

Motivating Marxian Descriptions

Jesse Sean Summers

University College London

Submitted for the degree of MPhil

1 April 2004



ProQuest Number: U643126

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest U643126

Published by ProQuest LLC(2015). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Abstract

There is good reason to think that Marx's writings do not contain an explicitly normative moral theory. Nevertheless, the average reader of Marx is to be forgiven for thinking that his presentation of capitalism is certainly not neutral and for believing that his calls for revolution must be grounded on precisely such a normative theory.

I propose that this misreading of Marx has an explanation that grants that there is no normative theory underlying Marx's writings but argues that there is an evaluative position from which he writes. This evaluative position contains values, primarily in the form of what I will call 'thick evaluative terms', but not norms. It is this evaluative position that is easily mistaken for a normative theory, thus explaining the misreading.

This evaluative position, moreover, is descriptive rather than prescriptive, so Marx is justified in holding that his position is descriptive. While descriptions may not clearly contain norms – such would apparently violate Hume's Law against deriving an 'ought' from an 'is' – they must be allowed values. In fact, if descriptions may not include values, then they will not even be able to describe facts. Therefore, Marx may hold his evaluative position without being forced to redescribe his enterprise as a prescriptive one.

Finally, there is a close link between values and motivation, and this explains why Marx is justified in his revolutionary call. He may not clearly be able to support the position that one *ought* to have a revolution, but he can provide strongly motivating reason for revolution from his evaluative position, all without leaving the realm of the truly descriptive.

Table of Contents

I. Marx and Morality	4
II. Marx's Early Arguments	9
III. Explaining Descriptions	33
IV. Motivating Descriptions	49
V. Conclusion	70
Bibliography	72

I. Marx and Morality

Marx famously claimed not to be engaged in the moral condemnation of capitalism, contrary to the ‘utopian socialists’ he held in such contempt. While Pierre Proudhon and Ferdinand Lasalle railed against the injustice and immorality of industrial capitalism, Marx took the surprising stance that capitalist distribution was ‘fair’,¹ and exploitation of the worker’s labour for less than its value was “a piece of good luck for the buyer, but by no means an injury [*Unrecht*] to the seller”.² Precisely at those points where it would be natural for one to assume a critique of the immorality or injustice of capitalism would arise, Marx refrains from such attacks.

Surely something was happening in capitalist production and distribution that aroused Marx’s ire, but it was not met with claims about what the system of production ought morally to do. Quite the contrary. In response to a political manifesto’s demand for fair distribution of production, Marx’s position seems clear: “What is ‘fair’ distribution? Do not the bourgeois assert that present-day distribution is ‘fair’? And is it not, in fact, the only ‘fair’ distribution on the basis of the present-day mode of production?”³ Nevertheless, many readers of Marx will be forgiven for thinking that his writings are full of moral invective, that his talk of justice, exploitation, theft, and so on are clearly indicative of a moral point of view. Indeed, what other sort of condemnation would he be making, if not a moral one?

If one agrees that Marx at least presented himself as refraining from a moral condemnation of capitalism, and one assumes as well that such a moral reading is a natural one in spite of Marx’s claims, then some explanation needs to be given how this reading is justified if incorrect.

There are two strong proposals to do just such a thing. The first, by Robert Tucker, proposes that Marx had pragmatic reasons not to engage in moral condemnation, since providing a moral position on capitalism might lead to reform instead of revolution.⁴ The cost of such a proposal, of course, is the acceptance that

¹ Marx and Engels *Collected Works* [hereafter MECW] (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), vol. 24, p. 84.

² *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, Ben Fowkes, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 188.

³ From *Critique of the Gotha Program*, MECW, vol. 24, p. 84.

⁴ *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea* (New York: Norton, 1969).

Marx actually did have a moral view despite his contrary claims: he just kept it well hidden for fear of what would happen if it came out.

