Phenomenology and Marxism

Edited by Bernhard Waldenfels,
Jan M. Broekman, and Ante Pažanin

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J. Claude Evans, Jr



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CHAPTER 9

Marx's critique of morality as an introduction to the problem of his philosophy as a whole

Ivan Urbančič (Ljubljana)

1 Introductory remarks

(1) One might say that Marx is a philosopher of the practical, productive activities of man. But the search for a special practical philosophy in his work is in vain, we do not find an ethics or moral philosophy as a special philosophical discipline; indeed, we do not even find the possibility of working out an ethics from his point of view. The same holds for all other philosophical disciplines such as ontology, epistemology, axiology, aesthetics and logic. If this is the case we must ask whether Marx is a philosophical thinker in the first place, for what is left of philosophy when we remove all of its disciplines? This question is thoroughly legitimate when it is considered in the light of the traditional definition of European philosophy. All the more so, since the Marxists themselves, who hold themselves to be the legitimate heirs of Marx, talk about a specifically Marxist ethics, aesthetics, epistemology, etc., especially in those countries in which Marxism is the ruling ideology. We cannot go into these Marxist theories here. But it seems to me that they miss the centre of Marx's thought. We shall see why this is the case in the course of the following discussion.

In rejecting the very possibility of a special philosophical ethics from the Marxist point of view, we are not asserting that there is in fact no longer any such thing as morals or ethics or practical philosophy, nor do we wish to say that there is in fact no such thing as a proletarian or socialist ethics. This is a different question and requires its own discussion. But is it legitimate to assert the possibility in principle of a *Marxist* moral philosophy on the basis of the factual existence of a proletarian or a socialist morality?

(2) The discussion will take the following path:
(a) If we wish to discuss Marx's critique of morality, moral consciousness or moral philosophy, we must first sketch some of the main elements of the basic structure of moral consciousness in the way that this moral consciousness or moral philosophy appears from the Marxist point of view. We need not exegetically collect all of Marx's claims concerning morality and moral consciousness; we shall rather attempt to develop the problematic in terms of the 'spirit' of his thought. In doing so, we shall take Kant's moral philosophy as our example.
(b) We shall then proceed to the centre of Marx's critique in order to gain an insight into the essence and origin of his critique of moral philosophy. This requires that we briefly discuss the basic standpoint of Marxist thought as a whole in order to see clearly why a new foundation of moral philosophy and indeed of philosophy itself in the traditional sense is no longer possible. Only on this level of our discussion will it be possible to say something about the relationship between Marxism and phenomenology.
(c) Finally, we shall have to ask whether we can accept the basic stance of Marx's thought without further ado. If we take the Marxist critique not only of moral philosophy but of philosophy itself seriously, how can we honestly pursue philosophy today?

2 Moral consciousness, moral philosophy

How and where does the basic structure of moral consciousness manifest itself? An initial characteristic: moral consciousness necessarily views itself as distinct from and standing opposed to factual reality. This difference and opposition is thematized by traditional philosophy as the opposition between is and ought. Thus, ideal moral norms and values such as freedom, equality, justice, honesty, etc., necessarily stand in opposition to reality for moral consciousness or for moral philosophy, while simultaneously being thought to be completely independent from this reality.

We said that this opposition between morality and reality is *necessary* for moral consciousness, for if freedom, equality, etc. themselves were already realized in reality, they could no longer count as duties or norms for the actor; if justice were already reality, the demand for justice would have no real sense. Moral consciousness, which moral philosophy merely systematically and consequently formulates and

justifies, always confronts the actor with a demand, i.e. an imperative according to which he should act, thus realizing ideal morality. Moral consciousness represents this demand as a duty, and this is the second characteristic of moral consciousness. The moral demand that morality be fulfilled or realized in reality is *ipso facto* a demand that reality be changed in such a manner that reality is assimilated to morality, and not vice versa. For moral consciousness, the sense of this moral action lies in the attainment of a happiness of which only man as a reasonable being is worthy. The ultimate fulfilment, the complete realization of morality in reality, would amount to the dissolution (*Aufhebung*) of the opposition between is and ought, thus the dissolution of moral consciousness and thus a universal happiness. But for moral consciousness such a complete fulfilment of morality lies in the infinitely distant future. Morality is thus an infinite task.

We can understand moral philosophy as a systematic formulation of moral consciousness, and as such it attained its highest form in Kant. The Europe of the post-Kantian era has not seen the development of a moral philosophy comparable to Kant's.

The highest law of Kantian moral philosophy is the categorical imperative, which has two forms. The first, from the *Critique of Practical Reason*, is: 'So act that the maxim of your will could always at the same time be valid as a principle making universal law.' The second, from the *Groundwork*, is: 'Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end.'[1]

This highest law of morality is derived from Reason, from the 'rational will which in its own maxim is simultaneously universal legislator'. According to Kant, all moral concepts have their origin in reason. The highest law of morality is *a priori*, is thus independent from any *reality* external to it, be it a concrete individual, society or nature. It is simultaneously also universally valid, valid for all rational creatures regardless of their concrete empirical differences. But it is not forced upon these individual rational creatures from without and thus affords each of them his complete autonomy. According to Kant, this autonomy of the rational will is the ground of man's freedom as a rational creature.

Moral consciousness, whose basic structure we have sketched, leads to an insoluble antinomy. The development of the oppositions of this antinomy is also itself a critique of moral consciousness, a critique from the standpoint of this consciousness itself. Hegel developed this kind of critique in great detail in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[2] We cannot

discuss this Hegelian critique here; although it is radical and thorough, from the Marxist point of view it is inadequate. Marx takes another path.

According to the Marxist analysis of the capitalist epoch of world history, we must begin with the strange fact (i) that Marx by no means primarily criticizes moral consciousness from the standpoint of consciousness or thought, and thus does not confront the old moral philosophy with a new one, for the simple reason that for him this would be senseless; (ii) that the division, the opposition between ought (morality) and is (social reality) turns out to be mere appearance from his point of view, behind which is concealed an indissoluble identity of the two, an identity which necessarily, according to the very principle of moral consciousness itself, must remain hidden to this consciousness; (iii) that there is no essential difference between morality and immorality.

Thus, if there is indeed a specific identity between moral consciousness or moral philosophy and the given historical reality – which must be demonstrated – then moral philosophy must in a certain sense be a manifestation of this reality itself, although according to its self-understanding it stands in opposition to this reality, is completely independent of it. The lofty, *a priori* moral 'ought' as a whole is thus nothing other than a specific self-revelation of this reality itself, although the consciousness of this ought knows nothing of this fact. If we follow Marx we can say: moral consciousness or moral philosophy does not know that it is not what it appears to itself to be, and is what it appears not to be. And further: if moral philosophy (moral consciousness) is such a self-revelation or, as Marx says, an ideal expression of the given reality, and if this reality is capitalist, thus for Marx a reality which is, as it were, inverted, then its ideal expression is also, as it were, inverted. In spite of its own appearance, it does not stand in opposition to this reality but rather affirms and confirms nothing other than this inverted reality. In this respect Marx's critique allows of no exceptions. There is no form of moral consciousness (be it understood as 'humanistic morality' or as 'class morality', 'Christian morality', 'proletarian morality' or 'socialist morality') which is not subject to his critique.

In the face of such theses one must surely ask: does Marx preach amorality? But this question misses its mark. It does not see that preaching amorality by no means leaves the level of moral consciousness. But because with his first step Marx breaks through the level of

moral consciousness as consciousness, he preaches neither morality nor some sort of amorality.

