

MARXIAN ETHICAL THOUGHT

BRUCE BALLARD

IN MEMORY OF
WILLIAM A. BALLARD (1930–1991),
A WONDERFUL FATHER

By now a great many attempts have been made to settle the question whether Marx or Marxism has or needs an ethics. However, constructive ethicists as well as Marxian anti-moralists have lately (though not only lately) misinterpreted aspects of Marx's thought on ethics through a lack of attention both to what Marx himself says pertaining ethics and to the Hegelian ethical background. I want therefore to critically review and typify Marxian texts relevant to ethics with special attention to the uniquely Hegelian ethical contribution. Neglect of the Hegelian ethical background is not surprising given the paucity of developed work on Hegel's ethics in recent years. With the appearance of Allen Wood's *Hegel's Ethical Thought*,¹ however, this ellipsis has been filled to a meaningful extent. Hence, in addition to Hegel's own writing, a number of insights from Wood's work concerning Hegel will be helpful for interpreting Marxian ethical themes. The Hegelian ethics is of especially telling importance in explaining some of Marx's moral sounding contentions if there are insufficiently compelling historical materialist arguments for the realization of the communist (ethical?) ideal, as Stanley Moore so trenchantly argues.²

¹ Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

² In *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) Stanley Moore exhibits the basic tension between Marx's 'philosophical communism' and the limits of historical materialist arguments for communism. In the same work Moore himself also identifies the suppressed

Since there have been a significant number of attempts to find or construct a Marxian ethics on grounds Marx himself specifically rejects (e.g. on Kantian or Utilitarian bases) or on grounds he could not entirely accept for their ahistorical characterization of human nature (Aristotelian ethics),³ it is worthwhile to reconsider a basis which is more congenial to Marx's native philosophical framework. Engels even explicitly recognizes the superiority of an Hegelian content to ethics; in contrast to Feuerbach's treatment, "The latter's [Hegel's] ethics or doctrine of moral conduct is the philosophy of law and embraces: (1) abstract right; (2) morality; (3) moral conduct under which again are comprised the family, civil society, and the state. Here the content is as realistic as the form is idealistic. Besides morality the whole sphere of law, economy, politics is here included."⁴ Though at times Marx explicitly refers to this background in his thought about ethics, the Hegelian influence is often an implicit resource, as I will show. At still other moments, explicitly Hegelian arguments could augment the Marxian position on ethics in ways I will suggest.

In order to typify Marx's ethical thought in more Hegelian terms, it is important to pay closer attention to what Marx himself says which sounds relevant to questions of ethics. I distinguish these main ethical aspects in Marx: a humanism, a self-actualization program, a critique of morality as ideology, and a language of moral condemnation. Within the self-actualization program there is an activist element, a teleological element, and an historical element. Within the historical element there is a critique of voluntarism, an anti-moralism, and a use of Hegelian justifications. Within the critique of morality as ideology, there is a critique of rights, of utilitarianism, of a priorism, of reformism, and of moralizing. Occasional later interpretation and development of these thoughts by Marxists is also noted. It is within the framework of a critical

premise for the moral superiority of cultures where appearance corresponds to substance (for Marx, cultures with natural economies) as an Hegelian assumption without which Marx has no sufficient historical materialist argument to support the movement from socialism to communism, cf. p. 62.

³ I do not mean to claim that attempts to show meaningful likenesses between Marx's perspective and classical theories of ethics are ill-informed as such. The point is just that Marx's thought cannot be reduced to a form of any of these theories, or of their combination.

⁴ Friedrich Engels, "Ludwig Feuerbach" in *Reader in Marxist Philosophy*, ed. Howard Selsam and Harry Martel (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 253.

survey of these ethical elements in Marx that Hegelian contributions will be assessed.

Negative humanism (anti-religion) and de-alienation

From his early works, what sounds like an ethics in Marx is explicitly humanist in two senses. As Marx puts it in 1843, "The critique of religion ends in the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man; thus ends with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being...."⁵ According to Marx, there can be no adequate appreciation of man's degradation (alienation) until the ultimate alienation—man's projection of his essential powers upon God—is revoked. This is the negative sense of his humanism and a view which is first found in Feuerbach's writings on Christianity. In Marx, only with this revocation are people in a position to make demands "for their true happiness."⁶ Today this proposition has been severely undermined by the phenomenon which in its theoretical explication is termed Liberation Theology. The social reality underlying this theoretical work has been the class-conscious involvement in proletarian and peasant struggle of large parts of the Catholic church in, especially, Latin America. This leads Fidel Castro to qualify Marx as overgeneralizing concerning the place of religion ideologically: "I believe that ...religion is not, in itself, an opiate or a miraculous remedy. It may become an opiate or a wonderful cure if it is used or applied to defend oppressors and exploiters or the oppressed and the exploited...."⁷

Still, true happiness is to be realized in a process of de-alienation⁸ made possible by the overcoming of the capitalist system. Notably, the

⁵ Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. Annette Jolin and Joseph O'Malley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 137.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁷ Fidel Castro, *Fidel and Religion*, trans. The Cuban Center for Translation and Interpretation (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), dust jacket.

