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Marx's ideas about how society presents a misleading appearance to its members have been the subject of many conflicting interpretations. In this book John Torrance takes a fresh, un-Marxist approach to Marx's texts and shows that a more precise, coherent and cogent sociology of ideas can be extracted from them than is generally allowed. The implications of this for twentieth-century capitalism and for recent debates about Marx's conceptions of justice, morality and the history of social science are explored. The author argues that Marx's theory of ideas is sufficiently independent of other parts of his thought to provide a critique and explanation of those defects in his own understanding of capitalism which allowed Marxism itself to become, by his own definition, an ideology.

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Studies in Marxism and Social Theory

Edited by G. A. COHEN, JON ELSTER AND JOHN ROEMER

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Preface

The title of this book is not intended to awaken philosophical echoes; 'ideas' has no technical significance. It is a term of convenience that refers to thought and its products – consciousness, ideology, morality, and science – in so far as Marx theorized about them. Nor is the title meant to imply that Marx had just one theory about these matters. 'Theory of' should be read as 'theorizing about', although a major aim of this book is to show how far his theorizing forms a consistent whole.

Marx's theories about ideas were mostly theories explaining how people's social relations and positions give them mistaken ideas about their social world. They were social-psychological and sociological theories, although he avoided the term 'sociology' with its Comtean associations. But I also touch on Marx's epistemology and discuss questions about his moral theory. His sociology of ideas was advanced in the context of his general view that human history superimposes a material and cultural development of the species on man's biological evolution, thanks to mankind's unique productive and self-productive capacities – a view that I believe can still be considered, as he considered it, scientific.

An echo that the title may indeed waken, therefore, is that of G. A. Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. I should be more than content if this book were to be seen as a pendant to that work, which I regard as the most cogent interpretation of Marx's historical view, as well as a model of interpretative method. Having said that, I hasten to exonerate Professor Cohen from responsibility for either my methods or results, and to make plain that the views and conclusions in this book, and all its shortcomings, are entirely my own.

With Marxism now discredited politically, yet another study of Marx's thought may appear decidedly *vieux jeu*, and may even seem to need some special justification. But with Soviet communism out of the way it is

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surely easier to make a dispassionate appraisal of one who, for all his mistakes, remains one of the nineteenth century's greatest social theorists. Only now, perhaps, can his legacy be fully separated from his programme. When that is done, the reasons for studying Marx are no different from the reasons for studying Hegel or Mill or Tocqueville or Durkheim. Each gave a profound analysis of nineteenth-century European society that still contributes to our understanding of our own. In each case, the acuteness and the errors of their analyses owed much to their views of history, coloured by hopes and fears for the future – for our past and present – and by fundamental assumptions which still engage and exercise our minds. We should no longer be too mesmerized by the fact that Marx had greater political influence than the others.

Another reason for studying Marx's theory of ideas is the continuing interest of sociologists in the subject of ideology and in what, since Karl Mannheim, has been called the 'sociology of knowledge'. The literature on ideology, whether coming from a sociology of knowledge perspective or from neo-Marxist perspectives like that of the Frankfurt School, or from other more eclectic or conventional perspectives, is immense and many-stranded. No attempt is made in this book to unravel those strands and relate them back to Marx. Only critical and expository works focusing on Marx's own theory of ideology are, at times, specifically discussed. But I hope nevertheless that the interpretation of Marx advanced here may contribute to this more general literature.

The germ of this book was a paper read to the Oxford Political Thought Conference in 1985, later expanded into lectures. My first aim was expository, to elucidate Marx's ideas about the misleading appearance of society in everyday life and about false consciousness and ideology. From this grew a wish to vindicate my belief that these ideas could be made more precise and coherent than is usually recognized. To do this I had to criticize nearly all Marxist formulations since Marx, including those advanced by Engels after Marx's death. These formulations have had a great influence even on the scholarly interpretation of Marx's texts. Criticizing them revealed more clearly the gaps in Marx's stated positions which Engels and his successors had filled in their own ways, and which I have tried to fill in ways that are faithful to Marx's explanatory intentions and maximize the coherence of his thought.

But Marx can be made coherent in different ways, and from the outset I was primarily interested in making him coherent in ways that would be plausible, and still of interest to social science. This is the second aim of the book. Readers, especially if they are mainly interested in the history

of ideas, may decide that in trying to make Marx plausible I have been too generous in some directions or taken excessive liberties in others. But I have quoted his words extensively to help readers make their own judgments on my interpretations. If they do not agree with me, I hope to persuade them at least that Marx had more interesting things to say on the subjects this book covers than most critics have allowed.

