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Why Marx Left Philosophy for Social Science

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ABSTRACT. It is customary to distinguish between philosophically oriented ‘critical psychologists’ and ‘mainstream psychologists’ who are committed to a scientific approach to the study of human behavior. In this article, we highlight a fundamental irony concerning the critical psychology movement, especially with respect to those contributions that appeal to Karl Marx and his legacy to justify the criticism or rejection of traditional scientific methods in approaching the subject matter of psychology on moral and/or epistemological grounds. The irony is that Marx’s own intellectual development led him to abandon philosophy in favor of empirically grounded forms of investigation resembling those of today’s ‘mainstream’ social sciences. Unlike many contemporary critics who see little or nothing of possible value in the image and methods of sociology and psychology as sciences, Marx’s own work sought to integrate critical, value-laden aims with a serious commitment to establishing independently verifiable facts. After examining a range of historical and biographical explanations given for Marx’s change of heart, we show that Marx was one of the world’s first social scientists. We highlight the characteristic features of a critical, empirically oriented Marxian social science, paying special attention to issues of continuing theoretical and meta-theoretical relevance in sociology, psychology and their intersection.

KEY WORDS: critical psychology, false consciousness, ideology, Marx, philosophy, social science

It is often claimed that mainstream psychology requires drastic remedial efforts of a critical, basically *philosophical* nature. Gergen (1991), for instance, decried in the inaugural issue of this journal a supposed ‘impoverishment of conceptual skills’ in psychology that should be blamed on the doctrine of empiricism:

As the empiricist logic of theory construction and evaluation became pervasive in the field ... issues and concerns relevant to psychological theorizing were progressively narrowed. Theory was to be generated and evaluated through the application of rules of evidence; all other debates were rendered secondary if not superfluous. Yet, within recent decades, foundationalist views of science have all but been abandoned within philosophy. Empiricist assumptions have come under severe, if not lethal, attack. (p. 14)

Many others have joined Gergen in lambasting the alleged moral as well as epistemological deficiencies of 'mainstream' psychology (e.g. Fox & Prilleltensky, 1997a; Hare-Mustin & Maracek, 1988; Newman & Holzman, 1996; Riger, 1992). Such critics frequently recommend philosophical or conceptual remedies of one sort or another for curing psychology's ills. For example, Parker (2002) points to Marx, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Jameson and Lyotard as inspiring models for how to achieve 'a critical distance from powerful ideological forms of knowledge like psychology' (p. 10).

While we would certainly agree that psychologists and other behavioral scientists would benefit considerably from sophisticated training in areas such as logic, epistemology, ethics, conceptual analysis, philosophy of science and the history of ideas, philosophers and other scholars would benefit from sophisticated training in the experimental method, research design, statistics, probability theory, as well as substantive empirical knowledge concerning cognitive, developmental, personality, social and clinical psychology. However, appealing to certain traditions in continental philosophy as a means of discrediting scientific approaches to psychology and the social and behavioral sciences more generally is neither constructive nor convincing. It has also led to an unnecessary and lamentable schism in the psychological community—a schism that the editors and contributors to this Special Issue are striving to overcome (see also Jost & Kruglanski, 2002).

In certain circles, for example, it has become customary to distinguish between 'critical psychologists', who are philosophically oriented—typically in the directions of Marxism, feminism and/or postmodernism—and those 'mainstream psychologists' who are committed to a scientific, empirically oriented approach to the study of human behavior. Fox and Prilleltensky (1997b) write:

By mainstream psychology we mean the psychology most often taught in universities and practiced by clinicians, researchers, and consultants. It is psychology portrayed as a science, with objective researchers and practitioners who uncover the truth about human behavior and help individuals adjust to the demands of modern life. ... Because psychology's values, assumptions, and norms have supported society's dominant institutions since its birth as a field of study, the field's mainstream contributes to social injustice and thwarts the promotion of human welfare. ... We believe it is necessary to advocate certain values and forms of political action rather than try to appear objective simply to retain legitimacy. (pp. 4–7)

As this passage indicates, critical psychologists frequently bundle together social/moral and epistemological issues, so that attacks on scientific empiricism are often intermingled with calls for political liberation, as if the methods of science are inherently oppressive and must be overthrown. In our view, this polemical confounding of issues is unhelpful and, in fact, distinctly un-Marxian (see, e.g., Jost & Hardin, 1996; Jost & Kruglanski, 2002).

There is, in other words, a fundamental irony concerning the ‘critical psychology’ movement, especially concerning those contributions that appeal to Karl Marx and his legacy to justify the criticism or rejection of traditional scientific methods in approaching the subject matter of psychology on moral and/or epistemological grounds (e.g. Ibáñez & Íñiguez, 1997; Newman & Holzman, 1996; Parker, 1999, 2002; Parker & Spears, 1996; Tolman & Maiers, 1991). As we will show, Marx’s own intellectual development led him to abandon ‘pure’ or ‘speculative’ philosophy in favor of a search for empirically grounded forms of investigation that resemble those of today’s ‘mainstream’ sociology and psychology. Unlike many contemporary critics who see little or nothing of possible value in the image and methods of psychology *as a science*, Marx’s own work boldly sought to integrate critical, value-laden aims with a serious commitment to establishing independently verifiable facts (see also Bottomore, 1966/1978; Fay, 1987). Marx’s goal—and the goal to which contemporary critical psychologists *should* aspire—was to arrive at a better society not merely through revolutionary activity but first and foremost by working towards an accurate, empirically grounded scientific understanding of human needs, capacities, tendencies and frailties. Critics of the theory and practice of psychology as a science should therefore remember that Marx left philosophy for social science and that he had good reasons for doing so.

Did Marx Leave Philosophy?

It is generally agreed that an impartial survey of Marx’s early writings—both published and unpublished, but especially the latter—reveals the gradual abandonment of a distinctively philosophical approach to the problems with which he had concerned himself. An earnest young Ph.D. in philosophy with a fresh dissertation on Greek Atomism, and good prospects for reaping the fruits of professional patronage (i.e. a lectureship at Bonn University), emerges in the late 1840s as the self-avowed militant theoretician of the international working class. In the period between his dissertation (1841) and the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), the chief outlines of a general social scientific theory of historical materialism had been mapped out and Marx himself had begun the long immersion in history and political economy deemed necessary to test that theory’s empirical adequacy.

