

productive forces, relations of production, the economic base, and superstructural phenomena adumbrated above) could be established, in principle at least, by either causal or functional accounts.

I submit that this conclusion should promote a broader debate about historical materialism. It obviously provides richer interpretive possibilities than many readers of Marx have considered: we now understand that non-functional materialisms are possible, and also that the presumptive greater plausibility often accorded to functional interpretations is misguided. Moreover, rejecting considerations of reverse causality advances discussions about the general plausibility and possibility of defending (some interpretation of) historical materialism, namely by separating this discussion from the question of whether or not functional explanation in social sciences is possible. Since non-explanatory versions are a distinct possibility, what often appears to be implicitly assumed is false: it is not true that the discussion of the possibility or impossibility of historical materialism rises and falls with debates about the conditions for successful functional explanations.

Put another way, historical materialism has more interpretive possibilities – and perhaps more life – than many have acknowledged.

IV

My argument thus far seeks to demonstrate that Marx's signature doctrine of historical materialism is more sophisticated and more interesting than prominent critics have assumed. In addition to seeking to highlight some aspects of Marx's subtlety and sophistication, this exegetical work also has a wider purpose: I wish to rebut some prominent objections to Marxism in order to create space for contemplating the value of Marx's ideas in our century. As I seek to demonstrate below, one source of significant value is Marx's ethical critique of capitalism, which I believe applies, in a novel and powerful way, a strikingly Aristotelian conception of human flourishing to a trenchant analysis of economic conditions that remain in effect today but of which Aristotle could not conceive.

To make this case, however, I must address a second prominent criticism of Marx, namely that Marx's views on morality are paradoxical and that his condemnation of capitalism is inconsistent. On the one hand, Marx seems to believe that any set of moral principles is ideological in the sense that their acceptance at a given time can be explained by reference to the mode of production then existing (i.e., to the development of the relations and forces of production) and to their being functional, at that time, for promoting the interests of a particular – usually the ruling – class. Marx's belief that moral judgments are grounded on such ideological illusion' is commonly, and mistakenly, I believe, taken to show that Marx cannot consistently hold that there are eternal (i.e., trans-historical) moral truths, because he is committed to holding that moral concepts are wholly and irredeemably historically-relative. It is this claim – that Marx cannot consistently maintain that there are historically-independent moral truths – which lies behind the charge of paradox. For the paradox is allegedly generated because, on the other hand, manifestly a sustained and incisive moral critique of capitalism is present in Marx's writings.

As one would expect, attempts to resolve this alleged paradox have centered on questions like ‘could Marx consistently criticize capitalism by appeal to *proletarian* justice,’ ‘could Marx’s condemnation of the evils of capitalism be based on a conception of *non-moral* evil,’ ‘could Marx’s claims that morality and justice are ideological be intended only ironically or figuratively,’ or even ‘could Marx sometimes have been mistaken about Marx’s own considered opinion about justice.’ If Marx’s views were paradoxical in the way that is assumed, then these would be interesting and important questions to ask. However, I believe that such questions are non-starters: because Marx’s writings (about morality) are in no way paradoxical, it is much easier to provide a sympathetic reading of his texts than is commonly held.

The reason why there is no deep problem of coherence or consistency among Marx’s “anti-morality” and “pro-morality” texts is that an ideological account of the genesis or spread of moral *opinions* is perfectly consistent with a “moral realism” about moral *truths*. That is, there is no reason why Marx could not consistently hold (1) that every set of moral principles, and every moral judgment based on those principles, arises or becomes widely-held at a certain time because this is functional for realizing some class interests and (2) that some of *these very same principles and judgments* are (eternally) true, and others are (at all times and under all modes of production) false. To think otherwise is to confuse genesis with justification, which is a fallacy. There is no question of a paradox: as I shall now attempt to show, some moral judgments could be true – and known to be true – even if people always possess moral beliefs because of ideological illusion.

To be successful, charges of moral paradox in Marx’s texts must be supplemented with arguments about the nature of epistemic justification. The question of paradox turns on questions about knowledge. One relevant question is what conditions must obtain for someone to justifiably believe a moral truth; a second is whether or not it seems plausible to hold that these conditions can be met under circumstances of “ideological illusion.” I shall argue that on any reasonable interpretation of knowledge, justification of moral beliefs is possible under even extreme conditions of ideological illusion.⁷

Consider this strong thesis about ideological illusion:

(1) For any person at any time, if that person has a moral belief, then he has that belief because he is under the spell of ideological illusion.

According to (1), in principle every moral belief of every person is caused by ideological illusion. That is, (1)’s extremely strong claim is that – regardless of a person’s historical or cognitive state regardless of whether, for example, a person

⁷ One problem with this line of approach is that Marx’s comments about knowledge are few and far between, not to mention cryptic. Even if he had a coherent view, it seems highly unlikely that Marx’s theory of knowledge could ever be determined. Yet if I am correct in holding that the “ideological” status of moral judgments is consistent with the possibility of moral knowledge under all but highly implausible conceptions of knowledge, then it follows that it is unreasonable for critics to focus on the alleged paradox in Marx’s moral theory and practice. Unless it can be shown to arise on plausible theories of knowledge, discussion of the paradox seems unimportant both to an evaluation of Marx’s texts and, more generally, to a discussion of Marxist condemnation of capitalism.

lives under communism or knows all about the theory of ideological illusion – humans cannot have a moral belief which does not arise *because* of its ideological character (e.g., because it serves to promote the interests of one class or another in the mode of production at a certain point in history). I note that (1) is consistent with (2):

(2) Certain moral judgments are true.

Suppose that people happen to entertain and accept certain moral notions when and only when and, indeed, because their doing so is functional for the optimal development of the forces and relations of production. Clearly, this does not entail that people never have true moral beliefs. For it seems at least *possible* that (1) some moral principles or judgments are in fact correct and (2) at some time for “ideological” reasons people might come to accept certain moral judgments which happen to be true. Again, it seems possible that were there a God or were (*pace* (1)) there a time in the past or future when people are not bewitched by ideological illusion, then it *would* be possible to come to have moral truths in the normal way, viz. by engaging in non-ideologically motivated moral reflection. It being impossible in practice for us to undertake such moral reflection would have no bearing on whether, in principle, there are moral truths which such reflection could discover.

It is perhaps less obviously true that (1) is consistent with (3):

(3) Certain moral judgments can be justifiably believed (i.e., known) to be true.

