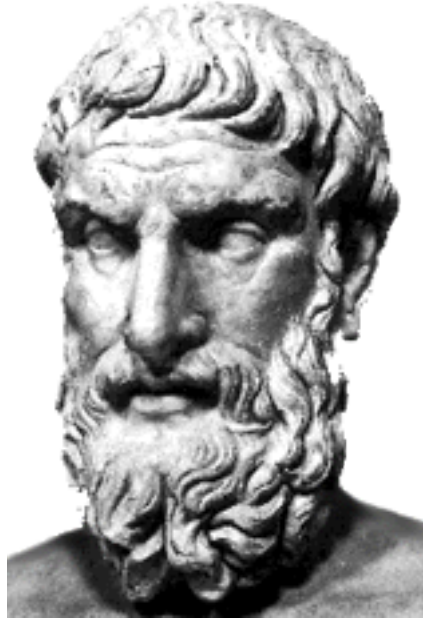


Marx and the Foundations of the Critical Theory of Morality and Ethics

Ricardo Brown



Epicurus

Understanding the Question of Ethics in Marx

1. How are we to understand the ethical content of Marx's work? Is there a socialist ethic or an ethic of socialism? Of course, these are not new questions within the marxist tradition. One hundred years ago, debates over "ethical socialism" coincided with those over accumulation, imperialism, organization and party. Although the question of ethics has been raised most recently by neo-liberal and neo-authoritarian critics, the turn to the question of ethics has not occurred for intellectual reasons. It is occasioned by the passing of state capitalism in the USSR and by the simultaneous critique of the adaptation by the Left of the discursive categories of bourgeois science in the forms of scientific socialism and the science of historical materialism. However, to raise the question of ethics is one thing, but to uncover its location within critical theory is quite another.

Broadly speaking, responses to the question of ethics have displayed two theoretical tendencies. In the first tendency, there is a moralization of Marx through the construction of the "young Marx." This tendency identifies the entirety of Marx's critique of morality

with his readings of Hegel and Feuerbach, the assumption being that Marx's critique of morality is restricted to these early works, leaving the impression that his materialism is at best discontinuous from his critique of morality, and, at worst, simply derived from a previous, enlightenment moral theory.

The second tendency is that of the so-called orthodox marxists who hold that ethics are merely the reflection or representation of economic determinations, simply a transparent feature of the base/superstructure model. This view also displays strong evolutionary arguments (see Kautsky and cf. Habermas). Like the first tendency, the effort here is to restrict ethics to Marx's early works. However, the goal is not to moralize the works but to transform the later works into promethean discourses of modern science, what Max Horkheimer called "Traditional Theory." The reduction of historical materialism to a science of social development attempts to remove ethics from consideration because of its "unscientific" nature. The very fact that ethics exist as *unscientific* simply means that at least one aspect of critical theory cannot be reduced to the disciplining of science -- and it also means that there are possibly many more. Of course, these tendencies are not mutually exclusive, and evidence of both can be found in the writings of marxists as different as Althusser and Habermas, but to answer the question of ethics in Marx is to also critique the moralization of Marx, as well as the adoption by marxists of the techniques and discourses of modern science. For Marx, ethics and morality do exist *scientifically*, i.e., they exist both *historically* and *materially*. Marx's view of ethics is, in other words, an active expression of a materialism that holds the promise of emancipation.

This essay, by starting with Marx's later works, and particularly with the *Grundrisse*, departs from the two aforementioned tendencies by deriving Marx's ethics from his materialism, demonstrating that if we open the question of ethics in the later works, the ethos that emerges provides little comfort to those who would turn Marx into either a moralist, or a scientist of the social. Marx's project of "ruthless critique of all things" certainly included the critique of bourgeois ethics and morality. It is precisely because ethics are most often sought after or confined to Marx's "early works" that the question of ethics allows us to touch on the continuous issues of the "young Marx" and the idea of an epistemological break, Marx's critique of morality, the place of this critique within the entirety of his development of materialism, and the relation of ethics to materialism. By beginning with the later works, I make an implicit argument for a large measure of continuity in Marx's project. It is true that works like the *Holy Family* are more overt critiques of morality, and we will discuss this work in more detail later. It is also true, I will argue, that these works should be seen as moments in Marx's overcoming and exposing of bourgeois morality and that the results of this critique are to be found within a later work like the *Grundrisse*. It is, to be sure, a critique different in style and depth than that found in the early works. Marx himself is often critical of these early efforts, but they are nonetheless continuous with his development of materialism. We can find a discourse on morality and ethics in the *Grundrisse*, but it is a discourse that pointedly avoids all sentimentality, development, or predetermined categories such as good and bad. It is a discourse in which ethics are derived from the practice of struggle. The struggles around morality are not a struggles over values, but conflicts in which each

class is expressed in their means of reproducing the very struggle that creates them -- and finds emancipatory expression in their practices of resistance, pleasure, and authority, i.e., in their sensuous social activity.

Marx moved beyond the question of human nature or essence, Althusser notes, and towards a critical analysis of the reproduction of the everyday world of capital. If we do not identify this critique with bourgeois political economy, then we are obliged to view the concept of an epistemological break -- despite its value in showing Marx's overcoming of Hegelianism -- as concealing the continuity and development of Marx's materialism. By taking production as his starting point, Marx attempts to address a fundamental problem of all previous materialist philosophy, identified in the First Thesis on Feuerbach as the problem of sensuous activity, pleasure and freedom. While Marx's rejection of Hegelian idealism was complete, his rejection of Feuerbach is not a rejection of materialism. "The separation from the Hegelian School was here also the result of a return to the materialist standpoint" (Engels 1941:43) and the practical tasks of materialism, which always consist of "denouncing all myth, all mystifications, all superstitions" (Deleuze 1994:270), and the purpose of which is, as Marx said, to change the world.