In the first part of this article, we explore some of the various explanations that have been offered for this early theoretical development, concentrating

on an analogy Marx himself often noted between his own post-Hegelian period in the history of philosophy and the earlier Hellenistic, post-Aristotelian era. We know from the foreword to his dissertation that 'the cycle' of Epicurean, Stoic and Sceptic philosophy in their relation to earlier Greek speculation was to be the subject of a planned 'larger work' to follow the thesis; one which would, *contra* Hegel, vindicate the 'great importance' of these Greek philosophical systems, especially for the would-be philosopher of 'self-consciousness'—the Young (or Left-) Hegelian ideal (Marx, 1841/1975a). The hypothesis to be elaborated and tested below is that, whether consciously or not, Marx came to see his own contemporaries' purely philosophical efforts as a modern repetition of the pattern of the earlier classical decline he had once hoped to celebrate.¹ Marx came to see that the way out of the philosophical trap was to adopt an empirical approach to the subject matter that was to characterize the social sciences.

The Critique of Pure Thought

Marx objected to several features of the Hegelian philosophy of his day, and he came to see these as more general limitations that applied to the discipline of philosophy itself as then practiced. As Lefevre (1968) observed, Marx was 'thus led to the view that there is something intrinsically inadequate about philosophy' (p. 11). In the first place, the common fault shared by Hegel and his followers (the 'Left Hegelians'), who were still working 'in the realm of pure thought', was to try to derive empirical phenomena from the airy realms of conceptual categories. Hegel and his protégés, for example, treated world history as the development of the idea of freedom by the 'Absolute Spirit' (i.e. a secular substitute for God). Like religious styles of thinking in general, Marx (1845/2000a) found this way of philosophizing hopelessly abstract and speculative.

A second, related criticism is that philosophers had failed to appreciate that history is the result of real human activity undertaken in specific social and material conditions rather than some unfolding of a spiritual process. According to Marx, human beings' historical forms of interaction with the world were affected more by individual and collective needs for food, clothing, shelter, and other means of survival than by the cognitive capacities for rumination and thought emphasized by philosophers.

A third objection to remaining at the level of pure philosophy is what McGuire (1989) referred to as 'Marx's good-field, no-hit sneer at philosophy' (p. 244). This was expressed famously in the eleventh of the *Theses on Feuerbach*: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, 1845/2000b, p. 173).

Just as the Hellenistic schools of philosophy found little they could do to cope with the social, economic and political changes brought about by

Alexander the Great's dismantling of the classical Greek world except to concentrate on ethical strategies for reducing personal discontent in the search for 'unperturbedness' (*ataraxia*), so too the Young Hegelian movement appeared to Marx as doomed to ineffectual and self-indulgent critical complaint against certain aspects of an emerging capitalism in its feudal context: for example, those taking the form of censorship and political repression. Hoping to link, as he would put it in the winter of 1843–4, the head of philosophy with the heart of the proletariat, an original recipe for simultaneously superseding and realizing philosophy in its struggle with the world was formulated (Marx, 1844/1975c). The program for combining theory and practice thus envisaged was, then, partially undertaken to avoid a merely philosophical protest that could only lead, as in times past, to a passive acceptance of an unchangeable, albeit unpleasant, social reality.

A Naturalistic Compromise?

Before examining some of the familiar although ultimately unsatisfactory reasons offered for Marx's theoretical change of heart, it is important to face an objection that might be made to the whole enterprise of characterizing Marx as someone who abandoned philosophy. Here we should note that a pre-supposition possibly hinted at in our title, namely that 'a content analysis of what Marx wrote after the 1840s simply illustrates a decision that he had reached to quit philosophy and to become a professional economic theorist', was sharply questioned by McBride (1977, p. 15). In his interesting and thoughtful interpretation, McBride argues for a revised and extended conception of philosophy, one that is not necessarily continuous with the traditional conception that encompasses 'the activities of the historical philosophers whom Marx may have had in mind' (p. 8) when he criticized them in his famous *Theses on Feuerbach*. McBride proposed to treat 'the most general of Marxian generalizations' as metaphysical

... attempts, more ambitious than those ordinarily made even by general theorists in other (i.e. non-philosophical) disciplines, to describe or characterize large swathes of reality, and sometimes all reality ... [These were] radically different only in scope, and not in kind, from relatively more modest generalizations about, let us say, the nature of capitalism; and no drastically different sort of knowing is involved in them. (pp. 70–71)

There is much in this characterization that would meet with ready agreement from those contemporary philosophers of science who have emphasized the similarity of philosophical and scientific problems in their effort to undermine the shaky foundations for what is sometimes referred to as the 'autonomy of epistemology' thesis (e.g. Kornblith, 1994, p. 7; cf. Quine, 1969). Traditionally, it was said that philosophy had its own problems, its own methods for solving them, and neither needed support from nor should it attack scientific results. From an anti-autonomous (or naturalistic)

perspective there is much to be said for McBride's (1977) widening of the concept of philosophy to include those theoretical activities of Marx that we have traditionally assigned to the disciplines of history, sociology, economics, political science or even psychology. However, it is Marx's (and not our own) perspective on the relationship between philosophy and science that is most relevant here. In any case, it is hard to follow McBride when he suggests that 'Marx was selective, rather than wholesale, in his rejection of elements of his philosophical past' (p. 43), when Marx himself concluded: 'When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of knowledge loses its medium of existence' (Marx & Engels, 1846/1970, p. 48). That Marx later (notably in *Capital*) 'flirted with' Hegelian language and methodology and bemoaned the tendency of some of his followers to attack without sufficient knowledge Hegel's philosophy is not tantamount to any philosophical conversion that would be comparable to the one that took him out of legal studies as a youth, as reported in his famous letter to his father. (An incisive account of the *appearance* of Hegelian dialectics in *Capital* can be found in Little, 1986, pp. 118–123.)

