MARX'S ETHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

One searches in vain through Marx's writings for an explicit philosophical exposition of the normative import of his critical social theory. This has led a number of commentators to deny that Marx ever intended an ethical critique at all. Thus, in a discussion of the sense in which the capitalist's appropriation of surplus value involves his exploitation of the laborer, H. B. Acton asserts that "Marx claimed that his account of surplus value is purely scientific, a matter of description and analysis, rather than a moral indictment." As evidence of Marx's "repudiation of moral criticism," Acton cites the remarkable passage from Capital in which Marx insists, at the conclusion of an exposition of the manner in which the buyer of labor power (the capitalist) exploits the seller (the worker), that this exploitation (in Marx's words) "is in no way an injustice against the seller." It follows, suggests Acton, that, for Marx, "to say that capitalism is brutal is 'sentimentality,' to accuse the capitalist of injustice is beside the point."

More recently, Allen W. Wood has argued that "... it would be wrong, in fact, to suppose that Marx's critique of capitalism is rooted in any particular moral or social ideal or principle." And in another context, Wood has suggested, partially on the basis of Marx's claim in The Civil War in France that the proletariat "has no ready-made utopias to introduce" and "no ideals to realize," that "Marx's reasons for condemning capitalism and advocating its overthrow are fully contained in his theory of its historical genesis, organic functioning and prognosis as this theory is developed in Capital. They are not to be sought in any moral or social principles 'implicit' in this

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2 Ibid.
4 Acton, op. cit., p. 123.
theory." Nor does Marx base such principles upon an allegedly normative philosophical anthropology: "Marx seems . . . to acknowledge no concept of man which could serve as a standard against which his present existence could be measured and criticized." No-where in Marx's writings will we find, Wood assures us, "a concept of man whose character is fundamentally that of an ideal or norm." 

In the first section of what follows I shall argue that one does find both in Marx's early and mature writings a normative philosophical anthropology whose partial function is to provide a basis for his condemnation of the capitalist mode of production. This feature of Marx's critique of capitalism is firmly rooted in the naturalist tradition which recognizes an implication from human nature to morality. The form of reasoning employed by Marx, which I shall call "the ergon argument," is found in its pure form in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, and is used by both Aristotle and Marx to support commendations and condemnations whose import is functionally ethical. Contrary to the contentions of Acton and Wood, I shall argue that there is an undisputably ethical component to Marx's critical social theory, and that this ethical element is based upon a normative anthropology, a "concept of man which . . . serve[s] as a standard against which his present existence . . . [is] . . . measured and criticized."

In the second part of this paper I discuss Marx's distinctive employment of his ethical anthropology. For although Marx's functionally ethical evaluations presuppose a normative anthropology, and in this respect are in the tradition of naturalist ethics, the historical matrix within which his conception of human nature is developed and to which it is applied sharply distinguishes his ethical philosophy from that of his predecessors and non-Marxian successors. As we shall see, Marx's ethical theory presupposes a theory of universals; accordingly, I begin the second part of this paper with a sketch of Marx's theory of universals.

I

Perhaps the locus classicus of a moral philosophy which rests upon a normative conception of human nature is Aristotle's Nicoo-

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8 Ibid., p. 124.
9 Ibid., p. 125.
machiavellian Ethics. In book I, chapter 7, we find the celebrated (or notorious) argument that the general notion of the human good, well-being or happiness, can be given a specific sense only if man’s natural function or *ergon* is first identified. This can be accomplished, Aristotle thinks, by determining the kind of activity that the human species, and only the human species, can perform, taking into account its characteristic structural organization. The good for man will consist in the performance of his function, the exercise of his specifically human powers, throughout a complete life. This form of reasoning, the *ergon* argument, presupposes the following three claims: 1) that it makes sense, and is correct, to say that nature endows man qua man with a special function to perform, 2) that this function can be ascertained by determining the kind of activity that distinguishes *homo sapiens* (or, in Marx’s case, as we shall see, *homo faber*) from every other species, and 3) that such activity is (the moral) *good* for man.

