

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Part 1: Marx

1. Marx's early writings

There is a sense in which Marx's writings span three centuries. Although Marx was born nearly two decades after the opening of the nineteenth century, and died well before the end of it, his writings have had their greatest influence – certainly in the political sphere, and possibly even in the intellectual world – in the twentieth century. But they have their roots in the late eighteenth century, in the outburst of social and political changes stemming from the Revolution of 1789 in France. Marx's works thus draw the shattering effects of the French Revolution into the modern age, and express a line of direct continuity between 1789 and the October Revolution in Russia of almost one hundred and thirty years later.

While rather little is known of Marx's early childhood, various fragments and letters survive from his adolescent pen. The earliest of these are three short essays which Marx wrote during the course of his final school examinations. Inevitably enough, these are of little intrinsic interest or originality, but they do give an indication of the enthusiastic grandiosity which inspired many of Marx's subsequent adult works.¹ The most novel of the three is called 'Reflections of a young man on choosing a career', and discusses the moral obligations and the range of freedoms open to an individual who is choosing which vocation to follow in his life. 'The main principle', Marx concludes, . . . which must guide us in the selection of a vocation is the welfare of humanity, our own perfection. One should not think that these two interests combat each other, that one must destroy the other. Rather, man's nature makes it possible for him to reach his fulfilment only by working for the perfection and welfare of his society. . . History calls those the greatest men who ennobled themselves by working for the universal.²

Such an outlook eventually led Marx, as a university student, to close study of Hegel, in whose philosophy we find precisely this: a theory of the self-fulfilment, of the culmination of 'our own perfection'. A letter which Marx wrote to his father in 1837 describes how, finding the philosophy of Kant and Fichte unsatisfactory, and finally rejecting his youthful love of lyrical poetry, Marx 'dived into the ocean' of Hegel.³ But even while he was first under the

¹ It might be noted that some commentators have attempted to discern in these essays a number of themes which were fundamental to Marx's later writings (cf. A. Cornu: *Karl Marx et Friedrich Engels* (Paris, 1955), vol. 1, pp. 65–6). But the most striking characteristic of the essays is their conventional adolescent idealism.

² *WYM*, p. 39.

³ *WYM*, pp. 40–50.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 Part 1: Marx

spell of Hegel's philosophical system as a student, it is clear that Marx was at no point a blindly orthodox Hegelian. The genesis of Marx's initial attraction to Hegelianism is revealed in his description of the notes which, as a student in Berlin, he made of his readings in philosophy and law.⁴ The Kantian dualism of what 'is' and what 'ought to be', seems to Marx – and this view he continued to maintain throughout the rest of his life – totally irreconcilable with the demands of the individual who wishes to apply philosophy to the pursuit of his objectives. The philosophy of Fichte is subject to the same objection: it separates the properties of logic and truth (such as is involved in mathematics and empirical science respectively) from the intervention of the human subject in a continuously developing world. This standpoint, therefore, has to be supplanted by one which recognises that 'the object itself must be studied in its development; there must be no arbitrary divisions; the rationale (*Vernunft*) of the thing itself must be disclosed in its contradictoriness and find its unity in itself'.⁵

Marx discovered himself unable to resolve these issues alone, and was thus unavoidably led to pursue in his own thought the process of evolution followed by German idealist philosophy as a whole – moving from Kant to Fichte and thence on to Hegel.⁶ However, what first drew Marx to Hegel was neither the impressive comprehensiveness of the latter's philosophy, nor the specific content of his philosophical premises as such, but the closure which Hegel effected between the dichotomous strands of classical German philosophy which formed the principal legacy of Kant. The impact of Hegel upon Marx was mediated by two partially separate sources, each of which involved the conjunction of Hegelianism to political standpoints at variance with the conservatism of Hegel.⁷ One of these influences is to be found in the teachings of Eduard Gans, whose lectures at Berlin made some considerable impression upon Marx. Gans seasoned Hegel with a strong element of Saint-Simonianism.⁸ However, Marx had almost certainly been exposed to contact with Saint-Simonian ideas earlier on in his youth, and a case can be made for the view that the influence of Saint-Simon's writings over Marx in his formative years was in some respects almost as great as that of Hegel.⁹

The second factor conditioning Marx's acceptance of Hegel was Marx's membership of the 'Doctor's Club' in Berlin University. In this circle, Marx

⁴ *WYM*, pp. 42–7.

