

PHILIP J. KAIN

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For Brother S. Robert Smith
my teacher and friend

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P.J.K.

Abbreviations

<i>AD</i>	Engels, <i>Anti-Dühring</i>
<i>AE</i>	Schiller, <i>On the Aesthetic Education of Man</i>
<i>C</i>	Marx, <i>Capital</i>
<i>CHPL</i>	Marx, <i>Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law</i>
<i>CHPLI</i>	Marx, 'Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law'
<i>Cj</i>	Kant, <i>Critique of Judgment</i>
<i>CM</i>	Marx, 'Comments on Mill's <i>Elements of Political Economy</i> '
<i>CPE</i>	Marx, <i>Critique of Political Economy</i>
<i>CPR</i>	Kant, <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>
<i>CPrR</i>	Kant, <i>Critique of Practical Reason</i>
'Critique'	Wood, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice'
<i>CWF</i>	Marx, <i>Civil War in France</i>
<i>EAP</i>	Schiller, <i>Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical</i>
<i>EPM</i>	Marx, <i>Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts</i>
<i>EW</i>	Hobbes, <i>English Works of Thomas Hobbes</i>
<i>F</i>	Kant, <i>Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals</i>
<i>G</i>	Marx, <i>Grundrisse</i>
<i>GI</i>	Marx and Engels, <i>German Ideology</i>
<i>GKPO</i>	Marx, <i>Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie</i>
'Gotha'	Marx, 'Critique of the Gotha Program'
<i>GPR</i>	Hegel, <i>Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts</i>
<i>HF</i>	Marx and Engels, <i>Holy Family</i>
<i>IUH</i>	Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History'
<i>JQ</i>	Marx, 'On the Jewish Question'
<i>KGS</i>	Kant, <i>Kant's gesammelte Schriften</i>
<i>MECW</i>	Marx and Engels, <i>Marx Engels Collected Works</i>
<i>MEW</i>	Marx and Engels, <i>Marx Engels Werke</i>
<i>MjH</i>	Marx, <i>Justice, and History</i> , ed. M. Cohen, et al.
<i>NE</i>	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>OC</i>	Rousseau, <i>Oeuvres Complètes</i>
<i>PG</i>	Hegel, <i>Phänomenologie des Geistes</i>

<i>PH</i>	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of History</i>
<i>PP</i>	Kant, <i>Perpetual Peace</i>
<i>PR</i>	Hegel, <i>Philosophy of Right</i>
<i>PS</i>	Hegel, <i>Phenomenology of Spirit</i>
'Reply'	Wood, 'Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami'
<i>SC</i>	Marx and Engels, <i>Marx Engels Selected Correspondence</i>
<i>SCn</i>	Rousseau, <i>Social Contract</i>
<i>SW</i>	Hegel, <i>Sämtliche Werke</i>
<i>SWN</i>	Schiller, <i>Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe</i>
<i>TF</i>	Marx, 'Theses on Feuerbach'
<i>TSV</i>	Marx, <i>Theories of Surplus Value</i>
<i>VPP</i>	Marx, <i>Value, Price, and Profit</i>

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Introduction

I have entitled this book *Marx and Ethics* rather than *Marx's Ethics* because I do not think that Marx has a single ethical theory that he sticks to throughout all periods of his thought. In the early writings, Marx's ethics are based on a concept of essence much like Aristotle's which he tries to link to a concept of universalization much like that found in Kant's categorical imperative. In the *German Ideology*, Marx develops a doctrine of historical materialism, abandons these Kantian and Aristotelian elements, and indeed rejects the very possibility of ethics altogether. In the later writings, he revives an ethical theory which, however, is different from that of his early works.

My interpretation of Marx differs quite sharply from that of most contemporary Marx scholars. Let me try to outline the current state of Marx scholarship and explain my views against this background.

It was not until the second quarter of the twentieth century that several of Marx's texts were discovered and published for the first time. The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, an early work written in 1844, and a complete edition of the *German Ideology*, originally written in 1845-6, were published for the first time only in 1932. The *Grundrisse*, a later work written in 1857-8, was published first in 1939 and 1941. The publication of these texts—all of them very important ones—seriously upset the traditional understanding of Marx's intellectual development. In particular, it produced a series of problems and disagreements in Marx scholarship over how the relationship of the earlier to the later Marx should be understood. Those scholars who concern themselves with these matters can be roughly divided into three schools.

The first school is made up of those who think that there is an essential unity to Marx's thought. These scholars usually focus on the philosophical and humanistic writings of the early Marx and argue that they give us the key to unlocking the later Marx. Their point is to show that Marx as a whole, even in his later scientific writings, is a thoroughgoing humanist.

