

# Nietzsche and Marx

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# Some Terms

**dialectical materialism** materialism: explanation in terms of material things (not ideas) – the explanatory primacy of economic production; dialectic: explanation always depends on history (note Engels' "doubt as to the eternal validity of that which exists")

**realism** contrasted with dramatizations, idealizations, class distortions (Engels insists that realism is sufficient and pedagogy unnecessary); Manifesto: "man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life and his relations with his kind" (2)

**bourgeoisie** the class between the aristocracy and the proletariat

In Marxism, **reification** is a process by which objects (such as commodities) turn into subjects and subjects (such as people) turn into objects (means of production). What once was an object becomes by reification active and determining, while the subject becomes passive and determined. My namesake György Lukács says in *History and Class Consciousness*

*Just as the capitalist system continuously produces and reproduces itself economically on higher levels, the structure of reification progressively sinks more deeply, more fatefully, and more definitively into the consciousness of man.*

# Reification of Consciousness

Here is an important example of reification: the reification of consciousness.

## Karl Marx

From this moment onwards consciousness can really flatter itself that it is something other than consciousness of existing practice, that it really represents something without representing something real; from now on consciousness is in a position to emancipate itself from the world and to proceed to the formation of “pure” theory, theology, philosophy, ethics, etc.

Nietzsche often thinks of this process as making the false inference from a deed to a doer; from a verb to a subject; from thought to thinker. Both Marx and Nietzsche are suspicious of language and its grammar. Marx says, for example, that “for the bourgeois it is so much the easier to prove on the basis of his language . . . since this language itself is a product of the bourgeoisie” (Love, 109).

# Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

*In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life . . .*

# Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

*... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.*

Reification may be the consequence of a simple fallacy: **hypostatization**, where an abstraction is treated as if it were concrete. For example, you may for a moment mistake the map for the territory it represents. Reification leads to **alienation**, for example the alienation of the worker from production.

# What the Bourgeoisie Has Accomplished

The bourgeoisie has

- resolved personal worth into exchange value
- reduced the family relation to a mere money relation
- made itself dependent on permanent revolution
- rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life
- agglomerated production and concentrated property in a few hands
- has undermined itself by creating the proletariat (“what the bourgeoisie produces is its own grave-diggers”)



*Communism abolishes eternal truths, it abolishes all religion, and all morality, instead of constituting them on a new basis. (10)*

*Law, morality, religion, are to [the proletarian] so many bourgeois prejudices, behind which lurk in ambush just as many bourgeois interests. (6)*

# The Fable of the Bees

Here is an interesting precursor to Marxian and Nietzschean ideas about morality: Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees*.

- virtue and morality have as their primary function to lubricate the economy (Mandeville therefore insists that they are necessary)
- vice and immorality are also necessary for the economy, for example in inducing us to more spending and consumption

Rather than being opposed to each other, virtue and vice are carefully balanced and conditioned on each other by the requirements of a functioning economy.

The aim of communists is

- the formation of the proletariat into a class
- the overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy
- the conquest of political power by the proletariat
- the use of accumulated labour to widen, to enrich, and to promote the existence of the labourer

The abolition of existing property relations is a consequence of the historical process, not unusual in other epochs, and not an explicit goal of communists. Communists seek to abolish private property, i.e. bourgeois property (just as the bourgeois French revolution sought to expropriate feudal property).

Just as for Nietzsche, morality and its metaphysical manifestations (freedom, law, responsibility) is based on a historical psychological development; it based on a historical economic development in the Communist Manifesto:

*the standard of your bourgeois notions of freedom, culture, law, etc. . . . are but the outgrowth of the conditions of your bourgeois production and bourgeois property*

Aristocrats in their reactionary and charitable support for the cause of the proletariat (having the bourgeoisie as a common enemy) stoop to “barter truth, love, and honour for traffic in wool, beetroot-sugar, and potato spirits.”

# Communist Manifesto

## consciousness and material existence

man's ideas, views, and conceptions, in one word man's consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations and in his social life

*And your education! Is not that also social, and determined by social conditions under which you educate, by the intervention, direct or indirect, of society, by means of schools? (9)*

*The bourgeois claptrap about the family and education, about the hallowed co-relation of parent and child, becomes all the more disgusting, the more, by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder, and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour.*  
(9)

Marx and Engels address the following fears of the bourgeoisie with respect to communism.

