

DIALECTICAL HUMANISM: AN ETHIC OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

BY

Hernan David Carrillo

Submitted to the graduate degree in Philosophy and the  
Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy.

---

---

Chairperson

---

---

---

---

---

Date defended: \_\_\_\_\_

The Dissertation Committee for Hernan David Carrillo certifies  
that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

DIALECTICAL HUMANISM: AN ETHIC OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Committee:

---

Chairperson

---

---

---

---

---

Date approved: \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

In the history of western philosophy, few thinkers have managed to generate as much controversy and confusion as Karl Marx. One issue caught in this controversy and mired in confusion the presence of evaluative language in Marx's 'later' works. Critics have seized on its presence, contending that it contradicts his theory of history, rendering his critique of political economy nothing more than proletarian ideology. These criticisms are based on an inconsistency that is only apparent. As this dissertation will demonstrate, Marx is able to *consistently* and *objectively* combine evaluation and description in his 'later' works because embedded within his dialectical method is an ethic of self-actualization I call Dialectical Humanism.

Since so much of the confusion surrounding this issue stems from a failure to adequately contextualize it, Chapter I places Marx's life and thought in proper perspective. With the overview of the development of Marx's life and thought complete, Chapter II examines his theory of history to understand how it explains socio-historical phenomena. Chapter III elucidates Marx's humanism, tracing its development from an explicit to an implicit aspect of his thought. In order to understand what Marx truly sought through the transcendence of alienation, Chapter IV carefully examines his solution to the problem of alienation. Chapter V then establishes the 'internal' relation between alienation and exploitation. Having thus brought out the connection between Marx's theories, concepts, and methods, Chapter VI identifies his ethic.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1:	
The Realization of a Philosopher.....	4
CHAPTER 2:	
A Materialist’s Conception of History.....	38
CHAPTER 3:	
“Nothing Human is Alien to Me”.....	56
CHAPTER 4:	
The Problem of Alienation.....	76
CHAPTER 5:	
The Dismal Road to Science.....	101
CHAPTER 6:	
Dialectical Humanism.....	124
CONCLUSION.....	162
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	166

## Introduction

If Karl Marx can be likened to a philosophical Prometheus for giving humanity some insight into its social reality, then unbounding him from the misunderstandings surrounding his thought is nothing less than a Herculean labor. With scholars and ideologues locked in conflict over the validity of his thought, it is less a philosophic dispute than a clash of worldviews. While a vast body of literature claims to examine Marx critically, much of it is cast through the lens of ideology. One issue caught in its prism is the presence of evaluative language in Marx's 'later' works. Critics have seized on its presence, contending that it contradicts his theory of history, rendering his critique of political economy nothing more than proletarian ideology. These criticisms are based on an inconsistency that is only apparent. As this dissertation will demonstrate, Marx is able to *consistently* and *objectively* combine evaluation and description in his 'later' works because embedded within his dialectical method is an ethic of self-actualization I call Dialectical Humanism.

Propadeutic to any attempt to resolve this problem, it is essential to place it in its proper context. The whole question of whether Marx's critical project can effectively combine evaluation and description was originally raised and resolved by actively or tacitly opposing the 'earlier' against the 'later' writings. With complete and unfettered access to his thought, compelling evidence emerged for understanding this issue in a new light. No longer limited to having to reconstruct Marx's ethic from the available remnants, it is now possible to derive it from patterns and themes discernible in the whole. While some scholars have acknowledged the possibility that Marx had an ethic of

self-actualization, certain factors have detracted from its full acceptance. The only constant operating in the debate is the tendency towards one-dimensional analysis. Whether arguing that Marx is best understood as a philosopher, a revolutionary, or a political economist, or trying to see too little or too much continuity to his thought, the *modus operandi* has been to represent aspects of his thought as its truth. To date, such partial approaches have only yielded partial truths.

Progress beyond this impasse requires recognizing that the problem is complex and as much political as it is philosophical. As one of the most controversial figures in the history of western thought, Marx proves *par excellence* that philosophy never occurs in a political vacuum. Not only has this fact placed almost every aspect of his thought under contention, but it has completely blurred the line between debate and diatribe. Lest one despair that the siren song of ideology dooms all discussion of Marx to founder upon the rocks of polemic, this isn't a tendency working itself out with 'iron necessity.' Breaking its spell does require puncturing some powerful illusions. Principal amongst them is the idea of pure objectivity. Far from facilitating the pursuit of truth, such preconceptions serve as one of its most powerful preventatives. With the possible exception of certain types of mathematics, there is no branch of study that is purely descriptive. It isn't a matter of whether we impose our values upon experience, but the extent to which we are conscious of doing so. The danger isn't necessarily *that* we value, but *what* we value. Fortunately, objectivity does not require strict impartiality. It merely requires the capacity to remain critical of one's values. So long as any area of inquiry is pursued critically, it is possible to be partial and objective. What this suggests is that any attempt to advance our understanding of Marx must minimize its tendency towards close-

mindedness if we are to maximize our capacity to do so adequately.

Proceeding on the belief that Marx must be grasped in whole before he can be understood in part, the best way to begin to see how self-actualization constitutes a controlling concern informing his ethic is to gain an overview of the development of his thought. Précis must precede analysis because any substantive treatment of Marx's concepts, theories, methods without adequate contextualization risks allowing the delimiting dichotomies of 'earlier' and 'later,' and 'humanistic' and 'scientific' to detract from illustrating how his fundamental and long-standing concern with self-actualization remains normative in nature. Although such an approach appears to place this dissertation firmly within the framework of existing essentialist interpretations, the unity it seeks to establish is of a different kind. Critics are right to regard much of what passes as essentialism as reductionism. More often than not, this arises from reliance upon principles and methods that emphasize sameness at the expense of difference. The specific difference between the kinds of crude essentialisms common in Marx scholarship compared to my own is its capacity to identify theme without ignoring variation. By cultivating a nuanced appreciation of his thought, it is possible to demonstrate how it constitutes a *unity in diversity* (identity-in-difference). Hopefully, what will emerge from reconstructing Marx's thought in this fashion is the recognition that he needn't be systematic in order to be thematically consistent, value-free in order to be objective, and that much of what is taken as evidence of his inconsistency and ambiguity in his ethical outlook arises from an inability or unwillingness to appreciate how his fundamental concerns can endure a complex evolution in thought.

## **Chapter I: The Realization of a Philosopher**

### *Introduction*

If political economy is the anatomy of civil society, then biography is the anatomy of a life. Each requires holistic explanation to be fully understood. There is no question that some of Marx's thought is problematic. Part of the reason his ethical outlook remains unclear resides in his failure to make it explicit, the other part in our failure to reconstruct it adequately. More often than not this stems from an inability to balance the personal and philosophical dimensions of the problem. Although it seems as if Marx's life and thought can be understood separately, such common-sensical presuppositions are precisely what often lead to repeating and reinforcing the tendency towards one-dimensional analyses. While it's not necessary to detail every aspect of his life or thought, any adequate analysis must reflect their general influence upon each other. As with much in Marx, the key to understanding his thought lies not only in its origins and ending but also in its evolution.

### *Halcyon Days*

Marx was nothing if not a contradiction in his own right. Born on May 5th, 1818, in Trier, Prussia, he came into the world a Jew in a Catholic city whose official state religion was evangelical Protestantism. Were it not for his father's conversion to Christianity to continue practicing law, it is unlikely Marx would have ever emerged from the socio-economic marginalization or cultural isolation of 19<sup>th</sup> century German



Jewish life to such prominence. This is not to say he didn't experience more than his fair share of adversity along the way. Although he started out with all the advantages and opportunities affluence could confer, his intellectual and political self-development would lead him down a path of privation, hardship, and woe. Plagued by poor health and possessed of unorthodox work habits, he was prone to drive himself to physical and mental collapse. As his philosophical convictions led him to political action, these predispositions wreaked havoc upon him and ultimately compromised his capacity to complete his life work.

Given his independent character and eccentric sensibilities, Marx was never a student or a scholar in the traditional sense of the term. Inasmuch as he found neither his home nor school life stimulating, he found little inspiration to excel. Records at Wilhelm Friedrich Gymnasium in Trier indicate that he was only a fair student of average application. Comments on his certificate of completion, dated August 25, 1835, praise his capacity to render difficult passages in Greek and Latin with "richness and depth of acquaintance" but, ironically, criticize his performance in religion and history."<sup>1</sup> Were it not for the Von Westphalen family and the enormous influence they exercised over him, it hard to say whether Marx would have ever developed into the person we know today. After all, it was Baron Von Westphalen's love of Shakespeare, poetry, and antiquity, not his father's passionate devotion to Voltaire and Racine, which found such poignant expression in his work. These seeds started to germinate around the time of his *arbitur*.

Written between August 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> 1835, Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession, is part psychological portrait, part program, and total prophecy. Here is a clear and condensed expression of the concepts and concerns that preoccupied

his thought and pervaded his works. In it one finds mention of the concept of man, the role of labor, the effects of false consciousness, the need for method, exploitation, and the importance of self-actualization. Both in tone and structure, it speaks eloquently on the human condition, displaying flashes of his flair for figurative language as well a certain capacity for pathos.

Marx begins the essay by claiming that humans are distinguished from the rest of creation by the fact that they alone possess free-will. However, this “great privilege” is not without its perils. The same thing that makes a man consciously self-determining can “destroy his whole life, frustrate all his plans, and make him unhappy.”<sup>2</sup> Confronted with this possibility, a young man must take special care not to make career choices based on momentary bursts of inspiration or fancy. Neither must he ignore his mental and physical limitations. To do either would likely invite ruin. If he relies exclusively on inspirations or his imagination to make career choices, he exposes himself to a whole host of potentially self-destructive deceptions. Even if he manages to avoid them by relying on his parent’s advice, there is still the possibility he will choose a career which is fundamentally incompatible with his personal capabilities. Ignoring these limitations can spawn a negative dynamic between the “mental and bodily principle” resulting in self-contempt, despair, and ultimately misanthropy. This is especially so for those attracted to “abstract truths.” The only way to find a profession capable of yielding true worth is to develop a decision procedure rooted not merely upon social experience and reason, but guided by principle. For the young Marx, this guiding principle was nothing less than self-actualization.

The chief guide which must direct us in a choice of profession is the welfare of mankind and our own perfection. It should not be thought that

these two interests could be in conflict; that one would have to destroy the other; on the contrary, man's nature is so constituted that he can attain his own perfection only by working for the perfection, for the good, of his fellow man.<sup>3</sup>

While one may opt to be selfish and develop into a "famous man of learning, a great sage, an excellent poet...he can never be a perfect, truly great man."<sup>4</sup> History only regards those as great who work for the common good of mankind.

### *Laissez le Bönn Ton Temps Roulez*

In the fall of 1835, Marx enrolled at the University of Bönn to study law. Although scant information exists from this period save some correspondence and school records, what little there is indicates it was a period of youthful indiscretion. From his father we find repeated complaints about his reckless and spendthrift ways. Like many students, Marx liked to party. Sometimes he could take this to excess. While "praising him for his 'excellent diligence and attention' in class, his school record at Bönn also cites him as "incurring a punishment of one day's detention for disturbing the peace by rowdiness and drunkenness at night."<sup>5</sup> Marx's revelries drove his parents from fits of despair to increasing alarm. Disappointed by his 'wild rampaging in Bönn,' and fearful that it might get him expelled or even killed, his father thought it best that Marx transfer to the 'sobering' atmosphere of Berlin to continue his studies.

The transfer to Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin did not transform Marx into the student or person his parents desired. To please his father he continued to study law, but to please himself he studied history and philosophy. During his twelve half-semester at Berlin, he only enrolled in nine courses. Despite the relatively light course

load, his performance was unremarkable. This reflected disinterest more than incapacity. When inspired (e.g. Gans' course on common law and Prussian civil code), he excelled. Instead, he devoted most of his time and energy on 'outside' pursuits. In his first semester alone he wrote three notebooks full of poetry for his fiancé "Jenny" von Westphalen, read the likes of Heinecuss and Thibault, translated the Germania, Elegies, and two books of the Pandects into German, started to learn English and Italian, founded a philosophy of law, and developed a system of metaphysics. Though little more than intellectual exercises, their true value resided in the regimentation they inspired. From it Marx developed the habit of excerpting, summarizing, and commenting upon the books he read.

It was during his second half semester that he became acquainted with Hegel. At first he found it to be a "grotesque and rough hewn melody."<sup>6</sup> A physical and mental breakdown afforded him the opportunity to go beyond his 'fragmentary' exposure of Hegel and read him from "beginning to end." Apparently, its impact was sufficient to inspire him to join a group of Hegelians composed of university lecturers, teachers, and writers which at one time or another included Mikhail Bakunin, Bruno and Edgar Bauer, Ludwig Feuerbach, Eduard Meyen, Max Stirner, David Strauss, Arnold Ruge, and Karl Freidrich Köppen. As formative influences go, the 'Young Hegelians' did as much to mould his mind and shape his future than any combination of factors up to that point in his life. From them, Marx not only deepened his understanding of Hegel, adapted some of his thought and style to theirs, but embraced a philosophical agenda whose advancement would set him on his life's work.

Seizing on the contradiction between Hegel's method and content, and siding with

the contention that “the real is rational,” the Young Hegelians sought to realize their master's universal philosophy. Convinced this was being impeded in Prussia by a climate of socio-political reaction, they sought remove these obstacles to the full self-actualization of the Idea. Their intervention took the form of a critical program whose first prong of attack involved repudiating the Church’s ‘irrationalities.’ Believing this cause could better be prosecuted from the lecture hall than the law courts, Marx stopped studying law to pursue a degree in philosophy. His first concrete contribution to this effort can be found in his doctoral dissertation. Initially intended as a comprehensive study of post-Aristotelian philosophy, it later restricted itself to an analysis of the differences between the Democritean and Epicurean philosophy of nature.

Entitled On the Difference between the Epicurean and Democritean Philosophies of Nature, Marx’s doctoral dissertation is significant for a number of reasons, most notably for heralding the arrival of the supposed ‘early’ Marx. Exit the schoolboy searching for a voice, style, and direction. Enter the man of trademark wit, epigrammatic flair, and keenly logical mind. In it Marx employs the Hegelian methodology not merely to examine and close a lacuna in its philosophy of history, but draw important parallels from the post-Aristotelian period for the post-Hegelian situation. The question of the difference between these philosophies of self-consciousness has significant ramifications for its modern variants as it demonstrates that theoretical differences can have profound practical consequences. Like Democritus and Epicurus, the Left (Young) and Right Hegelians share the same basic philosophy, differing on its proper application and meaning.

Proceeding hermeneutically and dialectically, Marx develops the contradiction

between Democritus and Epicurus sharing the same philosophy of nature yet differing as to its truth, certainty, and application. How can the same atomic principle result in so varied a practice that Democritus is reputed to have scoured the earth in a desperate search for knowledge while Epicurus was content to stay put in his garden? Marx resolves this conundrum by contrasting the role they ascribed to theory. Whereas Democritus believed that the primary purpose of theory was objective explanation, Epicurus regarded it merely a means to *ataraxy*. It is precisely this radical difference in meta-theory which explains their radically different praxis. In reversing the traditional purpose of theory, Epicurus also transformed the traditional epistemological dynamic from one of passive perception to active sensuous activity. Marx believed these adaptations fundamentally revolutionized his materialism, enabling him to develop a truly scientific understanding of the cosmos. Quick to acknowledge and condemn “the reckless irresponsibility of Epicurus in the explanation of physical phenomena,” he nonetheless lauds him as a Promethean figure for advancing Greek philosophy by breaking free from some of its ‘irrational’ constraints on theorizing.<sup>7</sup> From this study, Marx found justification for emphasizing Hegel’s method over its content, precedent for criticizing the Prussian state for its ‘irrationalities,’ and reinforcement for his conviction that the Young Hegelians reflected the true spirit of Hegel.

### *The Prussian Eagle vs. the Owl of Minerva*

As Marx came closer to discovering the “rational kernel in the mystical shell” of Hegel’s philosophy, his initial career plans were dealt a series of crippling blows. By

making common cause with the Young Hegelians, he also shared in their misfortunes. No sooner had they launched their critical program in earnest than the authorities moved to quash it. The accession of King Wilhelm IV to the Prussian throne in 1840 was part of romanticist reaction sweeping across the country and intensifying all existing forms of repression. Bent on rooting out and ridding themselves of anything ‘unchristian or un-Prussian,’ the government lashed out at anyone and anything they deemed remotely subversive. With newly appointed Minister of Culture Eichhorn playing the part of the royal hatchet man, the Young Hegelians were driven out of Prussia’s universities *en masse*. Ruge lost his position at Halle, Strauss fled Tübingen for Switzerland, Feuerbach left Erlangen for rural seclusion, and Bruno Bauer was transferred from Berlin to Bönn.

Marx had originally intended to complete his doctorate, publish his dissertation, and resume his philosophical collaborations with Bruno Bauer, all with the hopes of obtaining a position at the University of Bönn. The appointment of the anti-Hegelian Schelling to the philosophy department at Berlin disrupted these plans by making it politically impossible for him to complete his degree there. Recognizing that his prospects for becoming a *privatdozent* at Bonn were now decidedly poor, he thought he might still be able to work there as a *doctorpromotus*. While Marx managed to obtain a doctorate from the University of Jena on April 15, 1841 just for this purpose, he sabotaged his own plan. Instead of following through on his intention to publish his dissertation, he postponed it in favor of reaffirming the legitimacy of the Young Hegelian critical project. When it resulted in a highly controversial pamphlet proclaiming Hegel to be a revolutionary atheist, any remaining hopes Marx had for an academic career in Prussia ended. As it turns out, these setbacks weren’t complete misfortunes for Marx.

He found both Bonn and Cologne unsuitable places for philosophy. As he told Bauer, Bonn was filled with too many “intellectual skunks” while Cologne “was too busy for me.”<sup>8</sup>

That the Young Hegelians were driven out of academia in no way deterred them from continuing their critical project. If anything, it only intensified their resolve. Barred from academia, many of them turned to journalism. While Cologne might have been a bad place for radical philosophy, it was a perfect place for radical journalism. As the most advanced city in Prussia, it was a cauldron of political discontent and a magnet for “heretical thinkers and Bohemian malcontents.”<sup>9</sup> Chaffing against the restraints of the absolutist regime in Berlin, they desired a form of government better suited to their interests. Their demands included increased democracy, a free press, extension of the railway service, and common flag, and a unified Germany. Out of this fervent the *Rheinish Zeitung* was born. Meant as a counterweight to the conservative *Kölnische Zeitung*, it was founded by and for the liberal bourgeois to advance their desiderata. That it came into print had nothing to do with Prussia’s commitment to the freedom of the press and everything to do with the government’s interest in keeping the ultramontane influence in the Rhineland in check.

Up until that time, Marx’s only foray into journalism consisted of a “small contribution” criticizing the King’s censorship instructions submitted in February 1842 to Ruge’s *Deutsche Jahrbücher*. Unsurprisingly, it was censored. When the *Deutsche Jahrbücher* was subsequently suppressed, Marx turned to the *Rheinish Zeitung* to continue his critical project. While the newspaper was backed by wealthy bourgeois industrialists, its contributors were mainly Young Hegelians. Despite the obvious



philosophical differences between the paper's shareholders and contributors, their political aims roughly coincided. As many of their demands were being debated in the Rhenish Provincial Diet, Marx took their proceedings to task. He had only completed part of his critique when a scandal broke at the *Rheinish Zeitung* resulting in his appointment as its editor-in-chief on October 15, 1842. Under his stewardship, the paper would take on a decidedly different character and gain the increased attention of both readers and censors alike.

Before Marx became editor of the *Rheinish Zeitung*, many of the Young Hegelians in Berlin were accustomed to treating it as their own personal press. Calling themselves "The Free," they scandalized Berlin with their crude antics and Prussia with articles redolent with revolutionary rhetoric. Whereas the previous editor had permitted this, Marx did not. With both government censors and rival papers massed against it, he attempted to steer the *Rheinish Zeitung* out of crisis. One of his first tasks as editor-in-chief was to deal with a charge leveled by the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* that the paper was flirting with communism. Still a Young Hegelian, Marx successfully fended off this accusation by refusing to grant either communism or socialism "theoretical or practical validity."<sup>10</sup> In order to prevent further accusations of the kind, he demanded that "The Free" cease their outrageous antics and improve their contributions. When they refused to do so, there was a falling out. Marx ended up getting the *Rheinish Zeitung* in serious trouble anyways after his articles on the plight of the Moselle peasants landed it in double censorship. Tired of the oppressive weight of the censors and of the cowardly stance of its newspaper's shareholders, he resigned as its editor on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 1843.

'Freed' by the government from such public concerns, he could now devote

himself to private matters. During this time he received a copy of Feuerbach's Preliminary Theses on the Reformation of Philosophy. It was a revelation. Having determined on the basis of Hegel's philosophy of nature and religion that the essence of theology is anthropology, Feuerbach argued that Hegel's speculative philosophy is "nothing other than" rational theology. Criticizing Hegel by means of what has been referred to as "transformational criticism," Feuerbach began the process of inversion "standing Hegel right side up." This begins with the recognition that "the real relation of thought to being is as follows: being is subject, thought is predicate. Thought proceeds from being, but being does not proceed from thought."<sup>11</sup> From this and a series of like 'transformations,' the "Idea" becomes "Man" and idealism gives way to materialism.

While it is important to recognize the impact that both the Theses and the Essence of Christianity had on Marx, it would be inappropriate to overestimate their overall effect. Although he "enthusiastically welcomed" their publication, it was not without some critical reservations. Unlike Feuerbach, for whom philosophy was contemplative, Marx believed that philosophy must become worldly. While Marx did appropriate Feuerbach's concept of alienation and man, it was his method of criticism that had the most profound impact on his thought. By continuing the process of "standing Hegel on his head," he would initiate his own process of self-transformation from an idealist into a materialist. Inspired by Feuerbach's Gallo-Germanic principle, Marx became convinced that "realizing philosophy" required uniting German philosophy with French political theory. He and Ruge decided to resurrect the *Deutsch Jahrbücher* and relocate to Paris precisely for this purpose.

## *Prometheus Outbound*

Before leaving Prussia, Marx wanted to marry “Jenny” Von Westphalen. For seven long years they had been engaged to marry. After a protracted and highly disruptive struggle to overcome their families’ resistance to their engagement, they wed in Krueznach on June 19, 1843. During his honeymoon, Marx started some work for what became the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Originally intended as part of a series of criticisms starting with religion and politics, and extending to science and ethics, Contribution to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law, On the Jewish Question, and Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law are significant for a number of reasons, not merely for what they reveal about the progress of his intellectual development, but for the programmatic principles and concepts they introduce into his critical project.

In correspondence between each other, Marx and Ruge agree that the acute political crisis in Germany requires some kind of critical intervention. If they are to succeed where others have failed, Marx believes they must avoid dogmatism and divination. “Up till now,” he observes, “philosophers have always had the solution to all riddles lying ready in their writing desks, and all the stupid external world had to do was open their mouths to receive these roasted pigeons of absolute science.”<sup>12</sup> Instead, they must “criticize the world ruthlessly” and “not be afraid of [their] own conclusions and equally unafraid of coming into conflict with the prevailing powers.”<sup>13</sup> In the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, they would try to show the world why it struggles and what it wishes.

In a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law, Marx utilizes

Feuerbach's method of transformational criticism to resolve the critique of politics into the critique of political economy. Acknowledging in the Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law that the criticism of religion forms the first premise of all criticism, Marx argues that it necessarily leads to a criticism of politics. Feuerbach, in critiquing Hegel's philosophy of religion and finding on that basis that "man makes religion; religion does not make man," convincingly demonstrated that man is no 'abstract idea' but 'part of the human world.'<sup>14</sup> Now that religion is revealed to be anthropology, Marx claims that the next step is to demonstrate that man makes the state; the state does not make man. It is in exposing the state as a man-made form of political alienation that Marx makes the connection between political and economic alienation, paving the way for the transformation of the critique of politics into the critique of political economy

On the Jewish Question forms a crucial link in the transition from the critique of politics to critique of political economy. Although it poses a host of philosophical, social, and theological problems, it at essence is a question of how to reconcile the general and particular interest. Marx claims that neither Hegel nor Bauer really ever succeeded in reconciling the two because they proceeded from unreal antitheses and achieved only imaginary identities. Were Bauer to appreciate how capitalism dissolved feudal society and divided man into a political and civil self, he would have grasped the economic nature of this contradiction and ceased appealing to political means to resolve it. The Rights of Man cannot reconcile the opposition between man's political and civil self because they are only the political reflection of his civil self. This can only be achieved by human emancipation and the creation of a "social self."

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*" 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."<sup>15</sup>

Since neither Christianity nor the modern political state can emancipate the Jews because their "question" is neither a religious nor political but rather a socio-economic problem, the only way to truly emancipate them is to emancipate society from *judentum* (commerce).

The recognition that humans make religion and the state will not realize philosophy by itself. This would require praxis. In order to achieve human emancipation and all-around self-actualization, a revolution was required. However, a purely political revolution leaving Germany's existing economic foundations intact cannot effectuate the necessary social changes for this to take place. Only a radical revolution could do this.

As "material force can only be overthrown by material force," Marx finds this in

A class of bourgeois society which is not a class of bourgeois society. This class must represent the dissolution of all classes. It must be a sphere of society of universal character as a result of its universal suffering, demanding no particular right, because no particular wrong has been done to it, but only wrong as such. It must no longer be able to appeal to a historical title, but to a human title only. It must no longer stand in one-sided contradiction to the consequences, but in general and all-around contradiction to the very hypotheses of the German State. Finally, it must be of such a nature that it cannot emancipate itself at all without emancipating itself from all the other spheres of society, thus emancipating them at the same time. In a word, there must be a complete forfeiture of man as he is, compelling an equally complete rebirth of a new humanity. This dissolution of society is the proletariat.<sup>16</sup>

The critique of Hegel's philosophy of right enabled Marx to resolve the critique of religion into the critique of political economy and revealed not only that "philosophy can

only be realized by the abolition of the proletariat,” but that “the proletariat can only be abolished by the realization of philosophy.”<sup>17</sup>

### *City of Enlightenment*

In Paris, Marx found a stimulating intellectual environment and a dazzling array of opportunities for study, discussion, and friendship. While he was there for only a little over a year, he absorbed a massive amount of economic and philosophical material. Reputed to have read over 10,000 pages of economic literature alone from November 1843 to February 1845, he worked systematically through the likes of Smith, Ricardo, James Mill, Boisguillebert, Eden, Lauderdale, Sismondi, and Say. In philosophy he read widely from materialists like Locke, Helvetius, and Holbach and French socialists such as Leroux, Proudhon, Saint-Simon, Fourier, and Cabet. He became so involved in the study of the French revolution and the history of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Estate that for a period of time he decided to forgo his critique of Hegel and write a history of the Convention. While he never completed this task, he came away from it with a deeper understanding of the nature of the class struggle and its connection to socialism. The French Revolution was the culmination of centuries of class struggle driven by economic factors leading to the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Socialism and communism, as logical outgrowths of French materialism, were only in their infancy and still prone to a host of utopian illusions. With the appearance of works like Proudhon’s What is Property? and events like the Silesian Weavers revolt, they appeared to be rapidly maturing into a nexus for realizing philosophy. While the *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher* would founder after

one issue for want of French contributors and a conflict between its editors, Marx would soon find other opportunities to continue his critical project.