Althusser's Epistemological Rupture

If McBride goes perhaps too far in his portrait of Marx as a consistent, if innovative, philosopher, there is a corresponding danger of too sweeping a claim being made for the anti-philosopher in him as well. Althusser (1969) is probably the most aggressive proponent of the notion that there was an 'epistemological rupture' or 'break' in Marx's development, located in 1845, announced unequivocally in that year's *The German Ideology* and preceded by the *1844 Manuscripts*' effort 'to give philosophy every chance, its last' before '*its defeat*' (italics in original). After that, so we are told, Marx 'linked an absolute condemnation' to anything philosophical (see Althusser, 1969, pp. 13, 33–37, 158–159).

This Althusserian approach need not be endorsed in order to accept the central tenet of this article, namely that Marx did relinquish philosophical support for his theorizing. This is because, on Althusser's view, one must (condescendingly) refer to Marx's formative period as a 'roundabout route', a 'theoretical "Long March"' to the discovery of historical materialism for which 'there ought to have been a "short-cut"', such as Engels' 1844 article 'Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy' (Engels, 1844/1975). The early period of preoccupation with Hegel is credited with merely giving Marx 'a feeling for and practice in abstraction that is indispensable to the constitution of any scientific theory' and best seen as 'less a *theoretical formation* than a *formation for theory*, a sort of education of the theoretical intelligence via the theoretical formations of ideology itself' (Althusser, 1969, p. 85).

In a later work, 'Elements of Self-Criticism', Althusser (1976) distinguishes between a *science proper* and its *prehistory*, relegating Marx's work of the

early 1840s to the latter category; scholarly interest in the early period is taken to be a sign of intent to do away with the better, scientific child by focusing on ‘the father who *had to* have this child’ (pp. 112–113). While this warning is well-taken—one thinks of Paul Samuelson’s (1957/1966) characterization of Marx as a ‘minor post-Ricardian’ or various versions of the ‘Hegel-inverted’ thesis—interest in the early writings need not reflect ‘bourgeois’ bias against the mature Marx. If the hypothesis of this article holds up, there is a strong continuity between the *goals* of Marx’s social scientific theorizing and those of classical philosophy *as Marx conceived of them* during the period of his doctoral studies. The change or ‘break’ was not so much with these (broadly construed) humanistic goals as with the *means* to realize them—i.e. isolated, individual efforts of philosophical criticism vs. empirically informed, class-conscious collective action.

Some Proposed Explanations for Why Marx Left Philosophy

Before exploring this theme, however, it may be helpful to (briefly) consider various answers that have been given to this question of why Marx left philosophy. For ease of reference they are listed here by number and somewhat tentatively described. Each may be successively more promising than its predecessor, but all fail to make use of the fact that Marx was no amateur in philosophy. He knew a great deal about philosophy’s past and present prospects, and he continued to mine (for his own purposes, to be sure) its resources until the end. Among the most important but incomplete explanations of Marx’s decision to leave philosophy are the following:

1. The cynical suggestion that he was piqued at not having secured a teaching position in philosophy in Germany.
2. The claim made by praxis buffs that the activist Marx realized that theory was less important than practice.
3. The ‘orthodox’ scientific socialist claim that his problems were primarily empirical anyway and called for scientific, not philosophical, treatment.
4. The ‘sophisticated’ interpretation of some modern social critics (e.g. Bottomore & Rubel, 1963, pp. 30–5) that the ‘scientific’ spirit of the age led Marx to express himself misleadingly as having a true, testable theory of society instead of the more correct claim that he had articulated the real needs of the emerging proletariat. Because traditional philosophy was clearly the ideological preserve of the ruling class, he could hardly do otherwise.
5. The view that Feuerbach had solved all of the genuinely philosophical issues with his ‘transformative criticism’ and that only social, political and practical questions remained.

Sour Grapes

The first possibility (1) trades on the well-known fact that Marx, because of his close association with Bruno Bauer, a notorious atheistic professor at Bonn, was forced to give up his plans to join the faculty there when Bauer himself was dismissed. It has rarely been offered as a satisfactory explanation of Marx's development, but Isaiah Berlin (1978) comes close to this position when he suggests that 'in 1841 Marx might perhaps have continued to live in the fantastic world [of neo-Hegelian polemics], himself taking part in the inflation and mass production of words and concepts, if his circumstances had not suffered a sudden catastrophic change'; with the death of his father, upon whom he relied for financial support, and the loss of an academic career he was 'forced to look for another occupation', namely that of journalism (p. 54). From there his increasing involvement with socialist and (eventually) communist intellectuals along with the ensuing government suppression of their organs of expression may be interpreted as leading inevitably to his emigration to Paris and the eventual intellectual isolation of his London years. The cynic imagined in (1), then, could point to Marx's aborted career as an example of the alienation of the elite often observed in revolutionary times. With no outlet for a strong streak of self-assertion and understandable frustration in the face of a reactionary government–university bureaucracy, is it any wonder that Marx turned on philosophy and its practitioners with the fury so redolent in *The German Ideology*, *The Holy Family*, *The Poverty of Philosophy* and other, shorter works?

Without prejudging the issue of what an intelligent psychohistorian might be able to make of Marx's path, we can reject (1) as offering us very much help in the effort to explain his theoretical re-orientation. For one thing, Marx was never so naïve as to think that the authorities would forgive straightforward expressions of atheistic sentiment, to the point of ignoring Bauer's own well-intentioned warnings to tone down certain Promethean passages in his dissertation (McLellan, 1977, p. 71). Unlike his mentor, whose indiscretion cost him a professorship (the book that got Bauer fired was published anonymously as the work of a sincere Prussian parson scandalized by Hegel's atheism), Marx seems to have been fearless from the first, ready to weather the consequences. Even more striking, however, is the evident spirit with which Marx began his journalistic career. He hoped, perhaps naïvely but surely sincerely, to bring philosophy out of its 'isolation' and 'systematic seclusion', to change 'the ascetic frock of the priest for the light garb of the newspapers':

Since every true philosophy is the intellectual quintessence of its time, the time must come when philosophy not only internally by its content, but also externally through its form, comes into contact and interaction with the real world of its day. ...