In order to understand these theses, we shall have to take a closer look at Marx's critical analyses.

3 The Marxian critique

According to Marx, the existing reality is the all-encompassing process of capital. The process of capital is not just any process in the world or in society; it is a historical mode of the entire social production and reproduction. It thus includes everything and gives everything the imprint of its own character. In short: the process of capital bears and informs this entire epoch of world history. By mode of production is meant the totality of social relations of production. Within the totality of these relations, the relation of exchange plays the decisive role, for it is the foundation of all others. We shall have to take a closer look at Marx's analysis of commodity exchange.

In the *Grundrisse* Marx writes:

> Indeed, in so far as the commodity or labour is conceived of only as exchange value, and the relation in which the various commodities are brought into connection with one another is conceived as the exchange of these exchange values with one another, as their equation, then the individuals, the subjects between whom this process goes on, are simply and only conceived of as exchangers . . . there is absolutely no distinction between them. . . . Each of the subjects is an exchanger; i.e. each has the same social relations towards the other that the other has towards him. As subjects of exchange, their relation is therefore that of *equality*. . . . Furthermore, the commodities which they exchange are, as exchange values, equivalent, or at least count as such (the most that could happen would be a subjective error in the reciprocal appraisal of values), and if one individual, say, cheated the other, this would *happen not because of the nature of the social function in which they confront one another*, for this is *the same*, in this they are *equal* (p. 241).[3]

The last part of the quotation requires some explanation. Marx first speaks of the complete equality of subjects or individuals – of human beings – in the process of commodity exchange. Viewed from the

moral standpoint, the relation of equality among individuals is the content of a moral maxim. In the last part of the quotation Marx explains the sense of cheating in such a relation of exchange. When cheating occurs, equivalents are not exchanged. To be sure, cheating is something morally negative. It only appears when someone, perhaps with great powers of persuasion, gives the other less than he receives in return while convincing him that he has received equal value. But for the pure, paradigmatic structure of the relations of exchange, which is the foundation for the whole process of capital, such cheating is something merely accidental which, as Marx himself points out, is even weakened and foiled in the further development of this process. But this means that the process of exchange as a whole as the relation of equality already corrects cheating on its own, forces the cheater to respect the moral law of equality. Thus, one can already suspect that the capitalist reality of social relations in its paradigmatic form is identical with morality.

This connection between the process of capital and morality is nicely illustrated by the following remark from the 'Preface' to the *Situation of the Working Class in England* by Engels:

> Although it is not expressly listed in the recognized textbooks, it is a law of modern political economy that the more capitalist production develops the less it can tolerate the small practices of cheating and swindling which are characteristic of its earlier phases. . . . Indeed, these tricks and dodges are not as lucrative in a larger market in which time is money and where a certain level of commercial morality develops, not out of any enthusiasm for morality, but simply in order not to lose time and effort uselessly. And this is precisely the way things developed in England in the relation between the industrialist and his workers.[4]

In short, cheating, injustice, etc. is something merely accidental in the general relations of exchange, an accidental transgression of the norm which is already effective in this reality itself. Moral consciousness with its ought necessarily corrects only this sort of accidental transgression of this basic structure. In so doing, this moral correction, this ought or morality, establishes *precisely this* basic structure of exchange, which first makes the process of capital as a whole possible, as a duty.

In addition, the Marxist analysis of the act of exchange shows that this act also guarantees the individual complete freedom and autonomy.

For example, Marx writes:

> Out of the act of exchange itself, the individual, each one of them, is reflected in himself as its exclusive and dominant (determinant) subject. With that, then, the complete freedom of the individual is posited: voluntary transaction; no force on either side; positing of the self as means, or as serving, only as means, in order to posit the self as end in itself, as dominant and primary (*übergreifend*). . . . The general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interests. Therefore, when the economic form, exchange, posits the all-sided equality of its subjects, then the content, the individual as well as the objective material which drives towards the exchange, is *freedom*. Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*. As pure ideas they are merely the idealized expressions of this basis; as developed in juridical, political, social relations, they are merely this basis to a higher power (*Grundrisse*, pp. 244–5).

We can already see that Marx – in his analysis of the simple structure of the exchange of commodities – simultaneously finds the elements of morality. It turns out that everyone who takes part in the exchange of commodities takes the other as well as himself not merely as a means, but by the same token as an end in himself. In this way he does his duty in just the manner demanded by the second version of the moral categorical imperative in Kant's moral philosophy. To be sure, the maxim of his action can equally serve as a universal law. But since the relation of commodity exchange is the reality of the society which is based on the process of capital, this categorical moral 'ought' is neither independent from nor opposed to nor separate from this reality. To be sure, this remains completely hidden from moral consciousness. We shall see the reason for this shortly. In addition, Marx's analysis shows us that the universal interest appears in the relation of commodity exchange only as the universality of egoistic interests. Egoism is the general rule. But even Kant's categorical imperative has given rise to the objection that it is merely a form of universal egoism.[5]

In addition, we see that for Marx the entire process of commodity exchange in its developed form is already the real system of freedom.

Marx formulates this in the following manner: 'Since money is only the realization of exchange value, and since the system of exchange values has realized itself only in a developed money system, or inversely,

the money system can indeed only be the realization of this system of freedom and equality' (*Grundrisse*, p. 246).

Although it may sound fantastic, from Marx's critical standpoint classical political economy turns out to be a special form of moral consciousness or moral philosophy; indeed, moral philosophy turns out to be merely a special aspect of political economy. But this structural identity of morality and reality remains hidden from moral consciousness or moral philosophy. They cling to the appearance of their complete independence from and opposition to reality by obstinately demanding the realization of morality in reality.

Following the Marxist analysis, we encounter two different kinds of consciousness or knowledge. The first kind of consciousness or knowledge is moral consciousness or moral philosophy; the second sees and recognizes the status of the first as mere appearance, thus sees deeper, sees into the hidden foundations of the first, both in its form as normal, everyday consciousness and in its systematic formulation in moral philosophy. We shall call the first positive consciousness or knowledge, the second critical knowledge. This Marxist or critical knowledge thus penetrates into the foundation of positive knowledge.

Marx formulates this in the following manner:

> In the course of science, it is just these abstract attributes which appear as the earliest and sparsest. . . . In present bourgeois society as a whole, this positing of prices and their circulation etc. appears as the surface process, beneath which, however, in the depths, entirely different processes go on, in which this apparent individual equality and liberty disappear. It is forgotten, on one side, that the *presupposition* of exchange value, as the objective basis of the whole of the system of production, already in itself implies compulsion over the individual, since his immediate product is not a product for him, but only *becomes* such in the social process, and since it *must* take on this general but nevertheless external form; and that the individual has an existence only as a producer of exchange value, hence that the whole negation of his natural existence is already implied; that he is therefore entirely determined by society; that this further presupposes a division of labour etc., in which the individual is already posited in relations other than that of mere *exchanger*, etc. . . . What is overlooked, finally, is that already the simple forms of exchange value and of money latently contain the opposition between labour and capital etc. (*Grundrisse*, pp. 247–8).