Making Marx's theory of ideas as coherent and as plausible as the texts allow required a critical attitude towards Marx's own writings. So the third aim of this book emerged, to separate those parts of Marx's thought that are defensible as potentially scientific from those that are not. This raises the question of the standard by which scientificity should be tested. But I found no difficulty in accepting Marx's own standard, which I take to be founded on a type of scientific realism. Again, some may regard this as too permissive, and they are welcome to withhold the name 'science' from Marx's explanatory theories if they have a better one. The quality of the theories which interests me is simply their aptness for their explanatory purposes.

Applying Marx's standard of scientificity to his own texts raised a further question. For when Marx assessed the scientific value of a text – e.g. the texts of political economy in *Theories of Surplus Value* – he was not content just to separate out its non-scientific content. He also explained this content sociologically by his theory of false consciousness or by the social affiliations, interests and objectives of the author. This suggested a fourth aim: to see whether Marx's sociology of ideas could be used to explain the non-scientific aspects of his own thought, and the unscientific development of his ideas by later Marxists. Could Marx's critical concept of ideology help to explain what happened when Marxism became an ideology in Lenin's non-critical sense?

It seemed to me that it could, and Chapter 11 of this book argues that uncriticized presuppositions, illusions in Marx's sense, which limited Marx's own social science and nourished the dogmatic ideology of Marxism, stemmed from the revolutionary standpoint and interests of Marx and most Marxists. This criticism is far from new. But that it can be made using Marx's own critical theoretical concepts, without sacrificing either historical materialism or his conception of social science, is a more unusual claim. If convincing, it is an important one. For now that history has disposed of the myth of the revolutionary proletariat, it indicates a certain toughness in those parts of Marx's thought that can be rescued from the wreck of the rest.

This fourth aim of the book inevitably provoked more general reflec-

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tion on what might be valid and what is invalid in Marx's thought. Obviously, from what has been said so far, I think his theory of false consciousness and ideology still has value, as the book attempts to show. Although logically independent of historical materialism, it was closely linked with it theoretically by Marx, and I believe historical materialism is still the least deficient theory of history we have. But what of Marx's views on capitalism, class conflict and communism? My conclusions on these subjects are far from central to the concerns of the book, yet they inevitably inform much of the argument, and reasons for some of them are given where this seems necessary. But for the reader's sake I shall summarize here what I do and do not accept from Marx's package.

Alive, I think, are Marx's view of capitalism as an exploitative mode of production; his hypothesis that capitalism, like previous modes of production, will come to an end when its relations of production become fetters on development of the productive forces; his hypothesis that by then automation will have largely freed productive development from dependence on exploitation of human labour-power, while capital continues to measure wealth by a standard which (in a manner I try to elucidate) presupposes it; and his hypothesis that post-capitalist society will be post-industrial and classless. In addition, his conception of a communist society, transparent to its members because they participate equally in the decisions that determine their circumstances, remains alive as a utopia, contributing to the stock of ideas with which the moral imagination of a future generation may approach possibilities beyond our present horizon.

Dead, it seems to me, are Marx's hope that capitalism could be brought to an end before it has largely exhausted the worldwide productive potentiality of industrialism; therefore, also, his supposition that it will be ended by political action of the Western industrial working class; also the myth of political revolution which imagined that capitalism would end in a replay of the French Revolution with the cast in different roles; and dead in practice as well as theory is the prospect of a centrally planned socialist industrial society as a precursor to communism, though not the desirability of maximizing democratic control and social management of a transition to a post-capitalist economy.

Since no reassessment of Marx's thought can avoid responsibility for its practical implications, the reader will ask what, if anything, this bill of mortality has to say to socialists now, at the turn of the millennium? It should be clear that my reading of Marx is a thoroughly revisionist one. I can think of four practical recommendations that follow. First, socialists

need not be inhibited from basing demands for greater social justice on Marx's critique of the exploitative nature of capitalism by the thought that doing so commits them to supporting revolution or state socialism. Secondly, the approach of post-industrial society offers hope for the supersession of capitalism, but not through the action of a shrinking industrial working class, so socialists should not hesitate to broaden their appeal to all whose interests or values are jeopardized by the uncontrolled career of capital. Thirdly, if socialists can no longer aim at installing a planned industrial society they may embrace without embarrassment the aim of civilizing and democratizing bourgeois society. Since industrial capital will presumably prowl around the globe untamed for many decades, colonizing low-wage economies and transmitting painful shocks through the world's markets, this means undertaking the long-term defence of the weak, of the social fabric, and of the environment against capital's depredations. But it also means taking responsibility for peace and democracy during the turbulence of capitalism's decline, and for managing the transition to a post-industrial world. These are tasks enough to be going on with.