The question whether philosophical and religious matters ought to be discussed in the newspapers dissolves in its own lack of ideas.

When such questions begin to interest the public as *questions for newspapers*, they have become *questions of the time*. Then the problem is not whether they should be discussed, but where and how they should be discussed, whether in inner circles of the families and the salons, in schools and churches, but not by the press; by opponents of philosophy, but not by philosophers; in the obscure language of private opinion, but not in the clarifying language of public reason. (Marx, 1842/1975b, pp. 195–198)

The point of these quotations is to underscore the impression one gets from reading Marx's earliest published work, one that does not smack of a 'sour grapes' attitude brought on by the philosophical establishment's having forced him to earn a journalistic living with his pen. It is true that his subsequent experience opened his eyes to some realities about the social structure and its historical conditioning that would motivate his later researches, but the dominant impression is not that of a spiteful critic but of one slowly losing his illusions about philosophy's capacity to change reality. This point leads directly to explanation (2).

The Subordination of Theory to Practice

In his introduction to *The Development of the Marxian Dialectic*, Howard (1972) interprets Marx's theory as 'a *critical theory* because it is based on the recognition that the previous, purely contemplative theory has a negative foundation which forces it, once it has reached theoretical completeness, to negate and transcend itself' (p. x). It is both

... a theory *for* practice, and a theory *of* praxis. That is, it shows on the one hand that theory is self-transcending, that it calls for specific kinds of practice; and on the other hand, it reveals that the things of the world are constituted by and understandable as objectifications of praxis. (p. x)

Later in the book, Howard sees Marx's critical theory as doing 'its work not like a fine-honed knife but like a gross weapon. The function of the critique is not to refute the enemy with subtle arguments. The enemy must be destroyed!' (p. 118). But, apparently, Marx himself only half-realized this new practical necessity, for he 'appears to accord to philosophy—of course, in its critical garb—a greater role than might be justified. Marx seems to think of philosophy as a paradigm in terms of which the world can be criticized and therefore, changed' (pp. 118–119).

Howard (1972), like so many others who have written about praxis, interprets Marx as subordinating theory to practice.² The trouble with this suggestion is that Marx himself seems to have gone out of his way to scotch similar suggestions. A memorable example is provided by the famous Weitling incident in 1846 in Brussels. A heated discussion of the theoretical foundations for political agitation among German workers was broken up when Weitling's proud claim that his organizational efforts were 'perhaps of greater weight for

the common cause than criticism and armchair analysis of doctrines' was answered by Marx's pounding the table and shouting 'Ignorance never yet helped anybody!' (McLellan, 1973, pp. 155–157). When we add this to the well-known facts of Marx's later laborious researches in the British Museum, there can be little doubt that he believed the correct theory of society to be indispensable for advancing proletarian prospects. In leaving philosophy he was not leaving theory as (2) would have it; he was reaching for a more empirically based variety.

Orthodoxy and Scientific Socialism

Appreciation of the defects of (2) leads one quite naturally to (3), which appears in a rather strong form in Althusser. The 'orthodox' position in general relies on a sharp distinction between philosophy and science and tends to see the former as illusory and the latter sacrosanct. Some have gone so far as to offer grotesque attempts to derive Marxian social science from the so-called 'dialectical laws of nature and society' as exemplified in quantum physics, say, or the historical progress of the Soviet Union. Much as (2) can be seen as veering too far to the praxis pole of the inevitable antithesis, (3) opts for theory with a vengeance. And although modern social science continues to be nourished at the Marxian fountain, one should be cautious in endorsing (3) with the paradigm of explanation provided by the physical sciences (including evolutionary theory) in mind. If (3) is recast in such a way that the 'orthodox' interpretation that is traceable to Engels (and perhaps to Marx himself) is seen as one reading among others of the nature of Marxist social science, its merit as a positive motivation for Marx's development may be considerable. When supplemented by the negative reasons for leaving philosophy suggested by the analogy between the decline of German Idealism and that of Hellenism, (3) in its liberalized form may belong in a full account of Marx's motivation.

Why Marx Really Left Philosophy

Socialist Pragmatism

For those wary of the potential difficulties in defense of (1)–(3), Bottomore and Rubel's (1963) pragmatic interpretation as sketched in (4) is very appealing. While recognizing that 'Marx undoubtedly considered himself a scientist', they seek to undermine the 'myth of "scientific socialism"' by emphasizing that he was primarily interested in providing 'a "scientific basis" to socialism... as a social and political movement striving to bring about a new, and better, system of human relations' (pp. 30–31). Because he was convinced that, if socialism were to be realized, an in-depth understanding of its chief obstacles

in the form of ‘fetters’ from past relations of production and social relations was necessary, Marx planned his researches with the goal of advancing socialism ever in the forefront.

Given the ‘scientism’ of the age, however, it is perfectly understandable that he sought to express his theoretical goals in the way that he did. There is some support for (4) in many of Marx’s best-known concrete historical analyses, including those explanations he provided for the failure of revolutionary efforts in France in the 1848–51 and 1871 periods. It is often both as diagnosis of defeat and lesson for the future that Marx theorizes in accordance with his insight that:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (Marx, 1852/1979, p. 103)

Having realized by the mid-1840s that class (as opposed to individual) efforts were the effective sources of social change and having clearly identified with the proletariat as the ‘universal class’, Marx took on the role as its theoretical advisor, so to speak; one that would involve a mastery of a wide variety of ‘material factors’ forming the objects of social scientific study. In this capacity, he was ‘always passionately interested in factual social inquiries’ (Bottomore, 1978, p. 285).

On this view, suggestive here is the ‘embarrassment’ that accompanied Marx’s first efforts ‘to take part in discussions on so-called material interests’ in the 1842–3 Rhenish controversy over laws preventing peasants from collecting wood in accordance with their traditional feudal rights (Marx, 1859/2000c). Recorded as it is in the famous 1859 ‘Preface’—often seen as Marx’s most succinct statement of intellectual autobiography—it may well represent a continuing concern not to be embarrassed on those questions for which his philosophical training had provided insufficient preparation. If explanation (3), then, falters for the reasons mentioned, the pragmatic perspective of (4) promises a powerful positive motivation for leaving philosophy behind—one that implicitly acknowledges the drawbacks of a purely philosophical approach.