⁸ According to the 1844 MSS. the modern laborer is alienated in four primary ways: from the product of labor, from the process of labor, from his or her species-being or human essence, and from other people.

theory of alienation offered in the 1844 MSS and other early writings is not rescinded in later work.⁹

Positive humanism (self-actualization)

The positive sense of Marx's humanism is expressed in his theory of self-actualization. The goal of the dealienation process is to achieve "free self activity."¹⁰ While this sounds in principle no different from the bourgeois hedonist's objective, what Marx has in mind has more in common with the ethical naturalism of Aristotle, particularly with reference to the social dimension of human fulfilment.¹¹ Since Marx postulates the fulfilment of human capacities and needs as they are formed historically, he parts company with Aristotle's essentialism. He may rightly be termed an historical naturalist for his metaethical theory as Wood has termed Hegel for like reasons.¹² There is also an Hegelian aspect to the sense of freedom here which distinguishes it from ahistorical libertarian ideals. Specifically, Hegel distinguishes between negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom is mere freedom from constraint, freedom to follow ones caprice. This freedom is not primary in self-actualization. Positive freedom is more than this formal vacuity; it includes the realization of ones rational potential in the real world. For

⁹ Cf. the following passages from *Capital*, Vol. 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967): "To the out-cry as to the physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of over work it [Capital] answers: Ought these to trouble us since they increase our profits," p. 270. "Manufacture...converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts; just as in the State of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow," p. 360. Any division of labor "attacks the individual at the very roots of his being," p. 363. "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole," p. 645.

¹⁰ Cf. "Only the proletarians of the present day...are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity...." Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1947), p. 67. After capitalism comes "a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle," *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 592. Engels says virtually the same thing in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific in Karl Marx & Frederick Engels: Selected Works in One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 432. On the human need for variety see *The German Ideology*, p. 22 and *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 341.

¹¹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 326, n. 4.

¹² Hegel's *Ethical Thought*, p. 33.

religion, this zeal or what is sometimes referred to as moral energy is indeed something almost unique to Marxism in modern times. John McMurtry takes this feature, together with the scope of its intended change, to be Marxism's most attractive feature.¹⁵ On the other hand, the activist aspect is perfectly congruent with Marx's definition of humanity as 'practical life activity.' Paradoxically, this most energetic philosophy is not to be founded on altruism, but on self-interest (of workers).¹⁶

The teleological element

Even though Marx often disavows any connection between his revolutionary philosophy and ethics, there is a definite teleological strain in his writing. The whole idea of self-actualization—albeit without the full content of fixed virtues such as Aristotle describes—sees a certain type of activity which involves the development of the many-sided nature of human beings as an ultimate end (in a real community). It is clear in the 1844 MSS that Marx regards taking money as end-in-itself to be a perverse goal for a human being.¹⁷ His description of the short circuit of working to live and living only to work is also offered as a misdirection of human purposiveness.¹⁸

Marx does, however, spell out a certain virtue ethics of more specific content. These virtues have to be understood in relation to the historical telos of the proletariat.¹⁹ For instance, in contrast to his reading of the social principles of Christianity, Marx argues that: "...the proletariat, not wanting to be treated as canaille, needs its courage, pride, and sense of

¹⁵ John McMurtry, "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (Supplementary Volume VII, 1981), p. 189.

¹⁶ "This true community does not come into being as the product of reflection but it arises out of the need and the egoism of individuals, i.e. it arises directly from their own activity." *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, p. 265.

¹⁷ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* trans. T.B. Bottomore in Erich Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1966), pp. 145, 150.

¹⁸ "The worker must have just what is necessary for him to want to live, and he must want to live only in order to have this." *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 145.

¹⁹ Cf. Svetozar Stojanovic's specific development of a historical and class-relative ethics of character in his "Characterological Course of the Socialist Revolution" in *Between Ideals and Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 156-177.

independence much more than its daily bread."²⁰ Seriousness and conscience toward the workers' party are also assumed to be vital excellences.²¹ The honor of the Proletariat is likewise commended even in its defeats due to the historical moment of its struggle.²²

The historical element

One of the most puzzling aspects of any possible Marxian ethics when compared with traditional approaches is its lack of commitment to transhistorical principles. In fact, human fulfilment itself cannot be linked to but a very few unchanging capacities. Human needs and hence human self-actualization are quite relative to historical situation. On one hand, felt need is taken to be "the most obvious, irrefutable proof that that thing is a part of my essence."²³ On the other hand, "Our wants and pleasures have their origin in society; we therefore measure them in relation to society; we do not measure them in relation to the objects which serve for their gratification. Since they are of a social nature, they are of a relative nature."²⁴ Communist party organization itself also creates the new need of class society, or worker solidarity.²⁵

Engels expresses concisely the historical relativity of ethics in a discussion of three competing moralities of his day: "Which is then the true one? Not one of them, in the sense of having absolute validity; but certainly that morality which contains the maximum of durable elements

²⁰ As cited in *Between Ideals and Reality*, p. 141.

²¹ Cf. *Critique of the Gotha Programme* in *Karl Marx & Frederick Engels: Selected Works in One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 329.

²² "But in all these defeats, the proletariat succumbs at least with the honor that attaches to great historical struggles," *The Eighteenth Brumaire in Communist Manifesto*, ed. Samuel Beer (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1955), p. 54.

²³ *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, p. 267.

²⁴ Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital/Value, Price and Profit* (New York: International Publishers, 1933), p. 33.

²⁵ "When communist artisans form associations, teaching and propaganda are their first aims. But their association itself creates a new need—the need for society—and what appeared to be a means has become an end. The most striking results of this practical development are to be seen when French socialist workers meet together. Smoking, eating and drinking are no longer simply means of bringing people together. Society, association, entertainment which also has society as its aim, is sufficient for them; the brotherhood of man is no empty phrase but a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth upon us from their toilworn bodies," *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 150.

is the one which, in the present, represents the overthrow of the present, represents the future: that is, the proletarian [morality]."²⁶ In the same way, Engels also argues that there has been moral progress²⁷ albeit this progress remains within the realm of class morality which itself will be overcome.²⁸ We note here that ethics is relative not only to historical epoch, but to the class struggle. Hence, a "proletarian ethics." Lenin and Trotsky, among others, develop this theme quite explicitly.²⁹ Trotsky especially brings out this point in his discussion of the relation between means and end: Proletarian 'ethics' is bound to seem amoral or immoral unless it is remembered that the proletariat has a "wartime morality" and, as in all war, larger ethical standards are not applied.³⁰

Against voluntarism

The stress both Marx and Engels lay on the importance of historical class situation for any considerations of value helps explain their rejection of communitarian voluntarism.³¹ Since a number of the goods Marx sees as vital seem well within reach of such cooperatively based societies (even reached in successful ones),³² it isn't easy to see why they

²⁶ *Anti-Dubring*, p. 104.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

²⁸ "But we have not yet passed beyond class morality. A really human morality which transcends class antagonisms and their legacies in thought becomes possible only at a stage of society which has not only overcome class contradictions but has even forgotten them in practical life." *Anti-Dubring*, p. 105.