Suppose that, although they are caused by ideological illusion, a person happens to have only true moral beliefs and, in addition, among his other beliefs are beliefs which justify those true moral beliefs. The alleged paradox in Marx’s moral thought is motivated, I believe, by the assumption that in this case a person would not justifiably believe the “ideological” moral truths. That is, even if Marx need not deny that there are moral truths, it would be paradoxical for him to make moral judgments if his account of ideological illusion entailed that moral truths are unknowable. I believe that the claim that (1) is inconsistent with the possibility of moral knowledge presupposes a conception of epistemic justification which is untenable because under it *all* knowledge is impossible.

Philosophical questions about justification center on specifying exactly what cognitive relation with a belief’s justification is necessary for justifiably believing it. It is hotly contested, firstly, whether a person must know, justifiably believe, or believe a belief’s justification and, secondly, whether he must believe, justifiably believe, or know that the justification justifies the belief. The range of answers given to these questions is great. Epistemic externalists deny that a person’s justifiably believing something requires the person having *any* cognitive grasp of that belief’s justification. Epistemic internalists, on the other hand, hold that justified belief must involve believing (or justifiably believing, or knowing) whatever justifies the belief, and perhaps also believing (or justifiably believing, or knowing) that the belief is justified by those things. There are at least six distinct forms of epistemic internalism and several kinds of epistemic externalism.⁸

⁸ *Prima facie* one might think that arguments from ideological illusion would be ineffective against any form of epistemic externalism. Yet externalists with a causal account of justification

Consider our example where ideological illusion both causes a person to have a certain moral belief, which happens to be true, and also causes a person to have other beliefs, which happen to provide evidence sufficient to justify the moral belief. In this case the person has a true moral belief and has other beliefs which justify it. Presumably the reason why there would not be knowledge under conditions of ideological illusion is that the person doesn't believe the beliefs for the right reason. Clearly, the person might *possess* any belief required for justification; the argument that he cannot have moral knowledge must hinge on the claim that he does not have at least some of these beliefs for the right reason, viz. because he has them *because* they promote certain class interests and not because of the proper epistemological reasons (e.g., because they are true, because they are known to be justified, etc.).

That is, the objection from ideological illusion seems to be based on a conception of justification according to which certain evidence justifies a person's belief only if he justifiably believes or knows that the evidence justifies the belief. By holding that ideological illusion explains *why* the person has the latter belief, claim (1) defeats this kind of justification: the person merely believes, and does not justifiably believe or know (because the belief is only due to ideological illusion), that the evidence justifies his belief. Consider these definitions of two types of epistemic internalism:

(D1) Theory *T* is an instance of **Strong Justification Internalism** = DF. *T* holds that if *e* justifies *S*'s belief *b*, *S* justifiably believes *b* only if (1) *S* justifiably believes *e*; and (2) *S* justifiably believes that *e* justifies *b*.

(D2) Theory *T* is an instance of **Strong Knowledge Internalism** = DF. *T* holds that if *e* justifies *S*'s belief *b*, *S* justifiably believes *b* only if (1) *S* knows *e*; and (2) *S* knows that *e* justifies *b*.

Under either theory of justification, the strong thesis of ideological illusion (claim (1) above) entails that the second condition is not met for moral beliefs: person *S* could merely believe that evidence *e* justified belief *b*, but could not justifiably believe or know this because (by hypothesis) he believes this *because*

would probably agree that beliefs believed *because* they promote class interests do not have the proper causal link to whatever makes them true. (Indeed, such externalists are likely to be moral skeptics precisely because on nearly any account of morality there are no such causal links to moral truth.) But other externalists would be unmoved by such considerations: they argue that one may justifiably believe something just in case it is true (or perhaps if it could in principle be justified, for example by God or by people not in the grip of ideological illusion).

Thus one point to make about the argument from ideological illusion is that on this second kind of externalist account of justification, admitting that a certain belief is true ((2) above) is tantamount to admitting ((3) above) that it can be known. Since it seems that considerations about ideological illusion do not call (2) into question, (3) could be defended on externalist grounds; certainly defending the paradox charge would require producing an argument against the second type of externalism. But epistemological externalism is a fairly unpopular view. In the text I argue that the only form of internalism under which (1) is incompatible with (3) involves a conception of justification which is implausibly strong.

he is under the grip of ideological illusion.⁹ Thus a paradox might exist if such a conception of knowledge were defended (or at least if it could be shown that Marx held such a view). The trouble is that this conception of justification is implausibly strong; knowledge is impossible under this account of justification. Theories of type (D1) and (D2) hold that one justifiably believes *b* only if one justifiably believes that *e* justifies *b*. But, by parity of reasoning, one justifiably believes the second-level belief that *e* justifies *b* only if one justifiably believes the third-level belief that *e*₂ justifies believing that *e* justifies believing *b*.

These conceptions of justification are absurd because they generate this vicious “levels” regress:

1. A necessary condition for justifiably believing *b* is justifiably believing (a), that *e* justifies *b*.

2. A necessary condition for believing (a) is justifiably believing (b), that *e*₂ justifies believing that *e* justifies *b*.

3. A necessary condition for believing (b) is justifiably believing (c), that *e*₃ justifies believing that *e*₂ justifies believing that *e* justifies *b*.

4. A necessary condition for believing (c) is justifiably believing (d), that *e*₄ justifies believing that *e*₃ justifies believing that *e*₂ justifies believing that *e* justifies *b*.

And so on.

By contrast, consider these forms of epistemic internalism:

(D3) Theory *T* is an instance of **Strong Belief Internalism** = DF. *T* holds that if *e* justifies *S*'s belief *b*, *S* justifiably believes *b* only if (1) *S* believes *e*; and (2) *S* believes that *e* justifies *b*.

(D4) Theory *T* is an instance of **Weak Justification Internalism** = DF. *T* holds that if *e* justifies *S*'s belief *b*, *S* justifiably believes *b* only if *S* justifiably believes *e*.

Neither of these conceptions of justification generates the vicious levels regress. More importantly, under neither conception is justification defeated by the ideological illusion hypothesis. As we have seen, claim (1) is consistent with a person having any belief, and therefore with both having the evidence for belief and believing that the evidence justifies the belief: claim (1) is compatible with strong belief internalism because it is *possible* that ideological illusion generate all the requisite beliefs. In the case of weak justification internalism, similarly (though less obviously), moral knowledge is possible under conditions of ideological illusion: since justifiably believing evidence *e* does not require justifiably believing that *e* justifies *b*, the fact that ideological illusion causes believing *e* is irrelevant to *b*'s justification.¹⁰

⁹ That is, if *S* believed that *e* justifies *b*, he could not justifiably believe or know this because, *ex hypothesi*, this belief is “ideological” and *S* therefore does not stand in the proper epistemological relationship (according to (D1) or (D2)) to it.