Feuerbach and the End of Philosophy

The last explanation we have mentioned so far, (5), is the only one on our list that regards Marx as primarily driven by the belief that the most important philosophical work of his time had already been completed. As developed especially by Avineri (1968), this account sees in Marx’s adoption of Feuerbach’s ‘transformative method’ of Hegel-criticism in the *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* the key to his theoretical development. This is because Hegel’s philosophy is unmasked and dethroned once one realizes that he has

made real subjects (civil society, classes) into predicates of ‘an imaginary subject called “sovereignty”’, that for Hegel ‘an historical fact has become a metaphysical premise of universal validity’ (Avineri, 1968, p. 15). The impact of this discovery is summarized by Avineri as follows:

Marx turned to economic and historical studies only after his exegesis of Hegel had proved to him that the economic sphere ultimately determines politics and makes the Hegelian postulate of the universality of political life into a mere dream. Marx arrived at this conclusion not through an economic or historical study but by applying Feuerbach’s method to Hegel. (p. 38)

Once having crossed the ‘fiery brook’ of Feuerbachian criticism and having convinced himself that ‘Feuerbach... does not enter upon a criticism of... the real nature of man [as] the totality of social relations’ instead of ‘an abstraction’ from ‘the historical process’, Marx could not turn back to philosophy proper (Bottomore & Rubel, 1963, p. 83). Its work was essentially accomplished and he could afford to move on.

While there is much to be said for (5) as containing an important insight, it probably overstates Feuerbach’s significance, both positively and negatively. Historical work on the Left Hegelian movement, especially the analysis of Bruno Bauer’s influence, suggests that ‘it is useless to draw a straight line from Feuerbach to Marx and that Bauertian influences are evident in certain spheres in which it has been claimed that Marx bears affinity to Feuerbach’ (Rosen, 1977, p. 202). A considerable body of literature maps out the complexity of the intellectual relationship between Marx and the Young Hegelians and strongly suggests that (5) is, at best, an oversimplification. Philosophy had to be abandoned not because one philosopher had solved the problems, but because none of them were likely to free themselves from the illusions of self-consciousness that Marx saw as endemic to German philosophy.

A Lust for Knowledge That Leaves Him No Rest

We have claimed that (1)–(5) all suffer to some extent from their failure to appreciate that Marx’s early philosophical interests were genuine and far from amateurish. Perhaps the pre-eminent modern student of Epicurus, Cyril Bailey (1928), credits Marx with having accomplished a pioneering rejection of ‘the ancient tradition, repeated glibly in the histories of his time, that Epicurus adopted the Atomism of Democritus wholesale, changing it here and there for the worse’ (p. 205). In praising his dissertation, Bailey notes that ‘it is almost astonishing to see how far he got considering the materials then available’ and that ‘the work shows a careful study of the main ancient authorities for Epicureanism’ (p. 205). Only one who has been saved the laborious task of sifting through ancient texts for isolated bits of evidence by the century or so of (later German) scholarship embodied in modern collections of fragments can appreciate the value of Marx’s documentation.

Even the criticisms Bailey (1928) makes testify to the sincerity of Marx's early philosophical effort insofar as they revolve around the point that an '*a priori* theory, couched in terms of contemporary [Hegelian] philosophy, is forced upon ancient thinkers who really approached their problems in a far simpler frame of mind' (p. 206). The point is that an interpretation of an ancient text that errs in taking it too seriously, in making it speak to modern problems, however faulty as pure scholarship, is often evidence of a capacity for independent philosophical activity. In stressing the quality of Marx's dissertation, the promise both as scholar and philosopher that it reveals in a 23-year-old student who had wasted some of his college years in beer-halls and unoriginal romantic poetry, our intention has been to underscore that Marx chose to leave a field in which he had in fact excelled and may well have made significant contributions to in due time.

Marx's dissertation itself consists of an elaborate comparison of Democritus and Epicurus, mainly to the benefit of the latter. But, as argued by Seigel (1978), 'Marx identified himself with each of the characters in his philosophical drama' (p. 73). Democritus is a paradigm of a philosopher with a '*lust for knowledge* that leaves him no rest', such that when 'dissatisfied with philosophy [he] throws himself into the arms of empirical knowledge':

Cicero calls him a *vir eruditus*. He is versed in physics, ethics, mathematics, in the encyclopaedic disciplines, in every art. ... But since it is the characteristic trait of erudition to expand in breadth and to collect and search on the outside, we see Democritus *wandering through half the world* in order to acquire experiences, knowledge and observations. (Marx & Engels, 1842/1975, Vol. 1, pp. 40–41)

Epicurus, on the other hand, 'is *satisfied* and *blissful in philosophy*, having *nothing but contempt for the positive sciences*, since in his opinion they contribute nothing to TRUE perfection'. He champions *chance* and 'proceeds with a boundless nonchalance in the explanation of separate physical phenomena', whereas his predecessor invoked *necessity* and *determinism*, positing 'a network of conditions, reasons, causes, etc., by means of which this necessity reveals itself' (pp. 41–43). Above all, in his doctrine of the swerve of atoms, Epicurus finds in the atom's declination 'something in its breast that can fight back and resist', a symbol of 'the concept of abstract individuality, self-sufficiency and negation of all relation to other things' (pp. 49–50).

In his *Notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy* prepared in conjunction with the dissertation, Marx had offered a broad-brush interpretation of the history of Greek philosophy in terms of the gradual disengagement of the *sophos* or wise man from the *polis* or city-state. From Thales down through Socrates to the Hellenistic period, Greek philosophers lose their identity as 'active leaders in political life, lawgivers' in touch with 'the resounding theory of the people itself' until 'it is ideality itself which, in its immediate form, the *subjective spirit*, become the principle of philosophy' (Marx & Engels,

1842/1975, Vol. 1, pp. 434–437). The period after Aristotle may appear to be a decline, then, if one bemoans subjectivity, and it had been so described by Hegel in his lectures on the history of philosophy. But Marx sees the situation differently. Epicurus, with his concern focused almost exclusively on the need of individuals to be free of troubling doubts about the gods or the stars or an afterlife, is seen as a patron-saint for philosophers of self-consciousness, the post-Hegelian ideal:

... the spirit of the time, the spiritual nomad, sated in itself, ideally formed in all aspects in itself, is not allowed to recognize any reality which has come to being without it. The fortunate thing in such misfortune is therefore the subjective form, the modality of the relation of philosophy, as subjective consciousness, towards reality.