Thus, that which appears superficially to moral consciousness and national economy as the system of equality and freedom turns out, in the deeper vision of reality, as the system of inequality and bondage, of coercion. This look into the depth level, this critical knowledge, is not simple, but rather must discover at least two more strata beneath the surface of positive knowledge. As the surface, moral consciousness remains forever and necessarily where it is, i.e. on the surface, and thereby knows itself to be opposed to reality and pays no further attention to it as such. The deeper look of critical knowledge discovers *first* that there is no opposition or independence here at all, that reality – viewed paradigmatically – is rather already the precise fulfilment of morality itself, i.e. the system of equality and freedom; and, one might add, of brotherhood as well, since indeed every single subject treats both himself as well as every other person not as a mere means but also as an end in himself. But when it looks even deeper, critical knowledge discovers that in a still deeper stratum, this real system of equality, freedom and brotherhood is actually its own negative, namely a system of inequality, bondage (coercion) and egoism.

How is this look into the deeper strata below the surface of positive consciousness, how is this critical knowledge itself possible, how is it possible to see through all prior knowledge not merely moral philosophy but along with it also all previous philosophy including the sciences – as a mere surface and to investigate its foundations? This possibility cannot be simply assumed as something self-evident, as something which was already at hand somewhere in finished form merely waiting for its discoverer – Marx.

But before we try to give an answer to this question we must describe at least four of the main aspects of this unusual context of surface (thus, all of previous positive knowledge) and the deeper strata which lie below it, and explain the peculiar nature of this context.

The first thing that we see is that morality turns out to be unmorality when viewed from the Marxist standpoint. All ideal elements of morality reveal themselves to this deeper view to be the opposite of what they appeared to be. There is a symptomatic objection to this assertion: were morality in fact unmorality, then an honest relation to one's fellow men would be the same as a dishonest relation, robbery would be the same as honest labour, telling the truth would be the same as lying, etc. Objections of this kind are certainly possible and indeed justified within their own limits; we must understand them. But they also clearly give witness to the fact that their authors simply

have not understood what Marx is talking about, they cannot break through the level of everyday moral consciousness. They latch on to the abstraction and do not see the concrete relations. Moral consciousness can only correct the *deviation*, the small, accidental case of cheating, but cannot change the basic structure of the relation of exchange, since it is identical with it; by the same token, moral consciousness does not see that precisely the complete fulfilment of its principle, its imperatives, is even more problematic for the deeper view. This ridiculous objection arises on the basis of a simple unreflective transfer of the assertions of the critical depth analysis to the surface of moral consciousness, where it appears as a call for amorality and becomes the object of moral indignation. This only signifies that moral consciousness stubbornly remains on its own level. But at the same time it must be emphasized that if one takes the Marxist analysis as point of departure, one cannot simply reject moral consciousness or moral philosophy, indeed, not even philosophy itself. This would be pointless, since as long as the basic structure of social reality remains unchanged, positive consciousness necessarily corresponds to it as its ideal expression. This is also true of the science of national economy (and for philosophy). To want to have commodity production, exchange value and the free market while doing away with 'classical' political economy is, according to Marx, nonsense. It is only the other side of the same coin when someone who has heard the thesis that morality is unmorality asks if we should continue to educate our children in the spirit of morality. As if we had any choice in the matter.

But again, this cannot mean that one must simply close one's eyes to the fact that moral consciousness is a mere appearance. This can be seen clearly in Marx's critique of the socialists:

> What this reveals, on the other side, is the foolishness of those socialists (namely the French, who want to depict socialism as the realization of the ideas of *bourgeois* society articulated by the French revolution) who demonstrate that exchange and exchange value etc. are *originally* (in time) or *essentially* (in their adequate form) a system of universal freedom and equality, but that they have been perverted by money, capital, etc. Or, also, that history has so far failed in every attempt to implement them in their true manner. . . . The proper reply to them is: that exchange value or, more precisely, the money system is in fact the system of equality and freedom, and that the disturbances which they encounter in

> the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realization of *equality and freedom*, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom. It is just as pious as it is stupid to wish that exchange value would not develop into capital, nor labour which produces exchange value into wage labour. What divides these gentlemen from the bourgeois apologists is, on one side, their sensitivity to the contradictions included in the system; on the other, the utopian inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society, which is the cause of their desire to undertake the superfluous business of realizing the ideal expression again, which is in fact only the inverted projection (*Lichtbild*) of this reality (*Grundrisse*, pp. 248–9).

Thus, for Marx it is 'silly and stupid'

> 1 not to see that the actual capitalist system or money system is the real fulfilment of the system of equality and freedom;
> 2 for this reason to want to realize the ideal of equality and freedom all over again;
> 3 to think that exchange and exchange value in its original form is the original form of the system of freedom and equality and that it has merely been falsified by money or the capitalist;
> 4 to think that exchange value does not develop into capital;
> 5 not to see that the disturbances of the system of exchange and exchange value, namely inequality and unfreedom, are immanent in this system;
> 6 not to see that the ideal is merely an expression or photograph of reality and thus in complete correspondence with it, corresponding in a twofold fashion: in the first place as the positive and then as the negative of the original.

Thus, we see that moral consciousness corresponds to reality in a twofold fashion. On the one hand it is an ideal expression of reality and is thus structurally identical to it; on the other hand, however, in the light of a still deeper stratum of reality, it corresponds to it as a reversed, negative image of itself: morality, beneath the surface of moral consciousness, reverses itself into unmorality; or, put into the language of economics, the relation of exchange of equivalent exchange values reverses itself in the hidden depths which lie behind this mere appearance into an exchange of non-equivalents. We must

ask how it is possible that the exchange of equivalent exchange values becomes a mere appearance beneath which *the same* act occurs as an act of exchanging non-equivalents, and all this without any cheating.

What kind of act of exchange is this? This specific act, which is decisive for the entire system of capital, is the exchange of labour power as a commodity for other commodities of the same value. The only commodity available to the worker is his own labour power. He sells his labour power for a specified time, he exchanges it as a commodity for another commodity of the same value. The quantity of the value of labour power is basically determined by the cost of its reproduction, which is in principle analogous to the determination of the quantity of the value of any other commodity. We cannot follow the Marxist analysis into more detail here. It would appear that here too, in the exchange between the worker and the capitalist, equivalents have been exchanged. But labour power is a commodity whose use produces other, new commodities, it produces value. Marx shows that in the agreed-upon span of time labour power produces more value than the capitalist gave for it in the form of other commodities or money as the universal commodity. But it is the capitalist, and not the worker, who controls this surplus value, which remains strictly invisible to both parties in the act of exchange between the worker and the capitalist. And it is precisely the surplus value which turns the equivalence into a non-equivalence. This is the foundation for all of the reversals we have described; it lies in this *social relation* and only there. This relation is the foundation of all other social relations of production. It includes 'the entire negation' of the natural existence of man, as Marx says, his reduction to mere labour power as a commodity; thus the whole *essential impoverishment* of man, the reduction of his entire developed *essential wealth* and his *essential bounty* to the *essential poverty* of mere labour power as a commodity is already contained in this social relation of production (cf. *Grundrisse*, p. 248, lines 6–7). Its epochal significance first becomes visible at this point: it is the foundation of the whole world epoch of capital. In the discovery of the simple moments of the social relations in the act of exchange between the worker and the capitalist lies the seed of the entire Marxist critique of existing reality.

Before taking the next step towards the question of the basic possibility of such a discovery and critique, we must clarify something else.