²⁹ Cf. Lenin in *What is to be Done?, Address at Congress of Russian Young Communist League (1920)*.

³⁰ Cf. Leon Trotsky, "Their Morals and Ours" in *The Basic Writings of Trotsky*, ed. Irving Howe (New York: Random House, 1963), pp. 386-87.

³¹ "Without these conditions [i.e. the development of modern productive facilities] a communal economy would not in itself form a new productive force; lacking any material basis and resting on a purely theoretical foundation, it would be a mere freak and would end in nothing more than a monastic economy. What was possible can be seen in the formation of towns and the erection of communal buildings for various definite purposes (prisons, barracks, etc.)." *The German Ideology*, pp. 17-18 n.

³² Cf. Martin Buber's *Paths in Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958).

would be disparaged unless we remember Marx's Hegelian interest—the progress of world history.³³

If communitarian voluntarism fails, this is even more the case with merely individual ethics. In general, ethical consciousness, like consciousness generally, reflects the lived conditions of a particular historical class. For Marx, then: "It is self-evident...that... 'the higher being,' 'concept,' 'scruple,' are mere idealistic, spiritual expression, the conception apparently of the isolated individual, the image of very empirical fetters and limitations, within which the mode of production of life, and the form of intercourse coupled with it, move."³⁴ We will have an apt illustration of why Marx would not advocate the development of an individual ethics, even a "Marxian" one, if we scrutinize John McMurtry's attempt to do just that.

First of all, McMurtry admits repeatedly and throughout "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?" that the development of a personal ethics is not at all Marx's concern, even quoting Marx to this effect: "My standpoint...can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them."³⁵ He nevertheless fails to draw the usual conclusion—that such a moral goal is incompatible with Marxism—and attempts to realize this goal. In fact McMurtry is so eager to find such an ethics that he uses a problem in Marx—the contradiction between Marx's historical materialism and his version of the switch from socialism to communism—as a positive sign of Marx's ethical commitment.³⁶ Stanley Moore, much more coherently, develops the consequences of this disparity: that Marx fails on his own historical materialist assumptions to give a warrant for us to expect such a final stage.³⁷ This is particularly important inasmuch as Marx explicitly rejects an appeal to morally inspired voluntarism in the very work where he most completely describes the higher stage of communism.³⁸

³³ Marx and Engels' contempt for Utopian Socialism reflects their general lack of interest in anything but a total world historical liberation of the proletariat and, hence, the human race.

³⁴ *The German Ideology*, p. 21.

³⁵ As cited in "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?", p. 177.

³⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188, n. 37.

³⁷ Cf. *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*.

³⁸ I.e. the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*.

McMurtry's chief mistakes en route to his personal Marxist ethics are due to a failure to grasp the centrality of the historical dialectic. He misses historical materialism when he treats the charges of amorality against Marxism as "a world-historical mental block."³⁹ The same is true of the extended claim that "military dictatorships, arms build-ups, foreign interventions and red-scares have relied on it [Marxism's purported amorality] for more than half a century."⁴⁰ To make this kind of claim, McMurtry must accept two very unMarxian assumptions. First, he must assume that consciousness determines life. The point here is that capitalist ideologues will by no means have lost their last piece of rhetoric were all Marxists to suddenly embrace a fixed ethics since their propaganda depends on their class interests, not a reasoned debate with the proletariat about abstract ethical foundations.⁴¹ Second, because the actions McMurtry lists themselves typify the grotesque but characteristic hypocrisy of capitalist predation and suppression, we know that appeals to supra-class ethical norms from those quarters are never conceptually serious.

Again, where McMurtry finds it "a great irony that the most insistent and telling objection to the Marxian program is that it is indifferent to the individual person and his values,"⁴² this seeming ellipsis in Marx is completely in keeping with Hegel's division of *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit*, with a recognition of the ultimacy of the latter. It is in keeping with the indifference of great historical movements to individual's moral codes.⁴³

McMurtry's further claim that ethical egoism in the USSR is the result of a failure to develop a Marxist personal ethics⁴⁴ ignores both the actual attempt to do so through education in the USSR,⁴⁵ and the necessary inadequacy of any such an attempt when the requisite economic

³⁹ "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?", p. 173.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 173.

⁴¹ After a mock dialogue in which Capital and Labor engage over the justice of the capitalist extraction and the capitalist realizes he has no argument, "after a hearty laugh, he [the capitalist] re-assumes his usual mien. Though he chanted to us the whole creed of the economists, in reality, he says, he would not give a brass farthing for it... He himself is a practical man..." *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 193.

⁴² "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?", p. 175.

⁴³ Cf. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953).

⁴⁴ "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?", p. 173.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Communist Morality*, ed. N. Bychkova, R. Lavrov, and V. Lubisheva (Moscow: Progress Publishers).

development has not taken place (as it did not, in Marxian terms, in the USSR).

McMurtry similarly attempts to try to get individuals to escape their own ethical egoism (in paternalism, consumerism, and passive stupefaction (TV)) by recognizing their incompatibility with Marxist goals, particularly for post-capitalist type relations.⁴⁶ But Marx believes that the necessary virtues for the victory of the proletariat are developed in actual struggle with the bourgeoisie, in party activity, etc. This activity is purportedly based on self-interest, not altruism.