⁵ *WYM*, p. 43; *We, Ergänzungsband (Ergd)*, vol. 1, p. 5.

⁶ cf. Robert C. Tucker: *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1965), pp. 31–69.

⁷ On the views of the 'young Hegel', cf. the analysis given in Georg Lukács: *Der junge Hegel* (Zurich and Vienna, 1948), pp. 27–130.

⁸ See Hanns Günther Reissner: *Eduard Gans* (Tübingen, 1965).

⁹ This view is stated forcefully in Georges Gurvitch: 'La sociologie du jeune Marx', in *La Vocation actuelle de la sociologie* (Paris, 1950), pp. 568–80. This chapter is replaced in the second edition (1963) by a more general discussion entitled 'La sociologie de Karl Marx'.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Marx's early writings* 3

made the acquaintance of a heterogeneous assortment of young followers of Hegel, of whom Bruno Bauer was the outstanding figure.¹⁰ The immediate problems which concerned Bauer, and the group of 'Young Hegelians' which formed around him, preserved the concern with Christian theology which was intrinsic to Hegel's own writings. Marx's doctoral dissertation, which is concerned with a comparative discussion of the philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus, shows the strong imprint of Bauer's ideas. But at about the same time as Marx submitted his doctoral thesis, Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) was published.¹¹ Engels later wrote of the impact of the book upon the Young Hegelians: 'The spell was broken: the "system" was shattered and thrown aside... Enthusiasm was general: we all became at once "Feuerbachians".'¹² The immediate influence of the work upon Marx's developing thought was almost certainly, in fact, more diffuse and less immediate than is described in Engels' account, written over forty years later.¹³ Marx no more adopted Feuerbach's position in a wholesale fashion than he had that of Hegel.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it cannot be doubted that the influence of Feuerbach among the Young Hegelians was dominant by the end of 1842. Marx's critical discussion of Hegel's philosophy of the state, written in 1843, is heavily influenced by Feuerbach: and the standpoint of the latter is basic to the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844.

In *The Essence of Christianity*, and other subsequent publications, Feuerbach seeks to reverse the idealistic premises of Hegel's philosophy, stating bluntly that the starting-point of the study of humanity must be 'real man', living in 'the real, material world'. Whereas Hegel sees the 'real' as emanating from the 'divine', Feuerbach argues that the divine is an illusory product of the real; being, existence, precede thought in the sense in that men do not reflect upon the world prior to acting in it: 'thought proceeds from being, not being from thought.'¹⁵ Hegel viewed the development of mankind in terms of God having been divided against himself. In Feuerbach's philosophy, God can only exist in so far as man is divided against himself, in so far as man is alienated from himself. God is a fantasied being upon whom man has pro-

¹⁰ For a recent discussion of the influence of Bauer upon Marx, see David McClellan: *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London, 1969), pp. 48ff and *passim*; see also the same author's *Marx before Marxism* (London, 1970).

¹¹ Ludwig Feuerbach: *The Essence of Christianity* (New York, 1957).

¹² *SW*, vol. 2, p. 368.

¹³ cf. McClellan: *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, pp. 92–7. McClellan's claim that 'Engels' description of the effect of the book is completely at variance with the facts' (p. 93), however, is exaggerated. cf. Marx's well-known statement, written in the early part of 1842, that 'there is no other way to truth and freedom but through the "river of fire"' (Feuer-Bach: lit., 'brook of fire'). *WYM*, p. 95.

¹⁴ It might be remarked that Feuerbach's own views were characterised by a number of deep-rooted ambiguities, and underwent some definite changes, over the period from 1834 to 1843. cf. Feuerbach: *Sämmtliche Werke*, vols. 1–3. (There are some errors, however, in the allocation of writings to particular years in this collection.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.* vol. 2, p. 239.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Part 1: Marx

jected his own highest powers and faculties, who thus is seen as perfect and all-powerful, and in contrast to whom man himself appears as limited and imperfect.