- abolition of property → abolition of private (bourgeois) property
- abolition of monogamy → abolition of public and private prostitution
- abolition of home education → abolition of bourgeois social intervention in education
- abolition of countries → bourgeoisie and proletariat both abolish nationalism, the proletariat will do so achieving peace
- abolition of eternal truths → class antagonisms have indeed been a permanent feature of social relations, the communist revolution promises the most radical rupture



Here is the Communist Manifesto's political action plan:

- ① raise the proletariat to the position of ruling as to win the battle of democracy (contra Lenin)
- ② use the proletariat's political supremacy to wrest, by degrees (!), all capital from the bourgeoisie (this cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property)
- ③ centralize all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e. of the proletariat organized as the ruling class
- ④ increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible

# The Communist Decalogue

- 1 Abolition of landed property
- 2 A heavy progressive income tax
- 3 Abolition of rights of inheritance
- 4 Confiscation of rebel/emigrant property
- 5 Centralization of credit in the hands of the State
- 6 Centralization of communication/transport in the hands of the State
- 7 Extension of State production
- 8 Equal liability of all to labour (establishment of industrial armies)
- 9 Combination of agriculture with manufacturing, more equitable distribution of population
- 10 Free education (abolish children's factory labour, but combine education with industrial production)

In the last two paragraphs of Section II, Marx and Engels predict that class distinctions will dissolve, “public power will lose its political character,” and “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.” This prediction strongly clashes with the descriptive projects of Nietzsche and Foucault (and certainly with Nietzsche’s normative ideas about power differentials).

# Communist Manifesto

Marx and Engels reject other communist/socialist literature mainly on a Nietzschean basis: those other communists/socialists seek to improve the lot of every class, not just the lot of the proletariat. Sometimes they do so (perhaps subconsciously) in order to further the ends of their own class ("the old feudal coat of arms on their hindquarters").

**reactionary socialism** the feudal aristocracy using the proletariat in its resentment against the bourgeoisie

**petty bourgeois socialism** Bernie Sanders type socialism

**German socialism** "not the interests of the proletariat, but the interests of Human Nature, of Man in general, who belongs to no class, has no reality, who exists only in the misty realm of philosophical fantasy" (compare Taylor's critique of existentialism)

**bourgeois socialism** they wish for a bourgeoisie without proletariat (and got it in the developed world, didn't they?)

# A Trump Prophecy in the Manifesto

*They direct their attacks not against the bourgeois conditions of production, but against the instruments of production themselves; they destroy imported wares that compete with their labour, they smash to pieces machinery, they set factories ablaze, they seek to restore by force the vanished status of the workman of the Middle Ages. (5)*

# Themes from Manifesto of the Communist Party

- freedom vs. free trade; “in bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality” (8); “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (11)
- the bourgeoisie is self-undermining (4) because it depends on unlimited growth

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According to Nancy Love, Marx and Nietzsche have in common that they dissolve traditional dichotomies:

- between nature and history
- between objective reality and subjective preference (the impossibility of the detached observer)
- between morality and power; or justice and interest



Marx and Nietzsche's historical methods are **historical materialism** and **genealogy**, respectively. Here is what they are not, according to Love:

- ① transcendent or immanent teleologies
- ② economic or physiological determinisms
- ③ incoherent histories

Both Nietzsche and Marx, as philosophers, lived in the shadow of the idealist philosopher GWF Hegel. They were significantly influenced by him and defined themselves in contrast to him. Hegel viewed history as the autogenesis of spirit. Nietzsche and Marx reject teleology (making the consequent the antecedent) in favour of causal explanation.

## Nancy Love: Dialectical History

Nonetheless, Nietzsche's overman and Marx's communist society are often regarded as immanent historical goals. (73)

Nietzsche and Marx would counter that making speculative predictions does not turn the consequent into an antecedent. It is always an interesting question to what extent a philosopher's descriptive project is related to a normative theory.

What is especially problematic about teleology for Nietzsche and Marx is that it presupposes that consciousness forms history, when precisely the opposite is true. Consciousness is derivative, not determinant.

Nietzsche and Marx resist determinism in so far as they would always explain history as a confluence of a multitude of factors. Foucault and Althusser, respectively, bring their opposition to determinism into greater relief

Here is an area of agreement between Marx and Nietzsche:

## Nancy Love: Dialectical History

Men developed social customs because they have an instinct to dominate; those customs by creating consciousness then furthered the expansion of the will to power. Only ideologists reify conscious purposes, separating consciousness as a “cause” of history from the forces which functionally determine it. (88)

Both Christian morality and bourgeois capitalism are self-undermining, dynamic historical developments; they are not to be hypostatized. Both Marx and Nietzsche do not take the current societal configuration to be “ordained,” but ask if it is still functional for man’s expanding powers.