Still, Marx's own participation, as well as his observations regarding how other non-proletarians may end up on the worker's side does, at least at one historical stage, go beyond such interest. For Marx, however, it may well be the grandeur of a conscious embrace of what Hegel would have called Spirit's world-historical movement, which fired imagination and action. Trotsky makes this ethics explicit when he asserts that participation in the movement of history out of capitalism "with open eyes and with an intense will—only this can give the highest moral satisfaction to a thinking being!"⁴⁷

But where does this ethics come from? There is nothing *prima facie* which would attract many individuals to involvement in great historical purposes. However, the intoxication with historic change is evident in Hegel's description of the world-historical passions of "great" men. Such people don't want to be happy in the ordinary sense of realizing their small personal projects.⁴⁸ Rather, they have a singleness of purpose pertaining to "objective" interests (relevant to world history)⁴⁹: "Purposes that are relevant for world history must be grasped in abstract volition and with energy."⁵⁰ This is probably the best short summary of the ethical framework of revolutionary Marxism. This frame would in fact apply not only to the sympathizer (such as Marx), but to revolutionary proletarians themselves if Lenin is right in thinking that 'naturally' the proletariat never develops beyond trade-unionism. This point also explains Marx's rejection of utilitarianism as the pursuit of happiness, where social happiness is deduced through a fallacy of

⁴⁶ Cf. "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?", p. 176.

⁴⁷ "Their Morals and Ours," p. 399.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Reason in History*, p. 33.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 33.

composition beginning with individual satisfactions independently of larger social-structural reality. Still, Hegel's world-historical figures are often unsavory; they have large purposes but often bad motives. The revolutionary proletariat can likewise prove to be an instrument of unintentional consequences which benefit the whole human race through its world-historic mission of overcoming capitalism. But the professional revolutionary is world-historic in conscious intention to further human freedom objectively. This person therefore represents the coming to be of a unity between subjective morality (Hegel's *Moralität*) and objective morality (*Sittlichkeit*) such as Hegel envisioned in the modern State. For Hegel, this movement was the ultimate moral reality.

Such an 'ethics' is certainly unique and without much overlap with McMurtry's. This is especially evident in McMurtry's recommended list of 11 parameters for positive Marxist moral choice.⁵¹

In fact, this list of 11 (how different from Marx's list of 10 suggestions for the transition to socialism at the end of the C.M.!) suggests a quite reduced and non-Marxist praxis altogether. Lukacs rightly indicates (from a Marxist point of view) that this concept of praxis is most typical when social forms are mystified as natural relations to be at best comprehended but not overthrown, in which case "Praxis becomes the form of action appropriate to the isolated individual, it becomes his

⁵¹ "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?," pp. 179-181. McMurtry's list is as follows: "i. whether we are dictatorial or dialogical with our children; ii. whether we relate to those of different sex or race as equals, or as inferiors; iii. whether we consume more, or less, unnecessary commodities; iv. whether we watch commercial entertainment, or act; v. whether we eat junk-food, or soundly-grown fare; vi. whether we share what we can with others, or keep for ourselves; vii. whether we openly oppose greed and oppression, or remain more safely silent; viii. whether we curry favour for position, or remain less favouredly independent; ix. whether we love the development of our intimates, or their dependency on us; x. whether we join and act for liberative groups, or split them as imperfect; xi. whether we do productive work for our livelihoods, or unproductive tasks for accumulation..." Number x. alone reflects a specifically Marxist concern (but even here it isn't necessarily the revolutionary group or party). The others are either changes which would mostly follow an economic and hence political revolution of the proletariat or simply 'progressive' and just as acceptable to bourgeois reform. By failing to be world-historical in his aim but at the same time wanting to provide an ethics for the workers, McMurtry typifies the "petty pickpocket of history" by Trotsky's estimation—cf. "Their Morals and Ours?," p. 386.

ethics."⁵² How unlikely it is that an overthrow would spring from McMurtry's schedule of values!

McMurtry does try to abstract a universalizable value from Marx's historical materialism, sc. "the maximum preservation and development of human productive forces in all situations whatever."⁵³ If this is a 'universalizable value', it is not one for individuals to put into practice but part of history's 'value' seen through the retrospective teleology of the Phenomenologist of Spirit, Hegel. At the same time, Hegel admits, as does Marx, that this is not always history's pattern. McMurtry's further attempt to get altruism out of the very materially-conditioned outcome (Marx claimed) of dealienated community founders on the same consideration.⁵⁴

Anti-moralism

Most paradoxical of all for a would-be Marxian ethics is Marx's own repeated disavowal of any ethical theory or ideal at all for his system.⁵⁵ As Stanley Moore argues, this disavowal is perfectly in keeping with the historical materialist approach to proletariat liberation although it is not consistent with the final aim of communism as Marx describes it.⁵⁶ As will be seen below, Marx's anti-moralism is also perfectly in keeping with his judgment that ethics is a form of ideology.

⁵² Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 19.

⁵³ "Is There a Marxist Personal Morality?," p. 183.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 185 n. 32.

⁵⁵ Cf. "Communism is for us not a stable state which is to be established, an ideal to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence." *The German Ideology*, p. 26. "Communists cannot preach any kind of *morality* at all.... They cannot pose any kind of moral demands at all to people: love one another, do not be egoists, etc. On the contrary, they know very well that egoism, just as well as self-sacrifice, is in specific conditions a necessary form of individual self-affirmation;" "Morality is "impotence in action." From the German Ideology as cited in *Between Ideals and Reality*, p. 139. "Law, morality, religion, are to him [the proletarian] so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests." *Communist Manifesto*, p. 21. Communism's theoretical conclusions "are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be universal reformer." *Communist Manifesto*, p. 23.

⁵⁶ Cf. *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*.