The "Young Marx"

The ethical question is not a question of the "young Marx" vs. Marx. Althusser was correct to see the construction of the "young Marx" as both a theoretical problem as well as a practical tactic of social democrats opposed to the Bolshevik party ideologies within the Cold War Left. The ethical question is fundamentally, "Which Marx? The Hegelian or the materialist?"

Althusser rightly noted that Marx systematically rejected both Hegel's idealism and Feuerbach's materialism, purging his work of both humanism and essentialism. This means that he rid himself of any ethics based upon an abstract notion of human nature or rights. Althusser maintained, however, that what remained after this revolution of subjectivity was a science of historical materialism. Aronowitz decisively critiques this move on the grounds that Althusser mistakes materialism, which is always a revolutionary ideological practice, for bourgeois science (Aronowitz 1988). There is indeed, one might say, a Hegelian Marx, else Marx and Althusser would not have spent so much time exorcising him. Nor would Lenin have suggested that one read Hegel's *Logic* to understand *Capital*. Of course, the *Grundrisse* was unknown to Lenin, but to follow up on a suggestion of Nicolaus, with the *Grundrisse* it is no longer necessary to see Marx through Hegel, but instead as a materialist who gave us an alternative understanding of the dialectics of history and materialism.

At the same time, some writers like McCarthy in his otherwise admirable *Marx and the Ancients*, attempt to transform Marx's work into the discourse of Greek philosophy, as though Marx simply returned to the Greeks. These works exaggerate the continuity and at the same time they forget that what Marx said about Greek art is equally true of Greek philosophy: "One can not become a child again without becoming childish" (1973:103).

In his dissertation, Marx critiqued Epicurean philosophy as an ascetic and contemplative philosophy that justified a withdrawal from the everyday world into the garden of philosophy.¹ To find the ethical content of the *Grundrisse*, we can look to the example of Epicurus, who derived his ethics, including an egalitarianism and freedom quite uncharacteristic of most Greek philosophers, from his physics. In much the same way, we must derive Marx's ethics from his materialism. This is in fact how Marx undertook his own work on Epicurus: ". . . instead of presenting moments out of the preceding Greek philosophies as conditions for the life of the Epicurean philosophy, I reason back from the later to draw conclusions about the former and thus let it itself formulate its own particular position" (1975b:493).

As we mentioned earlier, because the *Grundrisse* begins with the production of difference, it also has indeterminacy at its center. Determinism, Marx noted in the dissertation, is a crucial question of materialism. In his study of Democritus and Epicurus, Marx concluded that despite what he understood as Epicurean materialism's contemplative stance, it was a major advance over the Democritean system, which viewed the fall of the atom as determined, and removed chance from the workings of nature. While Democritus held that the atom fell in a straight line, and hence the experience of the world was essentially determined, Marx notes that Epicurus advanced the thesis that instead of falling in a straight line, atoms are subject to spontaneous swerves because of their effects upon one another. In this spontaneous swerve of the atom, Epicurus located his argument for the immanence of freedom in nature, and a world not determined for people, but made by them (Marx 1975). It is instructive to note that De Santillana (1961) sees the same element of freedom in Epicurean materialism that Marx discerns, and also goes further and interprets Epicurus and his more famous follower Lucretius within the political context of their time (a task that Marx did not do in his dissertation). Rejecting the repressive weight of Hamlet's "dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns, puzzles the will," De Santillana seconds the traditional view of Epicurus as the first to bring humans to the status of god, or god to the status of human invention, and thereby free us of this myth. ". . . [T]he man who destroyed the whole foundation of religious faith and overturned the altars and the temples of the gods, not by manly force, as Xerxes did, but by the force of argument" (Cicero 1972:116). And in doing so, the determinism and unity of divinity gave way to a materialism that located spontaneity and difference in nature. For materialism, chance is

an initial element of indeterminacy, of spontaneity, at the core of the atom, so that it should work out as freedom at every point, in nature and specifically in life. . . . The message, in any case is clear: freedom does not come . . . from above, and to the elect as Plato would have it in his *Laws*; it comes from the very core of things, within life itself. Hence it is every man's [*sic*] inalienable inheritance. (De Santillana 1961:291-292)

But we cannot really say that Marx returned to Epicurus. Marx had long before, in his dissertation, condemned even Epicurean materialism as a contemplative and ascetic philosophy (which is also how Nietzsche would later describe it).² However, it did have

some very positive elements that Marx highlighted. It derived its ethics from its materialism, and more importantly, Epicurean materialism lacked essentialism. It placed all humanness into the sensuous experience of an indeterminate nature.³ Marx is particularly impressed with Epicurus locating freedom in nature itself, in the spontaneous swerve of the falling atom, and not in a transcendental category or in an essentialized Human Nature. Humans, from their sensations to their thoughts, never stand apart from nature. Epicurean materialism immersed all humans in the sensuous experience of an indeterminate nature. Marx in the *Grundrisse* does the same with the social relations that make us human.