Of all the people passing in and out of Marx's life at that time, the most important was Friedrich Engels. While they had known of each other and even met briefly in November of 1842, their initial encounter was marred by mutual mistrust stemming from the fallout between Marx and "The Free." Since then, Engels had moved away from Berlin, disassociated himself from "The Free," and spent twenty-one months in England working for his father's textile firm in Manchester. During his time there he made an extensive study of the history and character of English industry and published his findings in an article for the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Marx was greatly impressed by it. When they happened to cross paths again in August of 1844 at a Paris cafe, it sparked a ten day discussion which ultimately found them "in complete agreement in all theoretical fields."<sup>18</sup> It would mark the beginning of a life-long friendship and collaboration. Their first opportunity to collaborate came in the form of a polemic against the Bauer brothers known as The Holy Family. In what would become symbolic of their working relationship, Engels wrote his sixteen page contribution within the space of a night and returned to the Rhineland. He was "not a little surprised" to find out later that it had taken Marx another eight months and three hundred pages to complete it.<sup>19</sup>

Prior to collaborating with Engels, Marx had been compiling a set of notes for a book he was going to call A Critique of Politics and Political Economy. It originally was intended as the first in a series of monographs criticizing the state, law, morality, and civil life. Despite securing a publisher in Darmstadt for just such a purpose, neither the book nor the series ever appeared. Published posthumously in 1932 as the Paris

Manuscripts or The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, it expands upon the themes and further develops the problems discussed in both the Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right and On the Jewish Question. Having already identified the Jew as a concentrated expression of the anti-social effects of civil society, and established that the solution lay in human emancipation, the *Paris Manuscripts* explores the philosophic and economic bases for such a transformation.

### *The Labyrinth of Exile*

After the collapse of the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, Marx continued his journalistic activities in the Paris-based German radical periodical *Vorwärts*. The Prussian government had always kept a watchful eye on this publication, but only really began to exert pressure on the French government to have it censored after its satires of King Wilhelm IV. Expelled from France in January of 1845 on charges of lese-majeste, Marx gained entry to Belgium on the condition that he curtail some of his political and journalistic activities. When he arrived in Brussels, Marx found a large population of German émigrés that soon included many of his old collaborators. Ignoring his promise to the Belgian government, he became involved in some of its worker's leagues and remedied the absence of any formal organ to speak through by forming the Communist Correspondence Committee.

It was during this time that Marx finally finished The Holy Family. Originally entitled A Criticism of Critical Criticism, it also was meant as the first installment in a series of works addressing select philosophical and social problems and was soon



followed by Engels' Conditions of the Working Class in England. Ostensibly a response to a series of attacks by the Bauer brothers in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* against Marx and Engels for their 'empty' radicalism, it failed to appear in a form or fashion suitable to its intended purpose.

Above all else, The Holy Family illustrates the depths of the divisions which had formed between these former Young Hegelians and displays their diverging conceptions of how philosophy will realize itself. Unlike Marx and Engels, the Bauer Brothers have retreated from revolutionary praxis back to pure theory. Discouraged by their foray into radical politics and pessimistic about the prospects for revolutionary change, they came to regard the masses as unequal to the task. Convinced that they alone possess the capacity to realize philosophy, the Bauer brothers resurrected Hegelianism in the form of "critical criticism" and reinterpreted it to reflect their retrograde convictions. The leit motif of the *Literaturzeitung* was the opposition between the 'intellect' and the 'masses' and its 'critical criticisms' consisted of trying to demonstrate that all great ideas "come to grief the moment they become popular."<sup>20</sup> The Holy Family exposes the historical falsifications and refutes the philosophical contrivances used to support these claims, revealing precisely how reactionary they have become.

The Theses on Feuerbach continues the critique of the Young Hegelians. Written in Brussels during the spring of 1845 but published as an appendix to Engels' Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy in 1888, it constitutes another defining moment in Marx's intellectual development. Just as he critically distanced himself from Hegel, he now critically distances himself from Feuerbach. The Theses touch on a series of related issues arising from the defects of his contemplative

(metaphysical) materialism. Marx claims that though it enabled Feuerbach to “resolve the religious world to its secular basis,” it prevents him from “grasping the significance of “revolutionary,” of practical-critical, activity.”<sup>21</sup> The result is that he

Overlook(s) the fact that after completing this work, the chief thing remains to be done. For the fact that the secular basis detaches itself from itself and establishes itself in the clouds as an independent realm can only be explained by the cleavage and self-contradictions within this secular basis. The latter must itself, therefore, first be understood in its contradiction and then, by the removal of the contradiction, revolutionized in practice.<sup>22</sup>

The resolution of these contradictions can only be achieved by a materialism which recognizes “sensuousness as a practical, human-sensuous activity” and realizes that “man must prove the truth, that is, the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice.”<sup>23</sup> Then and only then will it be possible to realize philosophy.

Not long after Engels arrived in Brussels, they traveled to England to study economics. While there Marx and Engels not only spent a great deal of time in the libraries of Manchester and London but made important contacts within the English Chartist and socialist movements. Upon returning to Belgium, they intended to co-author a book based on the fruits of their research. What started out as A Critique of Economics and Philosophy ended up being The German Ideology. Meant to clarify their “own standpoint as against the opinions and ideologies of German philosophy,” it completed the critique of the Young Hegelians, and commenced an attack on ‘True Socialism’ in the persons of Hess, Grün, and Lünig.<sup>24</sup> Significant primarily for containing the first explicit articulation of Marx's theory of history, it exceeded The Holy Family not only in scale and scope but also in its propensity for petty diatribe.

Unable to find a publisher for The German Ideology, Marx and Engels had

nonetheless gained self-clarification, and, having done so, to set out to win the German and European proletariat to their convictions. While they had established ties with various organizations, they were under the sway of different theoreticians. Having critically demolished the 'True Socialists,' they now found themselves up against the likes of Wilhelm Weitling and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Marx had initially met both men during his time in Paris and even invited them to become part of their Communist Correspondence Committee. Between the two, Proudhon posed the greater threat as he not only rejected communism but exerted greater influence over the working class. When Proudhon published The Philosophy of Poverty, Marx seized upon this opportunity to attack him with The Poverty of Philosophy. Appearing in both Paris and Brussels in 1847, it displays the critical power of his theory of history and an emergent mastery of political economy. On its basis, Marx systematically refutes Proudhon's position by revealing it to be a composite of petit-bourgeois illusions.

By the time the Poverty of Philosophy appeared, Marx was well on path towards uniting theory and praxis through politics. This included but was not limited to publishing pieces of agitprop in the *Deutsch-Brusseler Zeitung*, cultivating ties with various political organizations, and presenting his ideas to the public in a series of popular speeches and lectures. Amongst the political organizations he actively courted, one was the Communist League. Formed in the 1830's in Paris and originally named the League of the Outlaws, they were a secret society whose principal activity consisted of conspiring to overthrow the government. After the Paris Uprising of 1839, they fled to England. Renaming themselves there the League of the Just, they grew into an international organization with affiliates in France, Belgium, and Switzerland. Engels

first came in contact with the group in 1843 and came away impressed with their leaders. Though Marx, Engels, and the Communist League shared similar political aims, they differed as to how they were to be realized. These differences were primarily due to the fact that the organization had long been under the influence of the utopians Gracchus Baubeuf and Weitling. In November of 1847, Marx traveled to London to give a speech to the Fraternal Democrats and attend the Communist League's Second Annual Congress. In a ten day marathon meeting Marx and Engels managed to convert the League over to their opinions and on the strength of their showing were commissioned to draft a manifesto on the principles of communism for them. When Marx and Engels returned to Brussels in mid-December of 1848, they promptly put off writing what would become the Communist Manifesto. For his part, Marx gave a series of seminal lectures before the German Workers Association. Prefiguring Capital in many ways, Wage, Labor, and Capital was Marx's first attempt at a popularized presentation of the economic mechanics and social dynamics leading from capitalism to socialism.

The dilatory fashion in which Marx went about composing the Communist Manifesto is reflected not only in the fact that prepared and presented Wage, Labor, and Capital before it, but that it took a stern warning from the Central Committee of the Communist League to get him to complete it. While Hess, Engels, and Marx all produced their own drafts of the Manifesto, it is Marx's version that is familiar to us today. To be fair, Engels deserves credit for its form, if not its content, as he was the one who suggested to Marx that they replace the traditional question and answer (catechism) format for one allowing "a certain amount of history to be brought into it."<sup>25</sup> The Communist Manifesto is not so much an original or independent work as a collaborative

re-summation of all of their thinking up to that point.

No sooner had Marx completed the Communist Manifesto, than a series of revolutions actually took place. Starting in Paris on February 24th, 1848 and spreading soon thereafter to Vienna and Berlin, workers rose and kings and ministers fell. Commencing what Marx would call his "mad year," the Communist League reacted to these events by transferring its executive authority to its district committee in Brussels. They, in turn, assigned it to Marx. In an effort to prevent the revolution from spreading to Belgium, its government banned all its worker organizations and expelled many of their leaders. Marx was summarily arrested, jailed, and quickly escorted to the French frontier. On the invitation of the French Minister of the Interior, he arrived in Paris just in time to reign in some of the rashness prevailing amongst its German League members. Consistent with the principles of the Manifesto, he issued a Declaration advancing the joint interests of the bourgeois and proletariat against feudalism and absolutism and dispatched some three hundred members of the Communist League to Germany to ready the proletariat for its revolutionary tasks. Marx and Engels soon followed, founding the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* in Cologne, and joined the Democratic Association to assist in the revolutionary developments. However, a series of political blunders on the part of the bourgeois and their representatives allowed the counterrevolutionary forces to rally and regain control of state power. Despite his best efforts, Marx was unable secure the conditions for a proletarian revolution. When the feudal reactionary revanchement was complete, Marx was forced to leave Prussia. He fled back to France only to be banished by its government to the disease-plagued department of Morbihan in Brittany. Confronted with this alternative, he took asylum in England.

### *Stranger in an Estranged Land*

No sooner had Marx arrived in England and settled his family in the Soho section of London than he summoned Engels from Switzerland to start another paper. Initially, he regarded both the move to England and the paper as temporary and hoped another revolutionary uprising would allow him to return to the continent. In the meantime, he re-established Communist League headquarters in London and, through the Refugee Committee, assisted with the influx of political exiles into England. For his first couple of months in London, Marx preoccupied himself with such affairs. In January of 1850, he branched out and started the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung: Politische-Ökonomische Revue*. It was during the short life of this ill-fated publication that he came out with a series of articles originally entitled *1848 to 1849*, but which are now known as The Class Struggles in France. This study served as the basis for a theory of revolution that made an economic crisis prerequisite for any political revolution. As trends in the business cycle ruled out such a crisis in the immediate future, Marx resigned himself to the fact that recent revolutionary period was over and cautioned the émigrés against any further agitation until another economic crisis arrived. This shift in strategy was not welcomed by significant sections of émigré population and Marx and Engels soon found themselves isolated and extremely unpopular. The infighting between the 'Marx Party' and the 'Willich-Schapper Faction' over revolutionary tactics eventually became so bitter that Marx was forced to transfer League headquarters from London to Cologne to avoid the complete collapse of the organization.

With the Communist League headquarters moved to Cologne, Marx turned his attention from public politics to private study with the intention of completing his economic studies and "moving on to other branches of learning."<sup>26</sup> Since his days in Paris, he had wanted to complete his critique of political economy. Marx's newfound "isolation" appeared to place him in a "splendid" position to do just that. Despite devoting almost all of his time to this task, he fell into a vicious cycle of poverty, debt, and illness that repeatedly undermined this effort. Marx could have avoided much of this if he had altered some of his personal habits. Instead, they gradually started to compromise his capacity to work. While he tried to remain stoic in the face of unrelenting adversity, his desire to keep up appearances only made matters worse. Any attempt to detail these difficulties goes way beyond the purview of a précis. Suffice it to say that the tragedies, horrors, and humiliations Marx endured during the 1850's were truly Jobian in nature and took such a toll on him that by the end of the decade he was reduced mere shadow of his former self.

This is not to say that the 1850's were for naught. Despite the constant distractions and disruptions, Marx managed to remain as productive as ever. Unfortunately, little of it advanced his critical project. Grinding poverty and crushing debt soon compelled him to spend his days writing for publications like *The New York Tribune*, leaving only the late night for his own work. Marx had always been a perfectionist prone to procrastination, over-preparation, and paralyzing anxiety in the face of a deadline. Now he was also a slave to truly appalling financial circumstances. Throughout the history of their collaboration, Engels encouraged Marx to get over his 'scruples' and complete his work as quickly as possible. Despite Engels' advice and

example, Marx never changed his ways. So long as some authoritative source lay unread, some point remained unconsidered, or prose unpolished, Marx found it difficult to complete his work. The combined effect of character and circumstance resulted in some historical reviews (Class Struggles in France (1850), The Eighteen Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1853), the partial exposition of his political economy (Grundrisse (1857) and A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy (1859)) and polemical pieces, (Revelations of the Communist Trial in Cologne (1851), The Great Men of the Exile (1853)) which while often brilliant in defense of his principles or person, more often overindulged his penchant for polemicizing.

Throughout all the trials and tribulations in this period of his life, Marx tried to make it appear as if he was almost finished with his critique of political economy. In reality, he had never gotten beyond excerpting and summarizing the materials he had collected for it. Appearance only started to approximate reality with the onset of a long awaited economic crisis in 1857. In preparation for what he hoped would be a new revolutionary period, he worked feverishly from November 1857 to May of 1858 to draw up the fundamental principles of his political economy. While this revolutionary period never materialized, the Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy: Rough Draft (Grundrisse) did. Published in 1939, it only became available in the German original in 1953 and in English in 1971.

With the principles of political economy established, Marx finally reached the stage where he felt he could write his critique. Through Ferdinand Lassalle, he secured a book contract under extremely favorable terms. Per Marx's request, it would appear in serial form under a series of deadlines, the first set for May of 1858. Health problems



prevented the first installment from appearing until January 21, 1859. As the first fruit of what had now become a fourteen year labor, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy fell far short of personal and popular expectations. Instead of containing the chapters on capital as promised, it confined itself to a critical re-summation of other economic theories. Now famous for its summary sketch of his theory of history, it again reconfirms that Marx didn't abandon philosophy for political economy but used it instead as 'the guiding thread' for his economic research.

*Ask Not What Your Country Can Do*

The 1860's started out much the same for Marx as the 1850's. The difference between the two decades wasn't so much that his personal problems disappeared as he managed to make some progress on his critical project despite them. In this he was no doubt aided by a brief respite from any political or journalistic work from 1861 to 1863. Between a small inheritance from the death of his mother, a large inheritance from the death of his friend Wilhelm Wolff, and the continued support of Engels, he managed to live the rest of his life without any form of employment. He put the extra time to good use by composing most of the material for what later would become the four volumes of Capital. This period of productivity was slowed in 1864 when he was drawn back into the political fray.

The spirit of proletarian internationalism experienced something of a revival in 1862 when a delegation of French workers came into contact with some British labor union leaders at the London World Exhibition. The encounter inspired the London

Trades Council to propose that they formalize their solidarity in an international association. Marx's experience with the Communist League had left him wary of any political involvement save "affairs of importance" he felt he could "steer in the right direction."<sup>27</sup> What led him to consider the London Trades Council proposal as an "affair of importance" was that it appeared to be a genuinely working-class initiative spearheaded by the same people responsible for preventing England from intervening in the American Civil War on the side of the Confederacy. He attended a meeting on September 28, 1864 to hear the French response to this proposal only to end up the corresponding secretary for Germany when it resulted in the foundation of the International Working Man's Association. The opportunity to "steer it in the right direction" appeared when he was elected to a sub-committee charged with drawing up the statutes and provisions for the association. Dissatisfied with the sub-committee's efforts, he arrogated the task to himself.

Marx recognized that the International was composed of many different groups with varying political tendencies. As the vast majority of its members were reformist in orientation, he knew he risked permanently alienating them if its statutes and rules contained any revolutionary rhetoric. In correspondence to Engels, he acknowledged that it would be some time before he could resort to the same old "bold language." Until then he had to content himself with being "bold in matter, but mild in manner."<sup>28</sup> The Inaugural Address, the Provisional Rules, and Value, Price, and Profit were all drafted with this dictum in mind. In contrast to his customary style, they confine themselves to sober economic analysis and subdued political pronouncements. Utilizing statistics to equally persuasive effect, Marx managed not only to get his Provisional Rules passed but

quickly rose to become the de facto leader of the International.

While Marx spared neither time nor energy on the International, it would be mistaken to imagine that he relished its responsibilities. In truth, they were so time consuming that he eventually regarded them as so many distractions from his theoretical work. Prior to joining this organization, he had made considerable progress on his critique of political economy. Since then he had hardly any time for his own work. His duties on the General Council of the International and its offshoot Reform League required him to spend most of his time in meetings and correspondence. Despite these enormous demands on his time, steadily deteriorating health, and pressing financial problems, he managed to complete the rough draft of the first volume of Capital at the end of 1865. Whatever free time he had from January 1866 to March of 1867 he spent reworking it into an “artistic whole.” In April of 1867 he personally delivered the manuscript to his publisher in Hamburg and after some delays it was ready for print later in August of that same year.

The euphoria of publishing the first volume of Capital soon gave way to the harsh reality that his publisher expected the rest of it by the end of 1867. Marx had contemplated moving to Switzerland for this purpose but decided to stay in London for the sake of the International. It was a fateful decision. From its inception the organization was fraught with huge problems. The attempt to unify and organize the working class into a social and political force led the International to admit tendencies into its fold whose differences prevented it from adopting any definite theoretical perspective or political program. This would be its undoing. The tensions and infighting between these factions for control of the organization was an enormous source of

distraction. At various times Marx sustained serious challenges to his leadership, particularly from the anarchist Bakunin and his followers, which he thwarted largely by procedural guile. It eventually became impossible to hold them all off after the fall of the Paris Commune in 1871. The bourgeois press blamed the Commune on the International and this became a pretext for a concerted governmental effort to destroy it. Marx tried to protect the organization from this grave external threat by centralizing its authority, only to be undermined from within. To prevent 'the forces of dissolution' from finally gaining the upper hand, Marx and Engels had Bakunin expelled from the International and moved its General Council to New York City. This did less to save it than speed its demise. Despite the collapse of the 'First International,' Marx never considered it a failure or a complete waste of his time.

### *Twilight of the Idled*

Exiting the political arena for good, Marx spent the rest of his life trying to complete his critique of political economy. Engels did what he could for him by eliminating his financial problems once and for all in 1869. Unfortunately, it came too late as the International had taken the last full measure of his health. The only other major works Marx produced after the first volume of Capital were The Civil War in France and Critique of the Gotha Program.

Part of the reason the First International failed was that the class struggle had assumed a national form. In Prussia, this encouraged the unification of the Lassallean and Eisenacher factions of the German Social Democratic Party. As Marx exercised a

strong influence on the Eisenach faction, he was sent a copy of the unified party program for his comments. He was enraged not only at prospect of such unification but that its program should contain so many 'Lassalleian' ideas in it. In marginal notes on the copy of the draft program, Marx goes paragraph by paragraph, line by line, caustically criticizing what he found to be a poorly edited litany of "outrageous retrogressions." In spite of all his attempts to instill "realist ideas" into the Eisenachers, he found them party to program larded with phrases like "the undiminished proceeds of labor," "iron law of wages," "the free state" and "the international brotherhood of mankind." Faulting both factions for forgetting the decisive role political economy plays in these matters, he ridicules their "servile belief in the state or in democratic miracles" and dismisses most of their "pious wishes" as so much "legalist rubbish."<sup>29</sup> Were they to recognize that the mode of production determines the mode of distribution, they would realize that "right can never be higher than the economic structure of society and its cultural development conditioned thereby."<sup>30</sup> Only in a full fledged communist society could one realistically "inscribe on their banners-for each according to his ability, to each according to his needs."<sup>31</sup> In the same caustic fashion, he goes on to clarify what he considers to be the correct socialistic perspective on education, child, female, and penal labor, and the work day. Despite the fact that the leader of the Eisenach faction of the SPD conceded that Marx's criticisms were correct, practical political interests prevailed and the unified party program was adopted with only minor alterations. The Critique of the Gotha Program remains valuable nonetheless for providing rare glimpse into Marx's vision of a communist society.

The last decade of Marx life was a period of protracted and irreversible decline.

Continued domestic difficulties and steadily deteriorating health prevented him from ever completing his critique of political economy. By 1873, these health problems had become so severe that he was largely incapable of work. Just as Marx had been compelled to wander in political exile during his youth, he spent his old age wandering in search of relief for his various maladies. Despite spending the remainder of life in and out of treatment facilities, he remained intellectually active much of this time, and tried to work on his political economy when and where possible. The death of his wife in December of 1881 hastened his decline and the death of his favorite daughter Jenny in January of 1883 was the coup de grace. He died on March 13, 1883. Dutiful friend and collaborator to the end, Engels collected whatever economic materials remained, collated them, and published them so that Marx's effort might not go in vain.

### *Conclusion*

As we have seen, Marx's 'choice of profession' had profound theoretical and practical consequences both for himself and the world. Attracted to "abstract truths," and believing that in pursuing them one's chief guide must be "the welfare of mankind and his own perfection," he sought some way to become a truly great man by working "not only for his own perfection" but "the perfection of others." Casting about in intellectual restlessness, he found what he thought was the means to do this in Hegel's philosophy, and eventually became convinced that this required a "ruthless critique of all existing conditions." This took the form of a plan to systematically critique the state, law, morality, and civil life whose second prong was the critique of political economy. What

started out so promisingly was eventually compromised by circumstances and character flaws that rendered him unequal to its demands. Marx's mercurial nature, combined with his perfectionism, led him to waste his energy in petty personal feuds, over preparation, and endless revisions. That Marx was unable to complete this critical project does nothing to diminish what he managed to accomplish in spite of these enormous obstacles. In truth, it was beyond the capacity of any one person to complete.

---

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> Franz Mehring, Karl Marx: The Story of his Life. Trans. Edward Fitzgerald. (New York: Covici-Friede, 1935), pp. 32-3.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession in Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works, Vol. 1. Trans. Richard Dixon. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Wheen, Karl Marx: A Life. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Werner Blumenberg, Karl Marx: An Illustrated Biography. Trans. Douglas Scott. (New York: Verso, 1998), p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, On the Difference between the Epicurean and Democritean Philosophies of Nature in MECW, Vol. 1., p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> Wheen, p. 34.

<sup>9</sup> Wheen, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Blumenberg, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Wheen, 53.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, Letters from *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in MECW, Vol. 3., p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx, Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law in MECW, Vol. 3. p. 175.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 168.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>18</sup> Wheen, p. 76.



---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>20</sup> Mehring, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach in MECW, Vol. 5., p. 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy in MECW, Vol. 29., p. 264.

<sup>25</sup> Mehring, p. 174.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 284.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program in MECW, Vol. 24. p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

## **Chapter II: A Materialist's Conception of History**

### *Introduction*

With the overview of the development of Marx's life and thought complete, it now becomes appropriate to examine particular aspects of his thought. Since Marx claimed that his theory of history formed the 'guiding thread' to his economic research and supposedly reveals the true nature and function of science and ethics, it seems the appropriate point of departure for determining their relationship to each other. After examining the relevant texts to gain a sense of what the materialist conception of history involves, we will have a clearer understanding of how it explains socio-historical phenomena.

### *The Materialist Conception of History*

Although Marx's theory of history forms a central component of his thought and finds extensive application in his works, its elaboration is scattered. First formulated and elaborated within the pages of The German Ideology, it emerged out of a joint effort by Marx and Engels to clarify "their own standpoint as against the opinions and ideologies of German philosophy."<sup>1</sup> In expounding his theory of history, Marx repeatedly draws attention to the fact that he develops his 'standpoint' on the basis of real rather than ideal premises.

The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination.

They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions of their life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way.<sup>2</sup>

The specific difference between idealist and materialist approach to history is that it takes these individuals

Not in any fantastic isolation and fixity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts, as it is with the empiricists (themselves still abstract), or the imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists<sup>3</sup>

As ‘real living human individuals’ require food, clothes, and shelter in order to live, the first historical act is “the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.”<sup>4</sup> The satisfaction of these ‘first’ needs leads to the creation of new needs. The re-creation of one’s own life leads to the pro-creation of new life, the formation of the family, and eventually to the appearance of society. As both a natural and social process, this implies that for any mode of production there is a corresponding mode of cooperation, or what is the same, a productive relation. Understood in this way, consciousness ceases to be some mysterious phenomenon operating in or on history but rather comes to be seen as a product arising out of need-based interaction. It is not through the mechanics of conceptualization but the dynamics of labor that humans achieve consciousness.

Since the various stages of development in human history are directly dependent on the degree to which the productive forces, the division of labor, and internal and external intercourse have developed, methodological considerations compelled Marx to focus his analysis on the development of the division of labor as it contains all

contradictions implicit in history. What this revealed is that “the existing stage of the division of labor determines the relationship of individuals to one another with reference to the material, instrument, and product of labor.”<sup>5</sup> This is why the division of labor and private property serve to periodize history.

The first form of property Marx distinguished on this basis is tribal property. It corresponds to an underdeveloped stage of production and consists primarily of hunting and fishing, with some agriculture. The division of labor within tribal society mirrors the division of labor within the family and, as such, property is almost entirely communal in nature. Tribal social structure may be patriarchal or matriarchal, but latent within it are the seeds of slavery.

The second form of property is ancient communal and state property. At this stage in human history agriculture supplants hunting and fishing as the primary form of production and immovable private property develops increasingly at the expense of communal moveable property. Growth in the population along with its needs and wants encourages inter-tribal intercourse and expansion into neighboring territories. The wars of conquest and compacts that followed resulted in the union of several tribes into a city.<sup>6</sup> As the opposition between town and country developed, the family unit was subordinated to the class relations of citizen and slave. As these twin processes unfolded, the state emerged to mediate their conflicts. The subsequent formation of great empires brought many tribes, cities, and nations under the yoke of a central power, facilitating the spread of commerce. The creation of vast commercial networks reliant on slave labor gave tremendous impetus to the productive forces, accelerating the concentration of private property and developing the division of labor. When the demand for slave labor finally

exceeded the supply of conquered peoples, free citizens were forced into bondage. Great empires like Rome fell in part because there weren't enough free citizens to maintain control over its vast appropriations.