It can be shown that Marx employs a version of the *ergon* argument. An essential constituent of any such argument is a philosophical anthropology, and it is to this aspect of Marx’s social theory that we must now turn. In this context I want to reinforce the view that has in recent years become widely accepted among Marx scholars that there is an essential unity to the Marxian corpus, from the early “philosophical” writings, such as, for example, the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*, to the later “scientific” theory of *Capital*. Recent scholarship has made it highly suspect to drive a sharp wedge between the “philosophical” and the “scientific” aspects of Marx’s thought. Thus, in *Capital* we find the *philosophical* claim that a critical social theory must start with a theory of human nature:

To know what is useful for a dog, one must study dog-nature . . . Applying this to man, he that would criticize all human acts, movements, relations, etc. . . . must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch . . .

This passage indicates both Marx’s ethical naturalism and his historical methodology. The appeal to a theory of “human nature in general” is characteristic of (but not peculiar to) naturalist ethical theory, and the claim that human nature is not immutable but

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11 *Capital*, I, p. 609.
rather "modified in each historical epoch" and thus in historical motion is distinctively Marxian. The latter aspect of Marx's ethical anthropology will be discussed in part II below.

Marx's theory of "human nature in general" (as well as the beginnings of his analysis of how human nature is "modified" in the "historical epoch" characterized by the hegemony of capital) is set forth in abundant detail in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. We are told that "The whole character of a species — its species character — is contained in the character of its life activity . . ." For Marx, the "whole character" or "essential being" of any species is its life activity, namely, that activity whereby it distinguishes itself from every other species. This is, of course, an indispensable component of the ergon argument. Marx's next step is to determine the life activity or species character of man. "It is just in his work upon the objective world . . . that man first really proves himself to be a species being. This production is his active species life. . . In creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being . . ." Man reveals his essential being in the activity of productive labor.

But do not nonhuman animals also produce? How, then, can the expenditure of productive labor be said to be distinctive of the human species? Marx anticipates this objection as follows:

Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces onesidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature.

What is especially interesting about this passage is its combination of descriptive and normative analysis. Human labor differs from animal production insofar as the former need not be a mere means to physical survival. To be compelled to produce in order to live is an invariant and limiting condition of the animal's existence. Human production, on the other hand, is capable of extending beyond what is necessary to satisfy physical needs; indeed, man "only truly produces" "when he is free from physical need." Thus,

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., pp. 113, 114.
15 Ibid., p. 113.
man produces qua man only when he exercises those productive capacities which set him apart from, and make him superior to, other species (for example, the ability to produce from aesthetic motivations, when he "forms things in accordance with the laws of beauty"\(^\text{16}\)). This is precisely the kind of reasoning that defines the ergon argument. Marx’s condemnation of the capitalist mode of production is based in part upon the claim that wage-laboring man is prevented from engaging in those productive activities which specify him as human; “in part” because restrictions on the exercise of man’s productive powers are, for Marx, common to all precommunist societies and become ethically opprobrious, as we shall see in what follows, only when the historical development of the means of labor makes it possible for all men to exercise these species’ capacities. On Marx’s view, it is precisely the capitalist organization of production that both creates this possibility and prevents its actualization, and this is the basis of Marx’s ethical condemnation of capitalism. “Homo faber” qua proletariat is systematically incapable of performing its ergon by being compelled, in order to stay alive, to sell its labor\(^\text{17}\) to the capitalist who uses what he has bought in the pursuit of his own (class) interests. The proletariat’s productive capacity is neither “free”\(^\text{18}\) nor “creative,”\(^\text{19}\) as it must be if it is to be fully human.