The *Grundrisse* and *Capital* begin at a very different moments.⁴ *Capital*, for reasons of political practice, begins with the commodity and with the fetishism of commodities. I.I. Rubin convincingly places the fetishism of commodities at the center of *Capital*. "The theory of fetishism is, *per se*, the basis of Marx's entire economic system . . . revealing the illusion in human consciousness which originated in the commodity economy and which assigned to things characteristics which have their source in the social relations among people in the process of production" (Rubin 1993:5). But it is not *Marx's* economic system-- for he proposed no such theory -- but "the many capitals of capital" that spread with the commodity form to every corner of the social world. *Capital* begins with difference, with the multitude of commodities that *appear* as one vast accumulation, as the unity that reveals the imperialism inherent in commodity production (Luxemburg 1964). In the relentless drive by capital to overcome all limits, production must be subsumed under the commodity form. Rubin's analysis shows how *Capital* is an immanent critique, starting necessarily from the capitalists' own understanding of the world as a world of commodities. As described by Marx, it is the fetishism of commodities that gives the appearance of an infinite market of difference, but this difference is a mystery whose solution reveals the unity of capital accumulation made real by its essential imperialism. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx replaces the fetishistic difference of commodities with the real difference of production.

The *Grundrisse* is first distinguished by the fact that it is not written from the perspective of the capitalist. Instead, it is written from within capital, by an active opponent of capitalist relations. The *Grundrisse* does not begin with commodities but with "material production. Individuals producing in society -- hence socially determined individual production by an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society" (1973:83-84). But in starting with production, Marx avoids the error of bourgeois political economy, which also starts with an abstract discussion of production. Instead, he opposes the *a priori* totality of "production in general." Horkheimer further reminds us that for "traditional" or "scientific" theory, "production is the production of unity, and production is itself a product." Classical political economy is marked by a "determinative, ordering, unifying function" that serves as the "sole foundation for all else, and towards it all human effort is directed." This unifying function expresses itself as the "consciousness of the bourgeois savant in the liberal era" (Horkheimer 1972:198), and is opposed to critical theory, which holds that production as the production of difference. Political economy, in both its marxist and its bourgeois forms, aims to describe production "as encased in eternal natural laws independent of history, at which

opportunity bourgeois relations are then smuggled in as the inviolable natural laws on which society in the abstract is founded" (Marx 1973:97). Marx's work is a *critique* of political economy. Horkheimer is simply paraphrasing Marx's statement that "the whole profundity of those modern economists who demonstrate the eternity and harmoniousness of existing social relations" lies in forgetting "that each determination is itself segmented many times over and splits into different determinations" (1973:85). The "essential difference" within any determination should never be forgotten. Production as an abstract unity, "production in general" did not concern Marx. And if "there is no production in general, then there is no general production, or it is always a particular branch of production, or it is a totality [comprised of many branches of production]. Production is also not only a particular production, rather, it is always a certain social body, a social subject, which is active . . ." (1973:85).

Production -- material production -- is the production of difference. But the production of difference is at the same time the consumption of this difference. In fact, it is this dialectic of production and consumption that Marx uses to demonstrate both his debt to and his overcoming of Hegel's dialectical method. For Marx states that "there is nothing simpler for a Hegelian than to posit production and consumption as identical" (1973:93), but it is not Marx's goal to prove this identity, but to critique it, to expose the non-identity of capital and labor, and thereby show that production is not merely consumption, but also the consumption of difference: "productive consumption" Marx calls it. In maintaining that production is the production of difference, Marx does not close off dialectical development, but opens it up to spiral ever further, acknowledging a fundamental indeterminacy to social relations. In a world of socially individuated humans producing in society, production is never the abstraction of "production in general," but is always expressed in material difference, i.e., in class. And ethics are inherent in the determinations of class, for Marx does not allow us any generalizations, even that of *society*. "This so-called contemplation from the standpoint of society means nothing more than the overlooking of the differences which express the social relation (relation of bourgeois society). Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of the interrelations within which these individuals stand" (1973:264-265).

The *Grundrisse* is best understood as the foundation of a materialist critique. If we want to understand ethics in the *Grundrisse*, then we must see it as the foundation of a materialism that derives its ethics from the experience of social bodies immersed in the historical activity of the production of difference. For the *Grundrisse* has difference at its center, in other words, it has the historical indeterminacy of class struggle at its center. And Marx, to emphasize the point again, is not writing about this struggle from the perspective of the capitalist. Thus, it is difference that allows us to derive the ethical content from a work that rarely mentions the word "ethics." For the entirety of this essay, I take seriously the possibility that the *Grundrisse* is truly the foundation of an exposition of materialism. My argument will proceed bearing in mind that any discussion of ethics is obliged to avoid the trap of searching for moralizing statements in Marx's texts, and instead locate the ethical content in the critique itself, i.e., within materialism. Morality, Marx said, is a particular mode of production (1978:85).

The Critique of Bourgeois Morality: life as sensuous activity

15. In some ways, *The Holy Family* is the first work of Cultural Studies, or at least of Critical Theory. All of the concerns are there, popular culture and the media, the "mass," authority, morality, punishment and ethics, the method of immanent critique that is to form the basis of the critique of political economy, and the technique based upon immanent critique and close reading. The texts (Sue's novel, the newspaper, the review of the novel) are deconstructed and recombined, with the addition of Marx's critique, into a new text. One moves from the review of a popular novel to the critique of Hegelianism itself, as well as a Nietzschean critique of morality. Certainly, it is a defiant rejection of bourgeois morality, ethics, and sexuality. Perhaps this is what is so important about *The Holy Family*, that it is where Marx takes up the problems of ethics and ethical life, following Rudolf through Parisian society in much the way one follows "ethical self-consciousness" in the *Phenomenology* through its development (another turning of Hegel on his head).⁵ It is also a critique that is never again given an extended, or explicit, treatment -- although one does hear it in the *Manifesto* in Marx's denouncement of marriage as a respectable form of prostitution and slavery. It is a critique that Marx himself critiques for its humanism, but the critique itself, as a ruthless critique of ideology, is never renounced. Indeed, *The Holy Family* was written at the same time as the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, and so it is not the result of a youthful Marx's naiveté or an early Hegelianism, as it was at this time that Marx overcomes Hegel. A certain indeterminacy lies at the heart of Marx's critique of morality, but Marx realized that to critique morality was not enough. Marx therefore carries over his critique of the social relations of morality to his critique of political economy and social relations in general. The multiple determinations and overdeterminations of historical relations express the indeterminacy of nature and our attempts to control and rationalize it, first through others (slavery), and then directly (commodification, management, and supervision) and which has its expression in new forms of discipline and control (Marx 1973; Marx I, 1976; Deleuze 1994).