The conquest of Rome by the barbarians set the stage for the transition to the third form of property: feudal or estate property. Unlike the ancient communal society which developed "from out the town," feudal society developed "from out the country."<sup>7</sup> Emerging from the ruins of the Roman Empire and developed under the influence of the Germanic military constitution, the feudal epoch commenced under conditions where the population had been decimated and a considerable portion of its productive forces destroyed. It nonetheless served to expand the existence of private property to the point where for the first time in history it supplants communal property as the dominant form of property. In the process, it multiplied and intensified class divisions.

While feudalism may have commenced under conditions where the population had been decimated and most of the productive forces had been destroyed, it eventually became far more productive than ancient communal society. Its technological advances were driven not so much by the division of labor as the antithesis between town and country. The town, with its masters, journeymen, and day labor, was the concentrated expression "of the population, of the instruments of production, of capital, of pleasure, of needs" while the country, with its princes, nobility, clergy, and peasants "demonstrates just the opposite fact, isolation and separation."<sup>8</sup> As this antagonism deepened and intensified, more and more serfs fled the country for the towns in search of work. The towns reacted to this influx of serfs by establishing police forces to protect it from within, militaries to protect them from without, and guilds to protect craft labor.<sup>9</sup>

The development of the town soon manifested itself in its expansion outward. By this time the separation of mental from material labor was well established, and with further development in the division of labor, there appears a special class of merchants. Emerging from the ranks of the guild masters to meet the need of commerce between towns, these merchants didn't so much introduce the capitalist form of property as expand its presence. The commercial connections they established between the towns unleashed a tremendous growth in productivity, marking the gradual rise of capitalism and the decomposition of feudalism. Before this each town had to develop its own technology. This exposed it to the risk of having to completely redevelop it should it suffer some kind of setback. The formation of trade between the towns created access to new and existing technologies, decreasing the likelihood of suffering such setbacks again.

The extension of trade between the towns eventually transformed them from relatively self-sufficient entities into specialized centers of production. For once the

Towns enter into relation with one another, new tools are brought from one town into another, and the separation between production and intercourse soon calls forth a new division of production between the individual towns, each of which is soon exploiting a predominant branch of industry.<sup>10</sup>

With the development of a division of labor between the towns, the guild system was superseded by manufacture. This was brought about by the struggle between the merchants and the guilds for control of the town economy. The guild, as an established and exclusive body of craftsmen, demanded high wages for their services. With improvements in technology, machines were able to replicate in components what craftsmen built *in toto*. Motivated by their thirst for profits, the merchants realized that paying an unskilled laborer to run a machine was cheaper than hiring a guild craftsman.

In a historically unprecedented move made possible by newly movable nature of capital, these merchants invested in manufacturing plants. This gave them exclusive control of the means of production and allowed them to replace guild with non-guild labor. The manufacturing system started out in weaving but went on to penetrate other branches of production, in the process absorbing into its labor force more and more of those the guild excluded, paid poorly, or the vagabonds the feudal lords could no longer retain. Against such competitive advantages, the guilds were rendered superfluous and forced to join the ranks of the "unskilled" laborers in order to survive. Banding together, the burghers were able to rival and eventually wrest political power from the country lords.

The growth of manufacture marks the beginning of the formation of the world market. Like the guilds, manufacturing was extremely fragile and required extensive protection in order to develop and prosper. The discovery and conquest of the Americas gave it 'enormous impetus' by vastly expanding the markets and bringing 'masses of silver and gold' into circulation.<sup>11</sup> Not only did this accelerate the rise of capitalism and the decomposition of feudalism but it fundamentally transformed both class and international relations to the point where the various tariffs, prohibitions, and treaties which had separated the world market into spheres of influence started to conflict with the free movement of capital. When the 'relative' world market started to generate levels of demand manufacture could no longer supply, the contradiction between manufacture and the 'relative' world market was resolved by the introduction of large-scale industry. So soon as it predominated, it "produced world history for the first time, insofar as it made all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for their

wants on the whole world, thus destroying the former natural exclusiveness of separate nations.”<sup>12</sup>

Large-scale industry, through its regime of universal competition and automation, completes the victory of the town over the country. In the process it not only

Makes natural science subservient to capital...takes from the division of labor its last semblance of its natural character...resolved all natural relations into money relations” but “creates everywhere the same relations between the classes of society.”<sup>13</sup>

On an ever increasing but uneven scale, capitalism reduces all existing classes into the bourgeoisie, with its separate national interests, and a class “for which nationality is dead; (that is) a class which is really rid of the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it.”<sup>14</sup> This class is the proletariat. As large-scale industry develops, it tends to create more unbearable conditions for it.

For Marx, the resolution of the antagonism between the bourgeois and proletariat is bound up in the contradiction between the forces of production and the forms of intercourse. It can only be resolved by abolishing the division of labor and overturning the system of private property. Historically, this contradiction initially assumes the form of a battle of ideas (*Kulturkampf*) and only when material conditions are right take the form of a political struggle. Capitalist competition complicates this process by pitting workers against each other for employment. So long as these workers remain isolated and opposed to each other, their “life and labor” will remain “something extraneous, something over which they, as separate individuals have no control, and over which no social organization can give them control.”<sup>15</sup> Both joint and several appeals to the state to remedy these defects are both delusional and ineffectual because the state is only the



illusory community and in reality serves as the organized domination of the ruling classes over the producing classes. Only with the universal appropriation of the productive forces and the establishment of communism will “the mass of instruments of production...be made subject to each individual, and properly to all.”<sup>16</sup> Only then will individuals cast off their natural (local) limitations and the development of individuals turn into the development of *world-historical*, empirically universal individuals.

Subsequent elaboration of Marx’s theory of history consisted largely of refinements resulting in a fuller if not slightly altered theory. This included, but was not limited to, changes in terminology, the addition of epochs, and rethinking the dynamic between base and superstructure, as well as the necessity of violent revolution. Many of these changes are reflected in Marx’s famous summary of it in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations which 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* constitute the economic structure of society, the real basis, on which rises the 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 processes in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing *relations of production*, or-what is the same thing-with the property relations within which they have been hitherto. From the forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins the era of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense *superstructure* is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations, a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of a natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic, or philosophic-in

short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relation of production. No social formation ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets for itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines, the *Asiatic*, ancient, feudal, modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formations 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.<sup>17</sup>

Critics have attacked the theory at every stage of its development for its purported determinism and reductionism, theory of classes, periodization scheme, and teleological implications. The materialist conception of history nevertheless enabled Marx to distinguish between reality and ideological illusion and achieve a sociological understanding of history and society.<sup>18</sup>

### *Making Sense of the Materialist Conception of History*

It would not only be remiss but erroneous to make it appear as if the foregoing suffices to capture every nuance or account for all the complexity of the materialist conception of history. Nevertheless, it manages to convey the gist of the theory and

none of the changes it later underwent altered it so drastically as to require further elaboration. Based on its elaboration in The German Ideology and summation in A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, the materialist conception of history is a dialectical (evolutionary) theory, which while acknowledging the subjective factor, seeks to describe the objective forces operating in history.<sup>19</sup> Whereas Hegel conceived of history as the self-development of the Idea, Marx re-conceives it as the self-development of humanity. For Marx, human history is a dialectic of labor where people self-actualize themselves by laboring to satisfy their needs and desires.<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that individuals (great or otherwise) are the driving force of history. Humans make history as classes, not as individuals.<sup>21</sup> Classes are central to the evolution of society because their antagonisms are the ‘motor’ of history and their dissolutions pave the way for new, higher forms of societies.<sup>22</sup> The historical dialectic is dependent upon advances in human productivity and classes gain their historic tasks from their ability to enable these advances.

Throughout most of human history, the ruling classes in any given epoch tend to be the ones which best develop its productive forces. Once they have performed their ‘historic task’ and become fetters upon the development of the productive forces, an epoch loses its ‘historical justification,’ and crises emerge and intensify until social revolutions clear the way for the productive forces to continue developing towards higher forms of society.<sup>23</sup> Although there is no fixed time limit for how long the ‘era of social revolution’ may last and no certainty that it will end successfully, it can commence no sooner than material conditions will allow. At various times, Marx makes it appear as if social revolution is a function of either objective economic factors or subjective social

factors. In actuality it requires not merely a crisis but a revolutionary class conscious *for itself* as a class irreconcilably opposed to other classes, capable of collectively acting to seize political power, and reorganizing society in accordance with its own interests.<sup>24</sup>

Marx not only schematizes the forces at work in history and traces their development, but also specifies the scope and nature of their interaction.<sup>25</sup> Every society possesses an economy, an economic structure, and a social form.<sup>26</sup> Marx distinguishes these elements into substructure (base) and superstructure. The productive forces and the relations of production form parts of the substructure; the ideological forms are part of the superstructure. In their relationship to one another, the productive forces enjoy explanatory primacy over the relations of production, and they in turn possess explanatory primacy over the ideological forms. That the productive forces, relations of production, and ideological forms are related to each other in this way in no way precludes the possibility of their mutually conditioning each other. While the economic base forms the ‘real foundation’ upon which the superstructure rises, the ideological forms can act on the economic sub-structure and modify it to some extent.<sup>27</sup>

The economic substructure, as part of the base, is the whole set its productive relations. Contained within the productive relations are persons and productive forces.<sup>28</sup> What qualifies a productive force as such is that it actively, immediately, and materially contributes to production and develops to the degree that “nature becomes human and humans become natural.”<sup>29</sup> Just as an economy can be distinguished into production, distribution, exchange, and consumption, so can the productive forces be distinguished into distinct yet interdependent components. This includes, but is not limited to, the means of production (tools, machinery, labor power, knowledge, skill, science), raw

materials, auxiliary materials (e.g. buildings, space, food, coal, tar, tallow), the revolutionary class, the community, the division of labor, the productive power of the masses, the power of the state, and the growth of population.<sup>30</sup>

The superstructure, for its part, consists of all non-economic institutions. This includes but is not limited to ideological forms like the state, law, art, religion, philosophy, and morality. Again, the fact that the economic substructure serves as the foundation and explanation for most superstructural phenomena doesn't diminish their dependence upon one other. Although most ideological forms rest upon the economic base no matter how indirectly, socio-economic systems need them to provide stability and legitimacy or to institute change.<sup>31</sup> Class-dominated societies are predicated upon their ability to mystify social reality and ideologies serve this function, more often than not, by maintaining the status quo. That ideologies arise under specific material conditions and serve definite social interests does not preclude them from taking on a life of their own. The specific material conditions that created them may cease to exist, but some prove capable of adapting themselves to changing realities. Religion, for example, originally arose out of awe and curiosity of nature.<sup>32</sup> Despite being superseded by science in its effectiveness as an explanatory paradigm, it continues to perform certain political, social, and psychological functions. Most ideologies are transmitted through upbringing, education, and environment and reinforced by tradition, custom, and habit. Once they control how an individual interprets experience, his or her perception of reality can become distorted and transformed into false consciousness.<sup>33</sup>

It is in view of the ideological forms and the false consciousness they produce that Marx proclaims, "if appearance was identical to reality, there would be no need for

science.”<sup>34</sup> The task of science is to go beyond appearances and reveal the essence of things. Often what appears simple is really a complex phenomenon that can only be truly understood by through a process of theory and praxis requiring active critical observation. Science succeeds in penetrating appearances to grasp the essence when it “resolves the visible and external movement into the internal active movement.”<sup>35</sup> Marx considers both natural and social science to be ‘exact’ and ‘objective’ and political economy to be the science of society revealing the laws of its internal motion. Perhaps it is its capacity to distinguish appearance from essence that explains why he categorizes science as a productive force and considers it neither super-structural nor ideological.

#### *Morality and the Materialist Conception of History*

As we have seen, morality is considered an ideological form that is supposedly relative to and dependent upon the mode of production. Like religion and law, its primary function is to serve as part of a system of control mystifying social reality, reinforcing the status quo, and conforming the general population to a set of behavioral standards necessary for the functioning of class society. It does this by making particular class interests appear as universal social interests. Conscious of their class-functions, Marx warns the proletariat that “law, morality, and religion are...so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush so many bourgeois interests.”<sup>36</sup> Appeals to justice, right, and morality are “so much obsolete verbal rubbish” which must be avoided as it confuses the proletariat and prevents it from understanding and acting in its class interests.<sup>37</sup> If morality is only so many concealed ruling class prejudices sapping the proletariat of

revolutionary energy, why is evaluative language such a pervasive feature of his analyses?

Again, appearances are deceptive and a superficial understanding of the theory overlooks certain important qualifications. Kai Nielsen, in his Marxism and the Moral Point of View, makes some of these distinctions. In arguing that Marxists can consistently criticize capitalism from a moral point of view while maintaining that morality is ideology, he claims that while “all ideological concepts are super-structural, not all super-structural concepts are ideological.”<sup>38</sup> What characterizes something as ideological is not that it is distortive, but that it is dependent on class interest.<sup>39</sup> That morality is used ideologically doesn’t mean that morality it is intrinsically distorted, just that it is prone to distortion in class societies. There is no necessary connection between morality and class and no inherent need for it serve some particular class. What this distinction illustrates is that all societies require some set of social norms to function and it is possible to have a non-distorted morality based on what is historically and anthropologically appropriate. Marx’s ethic of self-actualization is similar to this and those instances where his analysis contains evaluative language are based on it.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the materialist conception of history is a dialectical theory, which, while acknowledging the subjective factor, seeks to describe objective forces operating in history. Formulated, elaborated, applied within the various works of the Marxian corpus, it schematizes the forces and factors operating in human history and traces their

development, specifying the scope and effects of their interaction, and interpreting it to have been history of class rule which with the bourgeois relations of production ends humanity's prehistory of societies based on antagonisms. Like the phenomena it seeks to explain and justify, this theory has undergone an evolution of its own during which it experienced changes resulting in a fuller, more flexible theory. Criticized nonetheless for its reductionism, determinism, and teleology, it still retains considerable explanatory power and provides a sociological understanding of history and society. Just as careful distinction must be made between ethics and morality, so too must one be made between class morality and morality per se. While morality is used ideologically in class based-societies, it need not do so under communism. All human societies require some set of norms to function and it is possible to specify what they are in virtue of what is anthropologically, historically, and materially appropriate.



---

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy in Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works, Vol. 29. Trans. Richard Dixon. (New York: International Publishers, 1975) p. 264.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology in MECW, Vol. 5, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 64, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-74.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy in MECW, Vol. 29, pp. 263-264.

<sup>18</sup> The power of the theory to explain events and produce novel insights is evident in such works as The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte and The Civil War in France.

Appearing as a serial in *Die Revolution* in 1852, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte deals with the same material as The Class Struggles in France, differing from it by going beyond a superficial analysis of events to reveal the inner logic behind the failure of the French Revolution of 1848. Unlike the French Revolution of 1789, the

---

French Revolution of 1848 developed in ‘reverse fashion.’ Whereas the former started out conservative and ended progressive, the later started progressive and ended conservative. The process which began as a proletarian revolution and ended in executive dictatorship is a tale of political intrigue and betrayal of the first order. The solution to the riddle of the rise of a mediocrity like Louis Bonaparte is contained in an analysis of France's class struggle. In this instance, it revealed that neither the proletariat nor the bourgeoisie were capable of rule. While a parliamentary democratic republic may be the perfected form of bourgeois class rule, it is an unmediated expression of their class despotism. Like the proletariat, the bourgeois have their own class imperatives and are host to their own ideological illusions. Whereas the petit-bourgeois believes it transcends the class struggle and seeks to harmonize capital and labor, the big bourgeois suffer no such delusions or inclinations. Instead, they pursue their interests with a ruthlessness which makes prone to short-sightedness. However much the bourgeoisie may feud amongst themselves and however fearful they may be of revolution from above, they are always more afraid of revolution from below. Louis Bonaparte cunningly exploited these divisions and fears to usurp power and proved that in a crisis the bourgeois are willing to give up their political rule to preserve their class rule. The crucial lesson Marx drew from all this is that the proletariat's path to political power is fraught with perils and setbacks necessitating a process of critical revision before they are capable of completing the task

The Civil War in France was presented as an address before the General Council two days after the fall of the Paris Commune on May 30, 1871. In form and function was more of a polemic than a critical history meant primarily to defend the honor of the Commune. Contrary to the claims of its bourgeois critics, it was never controlled by the International, but rather by a coalition composed largely of radical bourgeois. Nonetheless, Marx believed it was essentially a government of the working-class and serves as the model for his conception of the Revolutionary Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Above all, the Paris Commune proved that the emancipation of labor could not be worked out by “laying hold of the ready made machinery of state, and wielding it for its own purposes” but rather only in a state form stripped it of its negative class features and rebuilt on the basis of its positive social features (MECW 22, p. 328). To their credit, the Communards made tremendous strides towards doing just that. For any revolution to succeed, it needs time. This was a luxury the Commune lacked. As soon as it was proclaimed, the counterrevolutionary forces in France schemed with the Prussians and contrived conciliation with the Commune until it could crush it.

<sup>19</sup> Mandell Bober, Karl Marx's Interpretation of History. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1927), p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

---

<sup>23</sup> Bober, p. 42.

<sup>24</sup> G. A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> Bober, p. 273.

<sup>26</sup> Cohen, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>29</sup> Phillip Kain, Marx' Method, Epistemology, and Humanism: A Study in the Development of His Thought. *Sovietica* 48. (Dordrecht: D Reidel, 1986), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p 46; George Brenkert, Marx's Ethic of Freedom. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 31

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>32</sup> Bober, p. 160.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. III. in MECW, Vol. 37, p. 311.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto in MECW, Vol. 6, p. 495.

<sup>37</sup> Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program in MECW, Vol. 24, p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Kai Nielsen, Marxism and the Moral Point of View: Morality, Ideology, and Historical Materialism. (Boulder: Westview Press. 1989), p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

### **Chapter III: “Nothing Human is Alien to Me”**

#### *Introduction*

One of the reasons Marx’s ethic remains so misunderstood stems from the way his thought became available to us. Since so many of his works appeared belatedly (e.g., his dissertation, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, The German Ideology, and the Grundrisse), his first interpreters were forced to understand him on the basis of only part of his thought. Depending on what was available at the time, their translations, the method used to understand them, or predilections of the particular interpreter, Marx came to be regarded as a philosopher, revolutionary, or political economist when, in truth, he was all of these things and more. Once such one-dimensional interpretations became established, they spawned certain misunderstandings. In order to resolve the misunderstandings surrounding his ethic, it is necessary, amongst other things, to re-examine the role humanism plays in light of what these missing works reveal, elucidate its key concepts, and recognize how it developed from an explicit to an implicit aspect of his thought.

#### *Truly Human Terms*

The notions of ‘essence,’ ‘consciousness,’ and ‘sensuousness,’ play an important role in Marx’s humanism. If we are to understand this aspect of his thought, we must begin by defining these terms.

The humanistic aspect of Marx's thought was initially predicated upon a concept of essence in which essences actualize themselves in existence and manifest themselves in appearance.<sup>1</sup> Rooted in the relationship between human beings and nature and reflected in the degree of species-consciousness attained, the human essence realizes itself in existence through labor. "Man is the object of nature and nature is the object of man" because they reciprocally realize each other's essential powers.<sup>2</sup> Theory *qua* criticism's role in this process is to measure appearance against essence and, through evaluation, engender praxis enabling the human essence to get realized in existence. In The German Ideology, Marx abandons this concept of essence and explains human history strictly in terms of material conditions, primarily through the historical development of private property and the division of labor.<sup>3</sup> With the introduction 'dialectic method' in the Grundrisse, the concept of essence reappears. However, it is now a methodological rather than metaphysical posit resulting from a theoretical paradigm. According to this new method, science penetrates appearances to reveal the essence not by empirical study alone, but by means of complex categorical constructs allowing us to understand social reality at a specific and limited level of generality. Despite this difference, the humanism of the early Marx isn't replaced by the science of the 'later' Marx but simply expressed in a different fashion. As we shall see, human self-actualization remains central to his thought.

Whereas 'later' Marx is said to reflect the influence of Hegel's Logic, 'early' Marx is said to reflect the influence of Hegel's Phenomenology. While this claim is debatable, it is certainly true that up until 1843 Marx was a Young (Left) Hegelian and subscribed to the concept of consciousness expressed within the Phenomenology.

Consciousness there is understood as a process involving ‘stages’ or ‘moments’ moving from lower to higher, simple to complex. In The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, this concept of consciousness develops through a dialectic between the human essence and existence in which consciousness seeks an identity with its objects. Need is the nexus linking the two by transforming nature in accordance with humanity’s constantly evolving needs.

Man, as a directly natural being, has natural powers of life. As a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being, he is a suffering, conditional, limited being. The objects of his need exist outside him. These essential objects are satisfied through sensuous appropriation, which in turn confirm his species-powers.<sup>4</sup>

By transforming nature in accordance with their needs, humans realize their species-essence in existence. The development of an essence is dependent on the development of consciousness because essence requires consciousness to reach its highest development.

When Marx became a materialist, he not only ceased to demand that appearance be explained as the realization of an essence, but also reverses the order in which phenomena is understood.<sup>5</sup> Consciousness from The German Ideology on becomes understood as the consciousness of “real life” processes.

In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven. That is to say, not from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes, and echoes of this life process. The phantoms formed in the brains of men are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men developing their material production, and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their

thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

This shift in Marx's thought should not be taken to mean that consciousness permanently ceased to play an active role in shaping social reality. To do that "forgets that it is men who must change circumstances and the educator must be educated."<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, the introduction of a new method for political economy and the reintroduction of the concept of essence in the Grundrisse reflect a return to a conceptualism best understood as counteracting the kind of crude materialism expressed in The German Ideology. The result was a more sophisticated and subtle concept of consciousness that, while no longer able to wholly constitute social reality, continues to affect it in more mediate ways.<sup>8</sup>

Sensuousness facilitates the development of consciousness by enabling the human essence to recognize itself in existence. Human beings, as proven by their need of nature in order to survive, are natural beings, and as natural beings are dependent on external objects. Humanism equals naturalism equals sensualism because it is having objects which "exist outside of man, as objects independent of him" which defines what it is to be a natural being as well as a sensual being.<sup>9</sup> However, neither nature nor the human senses in their primordial or 'pre-given' condition are adequate to satisfy human needs. They must be transformed if they are to raise the level of consciousness necessary for the realization of the human essence in existence.

Man is not merely a natural being; he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore he is a *species-being*, and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing. Therefore, *human* objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is human sense as it immediately is-as it is objectivity-human sensibility, human objectivity. Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the *human being*. And as everything natural has to *come*

*into being, man too has his act of origin-history-which, however, is for him a known history, and hence as an act of origin it is a conscious self-transcending act of origin. History is the true history of man.*<sup>10</sup>

Labor, as a process of objectification, accomplishes this by satisfying subjective needs in such a way as to give rise to new and different needs, which in turn call into existence new essential powers, reacting upon nature and the human senses transforming them in ways that allow for their fullest development.

Man does not lose himself in his object only when the object becomes for him a human object...all objects become for him the objectification for himself...The manner in which they become his is dependent on the nature of the essential power corresponding to it...Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear-is no object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of my essential powers-it can therefore only exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity; because the meaning for me only goes so far as my sense goes (has only a meaning for a sense corresponding to that object)-for this reason the *senses* of the social man *differ* from those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form-in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc), in a word *human* sense, the human nature of the senses, come into being by virtue of its object, by virtue of humanized nature. The *forming* of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present.<sup>11</sup>

Thus it is through labor that human beings transform nature into *humanized* nature, which as the embodiment, expression, and realization of their essential powers, allows them to sensuously recognize themselves in reality, thereby raising consciousness, and ultimately realizing their species-essence.



## *The Origin of Species-Being*

In order to understand what Marx means by ‘social man’ who actualizes himself in sensuously human labor, it is necessary to trace the history of this idea within classical German philosophy. With its origins in Christian philosophy, theology, and theogeny, this concern gets expressed in Kant through his concept of man as a divided self and morality as the means to overcome this schism.<sup>12</sup> The problem with construing human self-actualization on this model is that the gap between holy and profane will is so profound that Kant must postulate immortality for man to even be able to complete the process of moral perfection.<sup>13</sup> Hegel responds to Kant’s conundrum by re-construing the process of moral perfection in terms of an evolutionary theology whereby man is god in the making.<sup>14</sup> The divided and unrealized noumenal self of Kant becomes the unified and realized world-self of Hegel. Unfortunately, Hegel’s solution to this problem only succeeds by mystifying the relationship between god and man and transforming his system into rational theology.

Just as the concept of man undergoes change in classical German philosophy, so did its paradigm for human self-actualization. Whereas Kant conceived of human self-actualization primarily in terms of law and ethics and consequently viewed labor as a secondary factor in this process, Hegel’s study of economics led him to view it as a primary factor because it was “1) an appropriation of nature and annihilation of its independence, 2) a mediation between needs and their satisfaction 3) an activity which allows man to transcend his biology and zoology 4) a means of transcending animality, forming society, and achieving self-actualization.”<sup>15</sup> Hegel had originally considered

labor incapable of satisfying man's needs. However, his study of economics and analysis of civil society lead him to revise his opinion as he came to see how it enabled man to not only satisfy his needs but also socialize and humanize him in the process.<sup>16</sup> As Hegel became more conservative, the significance of labor shifted from its effects on man to Spirit's attempt at self-actualization.

Marx studied Hegel carefully and came away convinced of the crucial role labor plays in the socialization and humanization of man.<sup>17</sup> In adopting the Young Hegelian critical program, he was confronted with the challenge of overcoming the irrationalities impeding the 'realization of philosophy.' One of the fundamental contradictions in Hegel's system was its contention that the state was capable of socializing man despite the way civil society, with its economic laws, atomizes and alienates him.<sup>18</sup> Hegel's attempt to resolve this contradiction consisted primarily of redefining individual freedom as conformance to constitutional law. While the Young Hegelians all acknowledged the inadequacy of this solution, they soon developed differences over the best way to eliminate this irrationality.