The second proposal, developed in different guises both by Allen Buchanan and by Allen Wood, argues that Marx may condemn capitalism on non-moral grounds. In Buchanan's case, the condemnation is that "defective modes of production...make conceptions of justice and right necessary...which could only arise in a radically defective form of human society."⁵ In Wood's argument, there is deprivation of "such essential human goods as freedom, community, and self-actualization", all of which are good grounds for condemnation, though these are "non-moral goods", by his lights.⁶

It strikes me as unprofitable to recover much of the exegetical ground that these proposals have already covered: they have established at a minimum that there is strong reason to think that Marx did not intend his criticism of capitalism to be based on considerations of morality or justice, and I will assume that in this they are generally correct.⁷ Rather, I want to develop this position, which has come to be known as the Tucker-Wood reading, in order to see its limitations. These limitations will make clear why the Tucker-Wood reading fails to explain the moral reading of the texts adequately. As I take this moral reading to be a natural one and therefore one that must be explained rather than ignored, the Tucker-Wood thesis is in need of greater elaboration.

The most developed statement of the Tucker-Wood thesis is in two articles by Allen Wood.⁸ There are differences between his particular stance and those of Tucker and Buchanan, who share in large part Wood's position. I will focus on his position exclusively because he argues that Marx's position cannot allow a particular moral reading, against Tucker who argues more modestly that Marx simply does not present

⁵ 'The Marxian Critique of Justice and Rights', in Kai Nielsen and Steven C. Patten, eds., *Marx and Morality* (Guelph, Ontario: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1981), p. 270.

⁶ First quote from 'Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami' in Marshall Cohen, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 120; second quote p. 122; cf. Allen Wood, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice', in the same volume.

⁷ For further development of this position, see Norman Geras, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', in Alex Callinicos, Geoffrey Marshall, and Vernon Bogdanor, eds., *Marxist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Steven Lukes, 'Marxism, Morality and Justice', in G.H.R. Parkinson, ed., *Marx and Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Steven Lukes, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁸ See footnote 6.

such a view, and because his attempt to deal with the apparent misreading of the texts is far more developed than Buchanan's.⁹

Wood's position is initially developed as one that argues that Marx does not condemn capitalism for its injustice. Justice, for Marx, is a property of systems relative to the mode of production in which they operate, so it would be impossible to criticize a capitalist system for its injustice when that system corresponds to the existing capitalist mode of production. Furthermore, he asserts that there can be no comparisons made across modes of production that would yield any 'eternal' truths of justice: what is just in one system may fail to be just in another, and the contingent truth or even possibility that certain facts of justice may obtain in every system does not raise up such dicta any higher than their basis in specific modes of production.

When pressed in an article by Ziyad Husami¹⁰ to explain exactly what sort of condemnation Marx must have been relying on in his writings – since it would be difficult to deny that such condemnation was at least superficially there – Wood relies on what he calls “non-moral goods”. These he defines as “things which we would regard as desirable and good for people to have even if no moral credit accrued from pursuing or attaining them. Freedom, community, and self-actualization are pretty clearly goods of which this is true.” These he distinguishes from moral goods, examples of which are “virtue, right, justice, the fulfilment of duty, and the possession or cultivation of morally meritorious qualities of character”.

There is much to recommend a distinction of some kind between a moral grounding for Marx's condemnation, which Marx overtly refuses to make, and some other grounding, which he must surely need in order to defend his thoroughgoing use of morally-loaded terms: Wood cites a passage from Marx in which the capitalist “robs” the worker, but, later in the same sentence, does so “with full right”, which is clearly conducive to such a distinction.¹¹ Wood's distinction between the moral and the non-moral, however, is not developed enough to perform what he asks of it. Most importantly, what we find “desirable and good” is already to conflate two very different

⁹ Though I focus entirely on Wood's argument, I refer to this as the Tucker/Wood reading throughout. This preserves continuity with the previous literature and should create no serious risk of misinterpretation.

¹⁰ 'Marx on Distributive Justice', in Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History*, pp. 42-79.

¹¹ Wood, 'Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami', p. 115 (passage cited from Marx's notes on Adolph Wagner).

ideas, and it is unclear why such a cohabitation should be so quickly and neatly grouped under the 'non-moral'. Even if left together, surely we would find virtue, say, both desirable and good – at least on some accounts of the virtues – even if “no moral credit accrued” from their pursuit. That is, while the distinction Wood proposes is surely onto something, his quick and easy way of forming the set of non-moral goods is unsatisfying to say the least.