But at the same time, according to Feuerbach, the depth of the comparison between God and man can be a positive source of inspiration to the realisation of human capabilities. The task of philosophy is to enable man to recover his alienated self through transformative criticism, by reversing the Hegelian perspective, and thus asserting the primacy of the material world. Religion must be replaced by humanism, whereby the love formerly directed towards God will become focused upon man, leading to a recovery of the unity of mankind, man for himself. 'Whereas the old philosophy said: what is not thought, has no existence, so the new philosophy says, on the contrary: that which is not loved, which cannot be loved, has no existence.'¹⁶

The effect of assimilating the ideas of Feuerbach was to turn Marx back to Hegel, in an attempt to draw out the implications of the new perspective, and especially to apply it to the sphere of politics. The aspects of Feuerbach's philosophy which attracted Marx were essentially the same as those which originally drew him to Hegel: the possibilities which seemed to be offered of fusing analysis and criticism, and thereby of 'realising' philosophy. It is usually held that Marx's early writings on alienation in politics and industry represent little more than an extension of Feuerbach's 'materialism' to spheres of society not dealt with by the latter. This is misleading, however: Marx does not accept, at any point, what Feuerbach considers to be the primary significance of his philosophy – that it provides an 'alternative' to, and thereby a *replacement of*, Hegel. Even when most imbibed with enthusiasm for Feuerbach, Marx seeks to juxtapose him to Hegel. Marx thus succeeds in retaining the historical perspective which, while central to Hegel's philosophy, is, in effect if not in intention, largely abandoned by Feuerbach.¹⁷

The state and 'true democracy'

Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy of the state, written in 1843, is the first publication in which Marx's nascent conception of historical materialism¹⁸ can be discerned, and forms the starting-point of the treatment of alienation which Marx set out at greater length in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* one year later. Marx proceeds via a close textual analysis of Hegel, 'inverting' Hegel in the manner of Feuerbach. 'Hegel', Marx says, 'subjectifies the predicates, the objects, but he subjectifies them in separation from

¹⁶ *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, p. 299.

¹⁷ In a letter to Ruge of 1843, Marx also states that Feuerbach 'concerns himself too much with nature and too little with politics. But the latter is the only means whereby contemporary philosophy can be realised'. *We*, vol. 27, p. 417.

¹⁸ As is well known, the phrase 'historical materialism' is not used by Marx, but first appears in the writings of Engels. It is used here with the qualification that the term perhaps suggests a greater degree of theoretical closure than Marx would be willing to admit of his studies of history.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Marx's early writings* 5

their true subjectivity, the subject'.¹⁹ The point of Marx's analysis, therefore, is to reidentify the true subject (the acting individual, living in the 'real', 'material' world), and to trace the process of his 'objectification' in the political institutions of the state.²⁰ The real world is not to be inferred from the study of the ideal; on the contrary, it is the ideal which has to be understood as a historical outcome of the real. For Hegel, civil society (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), which includes all those economic and familial relationships which are outside the political and juridical structure of the state, is intrinsically a sphere of unrestrained egoism, where each man is pitted against every other. Men are rational, orderly beings to the degree that they accept the order inherent in the state, which is a universal sphere cutting across the egoistic interests of human actions in civil society. In Hegel's account, therefore, the state is not only presented as severed from the lives of individuals in civil society, but as logically prior to the individual. The acting individual, the real creator of history, is subordinated to the ideals of political participation embodied in the state, which thus appear as the motive-power of social development.

Feuerbach has shown, Marx continues, that in religion men participate vicariously in an unreal, fantasy world of harmony, beauty and contentment, while living in a practical everyday world of pain and misery. The state is, similarly, an alienated form of political activity, embodying universal 'rights' which are as ephemeral as is the idealised world of religion. The basis of Hegel's view is that political rights of representation mediate between the egoistic individualism of civil society and the universalism of the state. But, Marx emphasises, there is no existing form of political constitution where this connection exists in actuality; in extant states, general participation in political life is the ideal, but the pursuance of sectional interests is the reality. Thus what appears in Hegel's account to be separate from and superordinate to the particular interests of individuals in civil society is, in fact, derivative of them. 'Up to now the *political constitution* has been the *religious sphere*, the *religion* of the people's life, the heaven of their universality in contrast to the particular *mundane existence* of their actuality.'²¹

In the Greek *polis* every man – that is, every free citizen – was a *zoon politikon*: the social and political were inextricably fused, and there was no separate sphere of the 'political'. Private and public life was not distinct, and the only 'private individuals' were those who, as slaves, lacked public status as citizens altogether. Mediaeval Europe contrasts with this. In the Middle Ages, the various strata of civil society themselves became political agencies: political power was directly contingent upon and expressive of the division

¹⁹ *WYM*, p. 166; *We*, vol. 1, p. 224.