After disaffiliating himself with the Young (Left) Hegelians, Marx received a copy of Feuerbach's Preliminary Theses on the Reformation of Philosophy. Criticizing Hegel by means of 'transformational criticism,' Feuerbach reduced theology to anthropology resulting in "true materialism and real science by making real man on the foundation of nature the basis of his philosophy."<sup>19</sup> In replacing 'speculative idealism' with 'true materialism' based on naturalism, Feuerbach completed the criticism of religion revealing Hegelianism to be a form of religious alienation wherein Man projects all his powers and attributes onto God.<sup>20</sup> It is not God, but Man as a species who is

divine, infinite, and perfect in its own right. In recognizing that Man is not God in a state of self-alienation, but rather that God is Man in a state of self-alienation, the goal of history is ‘transformed’ from the self-realization of God in Man to the self-realization of Man qua species-being.<sup>21</sup>

Although the concept of man as a species-being is theological in origin, it evolved under Feuerbach into a philosophical concept expressing the idea that man requires social collaboration, cooperation in all respects, for the fulfillment of his potential.<sup>22</sup> Man, as a species-being, is an intrinsically social being, and his species-life is characterized by spontaneous, free, universal, and conscious activity. It is only by virtue of this species-essence that men possess an essence in common with other each other. Feuerbach makes this clear when he says

“Isolated man by himself has not the essence of man in himself”; “the essence of man is contained only in the community, in the unity of man and man, a unity however, which depends only on the reality of the difference between you and I.”<sup>23</sup>

Marx would later reaffirm this with some qualifications in his Theses on Feuerbach when he says that “the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.”<sup>24</sup> This is because

Activity and enjoyment, both in their content and in their *mode of existence*, are *social*; *social* activity and *social* enjoyment. The *human* aspect of nature exists only for *social* man; for only then does nature exist for him as a bond with man-as his existence for the other and the other’s existence for him-and as the life element of human reality. Only then does nature exist as the *foundation* of his own *human* existence. Only here has what is to him his *natural* existence become his *human* existence, and nature become man for him.<sup>25</sup>

Since species-consciousness is not distinguished by consciousness as such, but by a conscious awareness of the species to which one belongs, whenever humans produce without consciousness of their species, they confound their humanity with their biology and cease being human.<sup>26</sup> Alienation emerges in consequence of conditions which frustrate the human impulse towards all-around development and results in dehumanization.<sup>27</sup>

Marx lauds Feuerbach for initiating a ‘real theoretical revolution’ and adopts his humanism and naturalism, which amongst other things, re-defines of the realization of philosophy as the identification and elimination of alienation. When Marx finally found the opportunity to study communism, socialism, and political economy in depth, his humanism gained further grounding. French materialism taught him much in this regard, amongst other things the importance experience, education, and the environment play in the development of man.<sup>28</sup> As the philosophical basis for both communism and socialism, and with man’s sensuousness and human nature at the foundation of its morality, it espoused the idea that true morality and true politics unites rather than divides people and forces them to recognize that they are not only necessary to each other but possessed of common interests.<sup>29</sup> It was French Materialism’s notion of man and morality that Owen developed into English communism, Cabet popularized as socialism in France, and which finds qualified expression in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.

### *A Species of History*

With the idea of man as a species-being one of the fundamental concepts of Marx’s humanism, what function does it serve within his ‘later’ thought? In order to

answer this question, we must continue to trace the development of his thought, recognizing how his humanism evolved from an explicit to an implicit aspect of it.

As we have seen, Marx set out to “realize philosophy” by means of “a ruthless critique of everything existing,” and although this critical project experienced certain modifications, it remained one of the underlying and unifying aims of his thought.<sup>30</sup> This critical project began with an external critique of irrationalities impeding the realization of philosophy within Prussia, but turned into an internal critique of Hegel, the Young Hegelians, and the True Socialists, leading Marx formulate his own outlook, which consisted of adopting the basic framework of Hegel’s philosophy of history, but re-conceiving it as a dialectic of labor, and consistent with Feuerbach’s humanism and naturalism, making man, as species-being who self-actualizes himself through labor, the goal of history.<sup>31</sup> However, his rejection of certain aspects of Hegelianism and acceptance of Feuerbachianism was neither uncritical nor complete, but rather constituted a phase in the overall development of his thought.

While accepting certain of Feuerbach’s concepts, aims, and principles, he came to reject some of its content. First in the Theses on Feuerbach and later in The German Ideology, Marx criticizes his humanism for being abstract and naturalism for being passive. While acknowledging that substituting “Man” for “God” certainly constituted an advance over Hegelian idealism, Marx claims Feuerbach really only replaces one abstraction with another. Moreover, to found such an abstraction on an equally abstract (because static) conception of nature fails to recognize that neither is capable per se of allowing humans to self-actualize themselves. Insofar as both require practical development for this to be possible, human self-actualization is not merely passive and

contemplative but also active and sensuous.<sup>32</sup> It is for this reason that Marx's 'materialist view of the world' replaces Feuerbach's ahistorical notion of man with real historical one active in its relationship to nature.<sup>33</sup>

It is important to recognize that neither the critique of Feuerbach's humanism and naturalism nor 'discovery' of his theory of history resulted in the complete rejection of the concept of species-being, but rather it reappears in Marx's 'later' thought. While it is true that from 1846 to 1857 this concept goes out of use, this can be attributed to Marx's attempt in The German Ideology to "settle his erstwhile philosophical conscience."<sup>34</sup> What ostensibly began as a process of self-clarification turned into what Kain has rightly regarded as an over reaction to idealism and utopianism.<sup>35</sup> In developing his own standpoint, Marx was so eager to differentiate himself from the Young Hegelians and True Socialists that he went to extremes in doing so. One of the manifestations of this desire to differentiate himself from them was the replacement of the metaphysical method with that of materialistic 'positive science.'

Marx started out like the other Young Hegelians deducing appearances from essences, but came to reject this approach and replaced it with one which studies material conditions, comprehends them primarily as modes and relations of production, and explains them in ways that are empirically verifiable. The specific difference between these two methods resides in how they define the proper function of categories and constructs. Whereas the old method utilizes them to organize and interpret experience, the new method confines them to summarizing the results of empirical study.<sup>36</sup> Marx imagined that adopting this new approach would allow him to avoid the chief defects of 'German criticism' by eliminating any reliance on categories and constructs prone to

ideological distortions. This shift in methodology isn't obvious in subsequent works because they are primarily focused on application rather than exposition. In true dialectical fashion, developments were underway which would render the turn from speculative idealism to crude materialism yet another phase in the evolution of his thought.

This process of 'philosophical' self-clarification gave way to a period of 'political' praxis during which Marx devoted himself to increasing his personal influence, raising popular consciousness, and assisting in the revolutionary developments in Europe. The Poverty of Philosophy, the Communist Manifesto, Wage, Labor, and Capital, and his journalistic work in the *Deutsch-Brusseler Zeitung* and *Neue Rheinisch Zeitung* are best understood as outgrowths of this effort. The subordination of theory to praxis during this period wasn't so much a repudiation of his humanism as a reflection of the political exigencies of the moment. After these practical efforts failed (the revolution of 1848 crushed, the *Neue Rheinisch Zeitung* suppressed, the Communist League dissolved, and Marx forced into permanent exile), he returned to critical reflection resulting in the Class Struggles in France and The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte. Having determined the causes for these failures and concluded from them that the revolutionary period was over, he resumed work on a critique of political economy that he had started in Paris in 1843.

It was in deriving the fundamental principles of political economy that Marx found a way to unite history, philosophy, and economics through what he called the 'dialectic method.' The 'dialectic method' of the Grundrisse differs from the methods found in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and The German Ideology by being a synthesis of the two. Rather than deducing essences from

appearances or reducing ideas to empirical facts, this new method analyzes a given historical epoch, identifying and differentiating the trans-historical from historical characteristics of production in a particular period of production, and in trying to grasp these categories in their interconnection, constructs a “concrete for thought” enabling it understand the “actual concrete” as “unities in diversity.”<sup>37</sup> These concretes for thought, rich in determination, are a totality of thought based on a totality of concentrations.<sup>38</sup> Marx considered them both ‘scientific’ and ‘materialist’ because they originated and ended in the concrete. Contrary to appearances, the dialectic method is closer to the method of The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 than The German Ideology in its return to a reliance on constructs and essences, with the difference that the essences these constructs derive reflect rather than constitute reality. It goes beyond either of the two in its capacity to synthesize his humanism and historical materialism into his economic analyses.

Given the various theories, methods, and concepts operative in Marx’s thought, not only with respect to their relationship to each other, but in their respective developments, it is important to not confuse them. The specific difference between his theory of history and ‘dialectic method’ is that Marx’s theory of history makes a claim about the nature of historical reality and its development while the ‘dialectical method’ concerns the way we go about studying, organizing, and expressing this development.<sup>39</sup> Although this would appear make their relationship unilateral, in reality it is reciprocal. While it is true that Marx’s dialectical method cannot fundamentally contradict his theory of history, nothing prevents one from altering the other in ways that make them consistent with each other. That a change in one can lead to a change in the other is



reflected in the fact that Marx's theory of history of The German Ideology differs from that of the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Whereas the materialist conception of history of The German Ideology is reductionist in that seeks to explain everything in terms of material conditions and deprives all ideas of any independence or efficacy, in the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy the economic substructure and ideological superstructure are reciprocally related and as such ideas are reinvested with some degree of independence and efficacy. This change has precisely the effect of making his theory of history consistent with his dialectic method.

Although the dialectic method does introduce a new paradigm for 'scientificity,' it didn't alter every concept or theory in Marx's 'later' thought, and where it did, the changes it wrought were never so radical as to render them completely different from what they were before the paradigm shift. While it did alter some aspects of the historical dialectic and some of the content of his humanism, it didn't alter the essential relationship to each other or the general outcome of history. This becomes apparent in chapter one of Notebook II in the Grundrisse, where we find Marx analyzing the character of exchange relations between individuals in capitalist society. In the capitalist epoch,

Subjects in exchange exist for each other only through the exchange of equivalents, as of equal worth, and prove themselves to be such through the exchange of the objectivity of in which one exists for the other. Since they exist only for one another in exchange in this way, as equally worthy persons, possessors of equivalent things, who thereby prove their equivalence, they are, as equals, at the same time also indifferent to one another; whatever other individual distinction there may be does not concern them; they are indifferent to all their other individual peculiarities.<sup>40</sup>

While this is what appears to be the case, at essence it entails something more.

Regarded from the standpoint of the natural differences between them, individual A exists as the owner of a use value for B, and B as owner of a use value for A. In this respect, their natural difference again puts them reciprocally into the relation of equality. In this respect, however, they are not indifferent to each other, but integrate with one another, have need of one another; so that individual B, as objectified in the commodity, is a need of individual A, and vice versa; so that they stand not only in an equal, but in a social relationship to one another. This is not all. The fact that this need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other, and vice versa, and that the one is capable of producing the object of the need of the other, and that each confronts the other as owner of the object of the other's need, this proves that each of them reaches beyond his own particular need etc., as a human being, and that they relate to one another as human beings; that their common species-being (*Gattungswesen*) is acknowledged by all.<sup>41</sup>

As these excerpts demonstrate, Marx's new paradigm for science doesn't replace his humanism; it merely integrates the humanistic, historical, and economic aspects of his thought into a 'unity in diversity.' In this 'unity in diversity,' the concept of man qua species-being resumes its function within his thought, with the difference that it has been transformed into a trans-historical concept. What remains constant in all this, as will be evidenced from passages to be cited in subsequent chapters, is that human self-actualization remains at the center of his thought and serves as the basis for his ethic.

Certainly, one could legitimately question why it is that if the dialectic method allowed Marx to reintroduce concepts like species-being into his analyses, how come it fails to reappear after the Grundrisse? This apparent inconsistency can be explained by the fact that there is a definite, if not conscious, division of labor operating in his thought. It is absolutely critical to understand that for Marx the *order of presentation* differs from the *order of discovery*. Although most of his works formed part of a critical project aimed at 'realizing philosophy,' they performed specific functions that included but were not

limited to the formulation, exposition, application of concepts, theories, and methods within what were primarily philosophical, historical, economic and polemical in orientation. In The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, The German Ideology, and the Grundrisse, the central focus is on critically elaborating the concepts, principles, and methods under consideration. Given this, its discourse tended to be explicit because its aim was exposition and clarification. By contrast, the Poverty of Philosophy, Class Struggles in France, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, Capital, and The Civil War in France applies these concepts, theories, and methods to a given problematic. Given this, the focus on application had the effect of rendering its conceptual and theoretical underpinnings implicit. This is not to deny that some of his works combine all of these functions and include all of these features, it is to reject Tucker's reductionist thesis that Marx was "a thinker who spent his entire life writing a single important book under different titles" and recognize that although his work is unified by a basic aim, they served specific functions in this regard, and as such express themselves differently.<sup>42</sup> The omission of such humanistic concepts as species-being didn't prove its reappearance was an aberration but rather that this concept became implicit in its application to concrete problems.

### *Conclusion*

In re-examining the role Marx's humanism plays within his thought, I have defined some of its principal terms, traced its development, and determined how it developed from an explicit to an implicit aspect of his thought. What started as an

attempt to realize Hegel's philosophy gave rise to a critical program that evolved its own concepts, theories, and methodology to achieve this aim. This critical project initially took the form of external critique of the irrationalities impeding the realization of philosophy in Prussia, but turned into an internal critique of Hegel. The result of this was a re-construal of Hegel's philosophy of history as dialectic of labor, and the adoption of Feuerbach's concept of man, so that consistent with its humanism and naturalism, the goal of history was transformed into the self-realization of Man qua species-being, requiring the elimination of alienation to do so. Marx's studies in Paris eventually lead to a period of self-clarification in which he undertook criticism of the Young Hegelians as well as the True Socialists, resulting in an over reaction to idealism and utopianism, and the replacement of speculative idealism with crude materialism. It was primarily through the critique of Feuerbach that he came to reject the metaphysical method of deducing appearances from essences and replaced it with a method of history which studies material conditions and reduces ideas to empirical facts. This is why he temporarily abandoned the concept of essence and species-being. It was only after formulating his principles of political economy in 1857 that Marx finally found a way to unite philosophy, history, and political economy. With the development of the 'dialectic method,' the concept of essence and species-being reappear, with the difference that the essences it derives now reflect rather than constitute reality, and that species-being is a trans-historical concept. This new paradigm for science doesn't do away with humanism but rather embeds it within the dialectical method such that it becomes implicit in application.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

- 
- <sup>1</sup> Phillip Kain, Marx' Method, Epistemology, and Humanism: A Study in the Development of His Thought. Sovietica 48. (Dordrecht: D Reidel, 1986), p. 14.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 23.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in Karl Marx Frederick Collected Works, Vol. 3. Trans. Richard Dixon. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 336.
- <sup>5</sup> Kain, p. 36.
- <sup>6</sup> Karl Marx, The German Ideology in MECW, Vol. 5, pp. 36-37.
- <sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach in MECW, Vol. 5, p. 7.
- <sup>8</sup> Kain, p. 32.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 30.
- <sup>10</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 337.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 302.
- <sup>12</sup> Robert C. Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. Third Edition. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2001), p. 34.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 35.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 45.
- <sup>15</sup> Nicholas Lobkowitz, Theory and Practice: History of a Concept from Aristotle to Marx. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), p. 326.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 329.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 333.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 266.
- <sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 328.

- 
- <sup>20</sup> Lobkowitz, p. 252.
- <sup>21</sup> Tucker, p. 85.
- <sup>22</sup> Lobkowitz, p. 360.
- <sup>23</sup> Frederick Engels, Feuerbach in MECW, Vol. 5, p. 12.
- <sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach in MECW Vol. 5, p. 7.
- <sup>25</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 298.
- <sup>26</sup> Istvan Meszaros, Marx's Theory of Alienation. (Plymouth: Merlin Press, 1970), pp. 81-82.
- <sup>27</sup> Tucker, p. 191.
- <sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, The Holy Family: A Critique of Critical Critique. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 174.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.
- <sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, Letters from *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in MECW, Vol. 3., p. 142.
- <sup>31</sup> Tucker, 135.
- <sup>32</sup> Lobkowitz, p. 355.
- <sup>33</sup> Franz Mehring, Karl Marx: The Story of his Life. Trans. Edward Fitzgerald. (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), pp. 129.
- <sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy in MECW, Vol. 29, p. 264.
- <sup>35</sup> Kain, p. 36.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- <sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft). Trans. Martin Nicolaus. (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 101.
- <sup>39</sup> Kain, p. 76.

---

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 242.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243.

<sup>42</sup> Tucker, p. 204.

## **Chapter IV: The Problem of Alienation**

### *Introduction*

In the previous chapter, I examined Marx's humanism, defined some its principal terms and concepts, traced its development, and determined how it evolved from an explicit to an implicit aspect of his thought. In doing so, we saw how the identification and elimination of alienation became a unifying concern in his critical project. Some scholars claim that what Marx really sought through the transcendence of alienation was not so much the full development of the individual as their freedom. Such contentions confuse means and ends. The reason the identification and elimination of alienation became a central and unifying concern in Marx's critical project was its being the cause and consequence of a set of contradictions preventing individuals from self-actualizing themselves. In order to resolve this confusion, I will define alienation, trace its meaning and use within the history of western philosophy, and detail Marx's solution to the problem of alienation.

### *What's in a Word?*

Possessing multiple meanings and uses, the term and concept of alienation has a long and rich intellectual history. The dictionary defines alienation as a "separation, aversion, aberration of the mind."<sup>1</sup> While this definition manages to capture the gist of the term, it gives no clue as to how these descriptors stand in historical and conceptual relation to each other. The basic meaning of the alienation is located in its legal sense



where it denotes the “transferring of a thing, or of a possession of a thing, from one person to another.”<sup>2</sup> It is from the legal meaning of the term that it evolved its psychological connotation as *alienatio mentis*. Alienation as a mental disorder covers a range of phenomenon, including but not limited to, unconsciousness, paralysis, or loss of one’s mental powers and is characterized by absent-mindedness, loss of concentration, and even insanity.<sup>3</sup> Further semantic development led to it acquiring its more familiar present day connotation as interpersonal estrangement. Combining elements from its different connotations, it involves a process of “separation” whereby what starts as a “warm” or “close” relationship ends in anything from complete hostility to utter indifference depending on the circumstances under which the rupture transpired.<sup>4</sup> Amongst its many uses, alienation has figured most prominently within theological, political, and philosophical discourse.

### *The Problem of Alienation*

Although alienation finds expression in philosophical discourse as far back as Plato and the pre-Socratics, it didn’t figure prominently within western philosophy until the Social Contract Theorists. For Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, this involved the relinquishment and transference of certain rights to a sovereign or society.<sup>5</sup> While sharing the same definition of alienation, they differed not only on what was required to establish a state of civil society, but in their attitudes towards it. Whereas Hobbes and Locke considered civilization a positive development, Rousseau regarded it a negative and socially destructive force. In Rousseau’s opinion, “it is civilization which corrupts

man, separating him from nature, and introducing “from outside” all the vices which are “alien to man’s constitution.” The result is the destruction of the “original goodness of man.”<sup>6</sup> One of the main reasons Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau differed so drastically in their attitudes towards civilization is that they experienced it at different stages in its development. Hobbes and Locke only experienced the emergent stages of capitalism and were thus in no position to anticipate the new social evils it would unleash upon society. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism had established itself in England and was on the ascendancy in France, making it possible for Rousseau to identify its anti-social effects.<sup>7</sup> Despite being in a better position than Hobbes or Locke to gauge the progress of civilization, conditions had only developed to the point where Rousseau could identify the negative effects of capitalism. His inability to grasp the root causes of alienation in emergent capitalist society led him to mistakenly believe that they could be resolved by means of moral radicalism alone.

Hegel came of age during the Enlightenment and was profoundly affected by the French Revolution. Dissatisfied with conditions in his native Germany, he desired a similar socio-political change. Formally trained in theology but possessed of an encyclopedic mind, Hegel sought his own solution to the problem of alienation.<sup>8</sup> Taking up where the Social Contract Theorists and classical German philosophy left off, he tried to reconcile “the fragmentation of man” first by means of love, then theology, before finally settling on philosophy. It was in the process of finding the solution to the problem of alienation that he came to recognize that his political discontent was borne of unrealistic ideals. In coming to accept the status quo, he reversed his position on the proper role of philosophy from changing the world to simply understanding it. Hegel’s

conservative political turn led him to construct a philosophical system where humanity's identity and self-development are bound up in its social, political, and cultural institutions, alienation consists of a separation between the individual and these institutions, and de-alienation requires surrender and sacrifice to them.<sup>9</sup> Although individuals may achieve a sense of identity independent of these institutions, they cannot self-actualize themselves without them. Separated from these institutions individuals are rendered particular and inessential beings. It is only united in them that they become universal and authentic.

In order to see how Hegel arrived at this position, it is important to understand his influences. Although greatly influenced by Rousseau, he relied principally upon Schiller and Fichte for the conceptual and programmatic basis of his system. According to Schiller, modern man differs from his classical counterpart in that he displays a "fragmentation" and "dismemberment" they did not. The reason man has ceased to feel at one with the state and the world is that culture has "inflicted a wound upon him, through the "division of the sciences" and of labor ("occupations"). This wound is the unavoidable consequence of alienation."<sup>10</sup> Schiller considers the loss of immediate unity between man and the world a "misfortune" requiring "harmonization." Fichte assisted Hegel in developing a mechanism for such a harmonization through his use of the concept of alienation as *Entausserung*. On Fichte's construal, the phenomenal world (object) is produced by spirit (the subject) in such a way that it is brought forth by spirit out of itself, set out by spirit over against itself, as something that is now in a sense external to it.<sup>11</sup> It is by virtue of human consciousness, especially its reason, that he is

able to grasp the true relationship between himself and the world and gain a sense of freedom and mastery from it.

Hegel had initially sought to re-harmonize man with the world through religion and art until he realized that they constitute more of a retreat rather than a reunification with it. It was only when he recognized that philosophy alone had the capacity “to unite all that is divided in society and man into a new higher unity,” that his “urge for religion” gave way to “the need for philosophy.”<sup>12</sup> However, the “wound” inflicted upon man by alienation required more than a traditional philosophy could heal. Hegel believed that only a philosophy conceived as reason could “unite that which was divided and reduce absolute bifurcation to a relative bifurcation which is contingent upon fundamental unity.”<sup>13</sup> Prerequisite for this unification are two “presuppositions.” One is that the world is a unified totality, “the absolute itself” which is “the goal that is sought” and already exists essentially if not actually. The other is “the emergence of consciousness out of totality.”<sup>14</sup> With these two presuppositions Hegel was able to overcome the bifurcations between man and the world by interpreting them as stages in the course of a teleological development towards their unity in consciousness.<sup>15</sup> It is by means of construing alienation as a bifurcation (*Entzweiung*) and philosophy as its cure that Hegel goes on to construct his mature system.

In his mature system, Hegel traces the entire development of the human spirit. This involved delineating the general development of civilization, highlighting those aspects demonstrating the “emergence of the individual out of an unreflective unity with his society and culture, as a distinct and independent personality; and the subsequent establishment of a new and conscious unity, with which there is room for

individuality.”<sup>16</sup> What emerges from this overview is the importance of humanity’s social, political, and cultural institutions to its development. While Hegel acknowledges that humans are essentially individual, he contends that only the “social substance” is universal. If an individual wants to become universal, “he must make himself conformable to it.”<sup>17</sup> It is in discussing what this entails that we first find Hegel speaking of alienation as an *Entfremdung* involving both “separation” and “surrender.”

In tracing the development of the human spirit, Hegel points out that a sense of individuality is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of human history, people have “conceived themselves primarily in terms of roles they occupy and the groups they live in.”<sup>18</sup> This awareness was neither conscious nor deliberate, but unreflective and immediate. Hegel terms the unreflective and immediate unity of the individual to his or her world the “ethical world.” It was only after the appearance of civilization that instances where individuals ceased to identify with their social, political, and cultural institutions became the rule rather than the exception. Hegel interprets this alienation to be a “separation” amounting to a loss of unity with the “social substance.” In ceasing to identify with the social substance the ego separates itself from society in such a way that it experiences it as something “external and opposed to it.”<sup>19</sup> Far from considering such a separation a complete “misfortune,” Hegel viewed it as a positive development in that it allows for the emergence of true reflective individuality.

While the emergence of subjectivity is a crucial step in the development of true reflective individuality, it is an extremely limited step in that direction. At most it consists of replacing a one-sided conception of oneself as a mere member of the social order with another self-conception that is equally (but oppositely) one-sided.<sup>20</sup> For

Hegel, universality is the natural condition of a spiritual entity like man made possible only through unity with the social substance. The “separation” of man from his social substance amounts to self-alienation from his true self. In turning away from the world of social substance, the individual is “alienated from its actualization, its inner nature from its existence.”<sup>21</sup> Hegel considers it harmful to cling to one’s subjectivity beyond a certain point because it eventually comes at the expense of one’s universality. A more balanced and positive self-conception combines both particularity and universality but can only be achieved if this willful assertion of subjectivity is “surrendered.”<sup>22</sup> This allows for a process of “acculturation” (*Bildung*) reuniting the individual with the social substance enabling both to achieve universality and self-actuality. By conceiving alienation (*Entfremdung*) as separation and surrender and dialectically resolving it through acculturation (*Bildung*), Hegel had speculatively solved the problem of alienation.

Feuerbach studied under Hegel but became critical of his mentor. Sensing an esoteric significance to his thought, he made a careful study of his philosophy of nature and religion. On the basis of this study he determined that Hegel’s speculative philosophy was “nothing other than” rational theology. Fancying himself a second Luther, Feuerbach tried to demystify this “alienating philosophy.” He discovered that the “trick” of Hegelianism consists of describing the actual structure of things while inverting their true relationship to each other. Correcting this requires “inverting” the relation of thought to being. What this reveals, amongst other things, is that true essence of theology is “nothing other than” anthropology. Alienation consists of Man projecting all his powers and attributes onto God. According to Feuerbach, it is not God, but Man as a

species who is divine, infinite, and perfect in its own right. In coming to recognize that Man is not God in a state of self-alienation, but rather that God is Man in a state of self-alienation, Man must reclaim these alienated powers and attributes as his own. Believing the history of mankind to be the continuous and progressive conquest of its limitations, Feuerbach thought that religious self-alienation would remain an unavoidable illusion so long as humans remained un-actualized.

### *The Task of Philosophy*

Marx welcomed Feuerbach's critique of Hegel and later praised it for containing "a real theoretical revolution."<sup>23</sup> He believed that one of its "great achievements" consisted of "proving that (Hegel's) philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, i.e., another form of manner of existence of the estrangement of the essence of man; hence equally to be condemned."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in reducing Absolute Idea to real Man on the foundation of nature, Feuerbach founded "true materialism" and "real science" by "making the social relationship of "man to man" the basic principle of his theory."<sup>25</sup> While crediting Feuerbach for having thus started the process of "standing Hegel right side up," Marx believed that the "task has not yet been accomplished."<sup>26</sup>

It is the *task of history*, therefore, once the *other-world of truth* has vanished, to establish the *truth of this world*. The immediate *task of philosophy*, which is in the service of history, is to unmask human self-alienation in its *secular* form now that it has been unmasked in its *sacred* form. Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the *criticism of religion* into the *criticism of law*, and the *criticism of theology* into the *criticism of politics*.<sup>27</sup>

Marx tried to enlist Feuerbach in this critical program but failed to get his cooperation.

Marx set about “unmasking human self-alienation in its secular form” by first critiquing Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Employing Feuerbach’s method of transformational criticism to devastating effect, Marx exposes the state as form of political alienation.<sup>28</sup> In the Philosophy of Right, Hegel attempts to justify the Prussian state by demonstrating that its institutions stand in “rational” relation to each other as a “totality.” In the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law, Marx carefully examines his constructions and demonstrates that Hegel “had the elements and dynamic correct, but not their substance and significance.”<sup>29</sup> It is because of this that Hegel is forced to confront contradictions that invalidate his constructions. Rather than demonstrating the state’s “rationality” and “totality,” they reveal its arbitrary and fractured character. Conscious that his constructions “depend” more on empirical fact than reason, Hegel resorts to sophistries and “the worst kind of syncretism” to compensate for it.<sup>30</sup> It is in refuting Hegel’s claim that landowners, by virtue of primogeniture, possess the impartiality necessary to mediate between the estates and harmonize their interests, that Marx first draws the connection between political, religious, and economic alienation.