4 Relations of production – powers of production

If one asks what Marx actually means by reality, the answer seems easy enough. It is generally thought that for Marx reality is the whole of society with all that belongs to it. But this answer does not correspond to the Marxist view, because it is not precise enough. According to this answer, the powers of production would also belong to social reality. But this is not the case.

In the preface to the *Critique of Political Economy* Marx writes:

> 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. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.[6]

Marx summarizes his entire analysis of existing reality in these short sentences. For Marx, moral consciousness is a specific form of social consciousness that corresponds to the economic structure of society, i.e. to the real basis or to social existence. The economic structure, the real basis, social existence thus all mean the same thing, namely the whole of the given *relations of production* which correspond to a specific level of the development of the powers of production. Thus, *reality* signifies actually and only the *economic* structure, *social existence*, and by no means the powers of production themselves. There is thus an important distinction between the relations of production and the powers of production, a distinction which is decisive for Marx's entire thought: The powers of production are understood merely as the 'material' *base*, as the foundation of the relations of production, thus of social being as the real basis, and cannot be confused with this real basis or understood to be simply included in it. Social being as the whole of the relations of production *corresponds*, according to Marx, to the powers of production. This is the reason why Marx, as we have seen, writes: 'The mode of production of material [= actual] life conditions the general process of social, political

and intellectual life.' Precisely this *mode* of production is the decisive factor; the relations of production are thus the real basis of society. For this reason, the powers of production are not the real theme of Marx's analysis of social existence or of the real basis in general, they remain external to the analysis of the capitalist *mode* of production. This is not to say that his original understanding of the essence of these powers of production did not play an important role in his critical analysis of the capitalist *mode* of production (the capitalist world). On the contrary, this understanding determines and supports *every* step of this critical analysis of social being and its ideal expression, i.e. all social forms of consciousness (e.g. legal, political, religious, moral, philosophical, economic forms of consciousness, the consciousness of the human sciences and even of the natural sciences). All of these forms of consciousness together are positive consciousness or positive knowledge. This knowledge as a whole is in principle to be characterized in the same manner as we have characterized moral consciousness in our discussion; it is an ideal expression of the real social basis or of social existence, thus of the existing relations of production, and is thus also in principle an apology for them. Marx does not shrink back from this consequence.

The distinction and opposition between the relations of production and the powers of production is however not an absolute and eternal one; it is rather a historical appearance which for this reason is subject to supersession (*Aufhelbung*). Marx's theory of revolution turns on this point. Because the powers of production are subject to a continual development, they come into conflict with the given, relatively stable relations of production on the basis of the distinction between the two. This gives rise to a contradiction which is in turn cancelled by a revolutionary change of the existing relations of production, i.e. of the real basis of society. According to Marx, in the course of the capitalist epoch this difference as a contradiction develops up to its extreme limits, whereby the possibility of a radical, revolutionary change is made possible and necessary, a necessity which itself stems from the continual development of the powers of production. Thus, when we speak of a *distinction* between the *relations of production* (= the real basis, the economic structure of society, social existence) and the *powers of production*, we must not lose sight of this historical character.

5 The basic standpoint of critique

The discussion thus far leads us to the question: how is Marx's analysis of social reality itself, as well as the analysis of moral consciousness and in general consciousness that is bound up with this reality, in principle possible at all? Furthermore, what is the origin of the possibility of viewing as such the *reversals* within this reality as well as the reversals in the corresponding ideal expressions of this reality?

In order to answer these questions, we must penetrate to the core of Marxist thought, to the point from which a survey of the whole will perhaps be possible.

We have already given an answer to what appears to be the same question in our reference to Marx's theory of surplus value. This theory opens the way to insight into the necessity of the reversals within social reality as well as morality. This theory itself amounts to insight into the real ground of the entire hitherto existing positive knowledge, which was and had to be hidden to this knowledge.

But our current question concerns the possibility in principle of just this Marxist theory, so the apparent answer cannot count as an answer to our question. How could Marx gain insight into the reversals in social reality, what is the standpoint from which the relation of commodity exchange between capitalist and worker, and above all the decisive element of this relation, the production of surplus value, appears in the manner that Marx saw and described? Marx's personal genius is not sufficient. An in principle new standpoint, which leaves behind all existing positive knowledge, and from which moral philosophy and reality turn out to be what Marx saw them to be, is required. Only from such an in principle novel standpoint is this new, *critical* knowledge and thereby the relentless critique of existing reality possible. There is not really an opposition in the sense of a theoretical controversy between the 'old' positive knowledge and critical knowledge, because critical knowledge stands on an entirely different level. Marx does not enter into a theoretical debate with this or that theory of the 'old' philosophy on *its* level, and he need not do so; he sees in them simply the ideal expression of the given social reality, and he sees that theoretical refutations of such ideal expressions of reality in abstraction from this reality itself are meaningless. Thus, critical knowledge must have an in principle new standpoint.

There is, however, the widespread opinion that Marx assumes the standpoint of the working class or of the proletariat. Although this

thesis is taken to be self-evident, it is false; besides, it is pointless, since according to Marx it is not merely a question of abolishing the capitalist class but by the same token of abolishing the working class or proletariat. Such theses simply do not take seriously Marx's demand for the revolutionary abolishment (*Aufhebung*) of the class structure of society and do not see that the two antagonistic classes are both the result of the ruling relations of production. The assertion that Marx assumes the standpoint of the proletariat or of the working class is *ipso facto* the assertion that he assumes the standpoint of the existing social relations of production, and that is simply absurd. The fact that for Marx the proletariat is the vehicle of that movement which leads to the abolishment (*Aufhebung*) of the class structure of society and thus also to its own abolishment as proletariat merely shows that Marx does not and could not assume the standpoint of the proletarian class.

On the other hand, certain historical theories concerning the threefold origin of Marx's thought are widespread. According to these theses, the new standpoint of Marxist critical knowledge is somehow dependent on its historical origin, namely on Hegel's philosophy, classical political economy and utopian socialism. But a new standpoint could never be developed on this basis. It is true, of course, that all of these played a very great role in Marx's thought, but they were not decisive. Marx holds that all three theories assume the standpoint of positive consciousness as the ideal expression of the real social relations of production and are thus in principle uncritical with reference to their real basis. Marx worked out this claim in detail, and he never could have done so if his critique of the three historical 'components' of his thought were not carried out from an in principle different standpoint which made his *specific* (and no longer merely philosophical) *critique* of all three possible. Thus, his basic standpoint simply could not have been derived from his historical studies.

Thus, the question concerning the fundamental standpoint of Marx's thought remains open. In the absence of an answer to this question, we cannot know how we should react to Marxist thought today, we cannot know the degree to which it is valid for us, what its relations to phenomenology are, etc. It is thus highly important that we find an answer to this question.

Let us be clear about the problem. We have asked how it is in principle possible that Marx should see through the whole of hitherto existing positive consciousness or knowledge, especially moral

consciousness, as an ideal expression or picture of the existing relations of production, i.e. of the real social basis, with all of the inversions we have seen to be at work in this knowledge and in the real basis. We are obviously confronted with two modes of consciousness or with two completely different types of knowledge. The one is positive, traditional knowledge, the other is Marx's critical knowledge itself. Figure 9.1 illustrates this structure.