“An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature.” Here, again, Marx identifies another aspect of human production that both distinguishes it from, and makes it superior to, animal production. Human production stands in a special relation to nature:

The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body — both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man’s inorganic body — nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself the human body. Man lives on nature — means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die.\(^\text{20}\)

An animal relates to nature in a limited way, to the extent that it must to insure its physical survival. Man’s relation to nature is unlimited, “universal,” for all nature is the arena of his appropriation,


\(^{17}\) At this point in the development of Marx’s critique of the capitalist mode of production, he had not yet made the distinction between labor and labor power.


which, as already noted, goes beyond what is required for physical survival. In the process of appropriating nature's resources to satisfy his needs and desires, man is himself changed by nature. This dialectic of man and nature, central to Marx's anthropology, is a leitmotif of the Marxian corpus. It is expressed as follows in *Capital*:

[Man] opposes himself to Nature as one of her own forces, setting in motion arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of his body, in order to appropriate Nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants. By this acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature.21

This process of reciprocal development between human and nonhuman nature, mediated by productive labor, is described as “the metabolism (Stoffwechsel) between man and the earth”22 and “the metabolic interaction between man and nature.”23 Marx's repeated use, in both his early and later writings, of the biological metaphor of metabolism underscores both the intimacy, in his view, of the relation between man and external nature, and an essential difference between human and nonhuman animals. Whereas “man through his own acts mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature”24 and in the process changes both nature and himself, animals have little control over their relatively unchanging relation to nature, and their own needs and powers remain constant.

This special relation to nature that characterizes man's species life and hence his *ergon* is unrealized in capitalism. Marx's analysis of “alienated labor” in the *Manuscripts* is a description of a mode of social organization of labor which deviates from an anthropological norm; man's *ergon* is unexercised insofar as a wedge is driven between human and nonhuman nature, a wedge whose social form is the private appropriation by the capitalist of both the worker's labor and product. For labor is a moment in the metabolic process by which nature's materials are humanized in the form of the product, the consumption of which in turn naturalizes man. Hence, the capitalist's private appropriation of both labor and product has the effect of rendering inoperative those life-activities that make man more than a mere animal. This is indicated by Marx in the following passages:

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22 Ibid., p. 505.
23 Ibid., p. 43.
24 Ibid., p. 177.
In tearing away from man the object of his production . . . estranged labor tears from him his *species life*, his real objectivity as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him.\(^{25}\)

That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.\(^{26}\)

Wage-labor literally *dehumanizes* man by taking from him his "advantage over animals." To regain its expropriated humanity, the proletariat must "expropriate the expropriators" by wresting from capitalists control over both the use and product of its labor, thereby establishing, among other things, a distinctively human relation to nature.

None of this makes sense if one denies, as Wood and Acton do, that Marx is employing a *philosophical* conception of human nature *normatively*. And contrary to Wood's interpretation, Marx's claim that the proletariat has "no ideals to realize" was not meant to imply rejection of a normative anthropology, but rather to stress that communism is an actual historical force as opposed to a speculative ideal. "Communism is for us not a stable state which remains to be established, not an *ideal* to which reality will have to adjust itself. We call communism the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from premises now in existence."\(^{27}\)

We have seen, in an analysis of relevant passages from both the *Manuscripts* and *Capital*, that Marx's commitment to a normative anthropology via a form of the *ergon* argument was a feature of both his "youthful" and "mature" thought, and constituted an important aspect of his critical social theory. Let us examine a final passage in which Marx explicitly avers his adherence to a theory of human nature, and identifies still another distinguishing feature thereof:

> We shall . . . have to consider the labor-process *independently of the particular form it assumes under given social conditions*. Labor is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate . . . We are not now dealing with those primitive instinctual forms of labor that remind us of the mere animal . . . We presuppose labor *in a form that stamps it as exclusively human*. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in

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reality . . . He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own . . .28

Here we are told that if the worker were to be functioning in an “exclusively human” way, his production would “[realize] a purpose of his own . . .” But in fact, as a wage-laborer his ability to produce is used to realize the purposes of the capitalist, for whom the worker’s life-activity is a use-value. Under capitalism, the teleological character of human labor is the private property of the capitalist class.

That the capitalists’29 pursuit of their class interests prevents workers from exercising their human ergon is regarded by Marx as an unethical state of affairs. Indeed, what sort of condemnation other than ethical would be appropriate in this context, given Marx’s adherence to a normative anthropology? For it has been the historical role of ergon-based anthropologies to support claims concerning what is ethically good and bad for men. Marx’s use of the ergon argument is no exception: “. . . in its blind unrestrainable passion, its werewolf hunger for surplus-labor, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working-day. It usurps the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of the body.”30 It has been suggested that “The slanted interest, charged language and acrid tone of Capital imply not moral indignation, but simply outrage at the conditions of exploitation.”31 But such “outrage,” voiced in reference to an explicitly stated normative anthropology, and constituting a systematic network of commendations and condemnations, is precisely what counts in the Western philosophical tradition as moral indignation.