¹⁰ There is a regress of justification under weak justification internalism, but it clearly is not the vicious “levels” regress generated by strong knowledge or justification internalism. Rather,

The point is that there seems to be no good reason for supposing that the hypothesis of ideological illusion would defeat the justification of true beliefs arising from such illusion. The only plausible account of why claims like (1) would defeat justification rests on an untenable account of justification; furthermore, there are alternate accounts of justification on which (1) clearly does not defeat justification.

Thus the charge of paradox can be saved only by drastic and heroic measures: to show that paradox exists in Marx's texts one must discover and defend a conception of knowledge on which ideological illusion defeats justification. In the absence of such an argument, Marx could denounce "bourgeois morality and justice" as ideological – i.e., as arising because it is functional for promoting the class interests of the bourgeoisie – and consistently condemn capitalism *on these very moral principles*. It also follows that Marx consistently could hold that all his moral beliefs arise because of ideological illusion (viz., because they promote the class interests of the proletariat) and also claim that they are eternally true.

If these extremes are consistent, so much the better for Marx's actual, more moderate position! In fact, although he need not to avoid paradox, Marx does eschew the traditional morality of rights and justice for another, somewhat Aristotelian ethical theory based on the ethical unacceptability of unnecessary alienation. Similarly, Marx's actual claims about the ideological status of morality are fairly moderate – roughly, that apologists for capitalism employ bogus ideological rationalizations – and he does not hold that his own ethical judgments are ideological. Again, however, no paradox would be generated if his claims were as strong as claim (1).

The rest of this essay considers the ethical basis of Marx's condemnation of capitalism, as well as his dismissive claims about the ideological nature of bourgeois morality and justice. Hopefully, having avoided at the outset the tortuous, false trail of the famous Marxian paradox of morality will facilitate discussion of these issues.

V

Above I argued that no paradox would ensue if Marx's condemnation of capitalism were based upon an application of those bourgeois moral principles which he dismisses as ideological. Yet I also held that Marx's condemnation of capitalism, like his commendation of communism, is not based on principles of humanitarian justice, the universal rights of man or on any other principle of bourgeois morality. Rather, Marx's evaluation of modes of production is based on other,

it is the "normal" regress of justification which epistemic internalism is intended to solve—in the case of weak justification internalism, a solution might be to adopt a holistic conception of justification. If there is a problem here with weak justification internalism, it is a wholly epistemological problem.

The point is that such considerations are inessential to my argument against the existence of the "morality paradox" in Marx's texts. For my purposes, it is sufficient to show (1) that apparently the only plausible account of why a belief's arising from ideological illusion would defeat justification relies on a rather implausible account of justification and (2) that there are alternate, more plausible accounts of justification on which even the strongest ideological illusion hypothesis does not defeat the justification of moral judgments.

non-bourgeois moral principles. Even if it were somehow inconsistent for him to employ those very judgments he denounces as ideological, I believe that Marx would not be guilty of this inconsistency: Marx's condemnation of capitalism is based on ethical principles which are not ideological.

One apparent problem is that it is difficult to square this interpretation with the seemingly plausible assumption that non-ideological moral principles must be, in some strong sense, trans-historical or non-historically-relative. For, manifestly, Marx's evaluations of modes of production are *not* based on principles which are "universal" in this sense: undeniably, he bases his moral evaluations on his dialectical theory of history. It is clear, for example, that Marx subscribes to no ethical principles which condemn capitalist exploitation in all circumstances. Truly, he praises capitalism as ethically necessary for creating the material conditions under which communism is historically possible; insofar as some alienation is essential to the capitalist mode of production then that alienation likewise is ethically necessary.

Although such moral judgments may appear problematically relative, I believe that his making them is consistent with Marx's holding a non-ideological ethical theory based on eternal moral truths. Before turning to his texts, it will be helpful for me to sketch my understanding of Marx's ethical theory. Alienation seems to be central to Marx's ethics; these three premises, in particular, seem fundamental to his position:

1. Avoidable alienation is morally wrong.
2. Actions which alleviate conditions of alienation are morally commendable.
3. These ethical principles are lexically prior to all others.

I address Marx's extremely complex notion of alienation in section VI below. For the moment, it is important merely to note that my claim is that whatever alienation is, all of Marx's moral judgments revolve around it. I believe that, for Marx, avoidable alienation is the fundamental moral evil. Similarly, I argue below that he considers the unalienated development and manifestation of human capacities to be the fundamental moral good. It follows from this that for Marx, actions which alleviate conditions of alienation are morally praiseworthy.

The third step, the claim that premises one and two override or "trump" all other ethical considerations, is necessary for understanding some of Marx's puzzling failures to condemn alienation in capitalism. My claim is that Marx, like Rawls, holds that certain ethical strictures must be met before any other moral evaluation can take place. Put another way, I believe that Marx would reject any moral reasoning which contradicted premises one or two. Thus, for example, he would reject complaints that actions necessary for alleviating alienation are morally unacceptable on grounds of justice, or because they are inconsistent with allegedly inalienable human rights.

I've suggested that Marx's ethical theory is dialectical in an important sense because it relies heavily on his dialectical theory of history. Historical materialism is an extraordinarily optimistic doctrine. It holds, for example, that human existence under communist relations of production would be radically free of alienation; Marx believes that, unlike any other period of human history, unalienated

existence would be possible during a communist epoch. Historical materialism also makes the strong claim that the alienation rampant in all other modes of production can be avoided *only* under a communist mode of production. From this, these steps follow:

4. As the doctrine of historical materialism shows, the world can be de-alienated only by the establishment of communist relations of production.

5. From 2, actions promoting the establishment of communist relations of production are morally commendable.

6. From 1, actions impeding the establishment of communist relations of production are morally wrong.

It seems possible that actions which impede the development of communism could nevertheless reduce some unnecessary alienation, and thus for Marx would be morally commendable. Yet given Marx's belief that the world can be radically de-alienated and that this can take place only under communist relations of production, it follows that "on balance" such reforms would not be morally praiseworthy. Thus steps five and six hold that for Marx, actions promoting or impeding the establishment of communism are, respectively, in general morally correct and incorrect.