With primogeniture, therefore, landed property, perfect private property, becomes an *inalienable* possession, hence a *material attribute*, which constitutes the “innermost person, the general nature of the self-consciousness” of the estate of owners of entailed estates, its “personality generally,” its general freedom of will, its morality and its religion.<sup>31</sup>

Though “*primogeniture is private property become a religion unto itself, lost in itself, elated by its own independence and power,*” this independence and power<sup>32</sup>



Does not flow *ex proprio sinu* from the political state; it is not a gift of the political state to its members; it is not the spirit animating it; but rather the members of the political state receive their independence from a factor which is not the essential factor of the political state, but from an essential factor of abstract civil law, from *abstract private property*.<sup>33</sup>

From this he concludes:

In the constitution where *primogeniture* is a guarantee, *private property* is the guarantee of the political constitution. In primogeniture this appears in such a way that a *particular* kind of private property serves as this guarantee. *Primogeniture* is merely a particular manifestation of the general relationship of *private property and the political state*. Primogeniture is the *political* meaning of private property, private property in its political significance, i.e., in its general significance. The constitution is here therefore the *constitution of private property*.<sup>34</sup>

Thus it is in exposing the state as a form of political alienation that Marx makes the connection between political and economic alienation, paving the way for the transformation of the criticism of politics into the criticism of political economy.

It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of these criticisms were not only “unmask human self-alienation in its secular form” but also “stand Hegel right side up” so as “to reveal the rational kernel in the mystical shell.”<sup>35</sup> Marx may have broken free from the thrall of Hegelianism, but that didn’t prevent him recognizing that in many ways it was superior to Feuerbachianism, possessing, amongst other things, a more nuanced understanding of alienation. Whereas Feuerbach’s “limitations and crudities” lead him to identify alienation with religious self-alienation, Hegel made use of alienation not only as an *Entfremdung* but also as an *Entausserung* (“to make outer or external”) and *Verausserung* (the legal transfer of property). Feuerbach’s critique of Hegel may have

lead Marx to question the meaning and use of alienation, but it did nothing to prevent him from properly utilizing it.

Marx develops and deepens the connection between religious, political, and economic alienation in the *Deutsch Französische Jahrbücher*. In the Introduction to a Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, he proclaims Man to be “no abstract being encamped outside the world” who should be “disposed to find but the semblance of himself, where he seeks and must seek his true reality.”<sup>36</sup> Instead of harboring such religious illusions, Man must now “think, act, and shape reality like a man who has been disillusioned and has come to reason, so that he will revolve around himself and therefore round his true sun.”<sup>37</sup> What a critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right reveals is that just as with religious self-alienation, political self-alienation satisfies human beings only in an illusory way. By deluding them into accepting fantastic rather than real self-actualization, these forms of alienation prevent them from ever possessing any “true reality.” Eliminating religious and political alienation so that humans can truly self-actualize themselves requires universal human emancipation rather than mere political emancipation.

In distinguishing political from universal human emancipation, Marx claims that far from eliminating religious or political alienation, political emancipation only perfects them. Instead of freeing man *from* religion, property, or the pursuit of profit, the modern political state “frees him *to* worship, own property, and engage in business.”<sup>38</sup> While this was certainly a world historical achievement and the real significance behind the Declaration of the Rights of Man, it was accomplished by dividing man into a civil and political self and forcing him to lead “a double life.” As his civil self, he is an

“independent and egoistic being” preoccupied with his own particularistic ends. As his political self, “he is a species-being invested with imaginary sovereignty and infused with unreal universality.”<sup>39</sup> Far from allowing humans to realize their potentialities, such a Faustian-like fragmentation creates a set of contradictions ensuring they remain alienated and dehumanized. Any attempt to resolve these contradictions by making the state “the genuine and harmonious species-life sets itself in violent contradiction to civil society by declaring a permanent revolution against it which can only conclude by restoring what it tries to abolish.”<sup>40</sup> The only real solution to this problem for either the Jew or the German is the emancipation of the society from judentum (commerce). For “as soon as society succeeds in abolishing the empirical essence of Judaism-huckstering and its conditions-the Jew becomes impossible, because consciousness has no object.”<sup>41</sup> Only with universal human emancipation will practical need “assume a human form, and the conflict between individual sensuous existence of man and his species-existence will be abolished.”<sup>42</sup>

With the ‘unmasking’ of human self-alienation in its religious, political, and economic forms complete, and their reduction to economic alienation, the stage was finally set for transcending it through a critique of political economy. Moses Hess and Friedrich Engels were instrumental in this regard by laying the necessary groundwork for it. Hess, for his part, incorporated communism into the Hegelian philosophy of history, based it on Feuerbach’s humanism, and suggested that a criticism of political economy would be necessary to realize it.<sup>43</sup> Engels, in his Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy, provided a preliminary sketch of what such a critique would look like. From “examining the basic categories (of political economy), uncovering the contradictions

introduced by the free trade system, and bringing out the consequences of both sides of the contradictions,” he concludes that economic alienation is due to private property and the “fragmentations” it creates.<sup>44</sup> Not only do they dissolve and degrade all natural relationships but also create periodic crises that increasingly immiserate humanity. Engels claims that these problems would disappear only if private property were abandoned and people produced consciously.

### *The Riddle of History Solved*

Following Engel’s lead, Marx first takes up the critique of political economy in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844. Proceeding from the fact of alienated labor and in accordance with the premises of bourgeois political economy, Marx shows “that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and indeed becomes the most wretched of commodities.”<sup>45</sup> Unable to grasp the essential connections in this “whole estranged movement,” bourgeois political economy resorts uncritical presuppositions and historical fictions to justify it. In order to avoid such errors, Marx proceeds from the “actual economic fact” that “the worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces.”<sup>46</sup> This reveals that “the objectification of labor (*Entausserung*), labors’ realization as its objectification...appears as a loss for the worker; objectification as a loss of the object and object-bondage; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation (*Entfremdung*).<sup>47</sup> What further analysis of estranged labor reveals is that man is alienated not only from the products of his labor, but the labor process, the species, and from other men.

Man is alienated from the products of his labor because private property transforms his objectifications (*Entausserung*) into estrangements (*Entfremdung*). This “whole estranged movement” arises from the fact that “man can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world.” It is the material on which his labor is realized, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces.”<sup>48</sup> Historically, nature has not only “provided labor with (the) *means of life* in the sense that labor cannot live without objects on which to operate” but also “provides the means of life in the more restricted sense, i.e., the means for the physical subsistence of the worker himself.”<sup>49</sup> Capitalism, in privatizing and commodifying everything, alters the relationship between man and nature so that workers must alienate (*Verausserung*) their labor power in order to gain access to this means of life. For, “it is only as a worker that he can maintain himself as a physical subject.”<sup>50</sup> This results in a “condition of servitude” where

The more worker produces, the less he has to consume, the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes, the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the more powerful labor becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more ingenious labor becomes, the less ingenious becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature’s servant.<sup>51</sup>

Insofar as “the direct relationship of labor to its produce is the relationship of the worker to the object of his production,” this “condition of servitude” has the effect of not only of producing idiocy, cretinism, and deformity in the worker but transforming the product of his labor into something “external, outside him, confronting him as something hostile and alien.”<sup>52</sup>

The question of the essential relationship of the worker to his or her products raises the further question of the relationship of the worker to the production process itself. Claiming this additional question arises from alienation being interrelated in its aspects, he wonders “how could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?”<sup>53</sup> That “estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*, within the *producing activity* itself” follows inasmuch as

The product is but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labor is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labor itself.<sup>54</sup>

The reason workers are alienated (*Entfremdung*) from the labor process is

It does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and his work feels outside himself. He feels himself at home when he is not working, and when is working not he does not feel at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary; but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification.<sup>55</sup>

The worker’s inability to find satisfaction and self-fulfillment in production compels him or her to seek it in consumption.

It is from the consideration of what it means for humans to be alienated from the product of their labor and the labor process that Marx “deduces” that they are also alienated from their species. Having defined man as a species-being who

Not only in practice and in theory adopts the species as his object (his own as well those of other things), but-and this is only another way of expressing it-but also because he treats himself as the actual living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore free being.<sup>56</sup>

He explains what it means to be a universal and therefore free being.

The life of the species, both in man and animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on organic nature; and the more universal man (or the animal) is, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic nature on which he lives. Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as natural science, partly as objects of art-his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible-so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity. Physically man lives only on these products of nature, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling, etc. The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body-both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man's *inorganic body*-nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself a human body. Man lives on nature-means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous contact if he does not want to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is part of nature.<sup>57</sup>

Unlike animals, which are "immediately one with their life activity," "man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness."<sup>58</sup> Alienated labor inverts this so that man's species-life, "his *essential being*" becomes "a mere means to his *existence*" and in doing this, renders it animal."<sup>59</sup> Alienation from the species is therefore pernicious because

It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*. This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and *his* reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species-life*, for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in

a world that he has created. In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him his *species-life*, his real objectivity as a member of the species, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.<sup>60</sup>

In summing up the effects of estranged labor, Marx declares “an immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species-being is the *estrangement of man from man*.”<sup>61</sup> This determination follows not merely conceptually from the analysis of the concept of alienated labor but definitionally from the concept of species-being. It is precisely because humans are species-beings that “every relationship in which man stands to himself, is realized and expressed only in the relationship in which man stands to other men.”<sup>62</sup> In considering how the estrangement of man from man “expresses and presents itself in real life,” Marx asks two interrelated questions. 1) “If the product of labor is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong? 2) If my own activity does not belong to me, if it is an alien, a coerced activity, to whom, then, does it belong?”<sup>63</sup> By process of elimination he concludes, “if the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to *some other man than the worker*.”<sup>64</sup>

In the real practical world self-estrangement can only become manifest through the real practical relationship of other men. The medium through which estrangement takes place is itself *practical*. Thus through estranged labor man not only creates his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to powers that are alien and hostile to him; he also creates the relationship in which other men stand to his production and to his product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. Just as he creates his own production as the loss of his reality, as his punishment; his own creation as a loss, as a product not belonging to him; so he creates the domination of the person who does not produce over production and over the product. Just as he estranges his own activity



from himself, so he confers upon the stranger an activity which is not his own.<sup>65</sup>

The analysis of alienated labor has enabled Marx to deduce not only the estrangement of man from man, but also the relationship of the worker to the capitalist or “lord of labor”- a relationship in which the capitalist/lord of labor stands over and against the worker as someone who is “alien, hostile, powerful, and independent of him.”<sup>66</sup>

In the section on “Private Property and Communism,” Marx describes what it would be like to transcend economic alienation. The principal forces involved in this process are “labor, the subjective essence of private property as the exclusion of property, and capital, objective labor as exclusion of labor” which “constitutes *private property* as its developed state of contradiction-hence a dynamic relationship driving towards resolution.”<sup>67</sup> In this drive towards resolution, “the transcendence of self-estrangement follows the same course as self-estrangement.”<sup>68</sup> Again, communism, as the “necessary pattern and necessary principle of the immediate future” is:

“The *positive* transcendence of *private property*, or of *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real *appropriation* of *the human essence* by and for man; communism is the complete return of man to himself as a *social* (i.e., human) being-a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man-the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, and between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.”<sup>69</sup>

The transcendence of self-alienation requires communism, which as “the positive transcendence of private property (economic alienation)...is therefore the positive

transcendence of all estrangement-that is to say-the return of man from religion, family, the state, act., to his human, i.e., social existence.”<sup>70</sup>

### *The Fetishism of Commodities*

Marx, as we already know, would devote the rest of his life to transforming just such theories into praxis. In developing and deepening his critique of political economy, he would make further qualifications as well as add a theory of value and surplus value. Despite shifting his focus from philosophy to political economy, alienation doesn't drop out of his discourse. There are numerous references to it in the Grundrisse, Theories of Surplus Value, and the four volumes of Capital. It's not that Marx abandons his theory of alienation, or even that it becomes implicit in his discourse, but that he adds to it by concretizing it as the fetishism of commodities. As Marx had established in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 through the analysis of alienated labor, the sale of labor (*Verausserung*) transforms its objectifications (*Entausserung*) into something external, alien, hostile, a form of punishment (*Entfremdung*). Over time, this has a distorting effect on human perception. As Marx would subsequently establish during the development of his theory of value and surplus value, commodities acquire their value from the amount of socially necessary labor power required for their production. The fetishism of commodities arises from a failure on the part of alienated workers to grasp the true nature of their relation to their products. As Marx explains in Volume 1 of Capital,

A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing simply because the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation the producers

to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor.<sup>71</sup>

What has happened is that alienation has rendered human perception prone to reification. One of the concrete manifestations of this tendency occurs when “a definite social relation between men assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.”<sup>72</sup> So that there is no doubt that the fetishism of commodities is an effect and outgrowth of alienation, Marx likens it to religious alienation.

“In order therefore to find an analogy, we must take recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent being endowed with life, and entering into relations with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the product of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>73</sup>

Rather than a rejecting or replacing his theory of alienation, the fetishism of commodities represents the continuation of the analysis of estranged labor to its logical and concrete conclusion, reaffirming the need for its transcendence in and through communism.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have the considered the traditional meaning of alienation, its general philosophical meaning and use, and the way in which Marx utilizes it in his thought. As a term and concept with many meanings and uses, it is closely associated with rise of civilization and considered one of the principal causes and consequences of its social evils. Hegel took up the problem of alienation and tried to solve it by

constructing a system in which the contradictions created by civilization are resolved through a process of acculturation re-harmonizing individuals with society. Feuerbach subjects Hegel's solution to a critique and determines that his speculative philosophy is "nothing other than" rational theology and that transcending alienation really requires reducing theology to anthropology. Marx in turn takes up Feuerbach's critique of Hegel and continues it by turning the critique of religion into the critique of law. It was in unmasking human self-alienation in its secular forms that he made the connection between religious, political, and economic alienation, and, through Hess and Engels, that he came to realize it could be transcended through a critique of political economy. What the analysis of estranged labor revealed was that alienation is a complex and interrelated phenomenon. Humans, as species-beings who self-actualize themselves through labor, are alienated not only from the product of their labor, but the labor process, their species, and other human beings. Consideration of this lead Marx to claim that transcendence of alienation requires the abolition of private property, the division of labor, and the establishment of communism. In further developing and deepening his critique of political economy, he brings the analysis of estranged labor to its logical conclusion in deriving the fetishism of commodities, concretely reaffirming the need for communism to transcend alienation.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

---

- <sup>1</sup> “Alienation.” Webster’s New World College Dictionary. Third Edition. 1996. p. 34.
- <sup>2</sup> Nathan Rotenstreich, “On the Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of Alienation” *Review of Metaphysics* 16 (1963) p. 550.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 550.
- <sup>4</sup> Richard Schacht, Alienation. (Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), p. 11.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- <sup>6</sup> Istvan Meszaros, Marx’s Theory of Alienation. (Plymouth: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 54.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.
- <sup>8</sup> Schacht, p. 24.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>12</sup> Schacht, pp. 31-32.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

---

<sup>23</sup> Karl Marx, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works, Vol. 3. Trans. Richard Dixon. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 232.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>26</sup> Schacht, p. 77.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 176.

<sup>28</sup> Tucker Robert C. Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. Third Edition. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2001), p. 103.

<sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 69.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Marx, On the Jewish Question in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 173.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 174.

---

<sup>43</sup> Tucker, p. 119; Louis Dupre, The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism. (New York: Harcourt-Brace-World, 1966) p. 78.

<sup>44</sup> Frederick Engels, Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 421.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 270.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 278.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 296-297.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>71</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. I in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 83.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 83.



## **Chapter V: The Dismal Road to Science**

### *Introduction*

Over the course of the critique of political economy, Marx comes to realize that alienation and exploitation are ‘internally’ related, so that eliminating one requires eliminating the other. The next step in educating the ethic of self-actualization in his thought is to understand how these two concepts became concretely connected. Due to the numerous false starts, revisions, and repetitions Marx made during his critique of political economy, it is not possible to discuss it in any real detail without going way beyond the purview of this dissertation. In order not to have to needlessly repeat the same ideas in different works, or state every subtle variation therein, I highlight those elements and transitions which provide a general picture of its overall development.

### *The Dismal Road to Science*

Moses Hess and Frederick Engels may have paved the way for a critique of political economy, but completing it forced Marx into unfamiliar territory. The intellectual effort he expended to gain a full understanding of the ‘special’ laws of motion governing the “origin, existence, development, and death” of the capitalist mode of production ultimately cost him "his happiness, family, and health."<sup>1</sup> The first fruits of what turned into a life-consuming effort are found in what was originally intended as A Critique of Politics and Political Economy but ended up unpublished and unnamed until

David Ryazanov of the Marx-Engels Institute referred to it as The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844.

Lacking as yet a theory of value or surplus value and unable to integrate the philosophical and economic aspects of his thought, Marx nonetheless tried to grasp the basic processes and necessary interconnections giving rise to alienation.<sup>2</sup> As we saw in the preceding chapter, this revealed that workers in capitalist society are caught in a socio-economic system that alienates them from the objects of their labor, the labor process, their species, and other human beings. Instead of activity that freely and fully develops their capacities, it frustrates their needs, deforms their bodies, destroys their minds, and debases their senses. The subordination of every aspect of human life to the rule of private property not only transforms society into an aggregate of egoistic individuals but reduces the vast majority of them to mere existence. With labor shunned like the plague, “workers only feel freely active in their animal functions-eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in (their) dwelling and in dressing up.”<sup>3</sup> As “man’s alienated species-nature,” money is “the visible divinity” promising to “transform all...incapacities into their contrary.”<sup>4</sup> Its ability to “confound and confuse all natural and human qualities” leads to the belief that self-actualization is possible through consumption alone.<sup>5</sup> Although the capitalist and the proletariat are both under the sway of this ‘inhuman power,’ it tends to enrich the capitalist and impoverish the proletariat while dehumanizing both.

Having established how capitalism alienates and dehumanizes individuals, Marx delineates the historical forces transforming it from a condition of irrational particularism to a rational universalism. His initial philosophical and economic studies have revealed

that capital and labor are in active internal contradiction leading 'inexorably' to resolution. Alienated labor may give rise to private property, but eventually they become internally related such that the eliminating requires eliminating the other. A communist revolution abolishing private property and the division of labor would start the process of de-alienation by placing humanity's economic life under rational regulation. This would eventually eliminate past inequalities and culminate with the 'positive abolition' of private property. Although it would be a "severe" and "protracted" process, Marx thought that as it progressed social individuals 'rich' in self-actualization would come to replace the alienated and dehumanized individuals of human prehistory.

Marx subsequently started work on what was supposed to be A Critique of Economics and Philosophy but which turned into The German Ideology. Besides one section in The Holy Family, the only measure we have in the mid-1840's to gauge the progress of his critique of political economy is the Poverty of Philosophy.<sup>6</sup> By this time, Marx had reversed himself and accepted David Ricardo's labor theory of value, surplus value, and quantitative theory of money. Although he had started the process of criticizing Proudhon in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, and would wage life-long struggle against what he believed to be his 'false socialism,' the Poverty of Philosophy is the only work exclusively devoted to this task. The gravamen of its criticisms center on the way Proudhon misutilizes philosophy and political economy to advance his reformist scheme. Marx methodically and systematically demonstrates why the contradictions of capitalism cannot be resolved by utopian economics, false dialectic, and bogus categories. What Proudhon fails to accept is that capitalist productive relations are based on class antagonisms entailing, amongst other things, alienation and

exploitation.

The bourgeoisie begins with the proletariat which is itself a relic of the feudal times. In the course of its historical development, the bourgeoisie necessarily develops its antagonistic character, which at first is more or less disguised, existing only in a latent state. As the bourgeoisie develops, there develops in its bosom a new proletariat, a modern proletariat; there develops a struggle between the proletarian and the bourgeois class, a struggle which, before being felt, perceived, appreciated, understood, avowed and proclaimed aloud by both sides, expresses itself, to start with, merely in partial and momentary conflicts, in subversive acts. On the other hand, if all the members of the modern bourgeoisie have the same interests inasmuch as they form a class as against another class, they have opposite, antagonistic interests inasmuch as they stand face to face with one another. This opposition of interests results from the economic conditions of their bourgeois life. From day to day it thus becomes clearer that the production relations in which the bourgeoisie moves have not a simple, uniform character, but a dual character; that the selfsame relations in which there is a development of the productive forces, there is also a force producing repression; that these relations produce bourgeois wealth, i.e., the wealth of the bourgeois class, only by continually annihilating the wealth of the individual member of this class and by producing an ever growing proletariat.<sup>7</sup>

Proudhon's reformist scheme is therefore not only reactionary but utopian because the 'bad' aspects of capitalism cannot be eliminated without also eliminating the 'good' ones responsible for historical progress. It is only by means of championing myth over history and imposing philosophy upon political economy that Proudhon makes it appear as if you can resolve these contradictions without a revolution.

Although the Communist Manifesto was ostensibly meant to clarify the aims, tenets, and tendencies of the Communist League, it also reflects Marx's growing command of political economy, and his increasing ability to integrate into his philosophical thought. Proclaiming human history to be the history of class struggle,

Marx and Engels are quick to acknowledge the revolutionary role the bourgeois have played in it.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous "cash payment." It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom-Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusion, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation.<sup>8</sup>

They also credit them with creating and transforming more than any other ruling class before it.

The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations put together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground-what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?<sup>9</sup>

One of the unintended consequences of all these productive advancements is that the bourgeoisie have conjured up economic forces they can no longer control. These economic forces create systemic crises manifesting themselves in epidemics of overproduction and oversupply which they try to overcome by destroying their productive forces, speculation, intensively exploiting markets, or conquering new markets.<sup>10</sup> All this exposes humanity to periodic crises until the systemic contradictions driving them are resolved. The alienation and dehumanization that result from living under such relentless economic insecurity, war, oppression, and exploitation can only

truly be overcome when the proletariat gains class consciousness, overthrows capitalism, and replaces it with socialism.

A practical attempt to raise class consciousness can be found in Wage, Labor, and Capital. In this lecture series cum serial, Marx develops the law of capitalist accumulation and the law of immiseration to their logical conclusion. Though still a Ricardian, Marx contests the claim that capitalism is natural and eternal, and tried to show some worker's groups that it is an irrational social productive relation arising out of a definite historical context and destined to collapse under the weight of its own contradictions. While it is true that capital and labor are dependent on each other, their interests are fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed. Whereas the capitalist seeks profit, the worker simply tries to stay alive. Powerful economic forces tend to undermine these imperatives. The profit system pits capitalists against each other and compels them to constantly revolutionize the means of production in order to maximize their rate of return. All these innovations only temporarily boost profits. As automation and specialization are continually introduced into the production process to counteract declining profitability, two parallel but convergent processes occur. Allowed to develop in accordance with its own organic laws, capitalism inexorably leads to monopoly forcing the failing bourgeois into the ranks of the proletariat. As the pool of bourgeois shrinks and the proletariat expands, improvements in the production process cause skilled labor to be replaced by unskilled labor, which in turn are gradually replaced by machines, thus creating an ever increasing 'surplus labor army,' which act to depress the wages of those still working. Once this becomes a global economic phenomenon, it leaves so much alienation and immiseration in its wake that the proletariat will be forced to revolt simply

to survive, never mind regain its humanity.

### *Birth Pangs*

Revolutionary exile in London gave Marx access to the British Museum, allowing him to deepen his understanding of political economy, eventually resulting in the development of his own theory of value and surplus value. In the span of three years (August 1850 to June 1853), he compiled twenty-four Note-books of Extracts on various bourgeois economists. They cover a range of material and provided the factual foundation for a comprehensive study of the capitalist mode of production. Marx was making so much progress in his researches that he thought he would be done with what was now to be named Political Economy in 1851. Instead of completing it once and for all and “pitching into another science,” he delved even further into the subject.<sup>11</sup> It was not until late in 1857 that he started to elaborate the principles of political economy. Marx claims there were many reasons for this renewed research period and its slow progress.

The enormous amount of material relating to the history of political economy assembled in the British Museum, the fact that London is a convenient vantage point for the observation of bourgeois society, and finally the new stage of development which this society seemed to have entered with the discovery of gold in California and Australia, induced me to start again from the very beginning and work carefully through the new material. These studies led partly of their own accord to apparently quite remote subjects on which I had to spend a certain amount of time. But it was in particular the imperative necessity of earning my living which reduced the time at my disposal. My collaboration, continued now for eight years, with the *New York Tribune*, the leading Anglo-American newspaper, necessitated an excessive fragmentation of my studies, for I wrote only exceptionally newspaper correspondence in the strict sense. Since a considerable part of my contributions consisted of articles dealing

with important economic events in Britain and on the continent, I was compelled to become conversant with practical details which, strictly speaking, lie outside the sphere of political economy.<sup>12</sup>

While only a rough draft, the Grundrisse (Foundations) is an important work which allows us to witness, *in statu nascendi*, the formation of theories and methods linking his 'early' philosophic and 'later' economic periods.

Before the Grundrisse emerged from the archives of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow in 1939, it appeared to many as if Marx had abandoned philosophy for political economy. The Grundrisse dispels this notion in how it continues to make use of the concepts of alienation, species-being, and the materialist conception of history in its chapters on capital and money. The key to how Marx combines philosophy and political economy is contained in the section entitled: The Method of Political Economy. A critique, in the Hegelian and Marxian sense of the term, seeks to uncover the essence underlying the appearance in relation to the historical past. However,

In the study of economic categories, as in the case of every historical and social science, it must be borne in mind that, as in reality so in our mind, the subject, in this case modern bourgeois society, is given, and that the categories are therefore only forms of being, manifestations of existence, and frequently only one-sided aspects of this subject.<sup>13</sup>

Making sense of these one-sided 'manifestations of existence' is complicated by the fact that "neither microscopes nor reagents are of use."<sup>14</sup> Marx's renewed research efforts enabled him to realize that "the scientifically correct method in economics is neither speculative nor empirical, but one, which through observation and conception generates '*concretes for thought*' revealing '*unities in diversity*'."<sup>15</sup> As the synthesis of his earlier methods, this 'dialectic method' treats political economy as part of human history, traces



the logic of its development (moving from lower to higher, emphasizing change), recognizes the way it incorporates all previous development within it, and understands its lower stages on the basis of its higher stages. A *concrete for thought* is therefore not just a product of empirical analysis but contains irreducibly conceptualist (logical, historical, philosophical, political-economic) components.