²⁰ For a perceptive discussion of the 'Critique', see Jean Hyppolite: 'La conception hégélienne de l'Etat et sa critique par Karl Marx', in *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris, 1955), pp. 120–41.

²¹ *WYM*, p. 176.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Part 1: Marx

of society into stable socio-economic orders.²² 'Each private sphere has a political character, is a political sphere. . .'²³ In this form of society, the various strata become politicised, but there is still no separation between the 'private' or the 'individual', and the 'political'. The very notion of the 'state' as separable from civil 'society' is a modern one because it is only in the post-mediaeval period that the sphere of interests in civil society, especially economic interests, have become part of the 'private rights' of the individual, and as such separable from the 'public' sphere of politics. The distribution of property is now presumed to lie outside the constitution of political power. In reality, however, the ownership of property still largely determines political power – no longer in the legalised manner of mediaeval society, however, but under the cloak of universal participation in government.²⁴

The realisation of what Marx calls 'true democracy' entails, according to his analysis, overcoming the alienation between the individual and the political community, through resolving the dichotomy between the 'egoistic' interests of individuals in civil society and the 'social' character of political life. This can only be achieved by effecting concrete changes in the relations between state and society, such that what is at present only ideal (universal political participation) becomes actual. 'Hegel proceeds from the state and makes man into the state subjectivised. Democracy proceeds from man and makes the state into man objectivised. . . In democracy the *formal* principle is at the same time the *material* principle.'²⁵ The attainment of universal suffrage, Marx says, is the means whereby this can be brought about. Universal suffrage gives all the members of civil society a political existence and, therefore, *ipso facto* eliminates the 'political' as a separate category. 'In *universal franchise*, active as well as passive, does civil society first raise itself *in reality* to an abstraction of itself, to *political* existence as its true universal and essential existence.'²⁶

Revolutionary Praxis

There has been some considerable dispute concerning the relevance of the views set out by Marx in the 'Critique', to the writings which he produced subsequently in 1844.²⁷ It is evident that the 'Critique' represents only a prefatory analysis of the state and politics; the manuscript is not complete, and Marx states his intention to develop certain points without in fact doing so. Moreover, the tenor of Marx's analysis is in the direction of a radical

²² cf. Marx's discussion of the transformation of the feudal *Stände*. *We*, vol. 1, pp. 273ff.

²³ *WYM*, p. 176; *We*, vol. 1, p. 232.

²⁴ *WYM*, pp. 187–8.

²⁵ *WYM*, pp. 173–4.

²⁶ *WYM*, p. 202; *We*, vol. 1, p. 326.

²⁷ For divergent views on this question, see Lichtheim, pp. 38–40; Shlomo Avineri: *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 33–40.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Marx's early writings* 7

Jacobinism; what is needed in order to progress beyond the contemporary form of the state is to realise the abstract ideals embodied in the 1789 Revolution. But it cannot be doubted that the 'Critique' embodies notions which Marx did not subsequently relinquish. Indeed, it supplies the key to the understanding of the theory of the state, and of the possibility of its abolition, and thus the conceptions contained within it underlie the whole of Marx's mature writings. But at this stage Marx was, in common with the other Young Hegelians, still thinking in terms of the necessity for the 'reform of consciousness', as posited by Feuerbach. Immediately prior to leaving Germany for France in September 1843, Marx wrote to Ruge expressing his conviction that all 'dogmas' must be questioned, whether they be religious or political:

Our slogan, therefore, must be: Reform of consciousness, not through dogmas, but through analysis of the mystical consciousness that is unclear about itself, whether in religion or politics. It will be evident, then, that the world has long dreamed of something of which it only has to become conscious in order to possess it in actuality. . . To have its sins forgiven, mankind has only to declare them for what they are.²⁸

The effects of Marx's direct contact with French socialism in Paris are evident in 'An introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', written at the end of 1843.²⁹ Most of the points in the article are elaborations of themes already established in Marx's previous 'Critique', but Marx abandons the stress upon 'demystification', such as urged by Bauer, which informs his earlier critical analysis of Hegel. 'The criticism of religion', Marx admits, 'is the premise of all criticism'; but this is a task which has been largely accomplished, and the immediate and necessary task is to move directly to the field of politics.

