

# *Karl Marx and Alienation*

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# Friedrich Engels (1820-1895)

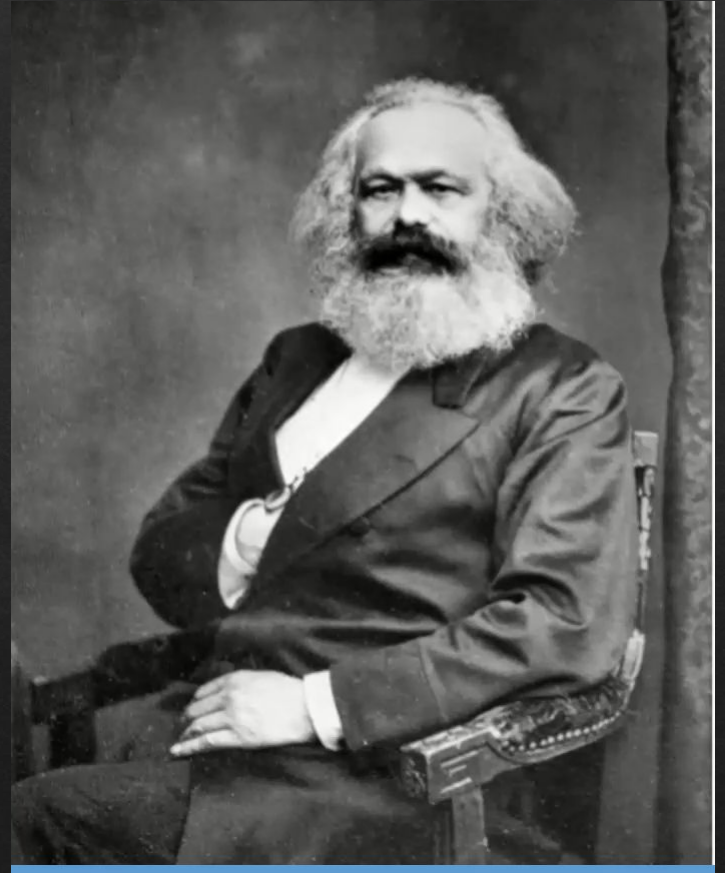
- Born in 1820, Rhine province (modern day Germany – then Prussia)
- Died 1895, London
- German socialist philosophy
- Close collaborator with Karl Marx
- Helped form modern communism
- Co-wrote *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
- Edited 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> volumes of *Das Kapital* after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



# 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





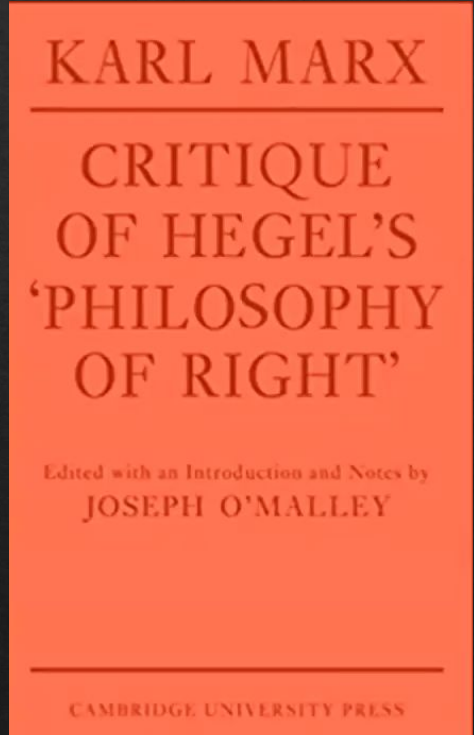
# Industrialism Creates Man Machines

“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