In fact, Marx insists that simple (i.e., non-revolutionary) reforms of non-communist modes of production usually do not reduce alienation at all – he claims that characteristically such reforms are functional for promoting the aims of the ruling class, and therefore for increasing alienation. Thus in the light of his theory of ideology, it follows that Marx considers "bourgeois" ideological morality ethically wrongheaded because it promotes and does not alleviate alienation. These steps follow:

7. From 5 and 3, "bourgeois" reforms to capitalism motivated by bourgeois moral principles are morally commendable if they promote the establishment of communist relations of production.

8. But such bourgeois reforms – and bourgeois morality as well – are ideological: they promote the class interests of the bourgeoisie, which impedes the establishment of communist relations of production.

9. From 3 and 6, therefore bourgeois morality and bourgeois reforms of capitalism are morally wrong.

On the ethical theory sketched above, it follows that if they are ideological in the sense described, then bourgeois reforms and morality are morally wrong. Surprisingly, though bourgeois morality is unconditionally condemnable under Marx's theory, the capitalist mode of production it supports is not. On Marx's analysis of the mode of production, significant alienation is an inherent feature of capitalism. Yet although he insists that existence under capitalism involves a miserable, alienated life for the vast majority, Marx also believes that the de-alienated communist world of the future would be impossible had many not suffered under capitalism. His doctrine of historical materialism supplies the second of these ethically-significant steps:

10. Necessarily, capitalism involves massive alienation.

11. But as historical materialism shows, capitalism is necessary for making the establishment of communist relations of production historically possible.

Given my claim that unalienated existence is the primary moral good in Marx's ethics, it would seem to follow that capitalism is, unconditionally, to be blamed. Yet a central claim of historical materialism is that the existence of capitalism is necessary for creating the material presuppositions of communism. Although Marx optimistically holds that communism inevitably will follow capitalism, his historical materialism also commits him to the extremely pessimistic conclusion that capitalism – and therefore extreme alienation – is a necessary *historical* precondition of communism.

That is, although the fundamental principles of Marx's ethical theory – steps one, two, and three – are eternally true, there is a sense in which many of the particular moral judgments made by his theory are historically-relative, viz. because his theory is extremely sensitive to historical possibility. Thus even though Marx insists that capitalism necessarily involves massive alienation, from step eleven it follows that capitalism is ethically necessary if a de-alienated communist era is to be ushered in. If, as I believe, the primary principle of Marx's ethical theory is that avoidable alienation is morally wrong, then it follows that the existence of capitalism is not always to be condemned. This is not to deny that in general Marx considers alienation a moral evil. Yet, depending on historical circumstances, sometimes the judgment that, e.g., 'the alienation inherent in capitalism is morally wrong' is over-ridden or trumped by the judgment 'the alienation inherent in capitalism is ethically necessary to bring about communism.' Specifically, given the claim from historical materialism in step eleven, it follows that capitalism is ethically necessary when and only when communism is not a historical possibility. Thus from step eleven,

11. Capitalism is necessary for making the establishment of communist relations of production historically possible, these steps follow:

12. Therefore, from 4, 2, & 3, revolutionary action against capitalism is ethically wrong insofar as establishing communist relations of production is not a historical possibility.

13. But, from 4, 1, & 3, impeding revolutionary action against capitalism is ethically wrong whenever it is historically possible to establish communist relations of production.

On the ethical theory I've sketched, capitalism is morally repugnant for two reasons whenever communism is historically possible: firstly, because capitalism involves massive alienation and secondly, and perhaps more repulsively, because this alienation is unnecessary. Because they promote the mode of production which perpetuates this avoidable alienation, bourgeois morality and justice are utterly morally abhorrent as well. The case when communism is historically impossible – i.e., because the forces of production are not yet sufficiently advanced – is more complex. In this case, I've argued, the alienation is historically necessary for producing conditions under which alienated existence can be avoided. Suppose that it could be shown that life under capitalism was far more alienated than any previous mode of life. I claim that according to Marx's moral theory, the lexically-prior principle 'avoidable alienation is morally wrong' would entail that

even if it were possible, it would be morally wrong to abandon the capitalist mode of production for an earlier, less alienated mode. The reason is that Marx insists that all alienation will be unnecessary *once humanity has endured the capitalist historical epoch*. Since the ultimate evil in Marx's ethics is permitting unnecessary alienation to exist, it follows that he must consider it morally wrong to impede the historical process whereby communism develops through capitalism.

This allows us to better understand Marx's complex evaluation of bourgeois morality. Insofar as it would impede the historical transition to communism, the premature supersession of bourgeois morality by proletarian morality would be morally wrong. My suggestion is that although he believes it false and ideological, Marx might hold that bourgeois morality has a historically important function. Note that this is a practical, empirical claim about the effect of particular standards of morality being adopted at a particular time; to say that it might have a historically important function is not to make any theoretical claim about the theoretical validity of bourgeois morality. In particular, it is not tantamount to saying that it is sometimes false on Marx's ethical theory that bourgeois ideology is false and morally repugnant: witness the derivation of step nine above. The way in which Marx seems to sometimes sanction, sometimes critique bourgeois morality has often been thought to pose a grave exegetical problem. As I shall argue in part III below, clearly distinguishing Marx's evaluation of the practical effects of a certain morality at a certain time from his theoretical statements about morality will go long way towards clearing up the appearance of mystery.¹¹

More generally, I believe that failure to recognize the dialectical structure of Marx's ethical theory, and in particular the failure to understand why Marx is committed to steps twelve and thirteen, explains why his condemnation of capitalism can seem so confusing. In the next section I will attempt to flesh out and justify the interpretation of Marx just sketched.

VI

Any discussion of Marx's condemnation of capitalism which, like mine, emphasizes his hatred of alienation faces the onerous task of supplying an adequate

¹¹ This is easier said than done because, notoriously, Marx often wrote as a revolutionary and not as a theoretician. Given his views about the historical inevitability of communism, and of the functionality of different ideologies for promoting the historical development of communism, it is clear that Marx would believe that explicitly discussing his ethical theory would have no important (and perhaps even a retarding) revolutionary function.

Of course, the seeming lack of even an implicit theoretical backdrop to much of Marx's writings is another problem altogether. My claim in this essay is not that Marx explicitly held the ethical theory which I've described. Nor do I hold even that the evidence shows that Marx consistently could have held this theory—clearly, no theoretical reconstruction can square with all of Marx's (often vague, often polemical) texts. Rather, I believe that the ethical theory sketched in this essay is merely a viable interpretive possibility: it is consistent at least with the main currents of Marx's thought.