This leaves the reader of Marx in a tense position: the Tucker-Wood reading of Marx explains rather convincingly that Marx's condemnation of capitalism is not a matter of justice or morality, but this reading fails in its inability to explain the most natural reading of Marx. It seems that what is needed to complete the Tucker-Wood reading is an explanation – more satisfying than some hand-waving at the 'non-moral' – of what grounds both Marx's criticism and his call to revolution, if this is not a moral theory.

There are actually two related problems here that need explanation. First, if Marx does not have a moral theory, how can one explain the misreading that he does have such a theory in a way that is both faithful to the texts and faithful to moral reasoning? This I call the explanatory problem. That the explanation is faithful to moral reasoning is crucial because the alleged misreading is far too common to be dismissed on grounds of inadequate attention paid to the text or grossly naïve expectations of what a moral theory is. If the misreading is to be explained, the explanation of Marx's actual position must be both subtle enough to have avoided general detection and uncontroversial enough to attribute safely to Marx, or, at least, to make uncontroversially on Marx's behalf. Such an explanation is attempted in chapter three.

The second problem, which I call the motivational problem, is related to the first in that both take Marx at his word in not having a moral theory. The motivational problem also takes him at his word that he is engaged in a descriptive enterprise. It then asks, if there is no theory of what one ought to do in Marx, whence the justification for the revolutionary call? If one ought to have a revolution, then such justification is self-evident, but that seems to require a moral theory. With no moral theory, then how would the 'ought' in question have arisen, and what grounds it? This question, I will argue in chapter four, is answered by developing a theory of descriptive value and then by showing that there is enough descriptive content in Marx's writings to motivate one to revolution, even without a moral call to do the same.

Before these two arguments, I spend some time outlining the textual justification for what I will argue on Marx's behalf. I do not intend my arguments here to be entirely exegetical, since Marx has provided far too little to respond to these problems solely from the texts. But neither do I intend for these arguments to be unfaithful to the few clues that Marx did provide to his views on these areas. The following chapter should provide enough to motivate the arguments of chapters three and four as genuinely Marxian, even if it must unfortunately stop short of establishing that such arguments had already been developed and worked out by Marx himself.

II. Marx's Early Arguments

I want to set out what Marx relies on, within the context of his larger positions, that will allow one to solve the explanatory and the motivational problems. I outline the components for such arguments in the following texts: *Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction* (1842), *The Leading Article in Number 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung* (1842), *The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law* (1842), *Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood* (1842), *On the Jewish Question* (1843), the *Introduction to Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* (1844), the *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845), and *The German Ideology* (1845-46). My focus in this chapter is not to develop these arguments to solve the above problems, which is a task undertaken in the following two chapters, but simply is to make clear that and how the components I there will rely on are used.

To highlight these components as they appear in Marx's overall positions, I shall divide these texts into two areas, according to their primary focus. These areas are the jurisprudential, on the one hand, and the relationship of philosophy to the world, on the other. While there is no line to discriminate determinately those texts falling under one theme from those falling under the other, I suggest that considering the texts within these two areas makes it easier to see what Marx's overall positions are and, thus, to isolate the needed components of his position.

The choice of these texts in particular, which are exclusively from Marx's youngest writings, will preclude conclusions about Marx's work overall. Nevertheless, the selection is limited to these for two reasons. First, it is unclear whether Marx's work is faithfully construed as an integrated whole. Some have argued that there are radical breaks in his thought or, at the least, that his thought developed significantly over his life. An argument constructed piecemeal from texts written thirty years apart may not then represent Marx's own thought at any time, however otherwise interesting it may be. As it is, there may be significant changes in his thought in the just over four years here considered. This leads me to focus on just one period of his writings.

I focus particularly on the younger over the elder Marx because of the younger Marx's more explicitly philosophical interests. There is already enough speculation involved in imputing arguments to another: I prefer not to add to it by choosing a set of texts less explicit than others available.

Finally, by way of introduction to these writings and to demonstrate that the related question of the interrelation of the normative and the descriptive was very early in Marx's mind, I cite the well-known letter to his father in November 1837. In it, he twice refers to the "opposition between what is and what ought to be", once in a derogatory reference to poetry he had previously sent to his future wife,¹ and again in criticizing his own attempts to build a philosophy of law.² However much weight one ultimately attaches to such expression, it is clear that such an opposition was in mind from early in Marx's thinking, and he was concerned to avoid it.