Figure 9.1

Critical knowledge comprehends positive knowledge and its real basis in their specific interrelations; these two constitute its object. The question concerns the ground of this critical knowledge itself. In purely formal terms, we have the following two possibilities:

(a) Critical knowledge or consciousness itself is grounded in the real social basis. But it is already clear that this cannot be the case. Should the ground of critical knowledge or consciousness itself turn out to lie in the real social basis, then according to Marx himself it could never be critical with regard to this positive knowledge and its social basis; it would be simply impossible as such.
(b) Critical knowledge or consciousness could be grounded in itself. But this could be true only in a very specific sense, and not in the sense in question. This self-grounding of critical consciousness *as consciousness* would only be possible against the background of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*. This proposition embodies the principle of the absolute self-grounding or self-certainty of consciousness and by the same token its complete independence from any and every external reality. This is the absolute foundation of philosophy from Descartes to Hegel and on to Husserl. We have found this independence from external reality at work in Kantian moral philosophy. But with his very first step, Marx left behind any such self-grounding and self-certainty of consciousness as consciousness, of knowledge as knowledge, and in this manner discovered that this absolute independence and

self-grounding is a mere appearance, behind (beneath) which lies concealed the fact that this knowledge is completely dependent upon social reality or the real basis as its ideal expression, as photograph to original.

This insight has the result that Marx's critical method cannot recapitulate the path or method of transcendental philosophy from Descartes to Hegel and Husserl; he can no longer assume the basic standpoint of this philosophy.

If our theme bears the title 'phenomenology and Marxism', and if 'phenomenology' means Husserl's transcendental phenomenological philosophy, which returns to the Cartesian standpoint of the absolute self-certainty of consciousness, then we have to say that Marx's thought has absolutely nothing in common with this phenomenology and is at no point compatible with it. When this is clearly seen, we have to agree with Martin Heidegger's remark that Husserl's philosophy does not allow the possibility of a fruitful dialogue with Marx.

Thus, critical knowledge, Marx's knowledge, is not self-grounding, its fundamental standpoint is not to be found immanent to this thought itself. If it reflects upon itself concerning the *conditions* of its existence – and it does indeed do so – it cannot take itself to be independent and self-grounding, but rather must see itself as referred to its own material conditions. And this is precisely the direction our inquiry must take. What is the material condition of the existence of critical knowledge or critical consciousness? For Marx, this condition is embodied by the actual *powers of production* which – as we have already seen – are not the real basis of society or of social existence.

We must pay careful attention to the fact that the material powers of production are not only the condition and ground of critical knowledge, but also the condition of the real social basis – the relations of production – and also of the ideal expression of this basis, i.e. positive consciousness or positive knowledge. Figure 9.2 illustrates this structure.

The powers of production are condition and ground of critical knowledge as well as of the real social basis and the positive knowledge which corresponds to it as its ideal expression. There are no reversals in these powers of production. But their immense wealth is negated by the given social relations of production or the real social basis, and reduced to a single relation, to commodity and exchange value (cf. the quotation from the *Grundrisse*, p. 248). This negation and reduction is identical to the negation and reduction of the use value of objects

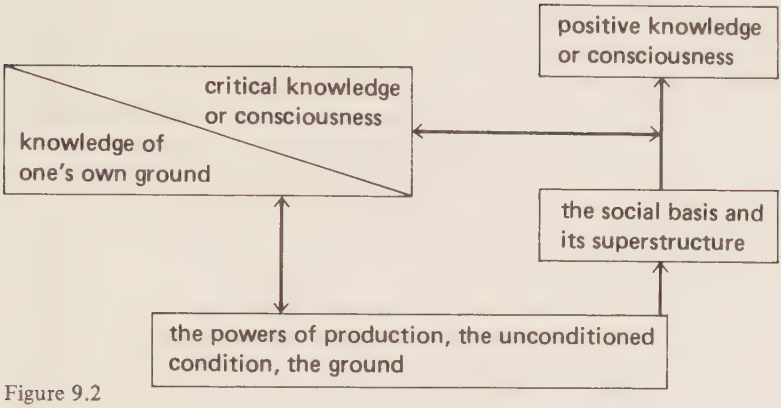


Figure 9.2

to mere commodities or that of the *essentially human powers* to mere labour power as a specific commodity. Modern powers of production, which have really developed the entire *essentially human wealth*, encompass the real human individuals as species-beings as well as the entirety of their means of production along with real nature as their own *possibility*. Viewed from the point of view of the 'material' powers of production, nature appears as their possibility. The 'materiality' of the powers of production does not signify a 'matter' in the sense of traditional materialism, but is only intended to point to the fact that in accordance with the Marxist understanding the powers of production are understood as *real*, i.e. not as something merely 'spiritual' or merely 'subjective'; this 'materiality' means as much as 'reality', but not in the sense of traditional philosophy. 'Materiality' thus encompasses not merely the 'material' (in a narrow sense) but also the 'spiritual' (e.g. the knowledge of the modern sciences).

The crucial insight at this point is that only the real social basis, social being or the existing relation of production – which are for Marx one and the same – yield the negation and reduction of the immense real wealth of the developed powers of production to a mere 'abstraction', as Marx puts it, to capital or to value as exchange value. This reversal occurs in the relations of production, not in the powers of production themselves. A thing is not valuable or a commodity on the basis of natural properties inherent to it as a thing, but only as a social relation – this is for Marx an abstraction which appears as a property of the real thing. This is precisely what Marx means by fetishism, and this is why he holds it to be a 'mystification'.

What does this have to do with our problem? How is critical consciousness or critical knowledge itself possible? To be sure, critical knowledge is founded in the powers of production, has its ground in them. *But critical knowledge is what it is, namely critical knowledge, only with reference to or in correlation with the existing real basis and positive knowledge as the ideal expression of this basis.* When it is removed from this correlation with the object of its critique (e.g. under the presupposition of a genuine revolutionary transformation of the existing social relations of production, which as a whole constitute social existence) critical knowledge ceases to be critical knowledge. And what remains of it can only be a moment of the powers of production themselves. So it would appear, at least. It is of great importance that this state of affairs be comprehended in terms of the whole of Marxist thought. Critical consciousness or critical knowledge constitutes itself as critical only with reference to the existing positivity. This positivity must however be understood strictly as the real basis or as the whole of the relations of production, i.e. of social being along with the positive consciousness or knowledge that corresponds to it. But since the ground and thus the basic standpoint of critical knowledge is to be found only in the powers of production, which as such are recognized in this knowledge as the foundation of its critique of existing reality, this critical knowledge is – once the existing structures have been abolished by a revolution – nothing more than knowledge of its own real foundation and is thus in principle an *un-critical* knowledge. But when it has 'become' uncritical with respect to the powers of production – and that means, really, 'always has been' instead of 'becomes' – this knowledge cannot be understood to have sunk back to the level of the old positive knowledge. We must distinguish two moments in critical knowledge. The first is the critical moment with respect to the real social basis, the second is the uncritical moment with respect to its own real ground – the powers of production; in its uncritical moment it appears to belong to the powers of production themselves. *Only* as this second moment would the new knowledge survive the transformation of the existing social positivity (i.e. the capitalist relations of production) by a revolutionary act. Such an act would also abolish the break or contradiction between the powers of production and the social relations of production (i.e. the real social basis); critical knowledge would have no object for its critique and would itself cease to exist. Consciousness or knowledge would be nothing more (!) than the universal consciousness or knowledge of the

wealth of universal production for the universal satisfaction of universal needs. There would – according to Marx – be only *one single* science, the science of man.