II

The foregoing account of Marx’s philosophical anthropology appears, at first glance, incompatible with his historical methodology. A conception of “human nature in general” considered “independently of the particular form it assumes under given social conditions” would appear to contradict Marx’s claim in The Poverty of Philosophy that “all history is but the continuous transformation of human

28 K. Marx, Capital, I, pp. 177-178, italics added.
29 It is the class activity of capitalists, not of exploiting classes as such, that Marx regards as unethical. Noncapitalist exploitation is for Marx regrettable, but not unethical. Cf. Part II below.
30 K. Marx, Capital, I, pp. 264-265.
nature.”\textsuperscript{32} According to this conception, human nature is in process and subject to historical development in much the same way that social structures are. “(T)he entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labor . . .”\textsuperscript{32} How, then, can the universal concept of “human nature in general” perform an ethically critical function for Marx when his ontological commitment is to a continuously developing human nature? This is the Marxian form of the Problem of the One and the Many, and is posed by Shlomo Avineri when he asks “whether, by reducing man to his historical conditions, Marx makes it impossible to discuss any model of man that transcends his concrete phenomenal form.”\textsuperscript{34}

The resolution of this apparent contradiction lies in Marx’s anthropological use of what Hegel called the “concrete universal,” the universal which differentiates itself into and manifests itself as its particulars. For both Hegel and Marx, differentiation and manifestation are historical processes, processes that for Marx remain incomplete until the emergence of communism. For Marx, the efficient cause of the unfolding of human nature in history is productive labor. Marx praises Hegel for having adumbrated this insight: “The outstanding achievement of Hegel’s \textit{Phenomenology} . . . is . . . that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process . . . he thus grasps the essence of \textit{labor} and comprehends objective man—true, because real man—as the outcome of man’s own labor.”\textsuperscript{35} Thus, what is connoted by “man,” or “\textit{homo faber},” is a universal in motion, a universal incomplete and only partially realized. There is a temptation, reflected in language, to treat universals as connoting fixed or static features of the world; to grasp \textit{(begreifen)} something through a (universal) concept \textit{(Begriff)} is to grip the thing in thought, to get a hold of it, to hold it \textit{still}. Marx resisted the temptation. In a discussion of the concept \textit{production}, he says, “\textit{Production in general} is an abstraction . . . this \textit{general} category, this common element sifted out by comparison, is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations . . . The determinations valid


\textsuperscript{33} K. Marx, \textit{Manuscripts}, p. 145.

\textsuperscript{34} Shlomo Avineri, \textit{The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 84.

\textsuperscript{35} K. Marx, \textit{Manuscripts}, p. 177.
for production as such must be sorted out precisely . . ."36 Thus, it is not only the act of social production that is in flux, but also its reflection in thought, the universal concept, production. And with regard to general laws (of economics), the propositional counterparts, with respect to universality, of concepts, Marx says, "The fixed presuppositions themselves become fluid in the further course of development."37

For Marx, then, the concept man, homo faber, is open-ended and "fluid," and evolves "into different determinations" as men forge a correspondingly38 developing human nature by engaging in determinate modes of social production. Now it is precisely the relation between human nature and determinate modes of social production that is most immediately relevant to an understanding of Marx's historical employment of an ethical anthropology constituted by a universal concept of man. It is to this question that we now turn.