Hegelian justifications

Though explicit references aren't frequent, Marx makes use of a quite Hegelian rationale for the most brutal episodes of human history, even for the British imperialism of his own day. For instance, while it is and must be sickening to human feeling to witness the barbarities inflicted upon the nation of India, and though "England, it is true...was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them...that is not the question,"⁵⁷ the question is "Can mankind fulfil its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social states of Asia?"⁵⁸—i.e. a most Hegelian question. Marx's answer to this question is the quite Hegelian justification of historical utilitarianism: "If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about that revolution."⁵⁹ If the form of this discussion were not obviously Hegelian, the content would still be. Hegel's remarks on the people of the Orient as not being true peoples at all are abundant. Specifically, Indian society is said to be without a history and so without a (moral) purpose in Spirit's progress toward human freedom.⁶⁰ For this reason again, Chinese and Indian thought fail to become philosophy.⁶¹

Marx also comes across with an Hegelian sounding justification for domestic capitalist oppression (from the point of view of history—what Wood calls 'History's Supreme Right'⁶²) with his prediction that Capitalism is bringing about the all round development of the worker through its labor needs and the uncertainty of work.⁶³ The failure both at

⁵⁷ Marx, "The British Rule in India" in *Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), pp. 306-307.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 307. Marx continues here quoting Goethe: "Should this torture then torment us since it brings us greater pleasure? Were not through the rule of Timur souls devoured without measure?" Cf. also, "When a great social revolution shall have mastered the results of the bourgeois epoch, and subjected them to the common control of the most advanced peoples, then only will human progress cease to resemble that hideous pagan idol, who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain." "The Future results of the British Rule in India" in *Karl Marx: Surveys from Exile*, ed. David Fernbach (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 325.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Reason in History*, p. 76.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁶² Cf. *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, p. 224.

⁶³ Cf. *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 487-488.

the time and since for this prediction to be fully born out would rather appear to support Stanley Moore's separation of Marx's historical materialist arguments from his philosophical commitment to communism.⁶⁴

Marx's ambivalence in these passages—human feeling is moved, but destruction still justified—perfectly expresses the ultimate divorce between individual moral ideas and the progress of Spirit. It is worth hearing this idea from Hegel: "The locus of morality is private sentiment, individual conscience, particular will and mode of action. These have their own appropriate value, responsibility, reward, or punishment. The demands and accomplishments of the absolute and final aim of Spirit, the working of Providence, lie above the obligations, responsibilities, and liabilities which are incumbent on the individuals in regard to their morality. (An individual may for moral reasons resist and for immoral reasons advance the course of history.) Those who through moral steadfastness and noble sentiment have resisted the necessary progress of the Spirit stand higher in moral value than those whose crimes have been turned by a higher purpose into means of carrying on the will behind this purpose. But in revolutions of this kind both parties stand within the same circle of disaster. It is therefore only a formal right, forsaken both by the living spirit and by God, which the defenders of ancient right and order (no matter how moral) maintain."⁶⁵ Certainly for Hegel, and in an attenuated sense for Marx, in the face of History there is a 'teleological suspension of the ethical'.

Morality as ideology

The relativity of ethical positions historically which I sketch above is filled out by a closer consideration of the class-relative nature of ethics which leads Marx to include it as a part of ideology. In general this amounts to the claim that ethics reflect the interests of the dominant economic formation.⁶⁶ Engels at least, is willing to talk about a supra-class ethics of the future, but as the expression of the new conditions

⁶⁴ *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*.

⁶⁵ *Reason in History*, p. 82.

⁶⁶ "Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behavior. The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics of a people." *The German Ideology*, p. 14.

under communism.⁶⁷ Evidence of this view in Marx can be found in his historical materialist trace of the origin of the concept of 'the General Good,' his frequent attention to the hypocritical use of this and other moral concepts by the bourgeoisie, his opposition to the concept of rights, his opposition to Utilitarianism, Kantian and other forms of a prioristic ethics, his opposition to reform movements, and his minimizing the import of ethics as critique of existing social conditions.

In *Excerpts from Mill's Elements*, Marx introduces his general contention that in a capitalist society moral concepts tend to express and justify capitalist interests⁶⁸ with this direction: "We should reflect on the immorality implicit in the evaluation of a man in terms of money, such as we find in the credit system."⁶⁹ When we do so reflect, we discover that a man is moral or good if he pays interest on principal borrowed. This is a demoralization in that "since the entire existence of the poor man depends on the chance whim and opinion of the rich his life hangs entirely on this chance."⁷⁰

The concept of the 'general good' (which does in fact represent the interdependence of society's members under a division of labor⁷¹) is also misrepresented as being identical to the interest of the capitalists.⁷² To blur these two interests is typical and often necessary for a class struggling for hegemony, as Marx points out repeatedly. Having given the general historical materialist diagnosis concerning the origin of moral ideas, Marx believes that he needn't reply further to charges against communism "from a religious, a philosophical, and, generally, from an ideological standpoint."⁷³

As with any number of philosophical questions, Marx invites the reader to resolve this issue empirically through an historical survey in which the development of ethical ideas will be seen to correspond to material developments.⁷⁴ The hypocrisy or contradiction of the

⁶⁷ Cf. *Anti-Dubring*, p. 105.

⁶⁸ The strongest historical materialist expression of this principle is in *The German Ideology*, p. 14 as cited in n. 66 above, but cf. also *Communist Manifesto*, p. 21, cited in n. 55 above.

⁶⁹ *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, p. 263.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁷¹ Cf. *The German Ideology*, p. 22.