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness. The demand to abandon illusions about their real condition is a *demand to abandon a condition which requires illusions*. The criticism of religion is thus the *germ* of the *criticism of the vale of tears* of which religion is the *halo*.³⁰

But 'criticism' in itself, Marx now goes on to say, is not enough. This is nowhere more obvious, he asserts, than in Germany, which is so retarded in its development. The abstract, philosophical 'negation' of the German political structure is irrelevant to the real demands which have to be met if Germany is to be transformed: 'Even the negation of our political present is already a

²⁸ *WYM*, pp. 214–15.

²⁹ Originally published in Ruge's *Deutsch-französische Jahrbücher*, in February 1844. *WYM*, pp. 249–64. Similar ideas are also developed in Marx's other contribution to the same issue, 'On the Jewish Question', *WYM*, pp. 216–48. An alternative translation of the latter article is available in *EW*, pp. 3–31.

³⁰ *EW*, p. 44; *We*, vol. 1, p. 379. All of Marx's statements, throughout his writings, upon the 'abolition' (*Aufhebung*) of religion, the state, alienation, or capitalism as a whole, have to be understood in the light of the threefold connotation of the verb *aufheben* (to abolish, to preserve, to raise up). Thus the 'abolition' of religion involves, not its eradication in any simple sense, but its dialectical transcendence.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)8 *Part 1: Marx*

dusty fact in the historical lumber room of modern nations.’³¹ The contributions of Germany to the social advancement of the European nations are limited to the realm of ideas. The Germans are ‘philosophical contemporaries of the present’ in lieu of being its ‘historical contemporaries’. To seek, therefore, to abolish this state of affairs through philosophical criticism is futile, since this merely preserves the existing dislocation between ideas and reality. The exposure of contradictions on the intellectual level does not thereby remove them. It is necessary to proceed ‘to *tasks* the solution of which admits of only one means – *practice (Praxis)*’.³²

If Germany is to experience reform, it cannot be brought about by slow progressive advancement, but must take the form of a radical revolution: in this way, Germany can attain ‘not only to the *official level* of modern nations, but to the *human level* which will be the immediate future of those nations’.³³ The very backwardness of the social composition of Germany can provide the circumstances whereby the country can leap ahead of the other European states. This cannot be attained, however, unless the ‘theoretical’ criticism of politics is conjoined to the experience of a definite social grouping whose position in society renders them revolutionary. It is here that Marx first makes mention of the proletariat. As yet, the low level of economic development of Germany, Marx points out, means that the industrial proletariat is only beginning to appear. But its further expansion, in combination with the peculiarly retarded form of social and political structure extant in Germany, will provide the requisite combination of circumstances which can propel Germany beyond the other European countries.³⁴

Marx finds in the proletariat the ‘universal character’ which Hegel sought in the ideals embodied in the rational state. The proletariat is ‘a class which has radical chains’; it is ‘a sphere of society having a universal character because of its universal suffering and claiming no particular right because no particular wrong, but unqualified wrong, is perpetrated upon it’. The proletariat localises within itself all of the worst evils of society. It lives in conditions of poverty which is not the natural poverty resulting from lack of material resources, but is the ‘artificial’ outcome of the contemporary organisation of industrial production. Since the proletariat is the recipient of the concentrated irrationality of society, it follows that its emancipation is at the same time the emancipation of society as a whole:

*total loss of humanity ... can only redeem itself by a total redemption of humanity... When the proletariat announces the dissolution of the hitherto existing order of things, it merely announces the secret of its own existence because it is the effective (faktisch) dissolution of this order... As philosophy finds its material weapons in the proletariat, the proletariat finds its intellectual weapons in philosophy.*³⁵

³¹ *EW*, p. 45.³² *EW*, p. 52; *We*, vol. 1, p. 385.³³ *EW*, p. 52.³⁴ *EW*, pp. 57–9.³⁵ *EW*, pp. 58–9; *We*, vol. 1, p. 391.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Marx's early writings* 9