At a given stage of historical development, men 1) employ certain methods, tools, skills, and resources, the "forces of production" (Produktivkräfte), with which they attempt to subject nature to their purposes, and 2) enter into determinate relationships, the "relations of production" (Produktionsverhältnisse), the legally sanctioned relationships within which they apply the forces of production to nature. Among the principal relations of production are, of course, the master-slave relationship, the lord-serf relationship, and the capitalist-wage-laborer relationship. 1) and 2) jointly constitute a form of social organization, a social whole which Marx calls a "mode of production" (Produktionsweise). Within a given mode of production, men have a corresponding human nature. For since a mode of production involves an organized expenditure of labor (man's "life activity"), it is "a definite form of expressing [men's] life, a definite mode of life on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production . . ."39

Human nature, then, is embodied not in particular men, but in men as organized in the process of social production. " . . . the essence

37 Ibid., p. 817.
38 This is not, of course, to suggest that Marx regarded the historical development of human nature itself as a reflection of an ontologically prior development of the concept of human nature. Quite the contrary; the unfolding of the concept is a reflection of the material forces.
of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its actuality it is the ensemble of social relationships."40 Hence, as noted above, just as "the ensemble of social relationships" is subject to historical development, so too is both human nature and the concept of human nature.

The foregoing considerations are essential to an adjudication of Wood's contention that nowhere in Marx's writings do we find "a concept of man whose character is fundamentally that of an ideal or norm." For it must be kept in mind that the "concept of man" which constitutes Marx's anthropology is only partially realized and acquires new determinations from one stage of the development of the forces and relations of production to the next. We can, therefore, concur with Wood that Marx employs no univocal concept of man with which to make ethical judgments of suprahistorical validity. But it does not follow from this that Marx acknowledges no concept of man "which could serve as a standard against which his present existence could be measured and criticized." The ethical criticism suggested by the application of a determinate concept of human nature to an historical mode of production will depend upon, both the specifications determining the at least partial completion of the concept in question and the possibilities and limitations inherent in the mode of production. It is well known, for example, that Marx regarded the development of the capitalist mode of production as a necessary condition for the emergence of its negation, communist society. In the process of capitalist development, the proletariat acquires both the will and the ability to overthrow the existing system; the will because it is deprived of both its material possessions and its humanity, the ability because of its numerical predominance, its indispensable role in the production process, and its capacity for organized action acquired in the factories. These factors, in conjunction with the unprecedented productivity of labor resulting from the ongoing revolutionizing of the technical basis of production, make it possible, for the first time in history, for the agents of historical development, "the associated producers," to begin "rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common

control . . . and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature."41

What is ethically reprehensible about the condition of the laboring masses, then, is that the historically unprecedented possibility of their creating social "conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature" is frustrated by the continued existence of the mode of production (and beneficiaries thereof) whose development created that very possibility. The organization of capitalist production frustrates the unfettered exercise of man's ergon, as described in part I above, at precisely that stage of history when it is first possible to perform that ergon freely. And the possibility at issue inhere in both the technical basis or "objective material conditions" of capitalist production, in virtue of its spectacular development of modern industry, and the human nature of the "associated producers," in virtue of the acquisition of new needs, desires, skills, and capacities for organized action. It is essential to conceptualize both these factors as corresponding aspects of a social whole, i.e., the mode of production; both human nature and the forces and relations of production develop as an organic totality. As Marx and Engels put it, human nature is "entirely dependent on the stage of development which production and human intercourse have reached."42 Now Marx's critical anthropology comprises a concept of man which can perform an ethically critical function vis-à-vis capitalism only because that concept has acquired the determinations which reflect the realizability of the human ergon in the socioeconomic matrix created in the process of capitalist development. This is not to say that the abstract concept of "human nature in general" or homo faber cannot function critically in the description of precapitalist societies. In fact, Marx repeatedly deplores the exploitation, hardships, and sufferings of modes of production based on slavery and serfdom. But he judges, in retrospect, that such exploitation was unavoidable under conditions of primitive technological development and low labor productivity, and hence is not subject to ethical condemnation. How, for example, when the location of natural resources does not necessarily correspond to the location of populations, and the means of distributing scarce goods, services, and resources are at lower stages of development, is it possible for all men to have equal and free access to the means of labor and requirements of life? In such

41 K. Marx, Capital, III, p. 820, italics added.
42 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, The German Ideology, p. 155.
circumstances, when the laboring population is so occupied with necessary labor that it cannot conduct the common affairs of the social order, there will invariably emerge a nonlaboring class which assumes administrative power, monopolizes ownership of the means of labor, and lives on the surplus product of the laborers.\footnote{43} There is no alternative to the emergence of some such leisure class in modes of production characterized by low levels of technological development and labor productivity. In the absence of those historical conditions which make it possible for man to exercise his \textit{ergon} in the context of an egalitarian and communitarian social order, the values of equality, community, and free exercise of one’s powers can be nothing more than empty ideals; ethics cannot require them because history does not allow them. The \textit{ought} of ethics is circumscribed by the \textit{can} of history.