We have seen that the powers of production play a fundamental role in Marx's thought. His original understanding of the essence of the powers of production determines and carries his entire analysis of the process of capital and thus of the entire capitalist epoch, although the powers of production themselves are not the real theme of this analysis.

The main problem in interpreting Marx's entire thought is thus not his analysis of the process of capital as a whole or the specific aspects of this analysis, is not his critique; the problem concerns his original understanding of this unconditioned condition, the real powers of production. And the problem concerns *these* powers not in the form of mere value, of the commodity or of capital, although in the context of the existing positivity they appear as reduced to such, but in that which was and is concealed by this form of capital, the powers of production in their fully developed wealth. To paraphrase Marx, we might say that to liberate the powers of production from their narrow bourgeois form is to lay open their actual *human* wealth.

6 The problem of Karl Marx's philosophy

On the assumption that the basic standpoint and the foundation of Marx's thought as a whole lies in the real powers of production, it remains to ask what this really means. The first central moment of the powers of production is according to Marx man as a conscious productive power, the really (sensuously) effective individuals who in and through their universal *production*, understood as the genuine expression or activation of all of their *essential powers*, satisfy their universal needs and thus continually develop themselves as ends in themselves. Really producing and enjoying in this manner, they are essentially *social* and in the final analysis *species-being*, the beings (*Wesen*) of the species. All objects, individually and as a whole, belong to the species-being or the species as their own objective reality, externalized in production. The immense wealth of the developed powers of production (including nature) is for Marx the externalized wealth of man (of his satisfaction) as the species-being. Consciousness or knowledge is understood only as the conscious species which knows itself. Thus, by the whole of the powers of production Marx means exactly that

which he essentially means by species. The self-conscious species is the authentic, real objective subject of the whole.

We must understand the *concept of species*, which Marx took over from Feuerbach and often uses in his early writings, against the background of his later works. Understood in this manner, the species is no longer a 'static' concept of the essence of man in the sense of Feuerbachian metaphysics. *The species is the whole of the given, historically developed powers of production in conjunction with the relations of production which correspond to them* (and not understood in opposition or contradiction to them). Being (*Sein oder Wesen*) as *species* in Marx's early writings can thus only be understood in this sense, since the powers of production in their real actualization, i.e. in production, are *ipso facto* the actualization or the genuine manifestation of the totality of essentially human powers in which all historically developed needs and modes of satisfaction are included. Man as the self-conscious species and totality of his essential powers is thus not separated as subjectivity from his actual objects as objects of the actualization of his essential powers.

But our inquiry cannot stop here. We must inquire into the inner structure of the powers of production. According to Marx, we must distinguish three inseparable moments within the powers of production. They are:

(a) the factually effective human individual as the self-conscious, subjective productive power with all of the wealth of his productive activities, essential capacities and satisfactions;
(b) the whole of the means of production; and
(c) the factual, actual *production* itself as the unity of the first two elements. It is only in and through production that the first two elements are real, exist.

We must be very clear about this simple situation. If man is understood as a productive *power*, then he, as this power, has reality (being) only in the real actualization or manifestation of this essential power, otherwise not. The real actualization of productive power is production. On the other hand, the sensuous-material object is only real when human productive power works on it. Here we can see that production is of *decisive* significance in the context of the powers of production as a whole, that it is only through production that the other moments of the powers of production – man himself and his object – attain reality, i.e. *real being*. Production is *self-determining*. It is very important that

this be seen clearly, since that by means of which man (the real-effective individual) and his object really exist is *production alone*, which is essentially to be understood as the actualization or manifestation of all human essential powers. Marx expressly says that production is the *condition* of human experience. It goes without saying that objects do not exist without production. *This* existence, *this* real being is posited and determined by production, and for this reason we say that production *posits and determines being*. Man, understood according to his essence as productive power, necessarily produces in order to be real at all, and for this reason he cannot be something static. He is subject only as the being that necessarily produces, his *production* is his *objective subjectivity*, from which he has his real being.

What about the *means of production*? In the context of the *developed* powers of production the means is that which one usually calls the unity of modern science and modern technology, and which Marx understands *instrumentally* as means. They are means, because it is *by means of* them that man manifests and actualizes his essential powers. In being understood instrumentally in this manner, modern science and technology are also understood anthropologically. Modern *production* as the decisive moment of the powers of production is thus mediated by these means, modern science and technology, and is only possible as so mediated. Production can only be characterized *as modern* (developed, as Marx puts it) in terms of its dependence on the unity of modern science and technology, which itself was developed in the course of the continual development of the powers of production.[7] These means, i.e. modern science and technology, suddenly receive a decisive role in the context of modern, i.e. developed production. Modern science/technology cannot be merely a means of the actuation of essential human powers, they become the determining condition of this actuation. Modern, developed *production*, which Marx essentially understands as actuation and manifestation of all essential powers, is now with historical necessity necessarily dependent on modern science/technology in such a way that science/technology affects production itself, indeed – and this is the decisive point – *determines* it. In no previous epoch of world history was production so completely determined by the exact natural (and social) sciences, never was production so *technical* in the modern sense of the term, as is the case today. This is the point, and the only point, at which our modern epoch of world history distinguishes itself from all previously known epochs. The consequence is that the decisive and determining moment

is no longer production as the actuation and manifestation of essential human powers, but rather science/technology – and this with historical inevitability. It determines the *mode of being* of everything which is touched by modern, technically conditioned production, and thus determines the mode of being of man himself. The *capital*-instrumentalist as well as the *anthropological*-instrumentalist understanding of science/technology necessarily miss this decisive significance of modern science and technology. But the fact is that this understanding governs man's *attitude* towards that production which is determined by modern science/technology. This attitude is exhausted by strained attempts to gain control of modern science/technology, and the production which is conditioned by it, as mere means, an enterprise which can never succeed once their *epochal* significance has become determining for being itself. And our theme here is the 'practical' conduct of man.

Marx does not see this entire state of affairs at all, and from his basic standpoint it is *not even visible*. How is it possible that modern science/technology, and no longer production as the actuation of essential human powers, determines the real being of man and objects? This remains outside of the field of vision which Marx's basic standpoint opens up. Marx can view modern science and technology *in principle only* as a means, can understand them only anthropologically-instrumentally, but not as *determining being itself*. From his standpoint he can only repeatedly voice the demand that modern science/technology be merely a means subject to and ruled by man. But this only serves to increase the tension in human conduct.

Let us return to our problem. If we now ask what is going on in moral philosophy, also known as practical philosophy, we must come to the following conclusion: although we have contrasted the basically *affirmative, uncritical* moment in Marxist thought with the critical moment, his critical thought, whose basic elements we have sketched, has blocked itself off once and for all from the possibility of making positive use of traditional moral philosophy and of philosophy in general in his own affirmative thought. His affirmative, uncritical thought is thought of the powers of production or of the human species as a whole.[8] It is thus – following Marx – in principle impossible to take over any elements from traditional philosophy or from consciousness as the ideal expression of capitalist reality into the new 'Marxist' positive thought. Why? Because the philosophy of the old style, regardless when it arose, turns out from Marx's standpoint to be a mere ideal expression or image of the real basis as the totality

of the relations of production based on exchange value and capital. And as such this traditional philosophy has no meaning outside of this specific reference to the existing real basis. It is thus useless for the new positive thought of the powers of production. Philosophy is abolished as such in being realized. But this only means that it must be grounded in the described reality itself, and not in itself, not in consciousness, in the *ego cogito, ergo sum*.