In all forms of society in which land ownership is the prevalent form, the influence of the natural elements is the predominant one. In those where capital predominates, the prevailing element is the one historically created by society. Rent cannot be understood without capital, whereas capital can be understood without rent. Capital is the all-dominating economic power of bourgeois society. It must form the starting-point as well as the end and be developed before land ownership. After each has been considered separately, their mutual relation must be analyzed...It would thus be impractical and wrong to arrange the economic categories in the order in which they were the determining factors in the course of history. Their order of sequence is rather determined by the relation which they bear to one another in modern bourgeois society, and this is the exact opposite of what seems to be their natural order or the order of historical development. What we are interested in is not the place which economic relations occupy in the historical succession of different forms of society. Still less are we interested in the order of their succession 'in the idea' (Proudhon), which is but a hazy conception of the course of history. We are interested in their organic connection within modern bourgeois society.<sup>16</sup>

The way the dialectic method grasps the "organic connection within modern bourgeois society" is by treating its subject matter as a totality, starting from the actual concrete, abstracting from it to find some of the fundamental principles and concepts with which to comprehend the interrelations and workings within it, and then utilizes them to comprehend social reality.<sup>17</sup> Marx was careful to distinguish his method of political economy from that of bourgeois political economy.

When we consider a given country politico-economically, we begin with its population, its distribution among classes, town, country, coast, the different branches of production, exports and imports, annual production

and consumption, commodity prices, etc. It seems to be correct to begin with the real and the concrete, the real precondition, thus to begin in economics with e.g. the population; which is the foundation and the subject of the entire social act of production. However, on closer examination, this proves false. The population is an abstraction if I leave out, for example, the classes of which it is composed. These classes in turn are an empty phrase if I am not familiar with the elements on which they rest. E.g. wage labor, capital, etc. These latter in turn presuppose exchange, division of labor, prices, etc. For example, capital is nothing without wage labor, without value, money, price, etc. Thus, if I were to begin with the population, this would be a chaotic conception (*Vorstellung*) of the whole, and I would then, by means of further determination, move analytically towards ever more simple concepts (*Begriff*), from the imagined concrete towards ever thinner abstractions until I had arrived at the simplest determinations. From there the journey would have to be retraced until I had finally arrived at the population again, but not as the chaotic conception of a whole, but as a rich totality of many determinations and relations. The former is the path historically followed by economics at the time of its origins. The economists of the seventeenth century, e.g., always began with the living whole, with population, nation, state, several states, etc; but they always conclude by discovering through analysis a small number of determinant, abstract, general relations such as division of labor, money, value, etc. As soon as these individual moments had been more or less firmly established and abstracted, there began the economic systems, which ascended from the simple relations, such as labor, division of labor, need, exchange value, to the level of state, exchange between nations and the world market. The latter is obviously the scientifically correct method. The concrete is the concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse. It appears in the process of thinking therefore, as a process of concentration, as a result, not as a point of departure, even though it is the point of departure for observation (*Anschauung*) and conception. Along the first path the full conception was evaporated to yield an abstract determination; along the second, the abstract determination leads towards a reproduction of the concrete by way of thought. In this way Hegel fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind.<sup>18</sup>

He was also careful to distinguish his method from that of Hegel.

My dialectic method is not is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life processes of the of the human brain i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of “the Idea,” he even

transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of “the Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected in the human mind and translated into the forms of thought.<sup>19</sup>

Despite all his “good faith” efforts to prevent any misunderstandings about his method, critics still considered it “economic metaphysics” and “Hegelian sophistics.” His response to such “bad conscience” was to make one more important qualification.

Of course, the method of presentation must differ in form from that of inquiry. The latter has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyze the different forms of development, to trace out their inner connection. Only after this work has been done, can the actual movement be adequately described. If this is done successfully, if the life of the subject matter is ideally reflected as in a mirror, then it may appear as if we had before us a mere a priori construction.<sup>20</sup>

As long one keeps these distinctions in mind as Marx develops his own political economy, many of the criticisms against leveled against it turn out to be unfounded.

It was by means of this method that Marx was able to develop his own theory of value and surplus value and go beyond bourgeois political economy to understand capitalist social reality in its dynamic and essential development. He had planned to present them in two parts through a series of installments under the title of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. Part one would contain a systematic exposition of his theory of value, part two his theory of surplus value. He published a truncated version of part one in 1859 and started the second only to digress into detailed critique of the history of bourgeois economy when he realized his theory of surplus value was inadequate.<sup>21</sup> A truly systematic explanation of capitalist social reality requires a comprehensive explanation of all the economic categories expressing it. The problem is that only certain of these categories- e.g. market prices, prices of production, and profit-

appear at the surface of society. Marx had to explain how both the surface and submerged economic processes are governed by the concept of value and surplus value. What started out as the second part of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy turned into Theories of Surplus Value. With the addition of a theory of average profit, price of production, and ground rent, he was finally able to explain all these processes in terms of value and surplus value, thereby completing his theory of surplus value. Marx was in the midst of composing Theories of Surplus Value when he changed his mind about the proposed title and format of his grand economic work one last time. Instead of appearing in two parts through installments under the title A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, it would now be named Capital and consist of six books. Failing health ultimately reduced it to the four volumes (with Theories of Surplus Value as the fourth volume) we are familiar with today. What most commentators fail to recognize or understand is that Capital was written in the reverse order in which it was published. As Marx explained in a letter to Siegmund Schott dated November 3, 1877,

For myself, I began to write Capital in exactly the reverse order in which it is to appear before the public (having started the work on the third, historic part\*), with the sole reservation that Volume I, which I started last, was at once prepared for the press, while the two other volumes remained in the unedited form which every inquiry assumes in its initial state.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to his many critics, Marx consistently and systematically elaborated his political economy within the *order of discovery* (inquiry), but failed to complete the *order of presentation*, and it is only when Capital is considered in abstraction from the entire development of his thought that certain contradictions appear in it.

---

\* The historical part referred to here has been called the third because in 1877 Marx had planned to publish books two and three of Capital in a single volume, as Volume Two, and book four-The History of the Theory-as Volume Three.

## *The Mechanics of Capitalist Exploitation*

Over the course his economic studies, Marx developed a deep and abiding respect for Adam Smith and David Ricardo, whom he credited as some of his greatest influences, considering them to be the scientific representatives of classical political economy. It was only his growing dissatisfaction with Ricardo's theory of money that led him to develop his own theory of value and surplus value. Priding himself doing historical justice to authors, ideas, and schools of thought, he acknowledges the past achievements which made his own economic 'discoveries' possible. This included the reduction of value to labor, the distinction between price and exchange value, the realization that surplus value was surplus labor, and a general attempt to grasp economic phenomena as an intrinsic and coherent whole.<sup>23</sup> Despite classical political economy's estimable achievements, its ahistoricity, empiricism, and fetishism led it to make a series of conceptual slides (the confounding of use and exchange value⇒the confounding of fixed and circulating capital⇒the confounding of constant and variable capital⇒the conflation of surplus value and profit⇒the conflation of value and price of production) resulting in the "Smith-Ricardo dogma" that surplus value arises from the whole capital advanced (built into cost price of production). Its general inability to penetrate beyond the surface processes of capitalist social reality prevented it ever from developing a theory of value or surplus value in accordance with the law of value (equivalent exchange).

Ricardo's theory of value is premised on the idea that human labor is the principal source of value and that the value of a commodity can be determined by the socially necessary labor time required for its production. The value of labor itself is "determined

by the means of subsistence which, in a given society, are traditionally necessary for the maintenance and reproduction of the laborers.”<sup>24</sup> Although Ricardo “saw” the two-fold character of labor, he did not understand it, and his tendency to “confound labor embodied in use value and labor embodied in exchange value” embroiled him in a series of contradictions he was unable to resolve.<sup>25</sup> Marx was able to “see in Ricardo’s writings what Ricardo himself had failed to see,” and in consciously and consistently distinguishing between use and exchange value, “did what Ricardo couldn’t do,” which was make a series of distinctions enabling him to explain the exchange between capital and labor in accordance with the law of value.<sup>26</sup> What the capitalist actually purchases from the laborer is not his or her labor but their *labor power*-a commodity whose use-value is not materialized in a product, does not exist apart from the worker, and that, consequently, it does not actually exist, but only as a possibility, as his (or her) capacity.<sup>27</sup> Marx was able to make these distinctions by tracing the evolution of social production and the social division of labor, noting how products of labor were transformed into commodities, commodities into exchange values, and exchanges value into money. He penetrated “the enigmatic character of the product of labor, so soon as it assumes the form of a commodity” by specifying the necessary and sufficient conditions for a commodity to possess a use and exchange value.<sup>28</sup>

Commodities come into the world in the shape of use-values, articles, or goods, such as iron, linen, corn &c. This is their plain, homely, bodily form. They are, however, commodities only because they are something two-fold, both objects of utility, and at the same time, depositories of value. They manifest themselves therefore as commodities, or have the form of commodities, only in so far as they possess two forms, a physical or natural form, and a value form.<sup>29</sup>

Concrete labor power creates commodities whose use-values are realized in consumption; while labor power in the abstract forms the substance of exchange-value. Price is the more or less adequate expression of value in money form.

The discovery of the two-fold character of commodity producing labor as a use and exchange value became central to Marx's understanding of the mechanics of capitalist exploitation. What distinguishes capitalism from previous epochs is the way surplus value comes to form the 'inner essence' of its production process. Whereas Ricardo simply assumed the existence of surplus value, Marx wanted to expose its true source. This forced him to confront and resolve the very same problems that plagued classical political economy, since surplus value cannot arise from the exchange process itself, where on the average and on the whole, equal values are exchanged. Marx was able to successfully determine the source of surplus value by means of the concept of labor power.

The value of a day's labor power amounts to 3 shillings, because on our assumption half a day's labor is embodied in that quantity of labor power, i.e., because the means of subsistence that are daily required for the production of labor power, cost a half day's labor. But the past labor that is embodied in the labor power, and the living labor that it can call into action; the daily cost of maintaining it, and its daily expenditure in work, are two totally different things. The former determines the exchange value of the labor power, the latter its use value. The fact that half a day's labor is necessary to keep the laborer alive during 24 hours, does not in anyway prevent him from working a whole day. Therefore, the value of labor power, and the value which that labor power creates in the labor process, are two entirely different magnitudes; and this difference of the two values was what the capitalist had in view, when he was purchasing the labor power. The useful qualities that labor power possesses, and by virtue of which it makes yarn or boots, were to him nothing more than a *conditio sine qua non*; for in order to create value, labor must be expended in a useful manner. What really influenced him was the specific use value which this commodity possesses of being *a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself*. This is the special service that the capitalist

expects from labor power, and in this transaction he acts in accordance with the “eternal laws” of the exchange of commodities.<sup>30</sup>

Since the creation of surplus value is simply the continuation of the labor process beyond a definite point, capitalists continually strive to lengthen the workday and intensify its pace.<sup>31</sup> One of the illusions of capitalism is that capital, ground rent, and wage-labor constitute three different sources of revenue. In reality, the surplus value extracted from wage-labor by capital is divided amongst the different sections of the bourgeoisie (industrialist, manufacturer, merchant, landlord, and banker) in proportion to their share of the total social capital in the form of profit, ground-rent and, interest.<sup>32</sup>

As capitalism develops, branches of production emerge and diversify, and within each one there is fierce competition for the total share of the surplus value created within that branch. This competition, operating both within a given branch of production and between branches of production, eventually transmutes commodity values into market values, which in turn transmutes them into prices of production.<sup>33</sup> In advanced capitalistic economies, prices of production become the center around which market prices fluctuate and equalize one another. Value (as determined by labor power) remains the basis of prices of production, but the influence it exerts on them is diminished and obscured by counteracting factors which “check, retard, and weaken it.”<sup>34</sup> Despite all the attempts by the various capitalists in the different branches of production to extract as much surplus value as possible (through intensive and extensive exploitation), there are limits to the rate of profit and surplus value. The irrational and ironic result of their efforts to maximize profits is changes to the organic composition of capital creating a tendency in the rate of profit to fall. This tendency “breeds overproduction, speculation,



crisis, and surplus capital alongside surplus population.<sup>35</sup> Surplus value may spring from the ‘inner essence’ of the capitalist production process, but so do the material conditions for its supercession. Capitalism develops unevenly. But once it establishes itself as a world system, the ‘depths and breadths’ of its contradictions reveal it to be just another historical stage in the development of humanity.

As soon as this process of transformation has sufficiently decomposed old society from top to bottom, as soon as the laborers are turned into proletarians, their means of labor into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own two feet, then the further socialization of labor and further transformation of the land and other means of production into socially exploited and, therefore, common means of production, as well as the further expropriation of private proprietors, takes a new form. That which is now to be expropriated is no longer the laborer working for himself, but the capitalist exploiting many laborers. This expropriation is accompanied by action of the immanent laws of capitalistic production itself, by the centralization of capital. One capitalist kills many. Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalists by the few, develop, on an ever increasing scale, the co-operative form of the labor process, the conscious technical application of science, the methodical cultivation of the soil, the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economizing of all means of production by their use as the means of production of combined, socialized labor, the entanglements of all people in the net of the world market, and with this, the international character of the capitalist world regime. Along with the constantly diminishing number of magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolize all advantages of this process of transformation, grows the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organized by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter on the mode of production, which has sprung up and flourished along with it, and under it. Centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labor at last reach a point where they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. Thus the integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.<sup>36</sup>

In Capital, Marx had come full circle from The Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844. This is not to say that he disavows the critical project that gave rise to the critique of political economy or discards any of the philosophical concepts advancing it. Rather, he undergoes an evolution in thought enabling him to integrate his discourse, concretize his concepts, and develop them to their logical conclusion. What started as fractured philosophical and political economic discourse is transformed by the dialectic method into a coherent and concrete whole. Concepts which were once explicit, like species-being, become historicized, implicit, and embedded within the critique of political economy. Others, like alienation, are not only developed to their logical conclusion and concretized in the form of the fetishism of commodities, but essentially linked with exploitation. Recall the analysis of alienated labor in The Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts of 1844 and compare it to following passage from the Grundrisse.

The exchange value of labor, the realization of which takes place in the process of exchange with the capitalist, is therefore *presupposed*, predetermined, and only undergoes the formal modification which every only ideally posited price takes on when it is realized. It is not determined by the use value of labor. It has a use value for the worker himself only in so far as it IS *exchange value*, not in so far as it produces exchange values. It has exchange value for capital only in so far as it is use value. It is a use value, as distinct from exchange value, not for the worker himself, but only for capital. The worker therefore sells labor as a simple, predetermined exchange value, determined by a previous process—he sells labor itself as *objectified labor*; i.e. he sells labor only in so far as it objectifies a definite amount of labor, hence in so far as its equivalent is already measured, given; capital buys it as living labor, as the general productive form of wealth. It is clear, therefore, that the worker cannot become *rich* in this exchange, since, in exchange for his labor capacity as a fixed, available magnitude, he surrenders its *creative power*, like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage. Rather, he necessarily impoverishes himself, as we shall see further on, because the creative power of his labor establishes itself as the power of capital, as an *alien power* confronting him. He divests himself (*entausst sich*) of labor as the force of productive wealth; capital appropriates it as such. The separation between labor and property in the product of labor, between labor and wealth, is

thus posited in this act of exchange itself. What appears paradoxical as *result* is contained in the presupposition. The economists have expressed this more or less empirically. Thus the productivity of his labor, his labor in general, in so far as it is not a *capacity* but a motion, real labor, *comes* to confront the worker as an *alien power*; capital, inversely, realizes itself through the *appropriation of alien labor*.<sup>37</sup>

From this we can see that Marx now considers alienation and exploitation internally related and contained in each other as presupposition and logical consequence. Through the critique of political economy he comes to concretely understand how the sale of labor power (*Verausserung*), exploited by capital for the purposes of profit, transforms the laborer's objectifications (*Entausserung*) into something external, alien, hostile, and a form of punishment, resulting in the alienation of the laborer from the object of labor, labor process, species, and other human beings (*Entfremdung*). Conversely, it follows that by abolishing the conditions that compel workers to sell their labor power to survive, which puts them in the position to be exploited by capitalists for profit, you abolish the conditions and processes that gave rise to their alienation. The abolition of capitalism and its replacement with communism reunites labor and property in the form of social property, transforms the creative power of labor into the creative power of the laborer, enabling them to utilize their objectifications to transcend their alienation and dehumanization to become fully self-actualized human beings.

### *Conclusion*

Marx's critique of political economy made many false starts, assumed many different titles and formats, repeated and revised itself often, and ultimately went unfinished. What started in The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 and

ended in Capital is nonetheless an evolution in thought comprising three distinct phases of development. In the first phase of this development, Marx ascribes to no political-economic position (rejecting even Ricardo's view), exhibits no integration in his philosophical and economic discourse, and without a theory of surplus value, is in no position to grasp the internal relation between alienation and exploitation. In the second phase of this development, Marx adopts Ricardo's political-economic position, evinces an increased ability integrate his discourse, but because of his crude materialism and the flaws in the Ricardian theory of surplus value, was still unable to grasp the internal relation between alienation and exploitation. It was only when Marx developed his own political economy, and evolved a method to integrate his philosophical and economic discourse, that he was finally able to fully and concretely understand why transcending alienation first required abolishing exploitation.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Volume I in Karl Marx Frederick Engels Collected Works, Vol. 35. Trans. Richard Dixon. (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 19; Franz Mehring, Karl Marx: The Story of his Life. Trans. Edward Fitzgerald. (New York: Covici-Friede, 1935), p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 275.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 324-325.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>6</sup> Ostensively intended to defend ‘real’ humanism against the speculative idealism of ‘criticism,’ The Holy Family formulates some important principles for a critique of political economy. This occurs primarily in chapter IV, section 4, entitled “Critical Criticism as the Calm of Knowledge or Critical Criticism in the Person of Herr Edgar Bauer: Proudhon.” What a comparative gloss of Edgar Bauer’s translation of Pierre Proudhon’s What is Property reveals are the defining characteristics of a ‘scientific’ critique of political economy. Like critical criticism, bourgeois political economy is mired in its own “illusions” (e.g. that capitalism is natural and eternal and that its values, wages, and prices are reasonable and humane). Whenever reality threatens these illusions, it struggles to find excuses for capitalism, faulting this or that aspect of capitalism instead of the socio-economic system itself. By critically investigating the basis of private property, dealing with real historical issues and real historical needs, and thereby taking the ‘internal’ critique of political economy to its ‘limits,’ Proudhon reveals systemic nature of these contradictions and strips bourgeois political economy of its “cherished illusions.”

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The Communist Manifesto in MECW, Vol. 6, pp. 486-487.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 489.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 490.

<sup>11</sup> Mehring, p. 284.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy in MECW, Vol. 29, pp. 264-65.

<sup>13</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy

---

(Rough Draft). Trans. Martin Nicolaus. (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> Vitaly Vygodski, A Book for All Time: Centenary of Karl Marx's Capital. (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1967) p. 98.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.105.

<sup>17</sup> Carol Gould, Marx's Social Ontology. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978) p. xxi.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse pp. 100-101.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Marx, Capital Vol. I in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Vygodski, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> David McLellan, ed. Karl Marx: Selected Writings. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 398.

<sup>25</sup> Vygodski, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse pp.281-2, p. 293, p. 359.

<sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, Capital Vol. I in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Marx, Capital Vol. I in MECW, Vol. 35, pp. 203-204.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> Karl Marx, Capital Vol. III in MECW, Vol. 37, p. 807.

<sup>33</sup> Vygodski, p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Marx, Capital Vol. III in MECW, Vol. 37, p. 233.

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>36</sup> Karl Marx, Capital Vol. I in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 750.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 307.

## **Chapter VI: Dialectical Humanism**

### *Introduction*

Now that I have contextualized Marx's life and thought, examined some of its key moments and aspects, and in the process, brought out their connection to each other, it is possible, by means of polemic, to identify his ethic.

### *Misreading Capital*

In contrast to the essentialist position taken in this dissertation, there is Louis Althusser's structuralist interpretation of Marx. Althusser denies the possibility of any kind of unity in Marx's thought, insisting instead that it underwent an 'epistemological break.' He regards all essentialist, historicist, and humanist interpretations of Marx 'mistaken readings' resulting from a left-wing reaction to the mechanism and fatalism of the Second International made possible through a series of conceptual slides and reductions conflating Hegelianism with Marxism.<sup>1</sup> Rejecting such 'totalizing' discourse, he offers a 'structuralist' reading of Marx as a corrective to such 'mistakes.' One of the 'peculiar objects' of his position is determining whether "Capital represents the founding moment of a new discipline, the founding of a new science...a theoretical revolution, simultaneously rejecting classical political economy and the Hegelian and Feuerbachian ideologies of its prehistory."<sup>2</sup>



Claiming his position is implied by what is ‘unseen’ in Marx, he believes the only way to ‘extract’ it is through a new paradigm. Utilizing Spinoza’s distinction between ‘objects of knowledge’ and the ‘real objects,’ he argues that knowledge for Marx must be understood as ‘construct’ rather than a ‘reflection’ because it contains an irreducibly conceptualist component. Basing himself almost entirely on “The Method of Political Economy” in the ‘1857 Introduction’ of the Grundrisse and Engels “Introduction” to the second volume of Capital, Marx’s method generates ‘objects of knowledge’ or ‘thought totalities’ from the combination of concepts organized according to their conceptual sequence rather than how they emerged historically.<sup>3</sup> According to Althusser, such a method contains a notion of ‘scientificity’ conceived as “a unified system of concepts which expresses the internal essence of an object.”<sup>4</sup>

Combined with this notion of science is a concept of time where any event occurs within the context of a structural whole relating to itself in a hierarchy of ‘effectivity.’ Just as Marx’s method of political economy ushered in a new paradigm for ‘scientificity,’ Althusser introduces a concept of time no longer composed of one homogeneous and undifferentiated time, but many ‘times.’ Not only does this require us to reject an ideologically simplified conception of time, but also forces us recognize that history can no longer be empirical.<sup>5</sup> For Althusser, sciences can emerge from ideologies and Marx’s materialist conception of history is an example of a science arising from an ideology not in the form of a development, but a break.<sup>6</sup> Based on this notion of ‘complex’ time, he rejects any recourse to origins or development to understand Marx. In Capital, we witness the birth of a science of history and the end of a philosophical teleology of reason. Since such a revolutionary accomplishment takes time to become recognized and

accepted, it will awhile before philosophies of history are consigned to their enlightenment pre-histories. The persistence of Hegelian terms in Capital are therefore better understood as ‘plays on words’ that will continue to tempt people into reading Marx historically and humanistically until it develops a terminology of its own.

While Althusser’s structuralist ‘reading’ of Marx is interesting and his concept of time even enlightening, it lacks the textual evidence or logical consistency to be correct. It is not so much that it requires us to radically rethink our understanding of Marx, but that it flies in the face a vast and well-established body of evidence to the contrary and raises as many problems as it supposedly resolves.

First, the textual evidence Althusser adduces in support of his ‘reading’ consists almost entirely of repeating and rephrasing the same paragraphs in the “1857 Introduction” of the Grundrisse and Engels’ Introduction to the second volume of Capital ad nauseum. Unfortunately for him, neither truly supports his ‘reading.’ In point of fact, the section he cites in the “1857 Introduction” in support of his anti-humanist and anti-historicist thesis is preceded by a criticism of classical political economy where Marx claims that part of the reason it wasn’t truly scientific was that it relied on ‘Robinsonades’ (historical fictions) rendering its categories fixed, abstract, and eternal.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to Althusser’s anti-historicist thesis, Marx explicitly insisted that for political economy to be scientific it must be historicized. For Althusser’s position to be consistent he would have to demonstrate why Marx’s political economy constitutes an exception to this. If a historicist and humanist reading Capital is mistaken, why does he concede that it’s impossible to read it without the help of Marxian philosophy?<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, Althusser's attempt to use Engels to 'read' Marx is problematic because it rests on the false assumption that because of their close collaboration they shared the same opinions on everything. Although they started out "in complete agreement in all theoretical fields," they came to differ not only with respect to the degree of determinism operating in history but the extent to which dialectics applies to reality.<sup>9</sup> Whereas Engels eventually became a dialectical materialist and tried to extend dialectics to natural phenomena, there is little evidence that Marx was ever anything more than a historical materialist. Given these differences, it would be intellectually irresponsible to uncritically equate Engels with Marx and treat their thought as identical.

It is especially important to keep these differences in mind when we 'read' what Engels had to say in his Introduction to the second volume of Capital for ourselves. There we learn that Marx had become too ill to complete his political economy and had bequeathed his unfinished manuscripts to Engels with the request "that he make something of it."<sup>10</sup> Although Engels claims to have been a conscientious editor who tried to remain faithful to Marx by "interpolating explanatory sentences or connecting statements only where this was absolutely necessary," this task was complicated by the fact that

The bulk of the material was not finally polished, in point of language, although in substance it was for the greater part fully worked out. The language was that in which Marx used to make his extracts; careless style full of colloquialisms, often containing coarsely humorous expressions and phrases interspersed with English and French technical terms or with whole sentences or even pages of English. Thoughts were jotted down as they developed in the brain of the author. Some parts of the argument would be fully treated, others of equal importance only indicated. Factual information for illustration would be collected, barely arranged, much less worked out. At the conclusion of chapters, in the author's anxiety to get to the next, there would often be only a few disjointed sentences to mark the further development here left incomplete. And finally there is the well-

known handwriting which the author himself was sometimes unable to decipher.<sup>11</sup>

Far from fully worked out in form, these manuscripts left much to be interpreted by Engels. If by Althusser's own admission there are no 'innocent' (i.e. non-ideological) readings, then his uncritical reliance on Engels to 'read' Capital constitutes a grave 'mistake' in its own right and explains, amongst other things, how he could conflate something as distinct as Marx's method of political economy with his theory of history.<sup>12</sup>

If his 'break theory' is true, then Althusser should be able to economically reinterpret Hegelian and Feuerbachian terminology whenever they occur. Instead, he largely evades the task by dismissing them as so many 'plays on words.' However, 'later' Marx contains too much philosophical terminology to be explained away as simply 'coquetting.' When in fact Althusser does try to reinterpret certain of these terms (e.g. human need) in purely economic terms, he fails so spectacularly that he not only contradicts Marx's history by making it abstract but ends up denaturing his economics by rendering it circular. Tragedy turns into farce when in order to remain faithful to his 'reading' he is forced to declare the Critique of the Gotha Program "idealist."<sup>13</sup>

While Althusser's 'reading' of Marx is interesting, it is plagued with too many deficiencies to be correct. Beyond the minor stylistic defects merely detracting from its 'readability' (e.g. its structuralist jargon, psychoanalytic doublespeak, and over reliance on literary devices to make his point), its textual support, methodology, and notions of science and development are extremely suspect. While concerns over what is 'orthodox' in Marx are valid, debatable, and certainly merit criticism it when they become dogmatic, it is another thing to reinterpret Marx so radically that he is rendered unintelligible. If

“Hegelian historicism is the flip side of economic eternalism,” then Althusserian structuralism is pseudo-scientific abstraction.<sup>14</sup> Althusser may feel the need to defend Marx’s political economy from its bourgeois critics, but denying its philosophical underpinnings to do so results in something equally extreme. How faithful is Althusser really being to Marx if his ‘reading’ leads to the rejection of the identification of Marxism with the proletariat, denies the role of labor in human history, and deems the Critique of the Gotha Program idealist?<sup>15</sup> Such absurdities recall Lukacs warning that those who would reject ‘totality’ and accept bourgeois science invariably rethink the relationship of theory to praxis and, in doing so, reintroduce a dualism emphasizing abstract contemplation.<sup>16</sup> In rejecting the concept of totality and interpreting Marx epistemologically rather than historically, Althusser has imposed his one-sided concerns upon Marx and interpreted him in one-sided fashion, reintroducing the ideological separation of science and philosophy, resulting in the conflation of Marx’s economics with his history. Like many philosophers of late, Althusser appears to echo the modernist tendency of viewing philosophy not as a totalizing (architectonic) discipline but as a handmaiden for and cheerleader of the sciences. Seeing the strong philosophical component in Marx’s thought and fearing its ramifications for his political economy, Althusser tries to revise him rather than understand him. This doesn’t help Marx, it hurts him.