It does seem, however, that for the reasons adumbrated above the theory I discuss represents a particularly interesting interpretive possibility. Namely, my reading seems interesting because it promises to explain away much of the mystery and paradox which is commonly thought to surround issues of "Marxism and morality."

account of that troubling concept. Notoriously, Marx's notion of alienation is extremely complex. He speaks of alienated actions (e.g., alienated labor) as well as states of alienation (e.g., states of the worker caused by alienated labor). His discussion of the things which can become alienated seems to encompass individuals, groups, institutions, and, indeed, societies as a whole. Finally, Marx invokes many senses in which these things can be alien from each other and themselves; alienation, for Marx, can involve being alienated from the results of production, from the process of production, from the physical and social environment in which production occurs, from other people involved in production, and, crucially, alienation from one's own historically possible self-development (i.e., from one's creative potential as a producer and consumer of production).

The last form of alienation is the most important. For Marx all alienation seems to involve the self-estrangement of man in two senses, namely estrangement by his own actions (as a producer, consumer, member of a group, institution, society, etc.) which is also estrangement from the realization of historically-possible development and fulfillment of one's wants. Many of these aspects of alienation are brought into play in this condemnation of alienated labor from the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*:

In what does this alienation of labor consist? First, that the work is *external* to the worker, that it is not a part of his nature, that consequently he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself, has a feeling of misery, not of well-being, does not develop freely a physical and mental energy, but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. The worker therefore feels himself at home only during his leisure, whereas at work he feels homeless. His work is not voluntary but imposed, *forced labor*. It is not the satisfaction of a need, but only a *means* for satisfying other needs... The alien character of work for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his work but work for someone else, that in work he does not belong to himself but to another person... The activity of the worker is not his spontaneous activity. It is another's activity, and a loss of his own spontaneity. (Bottomore, pp. 177–178; Marx's emphasis)

I believe that, at bottom, Marx's moral condemnation of capitalism revolves around the way in which "the activity of the [alienated] worker is not his spontaneous activity... [but represents] a loss of his own spontaneity." For Marx this alienation has a number of important effects, which he sketches in this passage. More generally, Marx seems to this loss of spontaneity morally repugnant because his conception of the good life cannot be realized under such conditions of alienation. Marx's account of the good life, as well as its importance in his ethical theory, seems quite Aristotelian. Thus Marx and Aristotle both emphasize the importance of exercising the most creative human activities, especially those involving purpose and intelligence. Like Aristotle, Marx insists upon the paramount moral importance of the distinctively human ability purposively to plan one's life through choice; for both a life determined by forces outside one's control is not

a good life. Finally, it seems that although he would find Marx's historical optimism utopian, Aristotle would agree with the spirit of Marx's famous dictum that the best life of all would be in "an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

The interesting question of precisely to what extent Marx's and Aristotle's views converge and diverge is perhaps best left untouched. For the purposes of filling out my sketch of Marx's ethical theory it will suffice simply to list some areas of broad convergence. Helpfully, Richard Miller supplies just such a list. In "Marx and Aristotle" he cites these correspondences between Aristotle's conception of the good life and Marx's denunciation of capitalism:¹²

- | | |
|-------|--|
| A1. | Since happiness is an activity, it requires a minimum of material goods and physical energy. |
| M1. | Capitalism degrades the proletariat by depriving them of the material means and the physical energies to exercise most of their capacities. |
| <hr/> | |
| A2. | The good life must give priority to the exercise of the best human capacities, the ones which remove a person the farthest from an animal existence. |
| M2. | The proletariat are forced to spend most of their waking lives providing for the physical needs they share with animals, and most of the rest recovering through mere relaxation. |
| <hr/> | |
| A3. | Intelligence, above all, separates men from animals. The exercise of intelligence is an especially important aspect of the good life. |
| M3. | Capitalism, while employing the most advanced technology and industrial organization, forces the proletariat to engage in monotonous, repetitive activity of unparalleled stupidity. |
| <hr/> | |
| A4. | The molding of one's life through deliberation and choice is an important, characteristically human ability. So far as one's life is determined by forces beyond one control, it is not a good life. |
| M4. | Under capitalism, proletarians' lives are largely determined by forces beyond their own control. |
| <hr/> | |
| A5. | The best life consists of activities engaged in for their own sakes. |
| M5. | Under capitalism proletarians sell their labor-power as a means to obtain mere necessities. |
| <hr/> | |
| A6. | In a good society, people care for each other for their own sake, not for the sake of the goods that can be extracted from each other. |
| M6. | In capitalism labor-power is a commodity competing in the market and consequently the vast majority of people treat each other as means and are separated from each other through the egoistical relations of civil society. |

¹² One could also add to each pair a corresponding statement about life under communism, where communism attains the Aristotelian virtue absent in capitalism. Miller lists these correspondences in Miller, 1989, pp. 177–180.

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- A7. Pleasure, although not the sole good, is a good. It is the unimpeded exercise of a human faculty.
- M7. Part of the damage of capitalism is the infliction of pain on the proletariat and the impairment of their ability to function.
-
- A8. The pursuit of money for its own sake is unnatural and undesirable. It leads to the atrophy of the many human faculties which have non-acquisitive goals. Money should only be acquired in order to provide the means for the exercise of these capacities.
- M8. Capitalism encourages people to pursue money for its own sake. Under capitalism, the experience of life loses its diversity and individuality.
-

These correspondences are striking. In Miller's words, when one compares Marx and Aristotle "an amazing similarity emerges, uniting the great opponent of exploitation with the most celebrated defender of slavery" (1989:178). Now I will examine several passages where Marx seems to denounce capitalism on the grounds that in alienated capitalist life the vast majority of human beings have little hope of realizing any of the Aristotelian virtues listed above. I shall try to show that a reading stressing the affinities between Marx and Aristotle motivates the interpretation of Marx's ethical theory sketched in section V above.

Central to my interpretation is the claim that Marx's ethical theory, and in particular his critique of bourgeois morality as ideological, is compatible with his adopting what I've called moral realism. In an interesting passage in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels respond to the charge that the Marxist critique of ideology is inconsistent with moral realism, i.e., the claim that there are non-relative moral truths. In this passage the interlocutor condemns Marxism for rejecting all morality:

There are... eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society. But Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, all morality...it therefore acts in contradiction to all historical experience.