From the Marxist standpoint it is senseless to want to develop a specifically 'Marxist' ethics. 'Marxist' aesthetics, logic, epistemology, etc., for this attempt can only produce monsters; all such attempts, and many Marxists have set out on this road, are fantastic mixtures out of some poorly understood ideas from Marx and elements of traditional positive consciousness. From the Marxist standpoint, such attempts turn out to be nothing other than a new kind of apology for the long since existing relations of production, which merely appear in a slightly changed form. The old philosophy, or rather philosophy of the old type, is thus fruitless – when viewed from the Marxist standpoint, that is. This is not to say that we may or ought simply to forget or reject it, that we should no longer teach and learn it, or investigate this or that aspect of it. Quite the contrary: we *must* study it, perhaps more intensively than ever before. However, doing so is not genuine philosophy. But even if we were to elaborate new philosophical systems, this would not be genuine philosophizing according to Marx.

Once we have reached this point, it would seem that our options for philosophical thought are reduced to two possibilities. We must either dogmatically accept the basic Marxist position without reservations, or we must reject it completely as something which is completely invalid and continue to philosophize in the old style in peace, to move along the well-marked paths of philosophy, i.e. to repeat the old, already abandoned positions of philosophical thought, thus keeping up the appearance of the 'development of the discipline'.

The possibility of a third way for contemporary thought could perhaps reveal itself only if we should encounter something at the core of Marxist thought which in principle cannot be grasped and explained with Marxist conceptual tools, i.e. is fundamentally not even visible from his standpoint. But this something must also elude the grasp of the conceptual tools of the old philosophy which Marx criticized, for we would otherwise fall back into the old style of philosophical thought: it must be *novel*.

But why should we even attempt an investigation of this sort? What is the source of the thrust of our discussion up to this point? Is this merely a historicism and scholarly industry, or are there perhaps deeper reasons for such an investigation? Our general topic here is practical philosophy. This title points to human *conduct*. The question is thus how we ourselves, as concrete human beings here and now, conduct ourselves, how we can exist at all once we have seen and reflected upon the real meaning of the situation we have uncovered in our discussion, a meaning which touches the deepest roots of our life and being. *That* is what has been at issue all along.

We ask – following Marx to the deepest roots of his thought – what is his own, new, positive thought; how are we to understand it? We said that this new positive thought is the thought of the powers of production or of the species. What is the relation between this *novel thought* and the powers of production? But this question is itself misleading. If we are not constantly aware of the fact that for Marx this new consciousness of thought or knowledge is always the consciousness, etc., of the concrete, materially sensuous, effective individual – man – as the central moment of the powers of production themselves, we might unknowingly fall back into the old philosophy or metaphysics, simply overlooking its novelty in the attempt to explain this new kind of relation in the old style. Marx also calls the species as a whole simply *being* (*das Sein*), and speaks of a relation between thought and being when he says, 'Thought and being are thus to be sure *distinct*, but by the same token in *unity* with one another.'[9] (We must understand the species or being in the sense elaborated.)

From the basic Marxist point of view we are thus barred from accounting for the novel relation between thought and being in the old philosophical or metaphysical manner. We cannot say that this relation between thought and being is a picturing relation or a constitutional relation (the latter for example in the sense of Husserl's philosophy). This is out of the question because for Marx this new thought *as* thought is only *one* among a multiplicity of other real relations between human beings and being as the whole of the objective species, only *one* way among others in which the real world is appropriated, others being, e.g. sensation, feeling, willing, working, enjoying, loving, hating, etc. Marx discusses this in the *Paris Manuscripts*:

> Man appropriates to himself his manifold essence in an all-sided way, thus as the whole man. Every one of his *human* relations

> to the world – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, perceiving, sensing, wishing, acting, loving – in short, all the organs of his individuality, which are immediately communal in form, are an appropriation of the object in their *objective* relation (*Verhalten*) or their relation to it. This appropriation of *human* actuality and its relation to the object is the *actualization of human actuality*. It is therefore as varied as are the *determinations* of the human *essence* and *activities*. It is human *efficacy* and human *suffering*, for suffering, humanly conceived, is a satisfaction of the self in man.[10]

Thus, the relation of man to real being is grasped in its totality only when one understands it as *production*. As we have already seen, the factual, real externalization of the essential human powers, their actuation, is production. This 'being' is not thereby turned into an 'abstraction' all over again; it is rather the whole of the powers of production in their actuation and movement, precisely in production.

At this point in our considerations we are again suddenly confronted with something completely unexpected. As we have seen, modern science/technology plays a decisive role in the developed powers of production, such that they determine and bear production as a whole; in this manner they are determinative of being itself and not mere means. If they are understood as means, this is an utter impossibility, so they are forced back into the role of means, but they can never be displaced from their epochal-new decisive role. The tension rises even higher, and this state of affairs simply cannot be seen through and thought out from the Marxist standpoint. But the old philosophy is just as impotent, since Marx has already critically seen through the positivism of its principle with respect to the existing real basis of society (the existing relations of production).

How and from which standpoint is this state of affairs to be thought through?

Something unexpected arises on another side too. The novel positive thought as Marx would have us understand it has turned out to be a moment of the powers of production themselves, it is not external to them. But it is also undeniable that man, who is really effective in this manner as species-being, along with the totality of his real objects, is to be thought as the whole in precisely this manner. Marx's own new positive thought is a thought of the totality of the powers of production in connection with the relations of production which do not contradict

them, both understood as the species or as real being. But *this* thought (*'Marxist'* thought), which thinks man in his relation to being or the world in *this* manner, obviously is not and cannot be identical with that thought or consciousness which is included and enclosed in every process of production itself. These are two totally distinct modes of consciousness (and thus of thought, of knowledge).

This 'Marxist' thought is not absorbed without remainder into the powers of production themselves, since a distance, a difference is required if these powers of production are to be thought as a whole. It is this difference which makes it possible to view the powers of production as a whole, i.e. as a world. The point that distinguishes these two modes of thought is very simple. The first ('Marxist') mode of thought thinks the *totality*; the other thought, enclosed in the powers of production, never thinks the totality, remaining merely a moment of concrete production; in this precise form it appears in the developed powers of production in the form of the modern sciences (on the assumption that they have been freed from their alienated form). Marx also calls the whole of the powers of production *being* and in so doing speaks of a relation between thought and this being. To repeat the quotation: 'Thought and being to be sure are thus *distinct*, but by the same token in *unity* with one another.' Marx describes the *unity*. But the question concerning the nature of the *difference*, and the circumstance that it is precisely this difference that 'allows' factual man according to his own nature not to be merely productive power and not to exhaust himself therein, were simply skipped over by Marx. And given his standpoint this was necessary and irrevocable. Marx simply skips over the question of how the difference between this new thought and being is to be thought in its decisive significance for concrete-factual man, what the sense of this difference might be. The fact that man can see himself in his totality in the sense of the powers of production or the species is evidence for the fact that the human being is not absorbed without remainder in the productive power or the species. But Marx does not ask what this is.

For Marx, the human being is the species or the totality of all his essential powers and thus the authentic productive power. But we discover a strange 'surplus' in this human being, a surplus which does not express itself as productive power and is thus not visible from the Marxist standpoint.