Thus, for example, the Epicurean [and the] Stoic philosophy was the boon of its time; thus, when the universal sun has gone down, the moth seeks the lamp-light of the private individual. (Marx & Engels, 1842/1975, Vol. 1, p. 492)

This, then, is the picture of the philosophers' predicament as it appeared to Marx in the years 1838–41. Estranged from society, ineffectual in their attempts to have the world 'swallow their solutions "like roasted pigeons"', they still have a certain nobility (Howard, 1972, p. 90). After further experience, however, in encounters with his own day's philosophers of self-consciousness (chiefly Steiner and the Bauer brothers), Marx has changed his attitude. They had become by the mid-1840s, like Hegel himself, representatives of 'philosophical withdrawal, a failure to comprehend "the object as object"', showing thereby an interest not in determining causal relationships in nature, but only in 'soothing the explaining subject' (Seigel, 1978, p. 73). By 1845 Democritus, and not Epicurus, had re-emerged as the truly commanding figure from Marx's student days. With a similar 'lust for knowledge that leaves him no rest' and a firm resolve to meet the needs of the universal class and not to withdraw into the subjective satisfaction of philosophy, Marx plunges into history, economics, politics, sociology—anything in order to understand the world but also to change it.

Marx and Social Science

Where, then, did Marx turn in order to carry out his 'lust for knowledge'? The most straightforward answer is that he turned to the study of empirical regularities in social relations. Marx and Engels (1846/1970) wrote, for instance, in *The German Ideology* that:

Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals, but of

individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they really are. (p. 46)

Although the disciplines of social science, including anthropology, sociology, psychology and political science, were not yet fully formed, Marx must be counted—along with Comte and Mill—as one of the world's first social scientists. As Bottomore (1978) observed,

... the general inclination of Marx's work, when it is traced from his earlier to his later writings, is clearly away from the philosophy of history and towards a scientific theory of society, in the precise sense of a body of general laws and detailed empirical statements. (p. 284)

This is not to say that Marx's contributions to the development of social science would have been the same if he had lacked a strong philosophical background. On the contrary, his social scientific investigations were almost surely strengthened by critical and theoretical skills that had been honed by philosophical training. In the remainder of this article, we will focus on the characteristic features of a critical, empirically oriented Marxian social science, paying special attention to issues of continuing theoretical and meta-theoretical relevance in sociology and psychology.

Marx as Proto-sociologist

In a work entitled *The Sociology of Marx*, Lefebvre (1968) refrains from asserting that Marx *was* a sociologist, an anthropologist or even an economist. The main reason for his hesitation in affixing the label of social scientist to Marx is that none of these fields properly existed as independent scientific disciplines. Nevertheless, Lefebvre noted that, 'it is possible to recognize in Marx's works a sociology of the family, of the city and the countryside, of subgroups, classes, and whole societies, of knowledge, of the state, etc.' (p. 24). According to Lefebvre, Marx's concept of praxis 'contains many sociological elements—a sociology of needs, of objects, of knowledge, of everyday life, of political life' (p. 37) and 'leaves room for sociology in the most modern sense of the term' (p. 38). Indeed, these themes and others are taken up in numerous articles and books devoted to Marxian sociology (e.g. Berger, 1969; Bottomore, 1975, 1978; Coser, 1970; Flacks & Turkel, 1978; Fromm, 1965; McQuarie, 1978; Nelson & Grossberg, 1988; M. Shaw, 1985).

Many sociologists and social and political theorists of the 20th century who were inspired by Marx were also influenced by the work of Antonio Gramsci and—to a lesser extent—György Lukács on such topics as cultural hegemony and class consciousness (e.g. Hobsbawm, 1982; Jessop, 2004; Kolakowski, 1987; Milliband, 1969; Poulantzas, 1976). Although many of these contributions have been extremely useful for theory-building, they have not had the kind of lasting impact on the social sciences that one might expect, probably more for methodological than substantive reasons. As Bottomore (1978)

pointed out, 'the major contributions of Marxist research have been in the historical field' and 'empirical investigations in the sociological domain have been rare' (p. 284). Unfortunately, it appears that many of Marx's most devoted followers in political sociology have not been as 'passionately interested in factual social inquiries' as Marx himself was (p. 285).

A very different tradition of theorizing about sociological themes contained in the writings of Marx comes from the school of Analytical (or 'non-Bullshit') Marxism (see, e.g., Cohen, 2000; Elster, 1985; Miller, 1983; Roemer, 1986a). The sociologist Erik Olin Wright (1985) and the economist John Roemer (1986b), for example, have developed and updated Marxian analyses of class and exploitation, respectively. In doing so, they drew on contemporary theories and methods in social science to derive and investigate empirically testable hypotheses from the writings of Marx. Similarly, Gerald Cohen (2000) adopted analytic standards in philosophy of science to clarify Marx's theory of history, especially the notion that technological developments in the forces of production (tools, knowledge and work skills) drive social and historical change. Cohen also provides a spirited and compelling defense of the ways in which Marx's theory is—contrary to the claims of Popper (1971)—falsifiable and empirically testable.

There are two additional, related assumptions of Analytical Marxism that represent strong departures from previous uses of Marx's writings in social science. The first is methodological individualism, that is, 'the doctrine that all social phenomena—their structure and their change—are in principle explicable in ways that only involve individuals—their properties, their goals, their beliefs and their actions' (Elster, 1985, p. 5). The second is the notion that the micro-foundations of Marxian social science are to be found in rational choice theory, including the assumption that self-interest is the driving engine of human behavior and a preference for methods developed in game theory (Roemer, 1986c).