There is one topical issue on which concern is not confined to socialists, and which is more closely related to the subject-matter of the book. Although I naturally do not expect it to influence practical affairs, I should be pleased if it were to help unsettle the blind faith in market forces that has been resurrected in the last fifteen years. This has now, it seems to me, outlived any useful purpose it may ever have served, even by capitalist standards, and threatens to become merely destructive. In a Marxian analysis it is a recrudescence, at a higher level of abstraction, of the commodity fetishism that characterized the 'vulgar political economy' of Marx's time. On my interpretation of Marx's theory of ideas it is explained by de-industrialization. Industrialization first made it possible for social theory to challenge, in the name of what I call a 'production model', the superficial understanding of capitalism in terms of the 'exchange paradigm' suggested by everyday experience of the marketplace. Contraction of industry, therefore, and the unceasing spread of consumerism, have reinstated the exchange paradigm in social consciousness and a corresponding ideology of market forces in politics. Britain and the USA, the countries of unchecked de-industrialization, have been most prone to this illusion. Most European countries and Japan, where socialist, corporatist or other state controls have hindered or managed the impact of de-industrialization in order to sustain productive capacity, have been less receptive to it.

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These practical political implications, however, are remote from the scholarly aims and interpretative arguments of the book. To help students extract those arguments I give a brief guide to the chapters.

Chapter 1 drives a number of wedges between Marx and later Marxist theories of ideology and false consciousness in order to strip off layers of misinterpretation and allow a fresh look at Marx's words.

Chapter 2 argues that Marx did not need to be as much concerned with epistemology as commentators sometimes suppose, and that much of his 'theory of knowledge' was sociological and descriptive rather than philosophical and normative. It establishes the meanings of key terms used in the rest of the book, especially the pairs essence/appearance and reflection/translation and 'practico-theoretical beliefs'. It shows that the concept of a planned society gave Marx an epistemic contrast with real-world unplanned societies which supported contrasts between the possibility of direct and indirect (scientific) understanding of social life.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine the bases of Marx's theory of false consciousness from two points of view. Chapter 3 sets out meta-theoretical pre-suppositions of Marx's social theory that enabled him to call some kinds of social cognition false and others true, especially his principle of the explanatory primacy of production. A diagram at the beginning of Chapter 3 (Fig. 3.1, p. 62) shows that the explanatory structure of Marx's theory of ideas, as I present it, has three levels, proceeding from social being to social consciousness, and from social consciousness to theory.

Chapter 4 begins at the lowest level and examines Marx's conception of social being to the extent needed to explain how misleading surface appearances, giving rise to false social cognition, arise in the course of social evolution in both capitalist and pre-capitalist societies. Key points are distinctions between the surface and interior of society (and explanation of how its appearance comes to differ from its essence) and between reification, a feature of the surface appearance, and fetishism, a feature of its reflection in consciousness. Suggestions are offered as to what might still be of sociological interest in Marx's theories of value and exploitation.

Chapter 5 deals with the second level, social consciousness, and presents a heterodox view of how consciousness connects with the base/superstructure distinction of historical materialism. Marx's explanations of how false consciousness reflects misleading social appearances in unplanned societies are examined. The concepts of social 'paradigm', 'model' and 'myth', used in subsequent chapters, are introduced here. They are illustrated by the 'myth of bourgeois classlessness' which Marx saw as a basic feature of social consciousness in capitalist societies.

Chapter 6 deals with ideology as part of the third level. The distinction between consciousness and ideology is explicated by the difference between beliefs and theories. Defining characteristics of ideology are suggested, and the feature of 'inversion' is interpreted by supplying Marx with a theory of norms, an item missing from his work. Marx's explanation of ideological inversion by the division between intellectual and manual labour is presented, and the connection between ideology and interests is examined through the example of Thomas Malthus.

Chapter 7 brings the three levels together to examine the interplay of class struggle, consciousness and ideology in Marx's theories of social and political change. Major topics are the role of political illusions in shaping class consciousness and the possibility of their avoidance by an organized working class, explanatory connections between ruling classes and ruling ideologies, and how ideas have a revolutionary function. Marx's account of socialism and its rival ideologies is discussed.

Chapters 8 and 9 examine the question of the place of justice and morality in Marx's theories, to see if the approach taken so far helps to resolve the tension between his condemnations of rights and morality as ideological and the apparently moral basis of his own attack of capitalism. I conclude that Marx could consistently hold implicit theories of justice and morality, and suggest how they might be made explicit.

Chapter 10 deals with social science as part of the third level, exemplified by Marx's critique of political economy. His account of intellectual and social conditions for the development of social science is examined and illustrated. Key points are that religious and secular illusions, generated by society itself and reinforced by ideology, must be neutralized by counter-ideologies containing scientifically fruitful insights, whose availability depends, in turn, on social changes. But these may generate new illusions that limit the scientific development possible from the new standpoint.