Marx establishes his position, which is an essential aspect of materialist philosophy, that there is no good or bad. The opposition of good and bad is not a dialectic, he says, but only a "mystery" of bourgeois morality. This view goes to the heart of his critique of Proudhon as having merely modified Hegel's Dialectic, making "every economic category" have two sides

. . . one good, the other bad. He looks upon these categories as the petty bourgeois looks upon the great men of history: Napoleon was a great man; he did a lot of good; he also did a lot of harm. The good side and the bad side, the advantages and the drawbacks, taken together form for M. Proudhon the contradiction in every economic category. The problem to be solved: to keep the good side, while eliminating the bad. [Marx then mocks Proudhon.]

Slavery is an economic category like any other. Thus it also has two sides. Let us leave alone the bad side and talk about the good side of slavery[!]. . . (1978:104-105)

Marx accuses Proudhon of having read Hegel's ethical development of the spirit as expressing essential ethical qualities of good and bad. For Marx, ethics exist in the material situation itself, in this example, in the institution of slavery. The good of slavery is that without it, you would have no cotton, and no modern industry, and no world trade. "The value of slavery is not in any good inherent in the abstract concept of its thesis -- we have left aside its 'bad' side -- and it seems that the 'good' side is good only relative to whether you think that it is 'good' to have a system built upon slavery at all" (Marx 1978:105).

To remain within materialism, and not be reduced to the negative abstraction of good and bad, ethics must be derived from sensuous experience. Bourgeois morality seeks to limit sensuous experience at every opportunity because such limits are seen, as Freud pointed out, as the foundation for social life. This limit is a limit not of nature -- for which the very indeterminacy of its material existence endows it an almost infinite productive potential (Epicurus 1964:11) -- but always a limit of capital. Freud later found, but could never admit, that the limits of the human psyche that he discovered were the products of the social relations of capital and specific to the bourgeois and petite bourgeois classes, and that even the Oedipal relation, supposedly so universal, was experienced first as a deployment within the bourgeoisie for the purpose of controlling itself and only later universalized to the other classes.[6](#)

It is sensuous experience that Marx takes up in the *Holy Family*, his first collaboration with Engels. Written at the same time as the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," the *Holy Family* demolishes the "mysteries" of the Young Hegelians. By interweaving a critique of Szeliga's review with a close reading of the text, Marx's critique operates on two levels: 1) as a general critique of the Idealism of the Young Hegelians, and of Hegel himself, and 2) as a critique of morality and discipline that uses sensuousness not a transcendental ideal that may be repressed, but as the basis for human emancipation.

Like Freud, Marx avoids the error of the science of his day and rejects degeneracy as an explanation for poverty, deviance, and other social problems and conflicts. Degeneracy is only a mystification that conceals the real social conditions that are expressed through the bodies of humans producing socially. Marx finds the limit to human freedom not in the "mystery of degeneracy," but in the experience of capital relations in the everyday world. It is this limit to freedom, to nature itself, that Marx exposes in the *Holy Family*, where he deconstructs a review by the critical criticism of Szeliga through his review of Eugene Sue's novel *Mysteres de Paris*. Because the mystery of degeneracy is to be found in the world, Marx follows Szeliga following Sue's protagonist, Rudolph, through his rounds of the city, where he seeks to raise up the weak and punish the wicked. Only we find that things are not so clear cut in Marx's close reading.

Marx speaks first of Szeliga: "his art is not that of disclosing what is hidden, but in hiding what is disclosed . . . [and] presenting world conditions as mysteries. He proclaims as *mysteries* degeneracy [criminals, prostitutes, the poor, etc.] within civilization and rightlessness and inequality in the state." Marx sees no mystery in these conditions, after all "the credo of most states starts . . . by making the high and the low, the rich and the poor *unequal* before the *law*" (1943:70). Marx characterizes Szeliga's presentation as the "mystery of *speculative*, of *Hegelian construction*." Szeliga proclaims degeneracy in civilization and rightlessness in the state to be mysteries, which Marx says dissolves them into the "category *mystery*" which takes on an abstract existence apart "from present world conditions":

Only now, after dissolving real relations, e.g., law and civilization, in the category of mystery and making "*Mystery*" into Substance, does [Szeliga] rise to the true speculative, *Hegelian*, height and transform "*Mystery*" into a self-existing Subject incarnating itself in real situations and persons so that the manifestations of its life are countesses, marquises, grisettes, porters, notaries, charlatans, love intrigues, balls, wooden doors, etc. Having produced the category "Mystery" out of the real world, he produces the real world out of this category (75-76).

Rudolph, the protagonist, roams the streets of Sue's Paris, encountering representatives of the various social classes. But in Szeliga's review, even Sue's bourgeois morality, which at least recognizes the existence of other classes and moralities, is reduced to the category of "mystery." Of course, Feuerbach also used the metaphor of mystery, "but whereas Feuerbach disclosed *real mysteries*, [Szeliga] makes *mysteries* out of real *trivialities*. His art is not that of disclosing what is hidden, but of hiding what is disclosed" (Marx 1980:70). Rudolph's journey through the mysterious social hierarchy of Paris consists precisely in this hiding of what is disclosed, for no sooner is a "mystery" exposed than its expressive, affirmative aspect is subsumed under the sign of bourgeois morality and an ethic of bad conscience and revenge. In fact Marx effectively shows the role of revenge and punishment in Rudolph's administration of justice, thereby putting punishment at the center of Rudolph/Sue/Szeliga's bourgeois morality.