But developed capitalism changes all this by creating the objective conditions for the unfettered exercise of man’s \textit{ergon}. And this is reflected in human nature as the proletariat’s will and ability, noted above, to destroy the conditions of its oppression by seizing control of its labor and product, and hence, of its humanity. This near culmination of human nature in the immediately prerevolutionary proletariat is expressed by Marx in \textit{The Holy Family}: “. . . the abstraction of all humanity and even the \textit{appearance} of humanity is practically complete in the fully developed proletariat . . .”\footnote{44} Correspondingly, the abstract and open-ended \textit{concept} of “human nature in general” which serves as Marx’s anthropological starting point has acquired, in the \textit{course of its application to successive modes of production}, those determinations sufficient to render it “practically complete” as it comes to reflect the specific characteristics of proletarian humanity. Marx’s analytically incipient, and therefore \textit{abstract}, concept of \textit{homo faber} is abstract precisely to the extent that it is only partially developed and therefore incomplete as applied to and reflective of human nature in precommunist modes of production. In its application to the proletariat it is as far from full completion and development as the proletarian revolution is from advanced industrial capitalism. And therein lies the justification of its \textit{ethical} use in Marx’s social theory; a concept once abstract and indeterminate has become progressively specified to the point at which it displays the possibility of its completion. \textit{At that point}, Marx’s concept of man becomes \textit{ethically} operative. It is in this

\footnote{43} Compare Donald Clark Hodges, “Mark’s Ethics and Ethical Theory,” p. 237.
\footnote{44} K. Marx, \textit{The Holy Family}, Easton and Guddat, p. 368.
sense that Marx has, in the course of his critique of capitalism, "first deal[t] with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch . . ."

Those who deny that Marx employs a concept of man by reference to which his present existence can be evaluated presuppose a static anthropology and overlook the explicitly dynamic character of Marx's concept of human nature. Without an appreciation of Marx's employment of the (Hegelian) concrete and "fluid" universal, one loses sight of Marx's distinctively historical anthropology.

The thrust of the present argument can be further clarified by considering the two most frequently proffered objections. The first amounts to the charge that the foregoing ignores Marx's rejection of ethical idealism. For to claim that an ethically critical anthropology is fundamental to Marx's condemnation of capitalism is in effect to imply that Marx foresaw revolutionary change as a result of ethical-theoretical analysis. But Marx held no such view (the objection continues), for the acceptance of such an analysis "[does] not as yet necessarily imply a condemnation of capitalism as a system of production. It might be that the sole consequence . . . would be . . . a resolve not to change the world but only to interpret it differently."45

There can be no caviling with the claim that for Marx the bones of theory, ethical included, must be filled out with the flesh of praxis, and nothing in the foregoing argument denies this. It is the relation between theory and praxis that is at issue. Both correct theory and revolutionary praxis are necessary conditions for the creation of communist society; neither is by itself sufficient. Without the ethical-theoretical analysis attributed to Marx in this paper, praxis would be without intelligible structure, aimless and blind. And without the praxis of the proletariat, Marx's ethical anthropology would be mere speculative idealism. But Marx was confident that tendencies implicit in the material conditions of proletarian life would confirm the validity of his anthropological analysis. "It is a question of what the proletarian is and what it consequently is historically compelled to do. Its aim and historical action is prescribed, irrevocably and obviously, in its own situation in life as in the entire organization of contemporary civil society."46 There is thus no basis for the charge that an ethical anthropology would render Marx's critical theory impotent with respect to praxis.