The second school takes the opposite approach. It argues that there is

a break in Marx's thought. The most interesting representative of this approach is Althusser, who wants to reject the early Marx and his humanism as pre-Marxist, and who thinks that the later scientific Marx is the true Marx. For Althusser, Marx's thought falls into four periods: (1) the early works of 1840-4, (2) the works of the break (the 'Theses on Feuerbach' and the *German Ideology* of 1845-6), (3) the transitional works of 1845-57, and (4) the mature works of 1857-83.¹

The third school, in many cases, begins by assuming an essential unity to Marx's thought, then goes on to argue that fundamental contradictions run throughout it. Gouldner, for example, argues that there are 'two Marxes'. Scientific Marxism, for Gouldner, emphasizes objective conditions, blind impersonal laws, and determinism. In opposition to this, Critical Marxism emphasizes purposive action, voluntarism, human ideals, and freedom.² These contradictory tendencies, for Gouldner, can be found both in Marx and in the later Marxist tradition.

For the past fifteen years, I have been trying to work out my own interpretation of Marx's intellectual development and have argued that there are problems with each of these schools.³ In *Schiller, Hegel, and Marx*, I studied Marx's views on the state, on society and labour, on alienation, and on the aesthetic ideal of ancient Greece. In *Marx' Method, Epistemology, and Humanism*, I extended my study to Marx's doctrine of nature and essence, his epistemology, and his method. In this present book, I would like to examine his views on ethics.

In my opinion, the main problem with the view of those who see an essential unity in Marx's thought, as usually argued, is its superficiality. In attempting to iron his thought into a smooth and unified whole, such theorists flatten out important shifts and developments to be found in it at various periods and ignore or underestimate the differences between these periods. To take one example, essential unity theorists rarely achieve an adequate understanding of the concept of essence which Marx employs in his early writings or of its radical implications for his social and political theory, his views on alienation, his method and epistemology, or his doctrine of nature. Moreover, essential unity theorists *must* refrain from a deep and adequate study of all that this concept implies if they are to avoid the conclusion that Marx abandons this understanding in the *German Ideology*, that his views then are altered fundamentally, and begin to develop in a new direction.

¹ L. Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. B. Brewster (London: NLB, 1977), 28-35.

² A. Gouldner, *The Two Marxisms* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 32-5, 58 ff.

³ P. J. Kain, *Schiller, Hegel, and Marx* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1982) and *Marx' Method, Epistemology, and Humanism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986).

In particular, those who follow the essential unity school make at least two errors when they come to the study of Marx's ethics. They dilute his early concept of essence and underestimate the determinism to be found in the *German Ideology*. I will argue that Marx's ethical views in the early writings, especially the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, are incompatible with the views of the *German Ideology*. In the early writings, Marx's concept of essence is the foundation of his ethics. In the *German Ideology*, he rejects this concept of essence, develops a doctrine of historical materialism which, at least at this point in his intellectual development, involves a form of determinism that makes ethics impossible, and he rejects morality as ideological illusion that will disappear in communist society.

A typical argument by essential unity theorists runs as follows. Marx's views are based upon an ethical conception of individuals and society. The key to this ethical approach is a theory of human nature or essence. In capitalist society, for Marx, we are alienated and thus cannot realize our essence. Communist society is conceived as one which overcomes alienation, provides the social relations and institutions which allow the human essence to be realized, and thus allows for the full and free development of the individual. Then it is often argued that this outlook is compatible with Marx's scientific approach to the study of society and thus that Marx combines facts with values.⁴

These claims are so general and unspecific that they actually do come close to being correct about Marx's thought as a whole, but at the same time they tell us very little. It is true that if one studies Marx's thought at a high enough level of abstraction and generality, one will find that there is some continuity to it. It is always Marx's view that society should be transformed to overcome alienation and realize the full development of the individual. But this is very superficial. At the heart of Marx's thought, we will see, if we study him carefully, such views are understood quite differently and have quite different implications in different periods of his thought. Essential unity theorists do not look this deeply. For example, it is not the case that Marx's theory of the overcoming of alienation and of the full realization of the individual is always based upon an ethical conception of individuals or on a concept of human nature or essence. This is not the case in the *German Ideology*, and, in that text at least, ethical conceptions are not compatible with

⁴ e.g. see D. Kellner, 'Marxism, Morality, and Ideology', *Marx and Morality*, ed. K. Nielsen and S. C. Patten, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, supplementary vol. 7 (1981), 94-5. Also J. McMurtry, *The Structure of Marx's World-View* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 6-7 n., 20 ff., 29, 32-3, 34 n., 53, 170, 222-3, 233.