Marx and Engel's response, in effect, is to appeal to trans-historical moral judgments based on analyses of alienation:

What does this accusation reduce itself to? The history of all past society has consisted in the development of class antagonisms, antagonisms that assumed different forms at different epochs. But whatever form they may have taken, one fact is common to all past ages, viz., the exploitation of one part of society by another. (McLellan, p. 236)

For Marx and Engels exploitation is a crucial notion for the analysis of alienation in a society; roughly, the more people who are exploited, and the more exploited they are, the more alienated is their society. It seems quite significant,

therefore, that Marx and Engels cite exploitation as the concept “common to all past ages” which shows that they do not mean to “abolish all morality.” This coheres with my interpretation, on which alienation the central notion of Marx’s ethical theory and his moral judgments are historically-relative insofar as they are sensitive to its “different forms at different epochs” and to the developing historical possibilities for its eradication. Moreover, my Aristotelian reading of Marx’s ethical theory – e.g., its concern with the good life, and evaluation of institutions and practices by appeal to their consequences for its realization – helps explain why Marx’s critique of bourgeois morality is not a critique on morality as such. As Marx and Engels suggest, their critique is of those non-Aristotelian moralities (utilitarian, deontological, etc.) which, by purporting to offer “universal” moral principles, are unacceptably insensitive to historical possibility.

Of course, my reading of Marx would be highly implausible if his celebrated critiques of private property, the hidden hand conception of the market, bourgeois freedom, etc. could not be understood in this Aristotelian light. In this passage from the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels argue that the alleged which proletarians allegedly exercise over their labor power is an illusion concealing the alienated character of life under capitalism. Significantly, they find bourgeois freedom bogus precisely because it is compatible with the debased state of the alienated proletariat, who are “subject to the power of things” alien to their own intentions and purposes:

In theory, therefore, individuals appear to have greater freedom under the rule of the bourgeoisie than before; in reality of course they are less free, because they are more subject to the power of things... For the proletarians... the condition of their own lives, labor, and with it all the conditions of existence of modern society, have become something accidental, over which the individual proletarians have no control... The contradiction between the personality of the individual proletarian and the condition of life imposed on him, his labor, becomes evident to himself, for he is sacrificed from his youth onwards and has no opportunity of achieving within his own class the conditions which would place him in another class... The proletarians, if they are to achieve recognition as persons, will be obliged to abolish their own conditions of existence, which are at the same time those of [capitalist] society as a whole. (Bottomore, pp. 255–256)

Despite their formal freedoms as owners of their labor power, not to mention their protection by the canons of justice and assorted and sundry universal rights, the proletarians are debased because they are alienated. Thus “sacrificed from their youth onwards,” the proletarians are “subject to the power of things” to such an extent that “the conditions of existence of modern society” afford them “no control” and, indeed, do not provide them with the possibility of “recognition as persons.” Clearly, in this passage Marx morally condemns the capitalist mode of production because it affords a miserable, alienated existence to the great majority of its members.

Similarly, Marx and Engels denounce the bourgeois claim that the “hidden hand” of the market realizes some supposed common good by discussing how the market causes proletarians’ lives to be alienated. In the *German Ideology* they write:

Just because individuals seek only their particular interest, which for them does not coincide with their common interest (for the ‘general good’ is an illusory form of community life), the common interest is imposed as an interest ‘alien’ to them, and ‘independent’ of them... The social power, i.e. the multiplied productive force, which results from the cooperation of different individuals as it is determined by the division of labor, appears to these individuals, since their cooperation is not voluntary but natural, not as their own united power but as an alien force existing outside them, of whose origin and purpose they are ignorant, and which they therefore cannot control. (Bottomore, p. 228)

Presumably the sense in which the cooperation of the proletariat is ‘natural’ as opposed to ‘voluntary’ is that under the capitalist mode of production economic forces compel them to work under a certain division of labor, which ideologically appears inevitable to them. Instead of acting in their genuine class interests, the proletariat’s “multiplied productive force” serves to promote an absurd “common interest [which] is imposed as an interest ‘alien’ to them, and ‘independent’ of them.” But the fundamental problem is deeper than a lack of class consciousness; the situation described is one where *individuals* are deeply alienated from their creative capabilities, viz. because under the capitalist mode of production they do not select what they produce, when they produce it, how much they produce or may consume, or indeed which skills they will cultivate and develop as producers and consumers. In short, what is true for the class is true for the individuals comprising that class: the proletariats are alienated from their essential human powers, which appear to them as “an alien force existing outside them, of whose origin and purpose they are ignorant, and which they...cannot control.”

In the light of his analysis of how it maintains alienated existence, it becomes clear why Marx is so unsympathetic to claims that the market efficiently satisfies at least some important needs. Consider his sarcastic portrayal in *Capital I* of capitalism’s commodity market as “a very Eden of the innate rights of man:”

The sphere that we are deserting, within those boundaries the sale and purchase of labor power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labor power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to is but in the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property,

because each disposes only of what is his own. And Bentham, because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other is the selfishness, the gain, and the private interests of each. Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all. (McLellan, p. 455)

Far from representing a concession to the “historically-relative justice” of capitalism, this passage summarizes what Marx considers the most contemptible features of capitalism: illusions to the contrary, there is no pre-established harmony or benevolent guidance shaping the market, and the alleged freedom, equality, and justice provided by fair competition are merely handy pretexts for the bourgeoisie to exploit and alienate the proletariat. Although in a sense Marx here admits that under bourgeois standards capitalist transactions are wholly moral and just, clearly he should be understood as insisting that these standards are false and ideological. For Marx the alleged freedom, equality, and utilitarian efficiency of the market are wholly illusory; worse, as ideological illusions these ideas are functional for maintaining a brutal, literally dehumanizing state of alienation.

The contrast between the “common interest” of a class and the ideological illusory “general good” suggested by the last two passages is noteworthy. Specifically, I think that it helps to explain an argument for the impossibility of constructing a (moral) theory of distributive justice found in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. According to Marx, because their political demands “contain nothing beyond the old democratic litany familiar to all: universal suffrage, direct legislation, popular rights, etc.” the follower of Lassalle fail to see through the illusions of bourgeois morality (McLellan, p. 565). Marx is particularly harsh on the call for “a fair distribution of the proceeds of labor.”

After criticizing the notion of ‘proceeds of labor’ as irredeemably vague, Marx attacks the notion of a just distribution of social goods. He begins by reminding his audience that from the point of view of bourgeois ideology, the capitalist distribution seems wholly just:

What is a ‘fair distribution’? Do not the bourgeoisie assert that the present-day distribution is ‘fair’? And is it not, in fact, the only ‘fair’ distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production? (McLellan, p. 566)

Marx is clearly not arguing that distribution under the capitalist mode of production is morally unimpeachable; however it is meant to be answered, the correct response to the first rhetorical question is not ‘a fair distribution in capitalism is whatever the bourgeoisie say it is.’ Rather, by the second question Marx emphasizes that the bourgeoisie rationalize away the immorality of the distribution by appealing to their ideological conception of justice. Finally, Marx’s third question

highlights the fact that this immoral – ‘fair’ to the bourgeoisie – distribution is essential to the capitalist mode of production.