Although the assumption of methodological individualism renders Marxism much more relevant to psychology (and vice versa), it is problematic to the extent that it entails a reductionist stance with regard to social phenomena. Not only did Marx reject scientific reductionism (Ball, 1984; Farr, 1984), but he was right to do so. As Wright, Levine and Sober (1992) argue,

... it is neither necessary nor helpful to frame the call for micro-foundations as a call for methodological individualism. To ban social types as objects of investigation is to impoverish the explanatory objectives of social science, and to contravene reasonable practices in the social sciences. (p. 127)

In other words, it is a good idea to flesh out the micro-foundations (or psychological processes) underlying the macro-level (or societal) phenomena that most interested Marx, but it is a bad idea to require that the latter must be explained exclusively in terms of the former.

The second assumption—that Marxism must be grounded in rational choice theory—is probably on even shakier ground, although it has led to some extremely useful analyses of phenomena such as the rationality of individual participation in revolutionary action (e.g. W.H. Shaw, 1984). The problem, which is acknowledged by Roemer (1986c, p. 193), is that empirical research in social and cognitive psychology poses a powerful challenge to rational choice theory in micro-economics. Studies of actual human judgment, decision-making and behavior reveal that people seldom (if ever) satisfy normative standards of rational self-interest as outlined in neoclassical economics (e.g. Kahneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982).

Nevertheless, Analytical Marxism helps to bring traditional Marxism further along the path from philosophy to social science by requiring it to provide non-dogmatic theoretical and empirical accounts on behalf of its fundamental claims. Roemer (1986c), for example, takes issue with the teleological aspects of traditional Marxism:

One cannot assert that those things happen which are optimal for the preservation of the capitalist system; or, on the contrary, that the system will destroy itself. Perhaps these events may happen, but the mechanisms at the level of the preference formation and solution processes must be shown to bring them about. (p. 201)

Marxism, in other words, needs to join in the methods of social science, taking into account psychological as well as sociological and economic processes, in order to fulfill Marx's scientific aspirations of explaining and even predicting human social activity.

Marx as Proto-psychologist

Theorists as diverse as Henry DeMan (1928/1985) and Wilhelm Reich (1946/1970) have suggested that Marx possessed an implicit psychology, but that his psychology was empirically naïve. Reich, for instance, wrote that:

The character structure of active man, the so-called 'subjective factor of history' in Marx's sense, remained uninvestigated because Marx was a sociologist and not a psychologist, and because at that time scientific psychology did not exist. Why man had allowed himself to be exploited and morally humiliated, why, in short, he had submitted to slavery for thousands of years, remained unanswered. (pp. 25–26)

Writing almost 40 years later, Bramel and Friend (1982) reached a similar conclusion, namely that 'Marx and Engels apparently believed that psychological problems would be a minor hindrance to the developing working-class struggle' (p. 167). The general idea, to which we will return later, is that if Marx had been able to avail himself of an empirically informed social psychology, he would have had a better and more complete theory of *false*

consciousness, defined as ‘the holding of false beliefs that are contrary to one’s social interest and which thereby contribute to the disadvantaged position of the self or the group’ (Jost, 1995, p. 397), and he would have been less sanguine about the prospects of revolution.

Because Marx’s work lacked a solid psychological foundation, members of the Frankfurt School turned in the 1930s and 1940s to the leading psychology of their day: psychoanalysis. With the benefit of hindsight, the intellectual marriage between Marx and Freud seems strange (e.g. O’Neill, 1985; Wolfenstein, 1993). Nevertheless, social theorists such as Fromm (1941), Reich (1946/1970) and Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford (1950) drew on psychoanalytic themes to address the social and psychological origins of fascism, elucidating the connection between the personality (or character structure) of the individual and society at large. By far the most influential of these works was the only one that was based on empirical data—obtained from survey and interview studies carried out by the social theorist Adorno in collaboration with psychologists Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson and Sanford. Although there were many methodological problems associated with early research on the authoritarian personality (e.g. Brown, 1965; Christie, 1954), many of Adorno et al.’s conclusions concerning the authoritarian syndrome, the rigidity of right-wing ideologues and the link between conservatism and prejudice have in fact been sustained by subsequent research in psychology (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003a, 2003b).

Of central relevance to any psychology based on Marx’s writings is the question of whether Marx himself subscribed to a general theory of human nature. This has been a contentious issue in historical scholarship on Marx (see, e.g., Geras, 1983). Bottomore (1978) frames the alternatives well:

Is there, for Marx, a permanent, unchanging essence of man, which is alienated in certain forms of society, but which in others can find its full expression, and which can thus be treated as a moral ideal in some version of a morality of self-realization? Or is the essence of man a purely historical phenomenon, so that no universal ideal or criterion of morality can be formulated at all? (p. 289)

Numerous scholars have argued that Marx unambiguously rejected the notion that there is any such thing as human nature in an abstract or universal form (e.g. Althusser, 1969; Suchting, 1979; Venable, 1945/1966). For support, they have drawn mainly on the sixth of Marx’s *Theses on Feuerbach*: ‘the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual’ (Marx, 1845/2000b, p. 172). Geras (1983) showed that this remark cannot sustain the view that Marx denied the existence of human nature and argued instead that ‘Marx—like everyone else—did reject certain ideas of human nature; but he also regarded some as being true’ (pp. 14–15). Indeed, other of Marx’s writings make clear that he believed that certain needs and capacities (including

self-consciousness, language, intentionality, creativity, ideology and certain forms of cooperative labor) are unique to the species and that if they are ignored or thwarted the result is human misery (see, e.g., Archibald, 1989; Elster, 1985; McMurtry, 1978).

Marx did, therefore, make certain psychological assumptions, but some of those assumptions turned out to be wrong. This is hardly surprising given that the scientific discipline of psychology did not yet exist and that his 'data' were far from systematically collected or analyzed.³ Here we will focus on the fact that Marx's (tacit) social psychology seriously overestimated the occurrence of protest and revolt, at least in part because he accepted the classical economic principle that people are motivated primarily by self-interest (e.g. Russell, 1938/1966, p. 12). As W.H. Shaw (1984) puts it, 'Marx thought socialism was inevitable, not because preordained by any theory, but because the mass of the citizenry would soon cease to tolerate an increasingly burdensome social order' (p. 12). The social unrest and revolutionary activity throughout mid-19th-century Europe encouraged Marx to believe that class consciousness in the working class would grow apace.