Rudolph's is a reactive stroll. The stroll has become familiar in some genres of critical theory. Closely associated with urbanism, the stroll, which dates as a theoretical subject to Simmel, Baudelaire, and Benjamin, is often conceived of as an emancipatory experience, an example being Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of Buchner's "Lenz" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:4-5). Lenz on his stroll is removed from the conditions that require that he "constantly situate himself socially, in relationship to the god of established religion, in relationship to his father, to his mother," and to the reproduction of capitalist relations. Lenz on his stroll experiences "not nature as nature, but [nature] as a process of production" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983:2). His stroll "emancipates him from the jail-yard of individual relations" (Emerson 1887). Conversely, Rudolph's stroll can be read as the steady accumulation of the very limits that Lenz seeks to momentarily escape. Rudolph seeks to enforce limits, especially to limit production to proscribed paths (and hence conceal production's essential difference by giving it a false identity).

Possessing the ability to reform even the most wretched person in accordance with his "impartial judgment" (Szeliga), Rudolph sets about reforming the lives of all the ne'redo-wells he meets. In order to accomplish this task, he either punishes them in accord with the "ruthless . . . thought of *pure criticism*" (Szeliga), i.e., punishment and torture; or Rudolph brings them into the strictures of bourgeois morality, where "the ethics of political economy . . . acquisition, work, thrift, sobriety" (Marx 1978:97), dictate that they, like the characters he "reforms," should willingly die for their "master," having no other need than to serve him.⁷ Rudolph goes to a ball and finds the aristocracy in its everyday condition. He talks to two of the "most beautiful among the beautiful" and he expects to hear from them their joy regarding "the blessing of beloved children and the fullness" of a life spent seeing to the "happiness of a husband." At the very least, since he is amongst the aristocracy, he expects a certain moral supremacy that comes with political power. Instead, they gossip about adultery and the very real and decadent, morality of their peers. This leads to Szeliga/Sue's speculations on love and sensuality.

It is here that Marx reverses the terms of the discussion and, in the manner of Spinoza, un.masks real relations that are so easily proclaimed mysteries.⁸ Marx puts forward the materialist view that it is through sensuous activity -- in love and in labor -- that humans experience the world. It is within sensuous activity that we experience the production of desire, the utilization of human impulses, and the historical materiality of human relations. This sensuous activity has, since the end of feudalism, been increasingly expressed in the production of the general ideological practices of capital, commodity fetishism and the concealment of bourgeois morality through the production of the "mystery of speculative love." This is aptly shown by Marx's analysis of the character of the parson in Sue's novel. Marx points out that the parson's idea of love conforms to the design of the church (1980:81) and not the actual sensuality of sex. It is a statement limited by Christian morality. The parson uses the metaphors of love -- which Marx deconstructs into the real social power of the church -- to conceal the real sensuousness of love, and to deny the very real things of sex. Szeliga goes on to ask:

What is the mystery of love? . . . Not the shady paths in the thickets, declaims the parson, "not the natural semi-obscurity of moonlight night nor the artificial semi-obscurity of costly curtains and draperies; no the soft and enrapturing notes of the harps and the organs, not the attraction of what is forbidden. . . . All this [curtains, draperies and organs] is only the mysterious. The mysterious in it is what excites, what intoxicates, what enraptures, the power of sensuality." (1980:81 interpolation by Marx)

To which Marx replies: "Curtains *and* draperies! Soft *and* enrapturing notes! Even the organ! Let the reverend parson stop thinking of the *church*! Who would bring an organ to a love tryst?" The parson states that the "mysterious in [love] is what excites, what intoxicates, what enraptures, *the power of sensuality*." Sensuality therefore invokes the experience of these things. On the contrary, Marx argues that our sensuality is excited, intoxicated, enraptured in our experience of the world. He says,

The parson advises us, after the fashion of speculative theology, to *recognize* sensuality as our own nature, in order afterwards to *dominate* it, i.e., to retract recognition of it. True, he wishes to dominate it only when it tries to assert itself at the expense of *Reason* -- will-power and love as *opposed* to sensuality are only the will-power and love of *Reason*. The unspeculative Christian also recognizes *sensuality* as long as it does not assert itself at the expense of true reason, i.e., of faith, of true love, i.e., of love of God, of true will-power, i.e., of will in Christ. (1980:81)

The parson does acknowledge that sensuality "has such a tremendous power over us" because we will not recognize it as a part of our nature. Szeliga maintains that this is a mystery of love, he does not explain it. So we must rhetorically ask, why this refusal? "It is true that we [the parson or the church?] do not like to admit the power of sensuality. . . ." This is understandable, given that such an admission can only come as a confession and a submission to Reason. According to Szeliga

If then love ceases to be the essential element of marriage and of morality in general, sensuality becomes the mystery of love, of morality, of educated society -- sensuality both in its *narrow* meaning, in which it is a *trembling in the nerves* and a *burning stream in the veins*, and in the broader meaning, in which it is elevated to a *semblance* of spiritual power, to lust for power, ambition, craving for glory. . . . (Szeliga in Marx and Engels 1980:81)

Marx then gives his final blow contra Szeliga, Sue and Hegel:

The parson hits the nail on the head. To overcome *sensuality* he must first of all overcome the *nerve currents* and the quick *circulation of the blood*. . . . As soon as there is no more nerve current and the blood in the veins is no longer hot, the *sinful body*, this seat of sensual lust, becomes a *corpse* and the souls can converse unhindered about "general reason," "true love," and "pure mortals." The parson debases sensuality to such an extent that he abolishes the very elements of sensual love which inspire it -- the rapid circulation of blood, which proves that man does not love by insensitive phlegm; the nerve currents which connect the organ that is the main seat of sensuality with the brain. He reduces true sensual love to the mechanical secretio seminis and lips with notorious German theologian: "Not for the sake of sensual love, not for the lust of the flesh, but because the Lord said: Increase and Multiply" (1980:82)

Love and labor are for Marx the real sensuous experiences of everyday life. The experience of Homo sapiens who are made human through their social production. Love is not a spiritual bond, nor does it represent the internal development of an absolute love in the ideas of humans. It is nature itself in humans and it must be dominated as nature is dominated. Even before labor there is sensuous activity, and this remains even after it becomes human sensuous activity through social labor. It is that part of us that is nature,

not *human nature*, but nature-as-nature, which is historically prior to human social relations, although the two are *historically* linked.

The passion of love is incapable of having an interest in *internal* development because it can not be constructed apriori, because its development is a real one which takes place in the world of the senses and between real individuals . . . what Critical Criticism combats here is not merely love, but everything which is immediate, every sensuous experience, any and every real experience, the "whence" and the "whither" of which one never *knows* beforehand. (Marx 1980:30)

Hence Critical Criticism combats the everyday world of individuals producing in society, the "whence and whether" we can not know precisely because it is *material* production, and therefore, *indeterminate*. It is the production of difference. The particular production that concerns us is capitalist production, which is a historically situated domination of social production through the *seemingly* unlimited expansion of wage-labor and the concurrent commodification of the everyday (Marx 1980: 322-324). It is the particular character of domination that is found under capital that necessitates that we turn our attention towards the most terrible of expression of "moral" order, slavery.

Morality and Slavery

25. The domination of sensuality, or the domination of sensuous experience, is also the domination of human labor -- since it is labor that is so much a part of us and through which we create ourselves (Lefebvre 1991:74-75). Under capital, the domination of sensuous experience has its particular form in the work of supervision and management-- authority-- that pervades both family and work.⁹ However, as authority "necessarily arises where the direct production process takes the form of a socially combined process . . . it takes on two different forms" (Marx 1976 [III]:507). In the one, the increased cooperation inherent in the historical division of labor, authority can appear as a "*governing* will . . . like the conductor of an orchestra" (Marx 1976 [III]:507; emphasis added) who leads, but is not the composer. The division of labor necessitates authority, but the expression of authority is specific to any process of social production. This is the second form of authority and it is the specificity of capital production that concerned Marx. While chattel slavery is the "high point" of the concentration of supervision, capital has its own concentrations of authority. The work of supervision and management is as "indispensable in the capitalist mode of production" as it is under slavery. Moreover, there is in both the tendency for supervision and management to become separate from ownership. In the case of Roman slavery, this tendency resulted in the *villicus*, the manager of a slave estate. In the case of American slavery, it is found in the position of the overseer, and in the separation of the house from the field slaves. Under capital, it is the slavery of the wage. But under capital, there is a multiplicity of supervisory positions so that even the individual capitalist can appear to another as a worker, for example, the industrial capitalist might appear as such to the financial capitalist. Marx actually applies Aristotle's description of the slave holder to the capitalist. The interpolated comments are Marx's:

"For the master" -- the capitalist -- "proves himself such not by obtaining slaves' ownership of capital, which gives him the power to buy labor" -- "but by employing slaves" -- using laborers, nowadays wage-laborers, in the production process. "There is nothing great or sublime about this science but whatever the slave is to perform, the master must be able to order. Whenever the masters are not compelled to plague themselves with supervision, the overseer assumes *this honor*, while the masters pursue public affairs or philosophy." (Marx 1976 [III]:509, quoting Aristotle, *De Republica*, Book I, 7)

Marx explains the importance of this science:

What Aristotle is saying, in very blunt terms, is that domination, in the economic as well as the political, imposes on those in power the functions of dominating, so that in the economic domain, they must know how to consume labour-power. And he adds that this supervisory work is not a matter of very great moment, which is why the master leaves the "honour" of this drudgery to an overseer as soon as he is wealthy enough (1976 [III]:509).

In the social domain, the critique of capital relations is also the critique of slave relations, there is, after all a reason why it is called wage-slavery. In a sense, Marx reveals to us the paradox of Hegel's statement that "A slave can have no duties; only a free man has them" (Hegel 1967:261). The "free man" is free to submit to duty. In other words, the free man has his freedom determined by his duty, his unfreedom. The slave, having no freedom, also has no duty. And having no duty, cannot be fully human. But this does not go far enough. The specific aspect of capital's social domination in the capitalist mode of production is that the slave and the "free man" become one and the same. It is not a question of the contradictions between abstractions, but, of the conflicts around the ownership of production and the apparatus of supervision and administration (e.g., the state, the boss, the teacher, the doctor, etc.). The capacity to command the labor of others permeates the labor process in general, so that even the capitalist appears as "a functionary of capital, as a simple bearer of the labor process in general; as a worker, and a wage-worker at that" (Marx 1976 [III]: 505). Marx draws this comparison of the slave and the "free worker":