science. If we study the early Marx's concept of essence in detail and in depth, we shall see, as I shall argue in Chapters 1 and 2, that this is the key to his concept of freedom. Freedom as self-determination is possible for the early Marx when our essence has been objectified in existence; then, as we seek existing objects, these objects cannot be seen as alien or heteronomous—they have become parts of our essence and thus our relations to them are free and self-determined. In the *German Ideology*, this concept of essence, and indeed even freedom understood as self-determination, is rejected. Again, it is Marx's concept of essence which explains how facts imply values. It allows us to treat things or facts descriptively. We can describe objectively what things are in essence. But at the same time things can be treated prescriptively. We can say how they ought to develop if they are to realize their essence fully. This approach is certainly abandoned in the *German Ideology* as, I think, is the general attempt to combine facts and values.

Moreover, when essential unity theorists begin to discuss the *German Ideology*, they usually argue for a very soft version of historical materialism and play down the amount of determinism involved. They often avoid difficult passages which count against their interpretation and misread others.⁵ Frequently, they provide us with their own arguments for the compatibility of ethics and determinism rather than those of Marx.⁶ Furthermore, in discussing freedom, almost all such commentators fail to recognize that Marx rejects freedom as self-determination in the *German Ideology*. In short, I will argue for a very different interpretation of Marx's historical materialism than that of the essential unity theorists.⁷

There are other scholars who do take seriously Marx's historical materialism and the degree of determinism it involves in the *German Ideology*. They conclude that Marx rejects ethics.⁸ However, they often

⁵ e.g. see G. G. Brenkert, *Marx's Ethics of Freedom* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), 25 ff., 27.

⁶ *Ibid.* 35-6, 42 ff.

⁷ There are some scholars who might be mentioned in passing. Some of them discuss essential unity and mention morality only briefly. Others discuss Marx's ethics in detail and seem to accept an essential unity but do not dwell on it. See A. Schaff, *Marxism and the Human Individual* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1970). S. Stojanović, *Between Ideals and Reality*, trans. G. S. Sher (New York: OUP, 1973). I. Fetscher, 'The Young and the Old Marx', *Marx and the Western World*, ed. N. Lobkowicz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), 19-39. M. Marković, 'Marxist Humanism and Ethics', *Inquiry*, 6 (1963), 18-34.

⁸ D. C. Hodges, 'Historical Materialism in Ethics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 23 (1962-3), 1-22. L. S. Feuer, 'Ethical Theories and Historical Materialism', *Science and Society*, 6 (1942), 242-72.

do not discuss the moral views found in Marx's early writings, nor the absence of such strict determinism there and in later writings like the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, as I will argue in Chapter 4.

The general point I am trying to make and will argue is that since there actually are shifts in Marx's intellectual development, anyone committed to its essential unity will tend to ignore, dilute, or misinterpret some part of Marx's thought. Moreover, a commitment to essential unity will tend almost inevitably to blind one to the deeper significance of one issue or another in Marx's thought. For example, the *German Ideology* so clearly attacks and rejects Kantian morality that anyone committed to essential unity is not likely to perceive that the ethical views of the early writings are influenced deeply by Kant, and, indeed, in many respects are Kantian. The abandonment of a commitment to essential unity makes it easier to notice such things. I will argue, in Chapters 1 and 2, that in his early writings Marx tries to combine a doctrine of essence much like Aristotle's with a concept of universalization not unlike that found in Kant's categorical imperative.

Althusser's views are quite different from those of the essential unity theorists. He argues that there is a break in Marx's thought which occurs in the *German Ideology* and wants to separate the philosophical and humanistic writings of the early Marx from the scientific writings of the later Marx; for Althusser, the science of the later Marx is not humanist, but anti-humanist. My views are closer to those of Althusser than to the essential unity theorists in that I too think there are shifts in Marx's thought. There are several respects, however, in which I sharply differ from Althusser. In the first place, I do not think that these shifts amount to a 'break' or 'coupure épistémologique', which, for Althusser, means a total shift in a whole pattern or frame of reference such that any element in the first pattern must have a totally altered or different meaning in the second.⁹ For example, I argued in *Marx' Method, Epistemology, and Humanism* that Marx's development should be understood as a rather ordinary evolution. The method which Marx first develops in the *Grundrisse* and employs in *Capital* is a new method. But in putting it together, Marx modifies his earlier views in a rather ordinary way. He drops some elements, keeps others, adds new ones, and moulds them into a new method.¹⁰

Moreover, despite his emphasis on a break, Althusser finds more unity between the works of 1845-6 and the mature works (the *Grundrisse*

⁹ For Marx, pp. 198-9, 244, 249. L. Althusser and E. Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster (London: NLB, 1970), 148-57.

