

Karl Marx and Alienation

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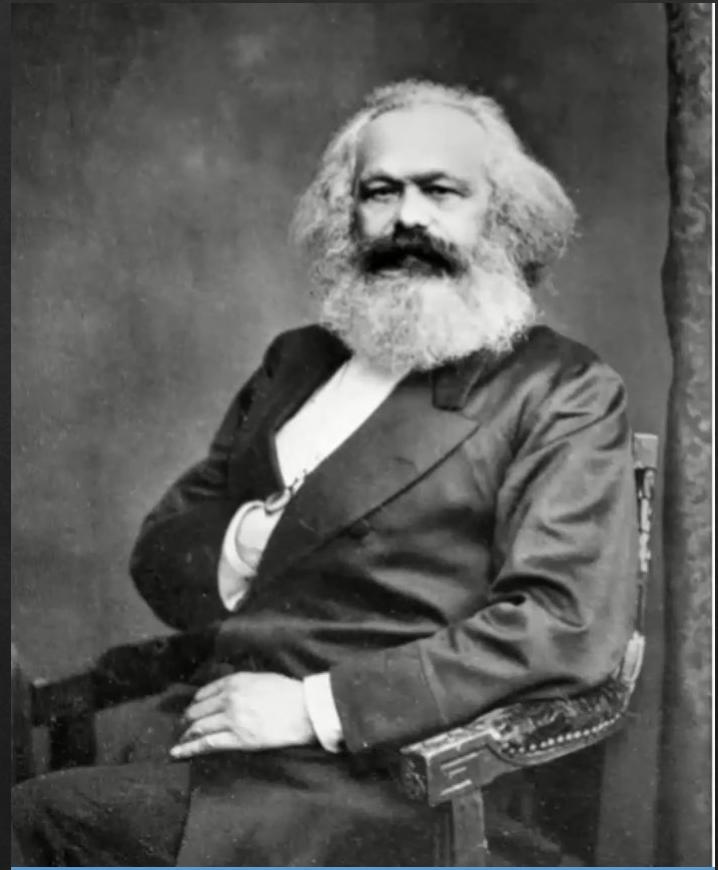
Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)

- Born in 1820, Rhine province (modern day Germany – then Prussia)
- Died 1895, London
- German socialist philosophy
- Close collaborator with Karl Marx
- Helped form modern communism
- Co-wrote *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
- Edited 2nd and 3rd volumes of *Das Kapital* after Marx died



Karl Marx (1818-1883)

- ❖ Born in Trier (modern day Germany)
- ❖ Jewish family converted to Christianity so father could practice law
 - Prussia had anti-Jewish laws
- ❖ Marx studied law in Bonn and Berlin □ wrote PhD in philosophy comparing Democritus and Epicurus
- ❖ Hoped for academic job, but was already in league with too radical of a group for real job prospects
- ❖ Turns to journalism and became involved in political and social questions □ began to consider communist theory



Karl Marx as philosopher

- ❖ Perhaps best known as a revolutionary and not a philosopher
- ❖ Hard to think of a single thinker who has had as much influence on the creation of the modern world
- ❖ Though not thought of as a philosopher □ trained as philosopher
- ❖ Turned away from ‘traditional’ philosophy to focus on economics and politics
- ❖ Early work philosophical □ later work engages in discussion with contemporary philosophical conversations and débates



The Young Hegelians

- ❖ The Young Hegelians or The Left Hegelians ☐ group of German intellectuals in the decades that followed Hegel's death (1831)
- ❖ Wrote and reacted to Hegel's legacy
- ❖ Philosophy of history: Young Hegelians developed on Hegel's premise that the purpose of history was the elimination (negation) of anything and everything which restricted freedom and reason
- ❖ Wrote radical critiques of religion and the Prussian state
- ❖ Rejected the “Old Hegelians” ☐ Young Hegelians critiqued the anti-utopian aspects of Hegel: the idea that the world had already reached perfection



Some philosophical contributions

- ❖ **Historical materialism:** societies rise and fall as they encourage and then impede human productive power and development
 - Historical process driven by material conditions
 - History will culminate in communism
- ❖ **Critique/analysis of capitalism** developed based on Marx and Engel's **labor theory of value**: non-traditional theory of value □ the economic value of a good or service is determined by the total amount of "socially necessary labor" required to produce it
 - Includes analysis of the extraction of surplus value from the **proletariat** who are exploited
- ❖ **Philosophy of history** and economics □ come together in the historical inevitability of the crash of capitalism and the rise of communism
- ❖ Refused to attempt to predict the form and nature of communism □ thought it would rise through natural historical processes and could not be the result of a pre-determined ideal
 - Conditions (not ideology) lead to new historical reality