The slave is the property of a particular *master*; the worker must indeed sell himself to capital, but not to a particular capitalist; and so within certain limitations he may choose to sell himself to whomever he wishes, and he may also change his master. The effect of all these differences is to make the free worker's work more intensive, more continuous, more flexible and skilled than that of the slave quite apart from the fact that they fit him for quite a different role. The slave receives the means of subsistence he requires in the form of *naturalia* which are fixed both in kind and quantity -- i.e., he receives use values. The free worker receives them in the shape of money, exchange values. . . . [The free worker] learns

to control himself [his conversion of "money into whatever use-values he desires"] in contrast to the slave, who needs a master. (Marx 1976 [I]:I, 1032-1033)

At no point does Marx condemn slavery on the basis of abstract ethical concepts of good and bad. Instead, the critique of slavery serves to underscore the need to understand the ethical content of Marx's work in light of the materialist practice of deriving ethics from the conditions of life. The creation of capital's "free man" as the bearer of capital's authority -- who is in all senses the child of the Enlightenment -- has an important place in Marx's critique of morality, especially that of bourgeois discipline and punishment. The critique of bourgeois punishment is continuous with Marx's discussion of the work of supervision and management. This is, of course, ineluctably tied to the domination of Reason over sensual experience, which in turn intersects with human attempts to dominate nature, and which has been shown by the impressive research of the Frankfurt School to be a necessary aspect of the domination of humans by other humans. Of course, this form of domination is itself the domination of the everyday life of the person. It is in this sense that the domination of the finite time granted by life becomes the means by which we can understand capital as the crystallization of dead labor (Gulli 1996; Krysl 1997).

The versatility of the worker is the result of h(er/is) freedom and h(er/is) freedom is the result of the subsumption of h(er/is) work to the relations of capital. Versatility is an immediate result of the worker subsumed under capital. Capital colonizes differences so that instead of producing freedom, they produce the desire for exchange values. The alienation of the person's labor (and their labor from that of others), becomes a desired object (commodity) that stands outside, and above, the labor that produced it. Difference, the origin of freedom, instead is produced so as to deny freedom. The versatility of the worker under the societies of discipline, already the denial of the freedom of the free worker, gives way to the continuous difference, the constant "retraining" of the present societies of control (Deleuze 1990).

Remarks

In the preface to his dissertation, Marx quotes Aeschylus' Prometheus defiantly responding to the god's messenger: "Be sure of this, I would rather not change my state of evil fortune for your servitude, / Better to be the servant of this rock, / Than to be the faithful boy to Father Zeus." Of course, it is easy to see this rock as a metaphor for materialism itself, which Marx never abandoned. The contradiction between freedom and the duty of the "free man" might also be seen in this passage. Someday, we must ask ourselves why so many editions of the "early works" begin with letters from Marx to his father. Or why we are to find Hegel looming over Marx, providing the only avenue for understanding Marx. "One must read Hegel to understand Marx." If it is not a father relationship that we often try to present in our genealogies of Marxism, then it is certainly a chronology of master and servants. Marx would have had none of this. He sides not with Hegel, but with Epicurus, for whom chance/spontaneity, and therefore freedom, was immanent in all of nature. Determinism, then, is a crucial question of materialism. Again,

Marx's epistemological break with Hegel is a meaningless question if there was never a clear unity.

There is no single ethics that covers all time and places, Engels notes (1941). Engels gives a later statement (which can be used if his scientism is critiqued; see Aronowitz, 1988):

We therefore reject every effort to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an external, ultimate and forever immutable ethical law on the pretext that the moral world, too, has its permanent principles which stand above history and the difference between nations. We maintain on the contrary that all moral theories have been hitherto the product, in the last analysis, of the economic conditions of society obtaining at the time. And as society has hitherto moved in class antagonism, morality has always been class morality . . . we have not yet passed beyond class morality. A really human morality which stands above class antagonisms and above any recollection of them becomes possible only at that stage of society which has not only overcome class antagonism, but has forgotten them in practical life. (1978 :726-727)

Ethics are specific to the social bodies engaged in struggles around the production of sensuous activity, what we might now call "everyday life." It is not that Marx was a relativist any more than Nietzsche was one. He was not. But he did recognize difference in social production, and therefore ultimately rejected any universal of human nature, or transcendental category (except those segmented by multiple determinations, e.g., labor). Thus, Marx can assail slavery not on moral grounds, in terms of good or bad, right and wrong, etc., but on the grounds of pleasure, desire, and freedom, which exist materially.

Negri says that "to go back must be a passage into politics" (1991:103), and I think that this is the way to understand and prepare to answer the question of ethics in the *Grundrisse*. Like *Capital*, it is a political intervention. But by starting with production, the *Grundrisse* marks the return to materialism as political action. Therefore, any ethic in Marx must first be seen as an ethic of struggle and resistance.¹⁰ Ethics are derived from political practice, and the fundamental production of difference means that the political is particular to each class and segmented within each. To venture beyond this point would be to enter into a discussion of ideology in general, which I can not do here. But it is important to remark that the ethical question in the *Grundrisse* is inescapably linked to questions of ideology and class. However, we can also say, regarding the current ideological struggles within the left over the ethical question, that the moralization of Marx by Habermas, Benhabib, Taylor, MacIntyre, and others, is an attempt to work through the problems of materialism, and historical materialism, outside of the context of the very conditions that gave rise to the contradiction in the first place. An ethic that serves as the justification for bourgeois morality on the basis of Marx having been an "enlightenment thinker" ignores Marx's materialism. Marx is not an Enlightenment thinker. In going beyond Feuerbach, Marx also went beyond the Enlightenment totalization. As Marx said in a circular letter, when one joins the proletarian party, "the

first requirement is that they do not bring any remnants of bourgeois, or petty bourgeois prejudices with them. . ." (1974:374). It is for this reason that I have avoided mention of alienation, so as to avoid any confusion of my position with those who make the ethical content of Marx rest solely upon the Feuerbachian idea of alienation, and in so doing reduce Marx's theory of the fetishism of commodities to an abstraction.