¹⁰ *Marx' Method, Epistemology, and Humanism*, ch. 3.

and *Capital*) than I do. For Althusser, the period after the break is a relatively steady movement to maturity. In my view, there is more than one shift in Marx's thought. After the *German Ideology*, another change occurs, in the *Grundrisse*. The method outlined there is quite different from those set out in either the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* or the *German Ideology*. I read the *German Ideology* as an overreaction to the views of the early writings which had to be corrected later in the *Grundrisse*.

However, my main disagreement with Althusser concerns his claim that the scientific approach of the later Marx is anti-humanist. Let us try to understand what this claim means. For Althusser, humanism involves ethics, and both humanism and ethics are ideological, not scientific;¹¹ ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. In other words, ideology does not correspond to reality. As Collier, who follows Althusser in this respect, puts it, humanism, ideology, or value judgements are not a sound basis for scientific theories. Ideology, for Althusser, does not give us scientific knowledge.¹²

I must point out that Althusser's theory of ideology is different, as he himself admits, from the theory of ideology that Marx outlines in the *German Ideology*. In that text, as I will argue in Chapter 3, ideology is seen as something that must be pierced through and overcome in communist society. It is Althusser's view, however, that while particular ideologies, say capitalist or feudal ideologies, can be overcome, ideology in general cannot be. It is omni-historical, eternal, and will exist even in communist society.¹³ In this sense, humanism and ethics do have a place in communist society, but only at the ideological, not the scientific, level.¹⁴

I must say that I disagree with Althusser. I do not think that the later Marx is an anti-humanist and I do not think that humanism is ideological. Althusser's opposition to humanism is based on his view that humanism reduces the forces and relations of production to objectifications of the human essence. For the early Marx, the forces and relations of production and their development are explained in terms of relationships and interactions between human individuals. For Althusser,

¹¹ *For Marx*, pp. 11-12, 45, 222 ff., 229-34. Also L. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. B. Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 38, 134, 155.

¹² *For Marx*, p. 233. *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 162, 164-5, 173. A. Collier, 'Scientific Socialism and the Question of Socialist Values', *Marx and Morality*, pp. 124-5.

¹³ *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 159-61.

¹⁴ *For Marx*, pp. 232, 235. *Lenin and Philosophy*, p. 161.

ideology constitutes individuals as subjects. The science of the mature Marx, however, does not study ideological appearances, nor subjects, nor even individuals. Moreover, it does not reduce the forces and relations of production to relations between individuals. Instead, science studies reality; it studies social structures—forces and relations of production, which, far from being the outcome of relations between individuals, structure those relations.¹⁵

I do not think that Althusser has characterized correctly the method of the mature Marx. In my view, Marx's science confines itself to a study of social structures only due to the fetishism that is present in capitalist society. Fetishism causes what are actually relationships between human beings to appear as relationships between things. It is the task of science to pierce through this fetishized surface appearance of society and to aid practice in transforming society so as to end fetishism. Then, according to Marx, we will see clearly that social relations *are* in fact relations between human beings, and at that point theoretical science will wither away.¹⁶ Althusser is right to insist that the later Marx rejects the concept of human essence which informed his early writings. He is correct in claiming that the forces and relations of production, once fetishism is overcome, are not to be reduced to the human essence, but incorrect in claiming that they are not to be reduced to human relations. That *is* Marx's goal and it is a *humanistic* goal. In the *German Ideology*, morality was viewed as ideological illusion destined to disappear in communist society. I will argue in Chapters 4 and 5 that, in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, morality is not ideological illusion and it does not disappear under communism. When fetishism and ideology are overcome, we will appear again as what we are, as individuals, who far from being dominated by social structures will control our forces and relations of production for our own benefit. This humanism is not ideological; it is a reality which ought to be realized.

Thus, I am opposed both to the essential unity theorists who reduce Marx's thought to a uniform consistency which ignores important shifts and developments and equally to Althusser's attempt to force Marx's thought into rigid and radically distinct periods which serve to deny his humanism. I see the humanism of his later writings as different from, but an outgrowth of, the humanism of his early writings. In all periods of his thought, it is Marx's goal to bring about a society which will

¹⁵ *Reading Capital*, pp. 139–41, 180. *Lenin and Philosophy*, pp. 170–3. L. Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. G. Lock (London: NLB, 1976), 200–6.