⁷² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷³ Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 29.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

bourgeois use of moral terms, however, does revulse Marx (morally?) as in the following passage: "The bourgeois claptrap about the family and education...becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor."⁷⁵ At the same time, 'hypocrisy' is a form of contradiction and should heighten the tension necessary for its overcoming in a dialectical advance such as Hegel described. Perhaps it is for this reason that Trotsky argues that revealing the deceit of moral ideology is itself "the first duty of a proletarian revolutionist."⁷⁶

Against Rights

Marx's discussion of rights is particularly illuminating with regard to his claim that morality is a form of ideology under capitalism. Like all forms of ideology used explicitly to justify capitalist practices, it shows its inadequacy if pressed for consistency. Even under a capitalistic interpretation of the rights of the buyer and seller of the labor commodity, a contradiction emerges. On one hand, "the capitalist maintains his rights as a purchaser when he tries to make the working-day as long as possible, and to make, whenever possible, two working-days out of one."⁷⁷ On the other hand, "...the labourer maintains his right as seller when he wishes to reduce the working-day to one of definite normal duration."⁷⁸ Without a logical way out of this conceptual dilemma, "There is here, therefore an antinomy, right against right, both sides equally bearing the seal of the law of exchanges. Between equal rights force decides."⁷⁹ Hence, far from being even a sufficient justification for capitalist practices, the illogic of bourgeois rights is only resolved by being overcome in the class struggle.

In the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, Marx extends his discussion of rights to include the questions of the fair distribution of the proceeds of labor, and the concept of rights generally. Marx begins this discussion by agreeing that the bourgeois assertion that the present distribution is

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ "Their Morals and Ours", p. 379.

⁷⁷ *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 234-35.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

"fair" is a legitimate one inasmuch as it corresponds to the present-day mode of production since economic relations are logically prior to legal (or moral?) judgments.⁸⁰ Without a correlation with the mode of production, standards of right will vary in a way which prevents their meaningful arbitration. The absence of this necessary linkage explains in part the difference between socialists on the concept of "fairness."⁸¹ On the other hand, since distribution of the proceeds of labor is only the effect of the distribution of the means of production, the latter should receive our primary attention.⁸²

Even in the first stage of communism (still socialism?), the institution of rights is inadequate. Marx evidently does believe in moral progress here despite the fact that the emerging communist society "is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth marks of the old society..."⁸³ While there is still the exchange of equivalents (products of labor), each exchange is "fair" to each individual using a labor coupon in place of the exchange of commodities which were equivalent only on the average.⁸⁴

The problem finally for Marx is that the concept of right itself is contradictory since right always involves the application of an equal standard to individuals who are not equal in need or talent.⁸⁵ As Stanley Moore well argues, the argument against the type of inequality at this level does not correspond to any contradiction between the forces of production and the way they are owned and controlled.⁸⁶ Hence, the strictures Marx lays on himself as an historical materialist are violated and the choice for communism is motivated by an ethical and philosophical commitment. This point is particularly striking when we note his explicit dismissal of rights talk in the *Critique* as opposed to "the realistic outlook" of historical materialism.⁸⁷ At the same time, even the final

⁸⁰ Cf. *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 321.

⁸¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁸² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁸³ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*, pp. 23, 44-45.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 325.

problem of rights as posed is resolvable by equalitarian socialism so that the communist solution Marx proposes would again be elective.⁸⁸

Against Utilitarianism

The chief criticism of Utilitarianism Marx makes is that it is ideological. In *Capital I* Jeremy Bentham takes a drubbing for this as well as for other features of his utilitarianism.⁸⁹ By conceiving social capital as a fixed magnitude of a fixed degree of efficiency, Bentham gets the conclusions that "...the labourer has no right to interfere in the division of social wealth into means of enjoyment by the non-laborer and means of production"⁹⁰ and "...only in favourable and exceptional cases, has he [the laborer] the power to enlarge the so-called labour-fund at the expense of the "revenue" of the wealthy."⁹¹ Bentham's larger utilitarianism is also ideological insofar as it reifies the then-contemporary situation of the British petty-bourgeois and identifies it with human nature per se, cf. "With the driest naivete he takes the modern shopkeeper, especially the English shopkeeper as the normal man. Whatever is useful to this queer normal man, and to his world, is absolutely useful. This yard-measure, then, he applies to past, present, and future."⁹²

James Mill is assailed by Marx for a similar ideological utilitarianism in the 1844 MSS. In a quite one-sided way, Mill recommends that workers abstain from procreation if they are to be moral. Since capitalism doesn't need too large a standing reserve army of unemployed it is up to workers to shape their lives to fit capital's needs. As Marx puts it, "the production of men appears as a public misfortune."⁹³ Mill therefore suggests "that public commendation should be given to those who show themselves abstemious in sexual relations, and public condemnation to

⁸⁸ Cf. *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism*, p. 45.

⁸⁹ "...the arch-Philistine, Jeremy Bentham, that insipid, pedantic, leather-tongued oracle of the ordinary bourgeois intelligence of the 19th century." *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 609. On p. 610, in the footnote, Marx goes on: "Had I the courage of my friend, Heinrich Heine, I should call Mr. Jeremy a genius in the way of bourgeois stupidity."

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 610-11.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 609, n. 2.

⁹³ *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, p. 147.

those who sin against the sterility of marriage."⁹⁴ Mill's basic error is the same as Bentham's, sc. trying to calculate the utility of actions toward happiness without taking into account the most unhappy framework conditions of British capitalism. Mill's error on this question is also exhibited throughout Marx's *Excerpts from Mill's Elements*. John Stuart Mill is not quite as egregious in this error, but still has a contradiction between his political economy and his "modern tendencies."⁹⁵

Against A Priorism

Excepting the desire and will for fulfilment of human felt needs (and these as interpreted in ones particular historical and class situation), Marx wants nothing else a priori toward the ideal of free self activity. Hence any form of a priorism in ethics which depends on a fixed conception of reason will be found wanting, including the famous system of Immanuel Kant. The separation of the rational from the empirical self leads Kant to be satisfied with "the good will" even without any results. The argument for the moral necessity of God's existence and of an afterlife in order for human needs and desires for happiness to correspond to their moral being is a clear indication to Marx of the bourgeois character of Kantian liberalism.⁹⁶ For Marx, "Kant's good will fully corresponds to the impotence, depression and wretchedness of the German burghers, whose petty interests were never capable of developing into the common, national interests of a class and who were, therefore, constantly exploited by the bourgeois of all other nations."⁹⁷

Part of the problem Marx observes both here and in the Manifesto⁹⁸ is the unrealistic way in which French revolutionary ideas (which did correspond to a very specific stage of the development of the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the vestiges of feudal power) were ripped from their context and universalized. Kant "made the materially motivated determinations of the will of the French bourgeois into *pure* self-determinations of "free will", of the will in and for itself, of the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

⁹⁵ *Capital*, Vol. 1, pp. 610-11 n. 2.