Here is what's wrong with current economics and social science (as apropos today as it was in the 19th century):

*Political economists and scientific historians . . . cannot explain or evaluate social wholes. They can only describe given realities as eternal; they are the most virulent positivists. (90)*

**Positivism:** Society and nature operate according to laws, which can be known only on the basis of empirical evidence (not introspection or intuitive knowledge) interpreted by logic.

## Karl Marx: Poverty of Philosophy

Economists express the relations of bourgeois production, the division of labour, credit, money, etc. as fixed immutable, eternal categories . . . economists explain how production takes place in the above mentioned relations, but what they do not explain is how these relations themselves are produced, that is the historical movement that gave them birth . . . these categories are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are historical and transitory products.

Here is what Nietzsche says about extreme descriptivism.

## Genealogy of Morals, III, 26

Its noblest claim nowadays is that it is a mirror; it rejects all teleology; it no longer wishes to “prove” anything; it disdains to play the judge and considers this a sign of good taste—it affirms as little as it denies; it ascertains, it “describes” . . . All this is to a high degree ascetic; but at the same time it is to an even higher degree nihilistic . . .

Engel's Three Basic Laws of Dialectics.

- ① transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa
- ② interpenetration of opposites
- ③ negation of negation



# Strategic Interpretation

In “Ressentiment, Value, and Self-Vindication,” R. Jay Wallace proposes an alternative account to the **strategic interpretation**. Here are the problems with the strategic interpretation.

- The strategic interpretation presupposes that resentment leads to a table of new values which will injure the interests of the oppressors. Yet if the new values were created **instrumentally** they cannot serve **intrinsically** as a framework for preference, deliberation, and criticism (114).
- Even if the strategic features remain below the level of consciousness, it is not clear how instrumental rationality could arrive at a successful formula that leads from the creation of the new values to the injury for the oppressors.

## R. Jay Wallace: Ressentiment, Value, and Self-Vindication

The ur-context of resentment is one in which some people have things that you very much desire, but that you lack and feel yourself unable ever to obtain. (116)

- status
- material possessions
- political power

RJW does not mention sex and cultural visibility.

What element is added to envy to result in resentment? RJW considers systematic barriers to the achievement of the desired goods (117). Janaway's perspective may be helpful here: envy plus the desire to injure may result in resentment, whether or not there are systematic barriers.

On page 128, RJW appears to be in greater agreement with Janaway in so far as resentment (in contrast to resentment and envy) is primitive and lacks more fundamental value judgments (and can therefore lead to new values without undermining itself).

## R. Jay Wallace: Ressentiment, Value, and Self-Vindication

The fundamental emotional dynamic of the slave revolt is not the selection of means to an end that is set by one's desires. It is the expression of one's negative emotional orientation toward the powerful, in the embrace of an evaluative framework that makes sense of that basic orientation. (118)

Question: do the powerless really have negative emotions towards their oppressors? Do they not rather admire them? Emulate them (see 127f for RJW's response)? Is it not rather the powerless who against their own interests subscribe to the values of the powerful? Do they not rather direct their frustration at their plight against themselves (Janaway)?

In Janaway, there is cognitive dissonance in the agent who inflicts punishment on herself: why is she hurting herself? This dissonance is resolved by a migrated concept from debtor-creditor relationships (rather than the more accurate explanation of a frustrated will to power).

In RJW, there is another cognitive dissonance. The powerless person asks herself: why do I hate those that are “good” (the powerful)? The dissonance is resolved by inverting the evaluative spectrum: the good (aristocrats) are evil, the bad (powerless) are good. This inversion vindicates the pent-up hatred that the powerless focus on the powerful.

In RJW's Nietzsche interpretation, the aristocrats eventually assimilate the values of the slave revolt based on the sheer number of people who have internalized those values. I have an alternative proposal: see next slide.

The more relevant question is why does the aristocracy care so much about the powerless, not why the powerless hate the aristocracy so much. The answer, I suspect, is found in the interests of the powerful. Thus, the economic advantage of the wealthy is aligned with the implementation of Christian charity. Furthermore, there is no Wallace Vindication needed for slaves with respect to the new values of the slave revolt—because those also were imposed on them by the aristocracy (this is more of a Marxian than a Nietzschean viewpoint).

- The powerful accepted the values of the slave revolt because these values ultimately promote the goals *of the powerful*. Political and cultural liberalism has succeeded more effectively at creating a superior class than uncouth conservatism (treating the poor as objects of disdain rather than charity), which has never been able to harness the productive powers of the oppressed.
- It is the invention of the “middle class” that has given almost unlimited potential of wealth and power accumulation to the currently ruling aristocracy.
- The question is whether the aristocracy was able to pull off this stunt of making themselves loved and served by the masses as a result of strategy or the convolutions of historical contingency.