### *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*

There are many scholars who believe Marx had an ethic of freedom. To see why they are mistaken, I will consider some variations on this position.

Carol Gould, in Marx's Social Ontology, considers Marx not so much a political economist, revolutionary ideologist, or philosophical humanist, but a great systematic philosopher in the tradition of Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. She believes that the best way to understand how he achieves a “striking synthesis of systemic philosophy and social theory” is through “a social ontology which is metaphysical and implicit.”<sup>17</sup> Gould reconstructs this social ontology almost entirely from a ‘close reading’ of the Grundrisse because it is “the one work that presents Marx’s basic principles and their application in an especially complete and integrated way and from which his ontological conceptions emerge most clearly.”<sup>18</sup> Although her aim is to “give a reconstruction of the text with an internal understanding of the project the text embodies,” she doesn’t want to limit herself solely to exposition and commentary.<sup>19</sup> Some of the ‘interests’ she ‘pursues’ outside the given ‘problematic’ are “to clarify what remains obscure in Marx’s thought” and “to develop some further conceptions that are only suggested in his system.”<sup>20</sup> What she hopes these additional reconstructions will reveal is that his principal values are freedom and justice

Gould reconstructs Marx’s social ontology by drawing out the Hegelian and Aristotelian features in his thought and detailing the structure and stages of the historical dialectic. In doing this she claims “the fundamental entities that compose society are individuals in social relations.”<sup>21</sup> Social reality is a process of dialectical change where individuals in social relations pass through stages of historical development. This dialectical developmental process has largely been characterized by domination relations entailing alienation and exploitation, where class status, rather than personal potential, has typically determined the degree to which individuals self-actualize themselves. It is

only in ‘the communal society of the future,’ where individuals are substantively free and equal, that self-actualization becomes possible for all.<sup>22</sup> As Marx matured, he learned to integrate philosophy and political economy so that his philosophy became implicit in his thought.<sup>23</sup>

Gould utilizes this social ontology to ‘reconstruct’ a theory of time and causality. These theories, in turn, are used to deny objective teleology. Although there is a ‘Hegelian’ logic to social and historical development, Gould claims “it would be wrong to see its stages following each other out of any logical necessity or as exhibiting any laws of historical development.”<sup>24</sup> This is because “Marx gave ontological primacy to individuals-that is, he takes them as the ultimately real beings-and sees both history and society as constituted by their activities.<sup>25</sup> Contrary to appearances, individuals are neither the products of objective processes nor even their previous actions but rather freely self-determining agents who create themselves through their labor.<sup>26</sup> This explains the special value that freedom and justice had for Marx.

While Gould identifies and develops some important features in Marx’s thought, her abstract and ahistorical approach creates some serious misunderstandings. Since it would go way beyond the purview of this dissertation to discuss them all, I will only address the ones relevant to my position.

First of all, her attempt to deny any laws of historical development and restrict agency to individuals reduces the logic of historical development to a crude voluntarism. Marx made it quite clear that both subjective and objective forces constitute social reality. Labor may be an activity of self-creation, but occurs under definite natural, social, and economic conditions.

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 encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.<sup>27</sup>

It was because Marx believed that “circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances” that he was compelled to consider both the subjective and objective contradictions of capitalism in his critique of political economy.<sup>28</sup> What it revealed, amongst other things, was that human productive activity (i.e. labor) creates impersonal ‘market forces’ whose laws frequently operate “behind the backs” of individuals.<sup>29</sup>

Each specific historical form of the labor process further develops its material and social forms. Whenever a certain stage of maturity has been reached, the specific historical form is discarded and makes way for a higher one. The moment of arrival of such a crisis is disclosed by the depths and breadth attained by the contradictions and antagonisms between the distribution relations, and thus the specific historical form of their corresponding production relations, on the one hand, and the productive forces, the productive powers and the development of their agencies, on the other hand. A conflict ensues between the material development of production and its social form.<sup>30</sup>

That socio-economic change requires collective action does not render dialectical motion completely subjective and contingent. Marx adopted Hegel’s dialectic method and only altered it by making it materialist. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, he states

Communism is the position of the negation of the negation, and 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 necessary principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development.<sup>31</sup>

He reaffirms this in the Grundrisse and numerous like passages when he states



Capitalist production moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome, only to be, again, constantly re-established. The universality toward which it is driving finds limitations in its own nature, which at a certain stage of its development will make it appear as itself the greatest barrier to this tendency, leading thus to its own self-destruction.<sup>32</sup>

Contra Gould, reified consciousness doesn't mistakenly imagine these objective processes.

To the extent that, from the standpoint of capital and wage-labor, the creation of the objective body of activity happened in antithesis to the immediate labor capacity—that this process of objectification in fact appears as a process of dispossession from the standpoint of labor or as appropriation of alien labor from the standpoint of capital—to that extent, this twisting and inversion is a *real* (phenomenon), not a merely *supposed one* existing merely in the imagination of the worker and the capitalists. But obviously this process of inversion is merely *historical* necessity, a necessity for the development of the forces of production solely from a specific historical point of departure, or basis, but in no way an *absolute* necessity of production; rather, a vanishing one, and the result and the inherent purpose of this process is to suspend this basis itself, together with this form of the process.<sup>33</sup>

Far from engaging in one-dimensional analysis, the critique of political economy describes the objective and subjective processes involved in the rise of communism and the fall of capitalism.

Secondly, Gould is grossly mistaken in maintaining that Marx had a theory of justice. 'Interpreting' his critique of capitalism as an attempt to explain how it gives rise to injustices in the form of alienation and exploitation, her reconstruction of Marx's theory of justice is aimed at showing how crucial it is to his possible 'communal society of the future.'<sup>34</sup> If Gould had included the Critique of the Gotha Program in her 'reading,' it would have been impossible for to ignore the fact that Marx considered it "in general a mistake to make a fuss about so-called *distribution* and to put any stress on

it.”<sup>35</sup> This is because in any historical epoch, production, distribution, exchange and consumption form members of an organic totality that begins and ends with production.

Within this organic totality,

The structure of (*Gliederung*) of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production. Distribution is itself a product of production, not only in its object, in that only the results of production can be distributed, but also in its form, in that the specific kind of participation in production determines the specific forms of distribution, i.e. the pattern of participation in distribution.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore,

Any distribution whatever of the means of consumption is only a consequence of the distribution of the conditions of production themselves. The latter distribution, however, is a feature of the mode of production itself. The capitalist mode of production, for example, rests on the fact that the material conditions of production are in the hands of non-workers in the form of property in capital and land, while the masses are only owners of the personal condition of production, of labor power. If the elements are so distributed, then the present-day distribution of the means of consumption results automatically. If the material conditions of are the co-operative property of the workers themselves, then there likewise results a distribution of the means of consumption different from the present one.<sup>37</sup>

Any theory of distributive justice derived from a specific epoch will generally be incapable of condemning its own historical form of exploitation because its mode of production justifies it.

The justice of the transaction between agents of production rests on the fact that these arise as natural consequences out of the production relationship. The juristic forms in which these economic transactions appear as willful acts of the parties concerned, as expressions of their common will and as contracts that may be enforced by law against some individual party, cannot, being mere forms, determine this content. They merely express it. This content is just whenever it corresponds, is appropriate, to the mode of production. It is unjust whenever it contradicts that mode.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Marx did not condemn antiquity for its slavery or feudalism for its serfdom, he didn't condemn capitalism for its exploitation of wage labor.

The seller of labor power, like the seller of any other commodity, realizes an exchange value, and parts with its use value. He cannot take the one without giving the other. The use value of labor power, or in other words, labor, belongs just as little to the seller, as the use value of oil after it has been sold belongs to the dealer that sold it. The owner of the money has paid the value of a day's labor power; his, therefore, is the use of it for a day; a day's labor belongs to him. The circumstance, that on the one hand the daily sustenance of labor power costs only half a day's labor, while on the other hand the very same labor power can work during the whole day, that consequently the value which its use during one day creates, is double what he pays for that use, this circumstance is, without a doubt, a piece of good luck for the buyer, and by no means an injustice to the seller.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, Marx explicitly states that freedom and equality in the capitalist exchange process is based on appearances concealing dependence and domination.

Capitalist production, therefore, of itself reproduces the separation between labor-power and the means of labor. It thereby reproduces and perpetuates the conditions for exploiting the laborer. It incessantly forces him to sell his labor power in order that he may enrich himself. It is no longer a mere accident, that capitalist and laborer confront each other in the market as buyer and seller. It is the process itself that incessantly hurls back the laborer to the market as vendor of his labor-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him. In reality, the laborer belongs to capital before he has even sold himself to capital. His economic bondage is brought about and concealed by the periodic sale of himself, by his change of master, and by the oscillations in the market price of labor.<sup>40</sup>

All the evidence indicates that Gould's attempt to derive a theory of justice from equivalent exchange is not only mistaken but unnecessary. Whereas a bourgeois principle of justice generally sanctions exploitation and ignores alienation, a communist principle of justice is superfluous because the conditions that created the need for it have been superceded. Like the Lassallean 'phrases' he criticized in the Critique of the Gotha

Program, Marx would consider Gould's principle that 'every individual is to be treated equally' "so much obsolete verbal rubbish."<sup>41</sup>

Thirdly, not only is her contention that Marx had a theory of justice mistaken but so is her claim that his principal value is "freedom as self-realization." Once again, her abstract and ahistorical approach enables her to overlook the overwhelming 'textual' evidence against such a claim. Instead of citing the specific passages proving her contention confuses means with ends and conflates freedom with self-actualization, I will include almost everything he states on the subject order to not only refute her contention but to reveal the real basis of his ethic.

1. In the Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession (1835);

The chief guide which must direct us in a choice of profession is the welfare of mankind and our own perfection.<sup>42</sup>

2. In The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844;

A. The rich human being is simultaneously the human being in need of the totality of human manifestations of life-the man in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as a need.<sup>43</sup>

B. Political Economy, this science of *wealth*, is therefore simultaneously the science of renunciation, of want, of *saving*-and it actually reaches the point where it *saves* man the *need* of either fresh *air* or physical *exercise*. This science of marvelous industry is simultaneously the science of asceticism, and its true ideal is the *ascetic* but *extortionate* miser and the *ascetic* but *productive* slave. Its moral ideal is the *worker* who takes part of his wages to the saving-bank, and it has even found ready-made an *art* which embodies this pet idea: it has been presented, bathed in sentimentality, on the stage. Thus political economy-despite its worldly and voluptuous appearance-is a true moral science, the most moral of all the sciences. Self-renunciation, the renunciation of life and of all human needs, is its principal thesis. The less you eat, drink, and buy books; the less you go to the theatre, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you *save*-the *greater* becomes your treasure which neither moths nor rust can devour-your *capital*. The less you *are*, the less you express your own life, the more you *have*, i.e., the greater is your *alienated* life, the greater is the store of your estranged being.<sup>44</sup>

3. In the Holy Family (1845);

One must be acquainted with the studiousness, the craving for knowledge, the moral energy, and the unceasing urge for development of the French and English workers to be able to form an idea of the human nobleness of that movement.<sup>45</sup>

4. In The German Ideology (1845);

A. The appropriation of the (productive) forces is itself nothing more than the development of the individual capacities corresponding to the material instruments of production. The appropriation is, for this very reason, the development of the totality of capacities in the individuals themselves.<sup>46</sup>

B. Private property can be abolished only on condition of an all-around development of individuals, because the existing form of intercourse and the existing productive forces are all-embracing and only individuals that are developing in all-around fashion can appropriate them, i.e. can turn them into free manifestations of their lives.<sup>47</sup>

C. Within communist society, the only society in which the genuine and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase, this development is determined precisely by the connection of individuals, a connection which consists partly in the economic prerequisites and partly in the necessary solidarity of the free development of all, and finally, in the universal character of the activity of individuals on the basis of existing productive forces.<sup>48</sup>

5. In The Poverty of Philosophy (1847);

But the moment every special development stops (in the division of labor), the need for universality, the tendency towards an integral development of the individual begins to be felt.<sup>49</sup>

6. In the Communist Manifesto (1848);

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.<sup>50</sup>

7. In the Grundrisse (1857)

A. The free development of individualities...corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc, development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them.<sup>51</sup>

B. The capability to consume is a condition of consumption, hence its primary means, and this capability is the development of an individual potential, a force of production. The saving of labor time (is) equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual.<sup>52</sup>

8. In Capital, Volume One (1867);

A. The working day contains a full 24 hours, with the deduction of the few hours of repose without which labor-power absolutely refuses its services again. Hence it is self-evident that the laborer is nothing else, his whole life through, than labor power, that therefore all his disposable time is by nature and law labor time, to be devoted to the self-expansion of capital. Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free play of his bodily and mental activity, even the rest time of Sunday...-moonshine!<sup>53</sup>

B. Capitalism creates the material conditions, which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle.<sup>54</sup>

9. In the Critique of the Gotha Program (1875)

In the higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and the springs of cooperative wealth flow more abundantly-only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banner; from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.<sup>55</sup>

From excerpts spanning the whole of his thought, we see not only that self-actualization started out and remained Marx's principal value, but that its relationship to freedom was one of means to end. Freedom is a necessary precondition for self-actualization. It creates "time for the full development of the individual."<sup>56</sup> 'Human emancipation' is

merely the totalizing means for freeing individuals *from* the social, political, economic conditions preventing their full self-actualization.

Far from considering “freedom as self-actualization,” Marx considered them distinct yet interdependent concepts. This becomes apparent when comparing the bourgeois with the Marxian concept of freedom.

Tranquility appears (to Adam Smith) as the adequate state, as identical with ‘freedom’ and ‘happiness.’ It seems quite far from Smith’s mind that the individual, ‘in his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill, facility,’ also needs a normal portion of work, and of the suspension of tranquility. Certainly, labor obtains its measure from the outside, through the aim to be attained and the obstacles to be overcome in attaining it. But Smith has no inkling whatever that this overcoming of obstacles is in itself a liberating activity-and that further, the external aim becomes posited as aims which the individual himself posits-hence, as self-realization, objectification of the subject, hence real freedom.<sup>57</sup>

Whereas the bourgeois concept of freedom is a freedom *from* coercion and compulsion so long as individuals do not harm each other, Marx conceives of it as a freedom *from* coercion and compulsion and a freedom *to* objectify and fully self-actualize oneself. That Marx considered freedom a unitary phenomenon composed of positive and negative aspects does not make it identical to self-actualization. If freedom were identical to self-actualization it wouldn’t require “objectification” to constitute it and make it “real.” Whether this “objectification” takes place in ‘the realm of freedom’ or ‘the realm of necessity’ (i.e. the labor process) does nothing to change the fundamental relationship between labor, freedom, and self-actualization, it only expands the parameters of where it may take place.

While Gould may think she has transcended “one-sidedness of the standard interpretations of Marx,” her crude essentialism proves otherwise. Though there is

certainly much in Marx that needs to be clarified and made explicit, Gould goes about it the wrong way. Even if we grant that her ‘dialectical method of interpretation’ “goes beyond a traditional hermeneutics which restricts itself to the problem of understanding the meaning of the text itself” by adopting “an external critical standpoint based on knowledge and interests that are independent of the framework of the text,” she herself admits that it still suffers from the same defects (e.g., ‘overly subjective,’ ‘imposed,’ and ‘circular’).<sup>58</sup> That Gould considers her method to be Marx’s method and justifies its “obvious defects and inconsistencies” on the chance that might provide “an internal understanding of the project the text embodies” is not only distorted but delusional. The ‘mature’ Marx took not only a dialectical but also a historical and materialist approach to philosophical and socio-economic problems, making it quite clear that there are no short cuts on the “road to learning.”<sup>59</sup> The sad fact of the matter is that it is impossible to understand a thinker as complex as Marx on the basis of a ‘close reading’ of one, or even some, of his ‘texts.’ This is true even if the Grundrisse “integrates his earlier “humanist” writings with his later political economy and permits us to grasp the continuity of his ideas throughout his works.”<sup>60</sup> If Gould had really treated Marx ‘critically’ and as a ‘totality,’ she would have grasped “the continuity of his ideas” from a close ‘reading’ of all his ‘texts.’ This would have revealed that his principal value was self-actualization and that he lacked either a teleological ethic of freedom or theory of justice.

Eugene Kamenka, in the second edition of the Ethical Foundations of Marxism, acknowledges that although Marx never directly devoted any attention to the problems of moral philosophy, he did emphatically reject the concept of ethics as a normative science.<sup>61</sup> In developing his thesis, Kamenka outlines what he believes are the formative



influences that shaped Marx's thought. He claims that it was in coming to reject and relocate the motive power of history from an absolute spirit to human self-consciousness, and arguing that censorship is evil, that Marx adduced the grounds for distinguishing 'good' from 'evil.' 'Good' is roughly equivalent to those factors which allow for one's own self-determination and 'evil' is whatever contributes towards making one dependent. From this point on, Marx takes freedom to be necessarily and exclusively the essence of man.<sup>62</sup> Thus in Marx's conception of the 'truly human society,' the human essence is said to possess an eternal nature whose universal expression finds obstacles to its fruition not only in the empirical particularities which divide men, but in the moral and legal norms which serve to reflect and reinforce these divisions.<sup>63</sup>

The question then turns to whether the young Marx leaned towards a positive ethics or normative morality. According to Kamenka, this amounts to whether 'good' is a quality or a relation. For those who hold ethics to be a normative science, the objectivity of an ethical judgment is most easily established if 'good' is a quality and not a relation. For if 'good' is a quality, then "the truth of the assertion that a given thing is good is logically independent of any relations into which the thing, activity, or asserter may enter."<sup>64</sup> For traditional moralists, 'good' cannot be a mere quality. It must be a relation, something which is "demanded, pursued, required, and illogical to reject."<sup>65</sup> What typically occurs in a normative conception of ethics is that it "confuses and amalgamates a quality and a relation so that the traditional conception of good becomes that whose nature it is to be pursued."<sup>66</sup> In simultaneously treating a 'good' as a quality and a relation, what results is a situation whereby the source of obligations becomes so obscure that in order for ethical propositions to have prescriptive force, they must be

elevated 'above the world' or ground in some kind of naturalism or essentialism. Doing this, however, is precisely what generates a dualism between 'facts' and 'standards,' 'actions' and 'principles,' 'apparent interests' and 'true interests' and thus renders the possible for an ethical science nil.<sup>67</sup>

According to Kamenka, the young Marx "takes the struggle between discord and harmony, between necessary conflict and true cooperation as the central theme of human history and social life."<sup>68</sup> However, he "rejects the attempt to impose harmony by supra-empirical powers, principles, or ideals."<sup>69</sup> While recognizing that the dualisms implicit in normative theories can have their basis in both the supra-empirical and the essential, Kamenka claims that the young Marx was unable to escape the dualisms required by normative theories because of his attempt to mingle logic and ethics in a metaphysics of history.<sup>70</sup> Thus despite the metaphysical confusions attendant in associating good as the freedom to be determined by one's own nature and evil as dependence or being externally determined, Marx rejects ethics as a prescriptive guide to action as well as morality as the ground of obligation because people cannot be 'obliged' to act contrary to the course of their character or social circumstance.<sup>71</sup> What emerges, then, from Marx's doctrine of freedom and human essence is the idea that goods and evils manifests themselves empirically in the character of our activities. Goods are able to work together and cooperate coherently, while evils not only conflict with goods, but with themselves.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, "good demonstrate internal progress and development in ways that evils cannot cooperate and progress."<sup>73</sup>

Before examining the relation between ethics and the 'mature' Marx, Kamenka contrasts him to the 'young' Marx. Thus we are reminded that the principal concept

guiding the ‘young’ Marx’s thought was his belief in a “metaphysical conception of the necessary dialectical development of man, through alienation and the inevitable conflicts resulting from alienation, toward the truly universal and self-determined.”<sup>74</sup> By the middle of 1845, however, Marx ‘discovers’ his materialist conception of history. In coming to the view that “economic production dominates and determines all social institutions and beliefs” Marx “turns viciously on his own conception of human nature, and man in general, who belongs to no class because “there is no essential man apart from real man and real men are shaped by economic forces.”<sup>75</sup> Having previously rejected normative morality in the sense of normative principles, philosophy is now replaced by an economico-historical science of society. Even though he now views moralities as ideologies reflecting specific class interests, Marx still seems to retain the belief “that history displays a moral advance towards true universality.”<sup>76</sup> Given his continued conviction that “history is inevitably working towards freedom, towards a communist society where men’s production will no longer enslave them, but become part of them,” ‘early’ philosophical concepts such as ‘alienation’ and ‘freedom’ of necessity come to reappear in the ‘later’ works like Capital except in the concretized conceptual guise of the fetishism of commodities and exploitation.<sup>77</sup> In Capital, Marx was looking for “the specific and concrete connections” which will show the truly free society given over to a productive “morality” as inevitable. Kamenka concludes from comparing and contrasting the ‘young’ and ‘mature’ Marx is that his “belief in a rational, free, and co-operative society of the human spirit” was such that, regardless of the alterations in style and method, his conviction “that man would pass from a realm of conflict and dependence to a realm of cooperation and freedom” remained the goal of his thought.<sup>78</sup>

Although Kamenka takes a more sound and thorough approach to the subject than Gould, he evinces the same abstract and ultimately inadequate understanding of Marx's critical project. If he had cultivated a more concrete and nuanced understanding of Marx, he would have realized that his concern for self-actualization predated his concern for freedom and that their relationship to each other had been inverted during his 'transformational' criticisms of Hegel so that freedom became the means to self-actualization. Though Kamenka recognizes that Marx rejected traditional moral and ethical thought, this awareness doesn't extend to the fact that he also rejected its traditional vocabulary. Just as Marx did not appeal to rights or justice in his critiques, there is no textual evidence that he had any special notion of good and evil or any real difficulty combining fact and value.<sup>79</sup> Kamenka only compounds his errors by claiming that Marx "replaced philosophy" with an "economico-historical science of society." Again, a more concrete and nuanced understanding of his thought would have recognized that his theory of history emerged as part of an overreaction to idealism and utopianism and only ceased to be crudely materialist upon developing a dialectical method integrating his philosophy, history, and political economy. This method allowed him to concretely and comprehensively demonstrate how humanity had evolved to a point in history where material conditions exist for the full self-actualization of all. Unfortunately, Marx was unable to complete his critical project and elaborate his ethic. So while it is true that he believed "man would pass from a realm of conflict and dependence to a realm of cooperation and freedom," it was so that individuals could fully self-actualize themselves.

Claiming to continue Kamenka's work, George Brenkert develops it in a more fruitful direction. In Marx's Ethic of Freedom, Brenkert takes it as his task to demonstrate that Marx's rejection of traditional morality and ethics didn't entail a wholesale rejection of ethics and morality.<sup>80</sup> The primary reason Marxists and anti-Marxists fail to recognize this is due to their "unjustifiably narrow" conception of ethics and morality.<sup>81</sup> This has led them to falsely conclude that Marx didn't have a morality because he didn't have a traditional ethic of duty. Although it is difficult to determine the nature of Marx's ethic, Brenkert believes he can derive it from a meta-ethical analysis.

Marx rejected the traditional moral and ethical philosophy of his time because its abstract and ahistorical character tended to make it ineffectual and illusory.<sup>82</sup> He believed that any adequate critique, science, or ethics implicit in it must be linked to material considerations and capable of distinguishing between appearance and reality. However, he also believed that "one basis for life and another basis for science is an a priori lie."<sup>83</sup> It was the need to develop a single all-embracing science guiding theory and praxis that lead Marx to collapse fact and value and to contend that the standards by which man should be measured come from the study of man himself. What the study of man in his historical, social, and economic realities reveals is that moralities have a historical and material basis such that what man *ought* to be *is* discovered in human historical development. Marx does not so much 'impose' the idea that man and society have developed by means of contradiction from a one-sided to a many-sided existence as 'elicit' it from his study of human historical development.<sup>84</sup> As such, this process of self-actualization possesses descriptive as well as normative import.<sup>85</sup>

Brenkert's meta-ethical analysis of Marx's thought ultimately reveals that he held a non-traditional virtue ethic of freedom expressed in non-traditional moral language. It is characterized by a classical concern for moral excellence and defined by a set of traits and range of activities required for a person to lead a flourishing life.<sup>86</sup> The specific difference between this ethic and a classical virtue ethics is that it applies to everyone rather than just a select few. What makes it difficult to identify is that it does not get expressed in the form of an ethic of duty, with rules and obligations, or in appeals to justice and rights, or concepts of good and evils, but rather through terms like 'inhuman,' 'exploitation,' 'repulsiveness,' 'subjugation.'<sup>87</sup> It is because societies constitute an interconnected series towards a condition where they can truly flourish that justifies the application of 'communist' moral standards to evaluate earlier and different social conditions.<sup>88</sup>

While Brenkert is articulate, insightful, and in certain respects correct, the plausibility of his position rests on omissions, revisions, and considerations that are ultimately unsupportable.

First of all, Brenkert bases his contention that Marx had an ethic of freedom on his "numerous references to freedom."<sup>89</sup> However, he never bothers cite these references or submit them to any form of analysis. Were Brenkert to do this he would find that they fall into three categories; 1) human and political emancipation, 2) the emancipation of the proletariat, and, 3) the free and full development of the individual. Although there are numerous such references, they don't support the contention that Marx had an ethic of freedom. The reason for this is most of these references refer to "emancipation," not "freedom," and the two terms are not identical. "Emancipation" is defined as "to set free

a slave; to release from bondage, servitude, or serfdom; to free from restraint.<sup>90</sup> It corresponds to a negative freedom *from*. If the Marxian notion of freedom is both a freedom *from* and a freedom *to*, and, as I have already shown, freedom for Marx is an instrumental value creating the time necessary for the full self-actualization of the individual, then all those instances where he refers to “human emancipation” and “emancipation of the proletariat” are not calls for freedom as an end in itself but only as a means of freeing humanity *from* the conditions that prevent its self-actualization.