I said that Marx’s argument in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* is an argument against *any* proposed principles of just distribution, bourgeois or not. The text continues with Marx’s rhetorical question, “Have not also the socialist sectarians have the most varied notions about ‘fair’ distribution?” (*ibidem*). Marx’s description of the Lassalleans’ proposed standards of distributive justice under communism prepares the way for his argument against all theories of distributive justice. He writes:

To understand what is implied in this connection by the phrase ‘fair distribution’... [we see that the Lassalleans hold that] ‘the proceeds of labor belong undiminished with equal rights to all members of society’. ‘To all members of society’? To those who do not work as well? What remains then of the ‘undiminished proceeds of labor’? Only to those members who work? What remains then of the ‘equal right’ of all members of society? But ‘all members of society’ and ‘equal right’ are obviously mere phrases... (McLellan, pp. 566–567)

In Marx’s eyes the Lassallean notions of ‘undiminished proceeds’ and ‘equal rights’ to those proceeds are, like their notion of ‘proceeds of labor’, hopelessly vague. But he also makes a more radical claim here, viz. that “‘all members of society’ and ‘equal right’ are obviously mere phrases.” On the one hand, I think that Marx’s radical claim is that it is in principle impossible for any standard of justice to embody a conception of ‘all members of society’ which captures all the morally relevant facts about those members. On the other (not unrelated) hand, Marx also claims that under no principles of distributive justice can there be a tenable conception of the way in which those principles guarantee people an “equal right” to the social goods being distributed.

I believe that Marx makes these claims largely for Aristotelian reasons. He continues by arguing that the Lassallean account of justice – which he identifies with the lesser stage of communism – doesn’t really abandon the ideological bourgeois conception of “equal justice for all:”

... Only now do we come to the ‘distribution’ which the programme, under Lassallean influence, alone has in view in its narrow fashion, namely, to that part of the means of consumption which is divided among the individual producers of the cooperative society.

... What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually still stamped with the birth marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer received back from society – after the [socially necessary] deductions have been made – exactly what he gives to it... He receives a certificate from society that he has furnished such and such

an amount of labor (after deducting his labor for the common funds), and with this certificate he draws from the social stock of means of consumption as much as costs the same amount of labor. The same amount of labor which he has given to society in one form he receives back in another.

Here obviously the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities [in capitalism]...the same principle prevails as in the exchange of commodity-equivalents: a given amount of labor in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labor in another form. Hence, equal right here is still...bourgeois right.

... This equal right is still constantly stigmatized by a bourgeois limitation. The right of producers is proportional to the labor they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard, labor. (McLellan, pp. 567–568)

If Marx were only concerned with condemning the poverty of the proletariat under capitalism or with alleviating the most extreme forms of economic exploitation, one would expect that he would consider this communistic distribution morally acceptable. Yet he finds that in the society described, “equal right here is still bourgeois right.” In fact, I believe that for Aristotelian reasons Marx finds the very notion of “equal rights” inherently immoral because mired in more subtle forms of alienation.

The heart of Marx’s argument is the claim that no conception of ‘equal right’ to social goods is tenable because necessarily, under any such conception “the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard.” To Marx this kind of equality is morally unacceptable because the use of such an equal standard contradicts his Aristotelian conception of human virtue. As Marx puts it:

Right by its very nature can consist only in the application of an equal standard; but unequal individuals (and they would not be different individuals if they were not unequal) are measurable only by an equal standard in so far as they are brought under an equal point of view, are taken from one definite side only, for instance, in the present case, are regarded only as workers and nothing more is seen in them, everything else being ignored....To avoid all these defects, right instead of being equal would have to be unequal. (McLellan, p. 569)

The parenthetical comment is sometimes thought to show that Marx’s argument relies on Leibniz’s dubious principle of the identity of indiscernibles. This interpretation, I believe, is wrongheaded: Marx finds it wrong to bring unequal individuals “under an equal point of view” for wholly Aristotelian considerations about the moral uniqueness of individuals. In the passage Marx rejects all attempts to conceive of people as equal under any single description; so too would he reject “equal measure” by any *set* of morally-relevant criteria. For Marx’s point is that no abstract principles of distributive justice can guarantee that people will

not suffer unnecessary alienation. On his conception, individuals are radically unequal because the conditions under which each can attain the Aristotelian virtues of a good life are unique. It follows, therefore, that individuals cannot be treated as “equal in principle” without violating the primary – and lexically prior – principle of his ethical theory.

Marx’s condemnation of the ‘general good’ follows from this point. What he condemns as illusory is any supposed general good which is good for all people at all times. The moral good for Marx is de-alienated existence, which is both historically relative (viz., because the type of de-alienated existence to which a person can aspire at any time is a matter of historical possibility) and radically unique to each individual (because as de-alienated every individual consciously molds his own life). It follows that Marx cannot countenance conceptions of either trans-historical or historically-relative justice; for Marx all appeals to justice are ideological and immoral.

Thus we come to Marx’s famous description of the “higher phase” of communism, where concerns of justice are simply irrelevant to de-alienated existence:

In a 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-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly – only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs! (*Ibidem*)

Although crossing “the narrow horizons of bourgeois right” involves abandoning notions of distributive justice, Marx need not hold that this transition leaves behind all morality. I have argued that an Aristotelian reading of Marx’s ethical theory is quite powerful, particularly because it shows that the famous charges of paradox are better off forgotten.