⁹⁶ Cf. *The German Ideology*, Lawrence and Wishart's Complete edition, 1965, p. 206.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 206.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Communist Manifesto*, Lawrence and Wishart's Complete edition, 1965, p. 37.

human will, and so converted it into purely ideological conceptual determinations and moral postulates."⁹⁹ That Kant was a "whitewashing spokesman" for the German petty-bourgeois is shown in the subsequent confusion and disapproval of French developments "in the Reign of Terror and in shameless bourgeois profit-making."¹⁰⁰

While Marx by no means entirely embraces the Hegelian ethics, his points against Kant are both explained and motivated in Allen Wood's summary of Hegel's criticisms of Kantian ethics, namely: Kant's moral will is impotent to accomplish its intentions since it cannot connect with the sensuous drives; Kant's moral theory has an innate tendency toward hypocrisy in its concentration on our knowledge of our intentions rather than on spontaneous loving; Kant's moral theory suppresses normal healthy relations which promote freely and habitually done good.¹⁰¹ Finally, unknowable psychological causes are useless, hence irrelevant to the moral quality of acts.¹⁰²

Again, the distinction Hegel draws between *Sittlichkeit* (social or customary morality) and *Moralität* (individual morality) may also be of use in understanding Marx's charges against Kant. For Hegel, *Moralität* considers an individual's role in ethical life in abstraction from the whole of which it is a part.¹⁰³ For Hegel, such a point of view cannot be "the absolute standpoint."¹⁰⁴ When it is one-sidedly taken as the total perspective, Hegel specifically calls it "the ethical life of the bourgeois or private individual."¹⁰⁵ The moral will which Kant praises "shines like a jewel in its own right" even without accomplishing anything of its purpose. But Hegel responds "The laurels of mere willing are dry leaves that never have been green."¹⁰⁶ This is due to Hegel's judgment that "My subjective willing is known through the interpretation of what it accomplishes, and has no actual existence in abstraction from that."¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ *The German Ideology*, p. 206.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, p. 130.

¹⁰² Cf. Ibid., pp. 152-53.

¹⁰³ Cf. Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰⁵ As cited in Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 143.

Sittlichkeit, on the other hand, includes the range of contents praised by Engels above. It includes a set of institutions and social roles in the family, civil society and the state.¹⁰⁸ Far from being principally constraint, as in Kant, ethical duties are among the best parts of life in the relations within a family, and in self-satisfaction in ones profession.¹⁰⁹ Without *Sittlichkeit*, "I could have neither a concrete self-image, nor a determinate plan of action, nor any confidence that what I think ought to happen actually will happen."¹¹⁰ Ideally it is the concept of freedom actualized in an objective world: "...in the ethical order [*Sittlichkeit*] the good takes a concrete form. It is a rational institutional structure, whose rationality makes it desireable by individuals as an end in itself, and not merely as a means to individual good."¹¹¹ Far from the individualist moral enterprise of Kant, "in a true ethical life, subjectivity is done away with."¹¹² An a prioristic ethics must of force not have taken these empirical conditions into account.

Against Reformists

His Hegelian absorption in the movement of world history, the opportunities he believed were open to the larger working class movement of his day, and perhaps especially his view that concentrating on small changes could just as well help secure the larger structures of capitalist oppression by distracting attention from ground phenomena through a seeming amelioration of their social consequences would all predispose Marx not to favor social reform movements. He certainly did not. In a passage which sharply distinguishes Marx's philosophy from that of most modern liberal or progressive movements for change (e.g. from bourgeois socialism) he lists with contempt "economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity, members of societies for the prevention of the cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind."¹¹³ Such writers or activists

are, explicitly or not, "desirous of redressing social grievances, in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society."¹¹⁴

Ethics as Critique of Social Conditions

First of all, for Marx, whenever ethical critique is directed at social evils, this activity itself is but the expression of the already lived social misery. In *The German Ideology* Marx claims "even if this theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc. comes into contradiction with the existing relations, this can only occur as a result of the fact that existing social relations have come into contradiction with existing forces of production."¹¹⁵ This would seem to be belied by the social critique of certain writers who at least appear to be ahead of their time. Marx answers this objection by extending the possible scope of critique to reflect awareness of such conflicts in other places, for instance between nations at unequal stages of development.¹¹⁶

Marx does then appear to accept a certain use of moral language in the struggle of a rising class. This is evident in his concession in the *Critique of the Gotha Program* when he allows that "equal rights," "fair distribution," "undiminished proceeds of labour" are ideas "which in a certain period had some meaning but have now become obsolete."¹¹⁷ It will remain to be seen whether Marx's own moral vocabulary stays within the relevant historical bounds as he unquestionably does employ such a vocabulary. This could be tactical or just a looser use of language which at least Engels permitted in everyday discourse.¹¹⁸

Moral language

Despite Marx's arguments against moralizing, his own vocabulary is punctuated throughout with moral condemnation. Examples of such language abound in both the early and later writings. Most of this language sounds like moral blame of capitalism. This is true of both explicit capitalist intentions and its 'unintended consequences.' At least looking at Engels' point about the use of moral vocabulary, that the

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹¹³ *Communist Manifesto*, p. 40.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ *The German Ideology*, p. 20.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹¹⁷ *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, p. 325.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Anti-Dubring*, p. 117.

demand for 'equality' "even today still plays an important agitational role in the socialist movement of almost every country,"¹¹⁹ it will be perhaps impossible to pin contradictions to Marx in his use of praise and blame language. Certainly it bears the marks of the Hegelian conceptions from which so many of Marx's judgments spring, particularly with respect to the blame of capitalism as a decadent social formation.¹²⁰ It is also easy to interpret much of this language in terms of the goals for dealienation set out from the 1844 MSS. Here then is a sampling of such language.