Secondly, the way Brenkert establishes this ethic of freedom is suspect. Fearing there is insufficient freedom in Marx’s theory of history to allow for morality, he feels compelled to revise it accordingly. In order to demonstrate that ethics and morality are not simply epiphenomenal, he distinguishes between ‘lived’ vs. ‘institutional’ values.<sup>91</sup> Values that play a role in the base are “lived values, ways of choosing, which people actually have and which they use to direct their behavior” while “institutional values” are “the values codified, transcribed, theorized, legislated, and legally enforced.”<sup>92</sup> This bogus distinction does nothing to change the fact that Marx did not consider morality part of the productive forces. Even though values influence decision-making in the labor process, they only become conscious as ideological forms.<sup>93</sup> Brenkert’s revision of Marx’s theory of history is not only unfortunate but also unnecessary as it was eventually altered to allow for reciprocal relations between the base and the superstructure, making Marx consistent with the soft determinism he espoused in the Theses on Feuerbach and The German Ideology.

Thirdly, Brenkert contradicts himself repeatedly in presenting his position. Not only does he equivocate on teleological issues, and “try too hard to make communism

intelligible,” but ends up arguing at cross-purposes.<sup>94</sup> On the one hand he raises problems with an ethic of self-actualization. On the other he resolves them only to raise problems with an ethic of freedom. As it turns out, the question of whether full self-actualization is even realistic or appropriate is not a problem for Marx. Consistent with the Greek and Hegelian influence in his thought, to “fully develop” one’s talents doesn’t require a “bad infinity,” but only the greatest development of them consistent with what is personally and socially appropriate.<sup>95</sup> An ethic of freedom, however, really doesn’t provide any form of guidance, prescribe any form of objectification, and must rely on other concepts for its meaning and content.<sup>96</sup> This ultimately forces Brenkert to concede that although an ethic of freedom would be preferable, an ethic of self-actualization might be more justifiable.<sup>97</sup> All of these considerations are beside the point. It’s not a question of which ethic is more or less problematic, but which one reflects Marx’s position.

Although Brenkert’s analysis contains many ‘virtues,’ it shares some of the same vices as Gould and Kamenka. Like them, he quotes from Marx without any awareness of his critical project or development in his thought. Absent such grounding, Brenkert denies we can truly know what Marx thought on any topic and, despite declaiming against the tendency to “twist” or “string together quotes” to make one’s point, leaves himself little recourse to do much else. A more concrete and historical approach would have made it impossible for him to restrict the scope of his analysis, forcing him to consider the period prior to 1842, where Marx’s primordial concern with self-actualization and the turn of events transforming it into a central plank of his critical project stand out clearly. This would have gone a long way in preventing him from conflating the Hegelian with the Marxian formulation of the relation between freedom



and self-actualization, maintaining that Marx permanently abandoned the concept of alienation and species-being after 1845, and misconstruing many of the developments in his thought as “inconsistencies.” It is only by dint of an abstract and ahistorical analysis that Brenkert’s claim that Marx had an ethic of freedom has any plausibility.

### *Dialectical Humanism*

Now we have reached the point where I can identify Marx’s ethic. By way of context it is imperative to restate that Marx started out a Young (left) Hegelian, attempted to “realize philosophy” by means of “a ruthless critique of everything existing,” and although this critical project experienced certain modifications, it remained one the overarching and unifying aims in his thought.<sup>98</sup> It began with an external critique of irrationalities impeding the realization of philosophy within Prussia, but turned into an internal critique of Hegel, the Young Hegelians, and the True Socialists, leading Marx to formulate his own outlook, which, amongst other things, consisted of adopting the basic framework of Hegel’s philosophy of history, re-conceiving it as a materialist dialectic, and consistent with Feuerbach’s humanism and naturalism, making Man, as a species-being who self-actualizes himself through labor, the goal of history.<sup>99</sup> Although Marx would ultimately redefine of the realization of philosophy as the transcendence of economic alienation, concretize and historicize the concept of species-being, and de-emphasize the objective teleological implications in his theory of history, self-actualization remained at the center of his thought and came to form the basis of his ethic.

The dialectical development of “man” and society in history unfolds roughly in

accordance with the following triads;<sup>100</sup>

The stages in the historical dialectic are:

1. Pre-capitalist societies.
2. Capitalism.
3. Communism.

The social relations corresponding to them are:

1. Relations of inequality.
2. Relations of formal equality.
3. Relations of concrete equality.

They can be characterized as:

1. Internal relations that are concretely particular.
2. External relations that are abstractly universal.
3. Internal relations that are concrete particular.

And at essence entail:

1. Personal dependence
2. Personal independence based on objective dependence.
3. Free social individuality.

Their organizing principle is defined by;

1. Community
2. Individual and external sociality.
3. Communal individuality.

And correspond to a certain type of consciousness;

1. Primitive self-awareness
2. Self-alienation.
3. Self-actualization.

Pre-capitalist societies, with the exception of early tribal society, are characterized by relations of inequality entailing personal dependence, but which are nonetheless composed of close-knit communities where individuals possess a primitive self-awareness. At this stage of history, individuals typically own or “are identified with and/or closely bound” to the means of production, produce primarily for self-consumption, and material conditions are insufficient for individual self-actualization. Since demand typically compels supply in pre-capitalist economies, they aren’t prone to

business cycles. The relative self-sufficiency and stability of pre-capitalist economies, combined with their rigid hierarchical relations, placed individuals in static social relations.<sup>101</sup> What makes these relations “internal” and “concretely particular” is that people relate to each other personally and intimately in accordance with their status, role, and function within the community.<sup>102</sup> Over time these fixed relations take on the appearance of something natural and pre-given.<sup>103</sup> It is the individual’s close albeit unreflective identification with the community that lies at the source of their primitive self-awareness.

With the advent of capitalism, human history enters a stage of development characterized by relations of formal equality, where personal independence is based on objective dependence, and self-consciousness is alienated. The prerequisite for this stage of development is the separation of worker from the means of production so that they have no means to survive other than by selling their labor power. With this the unity of pre-capitalist societies is replaced by the disunity of “indifferent” individuals confronting each other as social atoms in the marketplace.<sup>104</sup> It is in the capitalist system of exchange that formal equality and reciprocity first appear. As Marx explains, it is only an illusion.

These external relations are very far from being an abolition of ‘relations of dependence,’ rather...these objective dependency relations appear in antithesis to those of personal dependence in such a way that individuals are now ruled by *abstractions*, whereas earlier they depended on each other.<sup>105</sup>

Although a worker may be personally independent of a particular capitalist, he or she is objectively dependent on the capitalist class for their survival. As workers are increasingly exploited to create ever more surplus value, their objectifications more and

more take the form of an alien power standing over and against them. It is because objectification in general serves to alienate rather than actuate that consciousness is self-alienated under capitalism.

Communism stands in the dialectical relation of the negation of the negation to capitalism. With its inception the internal relations of pre-capitalism, which were negated by the external relations of capitalism, are reestablished in communism at a higher level. Although capitalism is geared primarily for profit, it inadvertently and unconsciously creates the material conditions for “socially developed human beings.”<sup>106</sup> When the proletariat, as the concentrated expression of all social, political, and economic degradation, finally revolts against this alienation and exploitation, it abolishes classes and replaces the rule of abstractions with the rule of need. In reestablishing the community at a higher level, individuals overcome their objective dependence, regain their subjective mutuality, without being in domination relations.<sup>107</sup> The formal freedom and equality of capitalism gives way to the substantive freedom and equality of communism. Individuals are now free to develop their capacities and are no longer constrained to develop them in the production process per se.<sup>108</sup> Relations become internal again because each individual recognizes the other as free and this recognition becomes the condition for the full realization of all.<sup>109</sup>

What the critique of political economy had enabled Marx to do was concretely comprehend the economic mechanics and social dynamics leading from capitalism to communism. On his analysis, human history had reached a stage in its development where self-actualization was possible for all. Now that capitalism had performed its historic task of developing the material conditions necessary for full human self-

actualization, it had served its purpose and lost its justification. With criticism “no longer an end in itself, but only a means” whose “essential sentiment is indignation” and whose “essential activity is denunciation,” the mature Marx’s condemnations of capitalism in the critique of political economy are best understood as an outraged attempt to catalyze the subjective realization of a “higher form of society” already objectively latent in “the womb of capitalism.”<sup>110</sup> That Marx based these evaluations on historically emergent material conditions proves he did not derive his ethic from fantasy or the future. Through his critical project he had advanced socialistic and communistic thought beyond its utopian phase by replacing speculative construction with a method of analysis capable of elucidating social reality at a specific and limited level of generality. Since material conditions weren’t developed enough to concretely discern what communism’s norms, goods, or virtues would be, Marx’s ethic of self-actualization could not be fully articulated. Such specificity would only be methodologically possible or appropriate at “the higher phase of communist society.”

It should not be thought that Marx use of “morally incendiary language” conflicts with his attempt to be objective. Just as Marx’s critics have an “unjustifiably narrow” conception of ethics and morality, they also have an “unjustifiably narrow” conception of science. The bourgeois fetish for exactness, certainty, and, testability leads many to identify science with “hard science” and denigrate anything not conformable to it. In the critique of political economy, Marx was trying to comprehend an enormously complex system of metabolic relations composed of too many dependent variables to allow for controlled experiments or completely accurate predictions. Although he had enormous respect for science, he did not restrict himself to its narrow bourgeois formulation. He

defined it as the “ability to take diverse phenomena and explain it as well as its apparent contradictions.”<sup>111</sup> Marx considered dialectics compatible with science because “it describes, it does not evaluate. It takes the good with the bad and doesn’t use one to eliminate the other. Neither does it try to consciously resolve ethical problems.”<sup>112</sup> However, he also recognized early on that “the opposition between political economy and ethics is only a sham opposition—all that happens is that political economy expresses moral law its own way.”<sup>113</sup> His dialectical method ultimately realized the need for an all-embracing ‘social’ science guiding theory and praxis by interrelating philosophy, history, and political economy in such a way as to enable him to combine evaluation and description without contradicting his theory of history or compromising his objectivity. It simply required him to base his evaluations on historically emergent material conditions. So long as the proletariat constitutes an overwhelming majority, and their needs are universal and universally appropriated, they comprise the ‘concrete universal’ whose revolutionary re-appropriation transcends class morality.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have tried to show by means of polemic that self-actualization started out and remained a fundamental concern guiding his thought and animating his ethic. This forced me to confront the likes of Althusser, who gained notoriety for his radical denial of any continuity in Marx’s thought, and address what I believe to be a representative sample of the many scholars who believe he had an ethic of freedom. Although there is an irreducibly conceptual component in the ‘mature’ Marx’s thought, it

is not sufficient to justify 'reading' a break into it. Althusser's audacious attempt to construe the materialist conception of history as a science does not succeed in effacing the philosophy from which it emerged and which continued to underpin it. Such distortions only do a disservice to Marx. As for Gould, Kamenka, and Brenkert, I believe I have shown that their abstract and ahistorical methodologies allow them to evade or ignore the fact that Marx considered freedom an instrumental value in relation to self-actualization. A more concrete and nuanced understanding of Marx reveals that he did not retain Hegel's formulation of the relation between freedom and self-actualization, but inverted it in the process of forming his own critical project, eschewing appeals to justice, rights, goods, or virtues in favor of a long standing concern for self-actualization which get expressed through a set of concepts rooted in his humanism, realized in history, and applied by means of his dialectical method to the critique of political economy. That his ethic of self-actualization remained undeveloped and implicit may make it problematic for those who want to "constitute the future" or "settle things for all times," but it didn't make him inconsistent or compromise his objectivity. It merely reflects the fact that Marx tried to remain consistent with his materialism until he could elaborate this ethic more fully.

## NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

---

<sup>1</sup> Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, Reading Capital. Trans. Ben Brewster. (London: Verso), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Marx, Trans. Martin Nicolaus. Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft). (London: Penguin, 1973), p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> Althusser, p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> Francis Wheen, Karl Marx: A Life. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 76.

<sup>10</sup> Frederick Engels, Capital, Volume 2. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels Collected Works, Volume 36. Trans. Richard Dixon (New York: International Publishers, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Althusser, p. 13.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>16</sup> Lukacs, Georg. History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics. Trans. Rodney Livingston. (Cambridge: MIT Press. 1990), pp. 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> Carol Gould, Marx's Social Ontology. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1978), p. xi.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. p. xiii.



- 
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 25.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 8.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 21.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 85.
- <sup>27</sup> Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte in MECW, Vol. 11, p. 103.
- <sup>28</sup> Karl Marx, The German Ideology in MECW, Vol. 5. p. 54.
- <sup>29</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Volume 3 in MECW, Vol. 37, p. 867.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 870.
- <sup>31</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 306.
- <sup>32</sup> David McLellan, ed. Karl Marx: Selected Writings. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 364.
- <sup>33</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse. pp. 831-832.
- <sup>34</sup> Gould, p. 130.
- <sup>35</sup> Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program in MECW, Vol. 24, p. 87.
- <sup>36</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 95.
- <sup>37</sup> Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program in MECW, Vol. 24, pp. 87-88.
- <sup>38</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 3 in MECW, Vol. 37, pp 337-338.
- <sup>39</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1 in MECW, Vol. 35, pp. 203-204.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 577-578.
- <sup>41</sup> Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program in MECW, Vol. 24, p. 87.

---

<sup>42</sup> Karl Marx, Reflections of a Young Man on the Choice of a Profession in MECW, Vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 304.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 309.

<sup>45</sup> Karl Marx, The Holy Family: A Critique of Critical Critique. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956), p. 113.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Marx, The German Ideology in MECW, Vol. 5, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>49</sup> Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy in MECW, Vol. 6, p. 190.

<sup>50</sup> Karl Marx, Communist Manifesto in MECW, Vol. 6, p. 506.

<sup>51</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 706.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 711.

<sup>53</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1 in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 270.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 588.

<sup>55</sup> Karl Marx, Critique of the Gotha Program in MECW, Vol. 24, p. 87.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 711.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Marx, Grundrisse, p. 611.

<sup>58</sup> Carol Gould, p. xxiii.

<sup>59</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1 in MECW, Vol. 35, p. 23.

<sup>60</sup> Carol Gould, p. xxiii.

<sup>61</sup> Eugene Kamenka, The Ethical Foundations of Marxism. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1972), p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

---

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 90.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., pp. 122-123.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>79</sup> George Brenkert, Marx's Ethic of Freedom. (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul 1983), p. 15.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>90</sup> “Emancipation.” Webster’s New World College Dictionary. Third Edition. 1996. p. 442.

<sup>91</sup> George Brenkert, p. 25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>93</sup> Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy in MECW, Vol. 29, pp. 263-264.

<sup>94</sup> George Brenkert, p. 234.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>98</sup> Karl Marx, Letters from *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher* in MECW, Vol. 3., p. 142.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 15.

<sup>100</sup> Carol Gould, pp. 4-5.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

---

<sup>106</sup> Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 3 in MECW, Vol. 37, p. 237.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>110</sup> Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 177.

<sup>111</sup> Karl Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy in MECW, Vol. 6, p. 124.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>113</sup> Karl Marx, The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 in MECW, Vol. 3, p. 311.

## Conclusion

Despite the concerted effort by many in government, academia, and the media to exorcize the specter of Marx, he continues to haunt us. Understanding this much maligned thinker requires extensive contextualization and explication to avoid the common misconceptions surrounding him. No armchair philosopher, Marx's life work was a bold attempt to unite theory and praxis. Attracted in his youth to "abstract truths," and believing one's chief guide must be "the welfare of mankind and his own perfection," he sought some way to become a truly great man by working "not only for his own perfection" but "the perfection of others." Casting about in intellectual restlessness, he found the means to do this in Hegel's philosophy, convinced that its 'realization' required a "ruthless critique of everything existing." Marx's subsequent adoption of Feuerbach's humanism and method of transformational criticism led to a series of 'inversions' changing him into a materialist seeking the realization of Man qua species-being through a critical project aimed at transcending alienation by means of a critique of religion, the state, law, political economy, morality, and civil life.

With the critique of religion already completed by Feuerbach, Marx undertook the critique of politics. It was in exposing the state as a man-made form of political alienation that could only be transcended by human emancipation that Marx made the connection between political and economic alienation. With the 'unmasking' of human self-alienation in its religious, political, and economic forms, and their reduction to economic alienation, the stage was set for transcending it through a critique of political economy. Moses Hess and Friedrich Engels were instrumental in this regard. Hess, for

his part, incorporated communism into the Hegelian philosophy of history, based it on Feuerbach's humanism, suggested that a criticism of political economy would be necessary to realize it. Engels, through in Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy, provided a preliminary sketch of what such a critique should look like.

Following a period of intensive research, Marx made his first attempt at the critique of political economy. Lacking as yet a theory of value or surplus value and unable to integrate the philosophical and economic aspects of his thought, he nonetheless tried to grasp the basic processes and necessary interconnections giving rise to alienation. That even a subsequent attempt at the critique of political economy foundered did not signify the abandonment of his critical project so much as a pause for self-clarification. Marx's attempt to establish his "own standpoint as against the opinions and ideologies of German philosophy" resulted in an overreaction to idealism and utopianism, coinciding not only with his acceptance of Ricardo's theory of value, surplus value, and money, but in his adoption of the crudely materialist method of 'positive science.' This led him to temporarily abandon the concept of species-being and essence and accounts for the reductionist and deterministic character of "newly discovered" theory of history. Once Marx gained self-clarification, he set out to win the working class to his convictions. The attempt to unite theory and praxis through politics took the form of attacking the popularity of Weitling and Proudhon, winning over the Communist League, presenting lectures to workers groups, and taking a leadership role in the revolutions of 1848.

When this revolutionary period was over, his political praxis came to a halt. In exile Marx resumed his critique of political economy. This led to another period of intensive research slowed in this instance by severe poverty, debt, and illness until the

prospect of another crisis forced him to formulate his principle of political economy. In the process of rejecting Ricardo's theory of money and developing his own theory of value, surplus value, price of production, and rent, Marx also created a method capable of integrating his philosophical, historical, and political economical discourse. With the development of the 'dialectic method,' we witness the reappearance of the concept of species being in historicized and implicit form, the development of the concept of alienation to its logical and concrete conclusion, and the transformation of his theory of history into a fuller, more flexible theory. Although Marx consistently and systematically elaborated his political economy within the *order of discovery* (inquiry), realizing the internal relation between alienation and exploitation, his return to the political arena to lead the 'First International' sapped the last measure of his health, resulting in his failure to complete the *order of presentation*-publishing only the first of what was ultimately supposed to be a multi-volume treatise.

Throughout these stages of intellectual and political development self-actualization remained at the center of Marx's thought. It started off as an ideal but gradually turned into a material principle as he went from deducing appearances from essences to comprehending the "actual concrete" by utilizing both conception (logical, historical, philosophical, and economic) and observation to generate "concretes for thought" revealing "unities in diversities." It is crucial to recognize that throughout this complex evolution of thought Marx never split fact and value. Scholars may disagree about the exact nature of his ethic, but there is broad consensus amongst them that Marx believed that what 'man' *ought* to be *is* discovered in human historical development. What the critique of political economy concretely demonstrated to him was that human



history had reached a stage where self-actualization was possible for everyone. The “morally incendiary language” in the “mature” Marx does not have its source in any theory of justice, special notion of good and evil, or virtue theory, but rather lay in his long-standing concern over human self-actualization, and formed part of an outraged attempt to subjectively realize a “higher form of society” objectively latent in the “womb of capitalism.” That this “ethic of self-actualization” was rudimentary resides in the fact that material conditions did not allow for a fully articulated ethic. His condemnation of capitalism and calls for revolution, however, did not compromise his objectivity. So long as the proletariat constituted an emergent historio-material force whose needs were universal and universally re-appropriated, his evaluative language had an objective grounding and transcended class morality.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Texts.

Karl Marx, Trans. R. Dixon. The Holy Family: A Critique of Critical Critique. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956.

Karl Marx, Trans. Martin Nicolaus. Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft). London: Penguin. 1973.

Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. Trans. Richard Dixon. Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works. London: Lawrence & Wishart. Vol. 1-45. 1975-

### Secondary Literature.

Althusser, Louis and Etienne Balibar. Trans. Ben Brewster. Reading Capital. London: Verso. 1977.

Bell, Daniel. "The Rediscovery of Alienation: Some Notes Along the Quest for the Historical Marx" *Journal of Philosophy* 56 (1959) 933-51.

Bober, Mandell. Karl Marx's Interpretation of History. Cambridge: Harvard UP. 1927.

Bohm-Bawerk, Eugen Von. and Rudolf Hilferding. Ed. Paul Sweezy. Karl Marx and the Close of his System and Criticism of Marx. Philadelphia: Orion Editions. 1984.

Blumenberg, Werner. Trans. Douglas Scott. Karl Marx: An Illustrated Biography. New York: Verso. 1998.

Brenkert, George G. Marx's Ethics of Freedom. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul. 1983.

Buchanan, Allen E. "Marx, Morality, and History: An Assessment of Recent Analytical Work on Marx" *Ethics* 98, (1987) 104-36.

Cohen, G. A. Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense. Princeton: Princeton UP. 2001.

Cohen, Marshall, Nagel, Thomas, and Scanlon, Thomas, Eds. Marx, Justice, and History. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1980.

De George, Richard T. Patterns of Soviet Thought. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1966.

De George, Richard T. Soviet Ethics and Morality. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 1969.

De George, Richard T. The New Marxism: Soviet and Eastern European Marxism Since 1956. New York: Pegasus. 1968.

De George, Richard T. "The Soviet Concept of Man and the Western Tradition" *Philosophy Today*. 8 (1964) 258-271.

Dupre, Louis. "Dialectical Philosophy Before and After Marx" *New Scholasticism*. 46 (1972) 488-511.

Dupre, Louis. "Idealism and Materialism" *Review of Metaphysics*. 30 (1977) 649-685.

Dupre, Louis. "Religion as Alienation, Ideology and Utopia In Marx" *Logos*. 5 (1984) 29-40.

Dupre, Louis. The Philosophical Foundation of Marxism. New York: Harcourt-Brace-World. 1966.

Elster, John. Making Sense of Marx. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1985.

Feuerbach, Ludwig. Trans. George Eliot. The Essence of Christianity. New York: Harper. 1957.

Fritzhand, Marek. "The Foundations of Karl Marx's Ethics" *Dialectics and Humanism* 10 (1983) 5-19.

Fromm, Erich. Marx's Concept of Man. New York: Frederick Ungar. 1979.

Giddens, Anthony. A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism, IV. Berkeley: University of California Press. 1981.

Gould, Carol C. Marx's Social Ontology. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1978.

Hegel, G.W.F. Trans. Robert Hartman. Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History. New York: Bobbs-Merrill. 1953.

Hegel, G.W.F. Trans. J.B. Baillie. The Phenomenology of Mind. London: George Unwin Ltd. 1961.

Hodges, Donald Clark. "Historical Materialism in Ethics" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. 23 (1962) 1-22.

Honderich, Ted. "Against Teleological Historical Materialism" *Inquiry*. 25 (1982) 451-469.

John, P.M. Marx on Alienation. Columbia: South Asia Books. 1976.

- Kain, Philip J. Marx and Ethics. New York: Oxford University Press. 1988.
- Kain, Philip J. Marx, Method, Epistemology, and Humanism. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co. 1986.
- Kamenka, Eugene. Marx and Ethics. London: Macmillan. 1969.
- Kamenka, Eugene. The Ethical Foundations of Marxism. London: Routledge & Keegan Paul. 1972.
- Kline, George. "Was Marx an Ethical Humanist?" *Studies in Soviet Thought* Vol. 9, (1969) 91-103.
- Lukacs, Georg. Trans. Rodney Livingston. History and Class Consciousness. Cambridge: MIT Press. 1990.
- Machan, Tibor. "Humanism and Political Economy" *Free Inquiry* 9, (1989) 21-22.
- McLellan, David. Karl Marx. New York: Penguin. 1975.
- McLellan, David, ed. Karl Marx: Selected Writings. New York: Oxford University Press. 1977.
- Mehring, Franz. Trans. Edward Fitzgerald. Karl Marx: The Story of his Life. New York: Covici-Friede, 1935.
- Meszaros, Istvan. Marx's Theory of Alienation. Plymouth: Merlin Press. 1970.
- Nielsen, Kai. "Historical Materialism: Ideology and Ethics" *Studies in Soviet Thought* 29, (1985) 47-64.
- Nielsen, Kai. "Alienation and Self-Realization" *Philosophy* Vol. 48. (1973) 21-33.
- Nielsen, Kai. Marxism and the Moral Point of View. Boulder: Westview Press. 1989.
- Nielsen, Kai and Steven C Patten. Eds. *Marx and Morality*. Canadian Journal of Philosophy. Supplementary Volume VII. (1981).
- Nielsen, Kai. "On the Coherence of Historical Materialism" *Philosophical Inquiry*. (1990) 48-57.
- Nordahl, Richard. "Marx on Moral Commentary: Ideology and Science" *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*. 15. (1985) 237-254.

Nowak, Leszek. "Man and the Problem of the Individual in Non-Marxian Historical Materialism" *Social Theory and Practice*. 13 (1987) 1-16.

Ollman, Bertell. Alienation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1971.

Pesic, Golubovic. "What is the Meaning of Alienation?" *Praxis* Vol. 2. (1966) 353-359.

Plamenatz, John P. Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1975.

Roemer, John E. "Should Marxists be Interested in Exploitation?" *Philosophy and Public Affairs*. 14 (1985) 30-65.

Rotenstreich, Nathan. "On The Ecstatic Sources of the Concept of Alienation" *Review of Metaphysics* 16 (1963) 550-5.

Schacht, Richard. Alienation. Lanham: University Press of America. 1984.

Schaff, Adam. A Philosophy of Man. London: Lawrence & Wishart. 1963.

Sher, Gerson S, Ed. Marxist Humanism and Praxis. Buffalo: Prometheus Books. 1978.

Stojanovic, Svetozar. Mihailo Markovic, Ed. "A Tension in Historical Materialism" in "Praxis" Dordrecht: D. Reidel. 1979.

Tucker, Robert C. "Marxism—Is it Religion?" *Ethics*. 68 (1958) 125-130.

Tucker, Robert C. Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1961.

Tucker, Robert C. The Marxian Revolutionary Idea. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. 1969.

Vernon, Venable. Human Nature: The Marxian View. New York: Knopf. 1945.

Vygotski, Vitaly. A Book for All Time: Centenary of Karl Marx's Capital. Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House. 1967.

When, Francis, Karl Marx: A Life. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 2000.

Wood, Allen W. "Historical Materialism and Functional Explanation" *Inquiry*. 29 (1986) 11-27.

Wood, Allen W. Karl Marx. London & Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul. 1981.