¹⁶ For an extended discussion of this point, see *Marx's Method, Epistemology, and Humanism*, ch. 3.

realize the highest development of the individual, but in these periods we find different understandings of morality and the way in which it is connected with and contributes to this human development.

The third school often assumes that there is or ought to be an essential unity to Marx's thought, but then goes on to argue that fundamental contradictions run throughout it. For this school there are two strands in Marx's thought which he is unable to reconcile. On the one hand, his science claims to be descriptive and objective. However, it also attempts to be prescriptive and to deduce moral norms. Kamenka, for example, argues that Marx in an uncritical and illogical way attempts to give ethical judgements the objectivity of scientific descriptions.¹⁷ For Kamenka, 'good' can be treated in two ways. It can be treated as a quality—an intrinsic property—which can be described scientifically and objectively, but, if so, ethics is shorn of its advocative and normative pretensions. Or 'good' can be treated as a relation—something demanded or pursued, something it is wrong to reject—but, if so, 'good' is not an objective property and cannot be treated objectively. Marx, in Kamenka's view, illegitimately attempts to combine scientific description and advocacy, facts and values, by treating relations as constituting the character or quality of things. For Kamenka, things cannot be constituted by their relations. A thing must have qualities before it can enter into relations.¹⁸

In Chapter 2, I will argue that it is not Marx's view that things are constituted by their relations: things do have qualities before they enter into relations, but relations transform those qualities. In this way, Marx avoids, I think, some of the problems that Kamenka raises.

Stanley Moore also argues that there is a contradiction running throughout Marx's thought between a scientific and descriptive sociology of change, which arises from Marx's doctrine of historical materialism, and a prescriptive and ethical dialectic of liberation, which stems from his early writings.¹⁹ Moore admits that a shift occurs in the *German Ideology*, but claims that it is less radical than it appears. In the *German Ideology*, Marx does reject the premisses of his early writings, but not the conclusions he drew from them.²⁰ According to Moore,

¹⁷ E. Kamenka, *The Ethical Foundations of Marxism*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 3, 89.

¹⁸ Ibid. 89-90.

¹⁹ S. Moore, 'Marx and Lenin as Historical Materialists', *Marx, Justice, and History (MJH)*, ed. M. Cohen, T. Nagel, and T. Scanlon (Princeton University Press, 1980), 213, 216-17.

²⁰ S. Moore, *Marx on the Choice between Socialism and Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 19-20, 24.

Marx adopted communism on moral grounds before developing his doctrine of historical materialism in the *German Ideology*. There Marx drops his original moral arguments, but keeps communism as his goal, despite the fact that he is unable to defend it on historical materialist grounds.²¹ Moore argues that, in the 'Critique of the Gotha Program', Marx only gives a moral reason for moving from socialism to full communism, whereas only a historical materialist one would be sound.²² I will try to argue in Chapter 5 that this is neither objectionable nor a contradiction because it is Marx's view that in socialist society human beings will gain control over the forces and relations of production which hitherto in history have dominated them. Freedom will replace determinism. Thus, moral reasons for moving on to full communism would be perfectly good reasons for doing so—they would no longer be incompatible with historical materialist determinism.

But, even if specific difficulties like those raised by Kamenka and Moore can be solved, there still remains the general problem of whether in other areas of Marx's thought there is an ongoing contradiction between science and ethics. Acton thinks so, as does Habermas and Wellmer.²³ And Gouldner is even willing to argue that there are 'two Marxes'. I certainly do not want to assert that there are no contradictions in Marx's thought. In fact, I have argued elsewhere that there are.²⁴ But I have tried to show that, while Marx's thought is not absolutely free of inconsistencies, we do not find ongoing and uniform contradictions running throughout it. We must study contradictions, when they exist, within the specific periods of Marx's thought. They may be very different in different periods or they may simply be absent in some periods and more or less intense in others. Moreover, I think that if the periods of Marx's thought are studied carefully, we find shifts or changes of mind, rather than 'two Marxes'.

I have said that the moral theory of the early Marx is built around a concept of essence much like Aristotle's and that Marx tries to reconcile this with a concept of universalization much like that found in Kant. In the *German Ideology*, he rejects this attempt and argues that morality is

²¹ Ibid. 89-90.

²² Ibid. 36 ff., 44-5. 'Marx and Lenin as Historical Materialists', pp. 230-3.

²³ H. B. Acton, *The Illusion of the Epoch* (Boston: Beacon, 1957), 191-2. J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 43-4, 52-3. J. Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon, 1974), 195-252 *passim*. A. Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society*, trans. J. Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1971), 70-5.

²⁴ P. J. Kain, 'Estrangement and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat', *Political Theory*, 7 (1979), 509-20.