This 'surplus' is even more clearly visible from another angle. Although for Marx man is essentially the species as the totality of all

of his essential powers (the essential powers are his essence – that is what we have to hear) – *he dies*. Man as the individual species-being is *mortal*. And the only thing Marx has to say to us about human mortality is: '*Death* seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the particular individual and to contradict the species' unity, but the particular individual is only a *particular generic being* and as such mortal.'[11] Marx takes this contradiction between the species and the individual to be a contradiction between man and being (as the totality of the powers of production), since in the context of this quotation Marx also calls the whole of the species, whereby the whole of the powers of production is to be understood, 'being'. Thus, this distinction between being and man appears in spite of their essential unity, in spite of the fact that man as concrete individual is only the specific, individualized and concretized species, is only a specific productive power. Marx is obviously not very concerned about the absolutely unavoidable finitude of this individual, his inevitable death; he simply neglects this facticity in favour of the species, i.e. in favour of the totality of the powers of production and of production along with the satisfactions which belong to it. Thus, he can also write:

> The individual and generic life of man are not *distinct*, however much – and necessarily so – the mode of existence of individual life is either a more *particular* or more *general* mode of generic life, or generic life a more *particular* or *universal* mode of individual life. As *generic consciousness* man asserts his real *social life* and merely repeats his actual existence in thought just as, conversely, generic existence asserts itself in generic consciousness and in its universality exists explicitly as a thinking being.[12]

Thus, Marx thinks that the entire distinction between the individual and the species consists in the fact that the individual is merely a more specific or more general concretization of the species itself; as a concrete individual man is merely a *specific* species-being. The fact that he must, as such, die, this is for Marx a trivial accident; and for this reason the distinction between the concrete individual and the species is in Marx basically no distinction at all. They constitute a unity, and this is all that matters for Marx.

But in spite of this asserted unity, there is 'something' proper to every concrete individual, something which simply cannot be inherent in the species. This is the absolutely unavoidable finitude and mortality of the individual, his facticity. Concrete, factual individuals die, the

species does not: the species is fundamentally a *death-less* being. If the concrete individual man were to see only the species-being in himself, nothing but productive power, he would completely lose sight of his death, his mortality. And this is precisely what is impossible for an individual living his real life. Marx simply ignores this human facticity when he asserts that man's individual and species life are nevertheless not different. Such an assertion is blind to the entire, all-encompassing realm of the facticity of the individual, which extends into every moment of this individual life and stamps it as a human life; it neglects this realm in favour of the species understood as the whole of the powers of production. This occurs in spite of the fact that Marx wanted to thematize precisely the concrete human individual, liberating it from its reduction to mere labour power as a commodity which includes all other reductions. But his original understanding of this human being as species or as the totality of the powers of production blinds him to the facticity of man which manifests itself most clearly in his mortality. And this facticity of mortality is not unimportant. It is decisively present in one way or the other in all human production, in all human satisfaction, in every expression of human life. It is not something theoretical, nor something practical, not a thing at all, not even a thing of thought (*Gedankending*). It is thus more than questionable whether human activity can become visible *as human* when this facticity is systematically ignored. But it is also by no means clear just what kind of thought might be adequate to this fact of death in relation to life. Our topic here is contemporary 'practical philosophy', and this topic, when understood correctly, might well move in the realm we have sketched, although it is also misleading.

Marx certainly knew – as does each of us – that human beings die, that the concrete individual is mortal in the sense that its life comes to an end. But Marx overlooks the simple fact that man *lives* as a mortal creature. And this is by no means equivalent to the mere statement that the individual dies at the end of its life. And it may well be that when we speak of the life-world, this simple fact that man *lives* as a mortal creature will be seen to be the basic structure of the life-world, fundamental for all other structures. From his standpoint Marx necessarily overlooks the fact that the facticity of every human act of production, satisfaction and enjoyment is qua *human* act essentially determined by human *mortality*. This human mortality, with which every human being *lives*, cannot be ignored as something towards which this creature is indifferent, which is merely accidental, for it itself *belongs*

to the human being. How this is to be adequately thought remains unclear, since the new positive thought which Marx projects is of no help at this point. However, neither can the traditional philosophy and metaphysics circumscribe that point from which this problem can be attacked. Neither the old styles of thought nor Marxist thought offers us an appropriate *topos*. We thus find ourselves in a u-topia; we are displaced. It would seem that it is the whole of philosophical thought to date which ties us to this u-topia and leaves us without any orientation.

Thus, talk about practical philosophy is insidious, it can mislead us; to be sure, it speaks most decisively about what it is to be human, but can we still try to think about what it is to be human in a practical-philosophical manner after all that has been said? What have we said? In the first place, that we do not have the option of returning to the old philosophy or to positive knowledge as a whole. But we encountered three unexpected problems, problems which remain invisible, unexplainable and thus obscure for the Marxist standpoint. The first is modern science and technology, which is taken to be a means and yet turns out to be *determinative of being itself*. The second is that essential difference or distance to being as species in the sense of the totality of the powers of production which is intrinsic to man as man. The third is that facticity of mortality, according to which man *lives* as a mortal, such that mortality must belong to the essence of man himself. All of these are questions, questions for which I do not have any ready-made answers. But genuine questions are of greater value for thought than ready-made answers.

The fundamental constellation of human life today is an unbridgeable schism and thus a difference between that subjectivity which is active in this or that manner and the facticity of mortality. It is unimportant whether this subjectivity be called spirit, will to life, will to power, realm of values, species, totality of essential powers, totality of powers of production or whatever. This discrepancy, this difference in the essence of humanity, must first be experienced. And for precisely this reason, the basic position of Marx's thought remains valid for us today, *but not in any dogmatic sense*.

Notes

1 Immanuel Kant, *Kant's Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. T. K. Abbott, London, 1909, p. 119; *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton, New York, Barnes & Noble, 1948, p. 91.

2 G. W. F. Hegel, 'Spirit sure of itself. Morality', VI C.
3 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, New York, Vintage Books, 1973.
4 Frederick Engels, *Zur Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, in *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 22, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1963, p. 316f.
5 Cf. A. Schopenhauer, *Preisschrift über die Grundlage der Moral*, II, §7.
6 Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1970, pp. 20–1.
7 According to Marx, one can view the historical development of modern technology and science from two different sides. In the first place, modern technology certainly was developed under the conditions of the process of capital, and in this development capitalist competition plays an important role. But for capital, science-technology (which itself appears as a form of capital) is an – always important – *means* of its self-realization. Since capital is the genuine subject of the capitalist world epoch, modern science-technology is the *means* which it posits for its own self-realization; it is thus a means for the goal of the faster quantitative growth of capital. Thus, in the capitalist world epoch modern science-technology has a *capital-instrumentalist* character.

   On the other hand, modern science-technology – freed from its narrow form as capital, thus essentially – is a means that man himself (who is the actual subject) posits for the actuation of his essential powers; thus, it is the means for the mediation between man and his object or actual object. Thus, Marx understands modern science-technology essentially *anthropologically-instrumentally*. Only as such is it a moment of the powers of production.
8 This is demonstrated in an especially instructive and revealing manner in the *Paris Manuscripts*, in the chapter 'Private Property and Communism' and in other places. But it should be noted that one cannot read the early works of Marx alone, but must understand them in the context of his later works.
9 Karl Marx, *Pariser Manuskripte, III*, *Marx-Engels Werke*, Supplementary volume I, Berlin, Dietz Verlag, 1967, p. 539.
10 Ibid., pp. 539f.
11 Ibid., p. 539.
12 Ibid.