There is necessarily "the intention to plunder, to deceive" from self-interest¹²¹ in capitalist exchanges. Capitalist exploitation is "naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation"¹²² while the modern proletariat are "slaves."¹²³ The more capitalism proclaims economic gain to be its purpose, "the more petty, the moral hateful and the more embittering it is."¹²⁴ Capitalist talk about the family and education is "claptrap" which becomes "all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor,"¹²⁵ while the German petty philistine bourgeois is full of "villainous meanness."¹²⁶

At the outset of *Capital I* Marx notes that the subject political economy deals with "summons as foes into the field of battle the most violent, mean and malignant passions of the human breast, the Furies of private interest."¹²⁷ Capitalism also receives blame for its insatiable

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 113.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Hegel's Ethical Thought*, p. 235.

¹²¹ *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Thought*, p. 275. Marx continues on p. 275 with: "Since our exchange is self-interested on your side as well as on mine, and since every self-interested person seeks to outdo the other, we must necessarily strive to deceive each other."

¹²² *Communist Manifesto*, p. 12.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 17.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

¹²⁷ *Capital*, Vol. 1, preface to 1st German edition.

"capitalistic greed,"¹²⁸ "were-wolf's hunger"¹²⁹ and "vampire thirst"¹³⁰ for surplus labor. Marx repeatedly condemns its consequences for the young with "the coining of children's blood into capital,"¹³¹ the rise in illegitimate births, opium use, and a rise in promiscuity among young women which he explicitly links to capitalist-engendered conditions.¹³²

In *Capital I*, Marx also stresses the consequences which he had, since the early 1840's, identified with alienation in quite moral language. He speaks repeatedly of the "physical and mental degradation, the premature death, the torture of overwork"¹³³ under capitalism. Using language reminiscent of the *Excerpts from Mill's Elements* (where work under capitalism reduces man to "a spiritual and physical abortion"¹³⁴) *Capital I* tells us that capitalist manufacture "converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity."¹³⁵ This crippling of body and mind amounts to an attack on the individual "at the very roots of his life."¹³⁶ While he explains that he need not go on about the moral and physical degradation of workers under capitalism, Marx does stress the intellectual degradation which capitalism guarantees for workers as "desolation."¹³⁷

Retrograde cultures also come in for blame in a way which strongly suggests the Hegelian judgment of history. Hindustan, despite its brutal destruction by the British is in some sense not undeserving of this judgment of history. This culture had, among other things, made the human mind the unresisting tool of superstition, enslaved it to traditional rules and deprived it of all grandeur and historical energies.¹³⁸ The Indian culture had at the same time callously witnessed the ruin of empires, the perpetuation of unspeakable cruelties and the massacre of large towns.¹³⁹ While on the one hand it had promoted an undignified,

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 239.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 243.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 256.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 271. Cf. also p. 756.

¹³² Cf. Ibid., p. 695.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 270.

¹³⁴ *Excerpts from James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, p. 269.

¹³⁵ *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 360.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 363.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 399; cf. also p. 645.

¹³⁸ Cf. "The British Rule in India," p. 306.

¹³⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 306.

stagnatory, vegetative and passive existence, at the same time it evoked wild, aimless, unbounded forces of destruction.¹⁴⁰ Whereas man should have been the supreme being for man, this culture had degraded humanity by the worship of animals.¹⁴¹ Notwithstanding these many faults, the British imperialists are themselves taken to task as "moved only by the vilest interests,"¹⁴² and notable for their "profound hypocrisy and [the] inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization."¹⁴³

Conclusion

While there are many unique, vital and attractive elements among the ethical constituents of Marx's thought, at last there is also insufficiency. A central drawback is Marx's reliance on an Hegelian dialectic which *presupposes* Providence. The attempt to get Communism out of historical materialist arguments alone appears to fail, as Stanley Moore has argued. If it does fail in this way, and is dependent on Hegel's faith in Spirit's historical dialectic, Marx can share no such faith. This is so because Hegel's faith in Spirit's dialectic is also a theodicy. Theodicy presupposes that evil will not prevail in the end and that we can know the purpose of history.¹⁴⁴ Hegel postulates a Reason with infinite power (akin to Aristotle's Prime Mover), a final and efficient cause of History: "The truth that a Providence, that is to say, a divine Providence, presides over the events of the world corresponds to our principle; for divine Providence is wisdom endowed with infinite power which realizes its own aim, that is, the absolute, rational, final purpose of the world."¹⁴⁵ There is something divine, something supernatural about the movement and purpose of history. Hence, there can be a retrospective and even something of a prospective teleology.

On the other hand, if the dialectic doesn't guarantee the Marxian ideal and one is unwilling to part with it, Marxism would require more voluntarism (as in the Cuban Revolution and its theoretical expression in Guevara) and less confidence (none?) about ultimate outcomes (as in Merleau-Ponty). The unbounded confidence in history to bring about a

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 306.

¹⁴² Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁴³ "The Future results of the British Rule in India," p. 324.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Reason in History*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁵ *Reason in History*, p. 15.

future ideal so characteristic of Marxism would require another Providence. In this sense, the approach of Liberation Theology could be the reconciliation of Hegel's dialectic in Marx. While admittedly, such a reconciliation implies a radical overhaul of Marxist conceptions, it provides what alone would integrate central, characteristic and compelling strands of Marxian ethical thought.

Stephens College