VII

If Marx’s conception of justice – and his ethical condemnation of capitalism – does not focus on distribution of wealth, on what does it rest? I submit that, for Marx, as for Aristotle, justice has the most to do with the conditions that make it possible for an individual to realize potential and freedom within and through society; for both, I believe, the goal of justice is a society that fully develops its citizens, educates them, and raises them to reflective self-consciousness. If I am right, the key issues for understanding Marx’s condemnation of capitalism center on the nature of social relationships within capitalist societies, the development of character within them, their formation of self-consciousness, and the possibilities of human potential they support. Thus, for example, these questions rise to the fore throughout Marx’s Critique of the Gotha Program just as they do, in Books I and IX of Aristotle’s *Politics* and in Book V of his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Moreover, and as I have shown in section VI above, both thinkers explicitly connect their accounts of development and actualization of human potential and freedom within a society with a sharp critique of economic forms that block or retard that development and actualization. To reflect more deeply on this, consider George McCarthy's discussion of this theme in Aristotle. After noting of Aristotle that "anything that tends to undermine the harmonious social and political relations of the polis is criticized by him as destructive to the possibilities of human self-realization" (71), he glosses the first chapter of *Politics* Book IX as follows:

With the introduction of commercial trade for profit – that is, commodity exchange – the art of household management turns into an unnatural process characterized by the search for wealth and profits without limit. In fact, the latter becomes the measure of the good life and the criterion by which happiness is calculated. This quest for money without limit is an example of living, but not living well; it is a form of pure existence without moral excellence, for it undermines the very foundations for the possibility of a virtuous and rational life in society... [For Aristotle], the economy has a crucial role to play in creation of a just society, for without it there can be no developed society at all. Exchange is a prerequisite for the economic survival of complex societies, the integration of their diverse needs, and the maintenance of a fair and just economic system. Opposed to *kapelike* we have economic reciprocity (*antipeponthos*), where need, equality, and mutual sharing maintain a just economic exchange for the common good. Here exchange is not viewed as a contest between individuals for private happiness and profit, but the economic basis for public happiness and social justice. Reciprocity and mutual sharing (*metadosis*) become the economic foundations of the polis and the education of the citizen. (73–74; also see Aristotle, *Politics*, 1258a 37–1258b 3).

To be sure, Aristotle's conception of justice is not Marx's, and their accounts of which members of society can benefit from a state of justice differ vastly (remember that Aristotle was the great defender of human slavery as necessary means for securing those benefits for some!), as do the particular details of exactly how just social relations constitute necessary conditions for promoting the full development of human capacities and freedom, and what social relations are necessary for justice. The crucial point is that Marx's critique of political economy can justly be seen as a form or return to Aristotle's conception of a broad account of justice that expands beyond issues of distributive justice in a way that integrates a positive philosophical anthropology that Miller's list of correspondences discussed above can be taken to articulate. To summarize via a slogan that McCarthy develops, "Like Aristotle, Marx believes that ethics is a form of political and economic knowledge" (111).

Recall Marx's clarion call from the German Ideology, discussed above, that "Only in the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions." For Marx, we have seen, the realization of human potential

depends on the organization and structure of the social relations of production. Despite the many differences of doctrine, and despite the many differences of perspective of an author writing so many centuries later, the heart of Marx's ethical condemnation of capitalism is Aristotelian: for Marx, as for Aristotle, rationality and morality represent full expressions of the humans' social nature, and for Marx capitalism is evil precisely because within capitalism individuals are alienated from the social forms on which rest the possibility of their freedom, their self-actualization, and their self-conscious existence. Although Marx's perspective incorporates philosophical, economic, and political developments of his time, at bottom his ethical critique of Enlightenment individualism rests on the teleological concept of a "social individual" developed within the *Ethics and Politics* of Aristotle.

Alan Gilbert makes a similar point by conceiving of Marx's communism as a modification of Aristotelian eudaimonism, which he defines broadly as "a theory that evaluates activities and states of characters by asking how they advance individual happiness *and affect the quality of human lives*" (Gilbert, 1971, p. 192; emphasis added). On Gilbert's view, Marx, like Aristotle,

[O]ffered an objective interpretation of human happiness in which certain activities, states of character, and effects of fortune make possible a full and happy life. While Marx differed with Aristotle on many specific issues (the alleged incapacity for happiness among barbarians, or women, the primacy of contemplative activity), he also emphasized objective features of individual lives which would profoundly influence happiness (display of social connectedness in genuine forms of friendship and political community, freedom from exploitation, freedom from physical handicap, possession of the opportunity to realize one's capacities, perhaps realization of some of one's highest capacities)... in some fundamental respects, therefore, Marx could have regarded his argument as a correction and refinement of Aristotle's eudaimonism " (*ibidem*).

Allen Wood similarly sees a dialectic in Marx between individuals, their cultures, and their political and economic communities. While discussing the similarity of Marx's account of alienation to Aristotle's account of self-actualization, Wood reads Marx's central concept of alienation as one where people are unable to actualize themselves and to develop and exercise the powers that human beings can potentially exert. Thus he concludes:

There are some reasons for thinking that the possibility of alienation is closely related to the essentially human trait of self-consciousness. To experience oneself or one's life as worthless or worthwhile, as meaningless or meaningful, seems to presuppose some conception of what is felt to be worthwhile or worthless. For this reason, only a being who has some sort of self-conception seems to be capable of either an alienated or a fulfilled life. Further, the possibility of alienation, at least

for Marx, is closely bound up with the human trait of species consciousness. Marx often speaks of alienated life as one in which human beings fail to 'affirm' (*bejahen*), 'confirm' (*bestätigen*) or 'actualize' (*verwirklichen*) themselves. A human life which is self-affirming, self-confirming and self-actualizing is a meaningful life; a self which affirms, confirms and actualizes itself is a self which has worth, and recognizes the worth it has. But Marx also indicates that to affirm, confirm and actualize oneself is to affirm, confirm and actualize one's essence, that is, the human species-essence. The measure of this self-actualization, of an individual's satisfaction of a 'natural vocation' (*natürliche Bestimmung*), is 'the extent to which the human being as species being, as a human being, has become himself and grasped himself'. Alienation is thus conceived by Marx as a separation and estrangement of individuals from their human essence. Their 'being does not correspond to their essence', is not 'in harmony' with it; their lives are not lives in which 'the human essence feels itself satisfied'. (2004:21)

I have argued that Wood, Gilbert, McCarthy, and Miller are right to stress correspondences between Aristotle and Marx, although I have also provided an epistemological argument that shows that Miller and Wood are wrong to conclude that Marx's condemnation of capitalism is paradoxical.

I end this paper by noting that the failure of the two global criticisms of Marxism that I have addressed opens significant interpretive possibilities that readers of Marx in our own century should not ignore: if, on the one hand, the broad criticisms that seem to make concern for Marx's texts and arguments at best a pedantic irrelevance and, on the other hand, Marx's condemnation of capitalism promises to develop Aristotelian ideas while taking into account economic, political, and technological developments which Aristotle could not conceive, my optimistic conclusion there is much alive left in Marx's texts to benefit us as we confront the troubled and turbulent currents of our own time.

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