Finally, in Chapter 11 this model is applied to Marx's own approach to political economy. It is argued that scientific elements – historical materialism, class theory, and the production model of the economy – came from his early ideological synthesis of dialectical humanism and socialism, reflecting new industrial conditions. But belief in the 'myth of political revolution', sustained by lifelong membership of a revolutionary movement with its specific form of false consciousness, distorted this scientific standpoint. The same pattern was reproduced among later Marxists, especially the Bolsheviks, who did most to consolidate Marxism as an ideology.

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Bibliography of works by Marx and Engels cited in the text, with abbreviations

Works by Marx and Engels

Wherever possible I refer to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works* (46 vols. so far), London: Lawrence and Wishart (1975–) (abbreviated CW). Sources cited are referred to in the notes by the abbreviations indicated below.

<i>HF</i>	<i>The Holy Family</i> (1845). CW, IV, 3–211.
<i>GI</i>	<i>The German Ideology</i> (1845–6). CW, V, 19–539.
<i>Manifesto</i>	<i>Manifesto of the Communist Party</i> (1848). CW, VI, 477–519.
'Address'	'Address of the Central Authority to the League' (March 1850). CW, X, 277–87.
'Review'	'Review, May to October', <i>Neue Rheinische Zeitung</i> (1850). CW, X, 490–532.
<i>Resolutions</i>	<i>Resolutions of the Conference of Delegates of the IWMA</i> (September 1871). CW, XXII, 423–31.
<i>Corresp.</i>	<i>Selected Correspondence</i> . London: Lawrence and Wishart 1936. (For Engels' letters after 1890. Earlier letters are identified by recipient and date, and by volume and page number in CW.)

Works by Marx

'Democritus and Epicurus'	'The Difference between Democritus' and Epicurus' Philosophy of Nature' (1841). CW, I, 25–105.
<i>CHPL</i>	<i>Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law</i> . (1843–4). CW, III, 3–129, 175–87.

xx *List of abbreviations*

- JQ *On the Jewish Question* (1843). CW, III, 146–74.
 ‘Comments’ ‘Comments on James Mill, *Elémens d’économie politique*’ (1844). CW, III, 211–28.
- EPM *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844). CW, III, 229–346.
- List Draft of an Article on Friedrich List’s Book, *Das Nationale System der Politischen Oekonomie* (1845). CW, IV, 265–93.
- TF *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845). CW, V, 3–5.
- PP *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847). CW, VI, 105–212.
- Rheinischer Beobachter ‘The communism of the *Rheinischer Beobachter*’ (1847). CW, VI, 220–34.
- MCCM *Moralising Criticism and Critical Morality* (1847). CW, VI, 312–40.
- WLC *Wage Labour and Capital* (1849). CW, IX, 197–228.
- CSF *The Class Struggles in France, 1848 to 1850* (1850). CW, X, 45–145.
- 18th Brumaire *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852). CW, XI, 101–97.
- Grundrisse, I, II *Economic Manuscripts of 1857–58* CW, XXVIII and XXIX, 5–255.
- CPE *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). CW, XXIX, 257–417.
- CPE (Original Text) The Original Text of the Second and the Beginning of the Third Chapter of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). CW, XXIX, 430–507.
- TSV, I, II, III, IV, V *Theories of Surplus Value* (1861–3). CW, XXX, 318–451; XXXI; XXXII, XXXIII, 253–371; XXXIV, 86–93, 170–7.
- RDPP *Results of the Direct Production Process* (1863–4). CW, XXXIV, 339–471.
- VPP *Value, Price and Profit* (1865). CW, XX, 101–49.
- Capital, I, II, III *Capital* 3 vols. (1865, 1885, 1894). London: Lawrence and Wishart; Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House 1970.
- CWF *The Civil War in France* (1871). CW, XXII, 307–55.
- CGP *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875). CW, XXIV, 75–99.
- Wagner Marginal notes on Adolph Wagner’s *Lehrbuch der politischen Oekonomie* (1881). CW, XXIV, 531–59.

Works by Engels

- Speeches at Elberfeld (1845). CW, IV, 246–52.
- PWG *The Peasant War in Germany* (1850). CW, X, 397–482.
- Political Action' 'On the Political Action of the Working Class' (1871). CW, XXII 417–18.
- Origin *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). CW, XXIV, 129–276.
- LF *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888). CW, XXVI, 353–98.
- HCL *On the History of the Communist League* (1885). CW, XXVI, 312–30.
- Programme *Programme of the Blanquist Commune Refugees* (1874). CW, XXIV.
- 'Introduction' 'Introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850*' (1895). CW, XXVII, 506–24.