I would instead propose that an affirmative ethics can be derived from Marx, one that is emancipatory, that finds the ethical in the materiality of pleasure and that constantly opens new avenues of desire that are not limited by the needs of capital production, the morality of bourgeois authority and family, or even by the needs of a party. All such political practice is reactionary, as Marx points out, because it is not predicated on emancipation.

Notes

[1](#) Epicurus' school was known as the Garden, much in the same way that Plato's school was known as the Academy.

[2](#) George Sarton disputes this reading, arguing that the Epicureans, by their practice of gender equality and their public attacks on religion and superstition, were quite conspicuous to the authorities and were therefore ultimately viciously slandered and repressed. "Let the common people have all the superstitions they want, Plato and his disciples would have said, they are too stupid to contemplate the truth, they prefer lies. That may be true, but the immense difference between Plato and Epicurus consists in this very fact, that the former was ready to exploit popular ignorance and credulity, while the latter does his best to eradicate them. [Epicurus was] the first to proclaim the social danger of superstition and the primary need of fighting it. The people must not be lied to according to the Platonic method; they must be told the truth; if they are not sufficiently educated for that, then they must be educated; the truth will make them free, naught else" (Sarton 1952:593).

[3](#) Cornell West (1991) has mentioned what he calls Marx's "anti-foundationalism." However, I believe that the very use of the term transforms the question of ethics into a question of relativism. While this is clearly West's intention, and his work is an excellent critique of Kautsky in particular, West derives Marx's "ethical dimension" from his "historicism." The Hegelianism of this attempt is obvious and even quite bold, but West utterly neglects both Epicureanism and materialism in general, and instead favors an idealist conception of moral relativism.

[4](#) Because of splits in the international movement, the *Grundrisse* remained virtually unknown until about thirty to forty years ago. So it is not surprising that it was eclipsed by *Capital* as the final word from Marx. Some would say for good reason. Once the *Grundrisse* began to circulate, it brought the inevitable comparison to *Capital*. It is in this

comparison that we can find the avenue towards the materialism from which any socialist ethics must be and is derived. Many commentators acknowledge the separate importance of the *Grundrisse*, while at the same time find its unfinished condition unacceptable (a problem they curiously do not have with the second and third volumes of *Capital*). Others have complained that the *Grundrisse* is unreadable or an abandoned rough-draft of *Capital*, "a kind of intellectual, personal, and often indecipherable shorthand" (Hobsbawm in Negri 1991:1). Martin Nicolaus characterized it as a rough-draft executed mainly for the purpose of "self-clarification" (1973:). In his commentary, Nicolaus points out that the *Grundrisse* can be thought of as *Capital* turned inside-out. This makes the two companion works, but works that differ because of Marx's method of presentation. The key difference being that "the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* have opposite virtues of form. The latter is the model of the method of presentation, the former the record of the method of working" (1973:61). But Nicolaus notes that much of the content of the *Grundrisse* is not carried over into *Capital*. Indeed, in the scheme of Marx's project, *Capital* was a popular political exposition of a much larger project. It is entirely plausible that the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* are two different works. The plan of the *Grundrisse* shows it to be the foundation of a much larger project, touching on the entirety of Marx's effort to infuse materialism with history.

5 Foucault adds that "our age, whether through logic or through epistemology, whether through Marx or through Nietzsche, is attempting to flee Hegel" (Foucault 1971:235).

6 The family in Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto* is distinguished by its class relation. Often when speaking of the family, they are referring to the bourgeois family. Moreover, the bourgeois family is an institution for the exploitation of women: "Prostitution both public and private." See also Foucault's insightful account in his *History of Sexuality* (1980), and Marx's "Greed for Surplus Labor" in *Capital* (1976 [I]).

7 "Needlessness as the principle of political economy is most brilliantly shown in its theory of population. There are too many people. Even the existence of men is a pure luxury; and if the worker is 'ethical,' he will be sparing in procreation. (Mill suggests public acclaim for those who prove themselves continent in the sexual relations, and public rebuke for those who sin against such barrenness of marriage. . . . Is not this the ethics, the teaching of asceticism?) The production of people appears as a public misery" (Marx 1978:97).

8 "Spinoza belongs to a great tradition: the practical task of philosophy consists in denouncing all myths, all mystifications, all superstitions, whatever their origin. I believe that this tradition always involves a naturalist philosophy. Superstition is everything that keeps us cut off from our power of action and continually diminishes it. The source of superstition is the concatenation of sad passions, fear, the hope linked to fear, the anxiety that delivers us over to our phantoms. Spinoza knows, like Lucretius, that there are no joyful myths or superstitions. Like Lucretius, he sets the image of a positive Nature against the uncertainty of gods: *what is opposed to Nature is not Culture, nor the state of reason, nor even the civil state, but only the superstitions that threaten all human endeavor. . .*" (Deleuze 1992:270).

[9](#) Thus calling into question Habermas's claims of a social life bifurcated into public/private, purposive/communicative, lifeworld/system.

[10](#) It should be remembered that Marx quotes *Prometheus Bound* in the forward to his dissertation: "be sure of this, I would not change my state of evil fortune for your servitude. Better to be the servant of this rock, than to be faithful boy to Father Zeus" (Aeschylus 1942:140). This view is diametrically opposed to the words of Homer, which Plato uses to justify his authoritarianism: "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master, than to live like them the masses of people" (Plato 1924:216).

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