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46 K. Marx, op. cit., p. 368.
The second objection has taken the form of an exposition of Marx's alleged critique of justice. Allen W. Wood has argued that "the attainment of justice does not, in itself, play a significant role in either Marxian theory or Marxist practice . . . we find no real attempts in Marx's writings to provide a clear and positive conception of right or justice."47 Since social justice is the focal notion around which theories of social ethics are built, Marx's social criticism is not ethical in content.48 Marx's condemnation of capitalism is based upon the claim that capitalist production relations are "relations of dominion and servitude [which] are experienced as such without being understood as such."49 The function of Marx's social theory, then, is to "[make] it possible for the workers to understand their condition of poverty, frustration, and discontent for what it is: a condition of servitude to their own product in the form of capital."50 And of course no ethical principles are required to enable a social class to recognize and understand its own subordinate position in the social structure within which it functions.

Wood's claim that Marx's contempt for capitalism does not rest upon an accusation of injustice is, it seems to me, correct. The entire thrust of Marx's Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right' is to undermine the Hegelian notion that the political state, along with its juridical and legal concomitants, chief among which is the notion of justice, is the fundamental unit of social life. Marx tells us in a description of the course of his study of political economy, that he was led to "the conclusion that neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human mind, but that on

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50 Ibid.
Marx's contention is that justice (Gerechtigkeit) is a legal (rechtlich) concept which is supervenient upon, and reflective of, the relations of superordination and subordination that characterize the mode of production in which it is rooted. Hence, one must not speak of "justice" per se, but of, for example, "feudal justice" or "bourgeois right," each accommodated to its respective productive mode. "The justice of the transactions between agents of production rests on the fact that these arise as natural consequences out of the production relationships." Thus, feudal justice would require that no serf can be forcibly separated from his land or family (a "right" not accorded slaves and hence an advance beyond modes of production organized around the master-slave relationship), and bourgeois justice would demand that a worker's wage be equal to the value of his labor power, i.e., that the exchange which characterizes the labor market be an "equal" one. "Right can never be higher than the economic structure of society . . ."53

But it does not follow from these observations that Marx's social theory is not at least partially based upon ethical considerations. The history of philosophy is replete with ethical judgments of social import that are based upon anthropological, rather than juridical or political, considerations. Marx would, correctly I believe, describe Aristotle's ethical and political theory as based upon 1) an analysis of man's ergon and 2) calculations as to how that ergon might be most fully exercised within the prevailing mode of production. The relations of production built into the institutions of slavery would, according to both Aristotle and Marx, be in harmony with the current development of the forces of production. Of course Marx would add that slave relations of production are also limited by the forces of production of ancient society. (Such a judgment would not occur to Aristotle, who regarded the ancient mode of production as permanent). Marx's view that both the forces of production and human nature undergo historical evolution allows him to claim that at a certain stage of development the organization of the productive forces permits corresponding developments in human nature, so that under conditions of fully developed capitalism, human nature

is afforded a degree of realization that approaches completion, if only the proletariat would "expropriate the expropriators" and thereby bring the relations of production, or property relations, into harmony with the socialized productive forces. Marx's analysis of the relation between human and nonhuman nature in his early and later writings, as discussed earlier, reveals an historically modified self-realization theory of ethics. Self-realization involves the "free" and "creative" exercise of those powers that define man's ergon and constitute his "advantage over animals." But the exercise of these powers is limited by the social-productive matrix within which they are developed; indeed, Marx's insistence that human nature be conceived as an historical process implies that it is not only the exercise of man's powers, but those very powers themselves, which are limited by precommunist modes of production: "... the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands, nails and teeth. Production thus produces not only the object of consumption but also the mode of consumption, not only objectively, but also subjectively. Production therefore creates the consumer." An historically evolved system of production that has the capacity to meet the legitimate needs of all men is a social whole whose most fundamental aspect is the self-creation of a human nature whose powers are "practically complete," i.e., that can perform its ergon with a degree of control over nature and self-direction hitherto impossible. That the continued existence of capitalist relations of production precludes the actualization of this possibility is the basis of Marx's ethical case against capitalism.

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54 K. Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, p. 197.
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