During the early part of 1844, Marx began an intensive study of political economy, the preliminary results of which are recorded in a set of fragments which were first published only in 1932, under the title *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. The direction of movement of Marx's thought which this stimulated led to a further divergence from the other Young Hegelians, with the notable exception of Engels, whose influence was important in directing Marx's energies towards economics. There are several reasons why the *Manuscripts* are of decisive importance for the whole of Marx's work. They form, in substance, the earliest of several drafts of *Capital* which Marx made prior to the publication of the latter work itself. The preface which Marx prepared for the *Manuscripts* outlines the framework of an ambitious project which he originally planned, but which he was never destined to complete. These plans which Marx sketched out at this relatively early stage of his intellectual career show beyond any question that *Capital*, lengthy and detailed as it eventually turned out to be, forms only one element in what Marx conceived as a much broader critique of capitalism. Marx originally intended to publish 'a number of independent brochures' covering the 'critique of law, morals, politics' separately. These diverse treatments were then to be connected together in a concluding work of synthesis.³⁶ In the *Manuscripts*, Marx set out only to cover these institutional spheres in so far as they are directly influenced by economic relationships. The work is, therefore, Marx's earliest attempt at a critique of that discipline which claims to deal with this field: political economy.

The *Manuscripts* are also of great intrinsic interest in that in them Marx deals explicitly with problems which, for varying reasons, occupied his attention less directly in his subsequent writings. Some of these issues dropped out of Marx's later works because he considered them to have been satisfactorily dealt with, given his over-riding aim of providing a theoretical critique of modern capitalism. The analysis of religion is one of these. The *Manuscripts* is the last place where Marx still devotes some considerable attention to religion. But certain of the topics which are prominent in the *Manuscripts* disappear from Marx's ensuing writings for other reasons. The most significant of these is that of the analysis of alienation, which occupies a central place in the *Manuscripts*. There can be no doubt at all that the notion of alienation continues to be at the root of Marx's mature works in spite of the fact that the term itself appears only rarely in his writings after 1844. In his subsequent writings, Marx disentangles the various threads comprised generically within the concept of alienation as used in the *Manuscripts*. Thus the term itself, which possesses an abstract, philosophical character from which Marx wished to dissociate himself, became redundant. But the explicit discussion of alienation which appears in the *Manuscripts* offers an invaluable

³⁶ *EW*, p. 63.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-09785-7 - Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber

Anthony Giddens

Excerpt

[More information](#)10 *Part 1: Marx*

able source of insight into the principal underlying themes of Marx's later thought.

Alienation and the theory of political economy

The main suppositions informing the critique of political economy which Marx develops in the *Manuscripts* are the following. There are two principal criticisms which have to be made of the writings of the political economists. The first is in reference to their assumption that the conditions of production characteristic of capitalism can be attributed to all forms of economy. The economists begin from the premise of the exchange economy and the existence of private property. Self-seeking and the pursuit of profit are seen as the natural characteristics of man. In fact, Marx points out, the formation of an exchange economy is the outcome of a historical process, and capitalism is an historically specific system of production. It is only one type of productive system amongst others which have preceded it in history, and it is no more the final form than the others which went before it. The second fallacious assumption of the economists is that purely 'economic' relations can be treated *in abstracto*. Economists speak of 'capital', 'commodities', 'prices', and so on, as if these had life independently of the mediation of human beings. This is plainly not so. While for example, a coin is a physical object which in this sense has an existence independent of men, it is only 'money' in so far as it forms an element within a definite set of social relationships. The economists, however, attempt to reduce everything to the 'economic', and eschew whatever cannot be treated in these terms.

Political economy thus does not recognise the unemployed worker, the working man so far as he is outside this work relationship. Thieves, tricksters, beggars, the unemployed, the starving, wretched and criminal working-man, are *forms* which do not exist *for political economy*, but only for other eyes, for doctors, judges, grave-diggers and beadles, etc.; they are ghostly figures outside its domain.³⁷

Any and every 'economic' phenomenon is at the same time always a social phenomenon, and the existence of a particular kind of 'economy' presupposes a definite kind of society.³⁸

It is symptomatic of these misconceptions that the economists treat workers as 'costs' to the capitalist, and hence as equivalent to any other sort of capital expenditure. Political economy declares it to be irrelevant that the real 'objects' of analysis are men in society. It is for this reason that the economists are able to obscure what is in fact intrinsic to their interpretation of the capitalist mode of production: that capitalism is founded upon a class division between proletariat, or working class, on the one hand, and bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, on the other. These classes are in endemic conflict as regards the distribution of the fruits of industrial production. Wages on the

³⁷ *EW*, pp. 137–8; *We, Ergd*, vol. 1, pp. 523–4.

³⁸ *EW*, pp. 120–1.