As we have already suggested, Marx failed to appreciate the human capacity to accept injustice and the tendency to rationalize suffering. If he had been able to draw on the resources of an empirically informed psychology, it is likely that his theory of revolution would have been much better.⁴ Jost, Banaji and Nosek (2004) have reviewed dozens of experimental and survey studies demonstrating that (a) the relationship between self-interest and political attitudes is very weak and many political attitudes appear to be contrary to self-interest, as in the case of 'working-class conservatism', (b) members of disadvantaged groups frequently internalize a sense of their own inferiority and possess a 'depressed sense of entitlement', and (c) nearly everyone possesses at least some motivation to defend and justify the societal status quo, especially when it is threatened or attacked. What Marx and many others in social science have underestimated, according to Jost et al. (2004), is the prevalence of system-justifying (rather than system-challenging) responses to inequality and injustice in the social order.

Marx as a Critical *and* Empirical Social Scientist

In arguing that Marx left philosophy for social science, we are not suggesting that he embraced a strictly positivist conception of science or that he joined Engels in conceiving of his project entirely in terms modeled after the natural sciences. As Farr (1984) has carefully shown, Marx explicitly rejected the 'unity of science' thesis that is central to many versions of positivism. He did not believe, for example, that the principles of social science would ultimately

be reducible to principles of physical science. Nor did Marx assume that causality with respect to human action mirrored causality in the physical world:

... human beings, in Marx's view, resemble Aristotle's acorns rather more than Hume's billiard balls; they change their identities as they actualize their species's unique potential. Unlike acorns, however, human beings determine, by their own efforts (and not always intentionally), what they will become. (Ball, 1984, pp. 247–248)

Marx, it seems, subscribed to a theory of human nature that is compatible with a social constructionist account of the person, but his philosophy of science stressed empirical methods and epistemological realism (see also Jost & Hardin, 1996, and Jost & Kruglanski, 2002, for similar views).

Another way in which Marx's social science departed from typically positivist versions is in his embracing rather than suppressing of moral and political values. The 'first methodological premise' of Marxian sociology, according to Flacks and Turkel (1978), is that 'the goal of social analysis and inquiry ought to be emancipatory' (p. 198). There is no reason to assume that critical (or emancipatory) goals will necessarily conflict with scientific goals to achieve an accurate understanding of the facts as they are. On this theme, Bottomore (1978) asked intriguingly whether Marx should be considered a sociologist *or* a Marxist and—after acknowledging that Marx repeatedly distanced himself from the latter label—concluded that there is no necessary conflict between the two. According to Bottomore, 'Marx's participation in the socialist movement and his efforts to advance the theoretical science of society proceeded together, and fructified each other' (p. 288). Bottomore also pointed out that Marx was always careful to argue issues on their merits and to avoid the kind of ideologically reductionist attacks that some of his followers have employed:

[Marx] ... never dismissed any serious theoretical view merely on the grounds that it expressed a non-proletarian ideology. ... Marx undertakes primarily to show by theoretical argument and empirical tests that the views he is opposing are false, and only later, if at all, does he refer to their ideological sources. (p. 290)

Surely there are important cases in which social scientists face a conflict or incompatibility between motives for scientific accuracy, on one hand, and the desire to advance one's moral or political values, on the other (e.g. Sears, 1994, pp. 551–555; Tetlock, 1994, pp. 526–527). It is also true that there are many cases in which these two goals are in alignment. Marx's work continues to stand out as the best single example of a critical *and* empirical contribution to social science (e.g. Bottomore, 1978; Fay, 1987). He was passionate both about his critical, value-laden aims and about achieving an accurate empirical understanding. Furthermore, Marx worked harder than most of his

followers to avoid conflicts of interest between these two motives and to resolve conflicts, whenever he could, in favor of the evidence.

Notes

1. Marx (Marx & Engels, 1847/1976), for example, castigated the French socialist economic theorist Proudhon for simplistically applying an outworn Hegelian logic and metaphysics to the newly emerging positive science of political economy:

... you have the economic categories everyone knows, translated into a little-known language which makes them look as if they had newly blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason; so much do these categories seem to engender one another by the very working of the dialectic movement. (p. 165)

Marx inverted the subtitle of Proudhon's book (*La Philosophie de Misère*) in his devastating reply, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which, according to McLellan (2000), Marx regarded as 'the first scientific presentation of his theory' (p. 212).

2. According to Howard (1972),

The movement of praxis which Marx considers the correct approach for the philosophy of his time is not simply the denial of philosophy ... philosophy is essentially completed with Hegel; yet it remains the premise of the praxis which follows on that completion. (p. 123)

Furthermore, 'It must continue to be applied during that praxis in order to make possible the praxis, to make it rational' (p. 123).

How Hegelian philosophy—which on Marx's reading as of 1843 results in an elaborate and mystifying justification of the Prussian state—can be the premise for revolutionary activity against that very institution is too dialectically subtle for our taste. Howard's picture seems to be that of German Idealism's bringing you to the moment of praxis, to that 'nodal point' where you realize you can leave it behind and join forces with the proletariat, that 'passive matter' which 'has to *want* and *need* to become philosophical in the same way that philosophy wants and needs to become worldly' (p. 129).

3. Archibald (1989) notes: 'Part of the ... problem may lie with Marx's predilection for post hoc analyses of social movements of workers who were unusually highly organized—émigré German artisans, Parisian workers in the late 1840s' (pp. 4–5). Apparently, this led Marx to exaggerate the frequency of the protest response and the ease with which it could be triggered.
4. Archibald (1989) points out that Marx's social psychological understanding was accurate in some respects. For example:

Marx's expectation that the circumstances most workers face most of the time—fragmented ties and competition with each other—combine with their general human nature to produce indifference, even hostility, toward each other, turns out to be all too correct and to work against the alternative process of class organization. (p. 5)

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