Important concepts in Marxism

- ❖ **Proletariat:** workers or working-class people, regarded collectively □ those who do not own the means of production. Exploited by capitalism. Sell their labor on the labor market
- ❖ **Bourgeoisie:** the capitalist class who own the means of production and who profit from the exploitation of the working class
- ❖ **Alienation :** estrangement of people from their essence as a consequence of living in a society of stratified social classes, the condition which estranges a person from their humanity □ important for understanding Marx's theory of human nature
- ❖ **Surplus labor:** the excess in labor above and beyond the needs to sustain oneself
- ❖ **Surplus value:** the excess value produced by the labor of workers over the wages they are paid



The German Ideology

- ❖ *The German Ideology*: written in 1845 □ written by both Marx and Engels
- ❖ Contrast new materialist methods against idealism □ set out “the premises of the materialist method”
- ❖ Start from real human beings □ essentially productive (i.e., must produce their means of subsistence to meet material needs)
- ❖ Material life conditions and determines social life □ explanation must go from material production to social forms □ then to consciousness
- ❖ As material means of production evolve, modes of co-operation and economic systems rise and fall
- ❖ Eventually communism becomes a possibility once the workers understand their position and the possibility of alternatives
- ❖ Motivates them to become revolutionaries



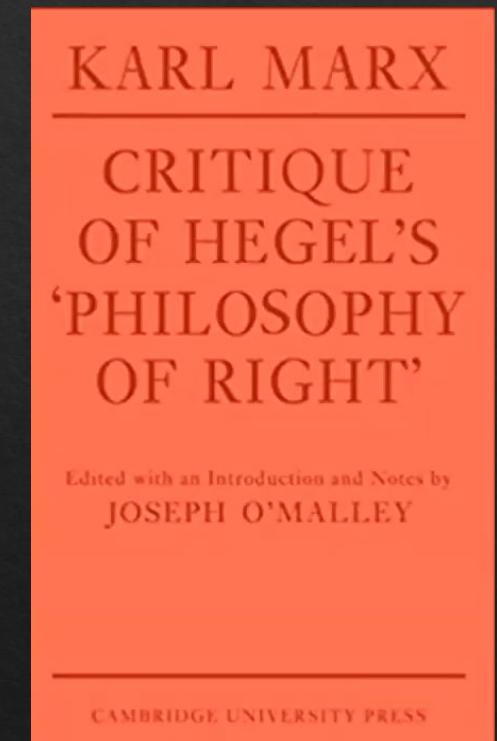
Industrialism Creates Man Machines

“The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism.”

-Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1857–1858

Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

- ❖ Where Marx's famous remark comes from: religion is the “opiate of the people”
 - A harmful painkiller, an illusion
- ❖ Sets out his account of religion in detail
- ❖ Attacking and undermining the state religion seen as a method of weakening the Prussian political power
- ❖ Here also considers the possibility of revolution in Germany and how it might be achieved
- ❖ Sets out the role of the proletariat in being the primary agent of society's emancipation



Morality

Is capitalism unjust?

- ❖ The question of Marx and morality is a difficult one
- ❖ He appears (at all stages of life) to have a strong aversion to capitalism, and he endorses a future communist society
 - Yet the motivations or the terms of these two positions are unclear
- ❖ Though we might expect it, Marx never says that capitalism is unjust
- ❖ Never says that communism would be a just form of social organization
- ❖ Makes effort to distance his work from work which engages in justice discourse
- ❖ Takes pains to avoid direct moral commentary



Morality

- ❖ However we think about Marx and the question of justice, it's obvious that Marx believed that capitalism was not the best method for humans to live to their fullest potential
 - Under capitalism, workers find their labor a burden, a torment. They suffer poverty and overwork. They lack fulfillment and freedom.
 - Humans are unable to relate to each other as they should
- ❖ The question of whether this is a **moral criticism** of capitalism or not
- ❖ Though he avoided moral language, it seems safe to say that this critique is a moral one: capitalism impedes the flourishing of humanity



Morality and Hierarchy

- ❖ Did Marx think that communism should be recommended on moral grounds?
- ❖ Morality/ethics might recommend communism on moral grounds
- ❖ In some sense, Marx's career and writings don't make sense unless we attribute this belief to him □ since he believed that communism advances human freedom and flourishing
- ❖ However, Marx had theoretical antipathy towards the concept and world “good”
- ❖ Perhaps the main point: communism will not be made by high-minded philanthropists and benefactors of society

