elsewhere will find that what I shall go on to discuss here stands well enough on its own.

I cannot begin to thank everyone who has helped in one way or another to shape my views on the themes of this book. In addition

1 Cf. Erik Olin Wright, Andrew Levine, and Elliott Sober, *Reconstructing Marxism* (London: Verso, 1992), Chapter 1.

2 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).

3 Unfortunately, very little of this has found its way into print; but see Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper, 1970).

4 Louis Althusser, "Sur le *Contrat Social* (Les Décalages)," in *Cahiers pour l'analyse*, no. 8, *L'Impensée de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Paris, n.d.), translated as "Rousseau: The Social Contract," in Louis Althusser, *Politics and History* (London: New Left Books, 1972). In my first sustained investigation of Rousseau's political philosophy, I attempted, in effect, to deploy Althusserian positions on Rousseau to some of the theoretical problems identified by Wolff; see *The Politics of Autonomy: A Kantian Reading of Rousseau's "Social Contract"* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1976).

to countless conversations, Erik Wright has read and commented in heroic detail on drafts of this manuscript. Daniel Hausman has also provided extensive and insightful comments at various stages of its composition. Others who have provided comments on particular chapters or on talks that have eventually become chapters include Richard Arneson, G. A. Cohen, Gerald Doppelt, Jane Mansbridge, Debra Satz, Elliott Sober, Robert Ware, and Daniel Wikler. I must note that few if any of these friends and colleagues would want to sign on to all or even very much of what I shall go on to maintain. A version of Chapter 1 was read at a conference on Biology, Behaviour, and Society at the University of Alberta, Edmonton, in May 1991; an article based on that talk will appear in a special supplement of the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*. What follows also draws on talks I have given at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, the University of California – San Diego, the University of British Columbia, the University of Turin, Iowa State University, and the University of Chicago, and at the 1989 International Meeting of the Conference for the Study of Political Thought in Williamstown, Massachusetts. I have benefited greatly from discussions at these events. I would also like to thank my students at the University of Wisconsin – Madison, some of whom helped enormously in the gestation of my thinking on Rousseau and Marx. Finally, special thanks are due to Terence Moore at Cambridge University Press for his assistance in seeing this book through to publication.