Jurisprudence

Two years before the comments in the above-cited letter to his father, Marx began studying law at the University of Bonn, transferring to the University of Berlin in the autumn of 1836.³ Remarking on his arrival in Berlin, Marx claims of his then desires, "I had to study law and above all felt the urge to wrestle with philosophy", and, importantly, that "the two were so closely linked" that consideration of either led to the other. Indeed, the debate into which Marx was immediately thrust at Berlin was that surrounding the Historical School of Law: its chief expositor and its chief critic each instructed the young student in his first term.⁴ The debate itself was over what role the laws of the past played in the justification of the laws of the present. The precise role that this debate may have had in Marx's development will, unfortunately, be ignored here, though I do point out that many of Marx's concerns in these early years seem to mirror these jurisprudential debates, and it is thus not without merit that one considers Marx's writings on law as intimately linked with his philosophical reflections.⁵

Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction

Written between 15 January and 10 February 1842, these earliest of Marx's writings after his legal education address recent censorship instructions that gave the censors individually much more initiative and control to look for "form and tone" and

¹ MECW, vol. I, p. 11.

² Ibid., p. 12.

³ Ibid., pp. 657-8, 699-704.

⁴ Ibid., p. 699. Von Savigny was its chief expositor; Gans was its chief critic.

⁵ For a fuller, fascinating, and strangely neglected development of the role this debate may have played on Marx's thought, see Donald R. Kelley, "The Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx", *The American Historical Review*, vol. 83, issue 2 (1978), pp. 350-67.

“tendencies”, which Marx glosses as prohibitions on states of mind. Marx posits, however, “only insofar as I manifest myself externally...do I enter the sphere of the legislator. Apart from my actions, I have no existence for the law.”⁶ This opposition, then, is to any putative law that “punishes me not only for what I do, but for what I think, *apart* from my actions.”⁷

The point is not particularly insightful in itself, as a comment that the law, whatever it is, cannot regulate states of mind, but it is significant that Marx does not try to say that the new censorship law ought not to exist; rather, he argues that such a law “against a frame of mind is not a law of the state promulgated for its citizens...It is not a law, but a privilege.”⁸ If a privilege is a recognition that some action, state, etc. is legally reserved to some but not to others, where the nature of what is reserved does not justify the difference in treatment, then this is a privilege in the following way. States of mind, as unknowable, and if assumed to be distinct from externally manifested actions, can be imputed to any. Since censors would have the freedom to impute such states of mind as they saw fit, this would render the law a tool censors could yield at their own discretion, unguided by any criteria of action. Any enforcement of such a law would then likely create a privilege of some to act without having prohibited states of mind imputed to them, while others would not have such luxury for precisely the same external acts.

The criticism is precisely that “the legal form contradicts the content”,⁹ where legal form, as those necessary conditions for something’s being a law, disallows consideration of states of mind because such restrictions cannot be enforced universally, whereas the content of the censorship instruction requires such consideration. Therefore, the censorship instruction is, by definition, not law because it cannot be made universal.

This argument is of the following form. Law is necessarily universal. The latest censorship instructions cannot be universal. Therefore, the latest censorship instructions cannot be law. This need not end debate over whether to follow such instructions, as the state-imposed consequences of not following them are no doubt serious. Without this further understanding, a description that Marx gives, if accepted, would be sufficient for these instructions not to be taken *as* law. Since we assume nothing motivational at

⁶ MECW, vol. I, p. 120.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 121.

this point, the description if accepted would be sufficient to exclude one's being motivated to adhere to these instructions *qua* law, since one could not then believe that these instructions *are* law. One may be motivated for any number of other reasons, but not motivated *qua* motivated by law.

Marx also considers a second contradiction in the practice of such a law, from the assumption that the censor can only suppress gossip by relying on it. Therefore, in this case as well, the law could not be universally applied, since its universal application would undermine any possibility of its enforcement. This second case is superfluous here, as it has a similar form to the first argument, and the form is of interest here. In both cases, the argument is that if law is necessarily universal, and if this particular instruction cannot be applied universally (because it is impossible to know states of mind, in the first case, and because it is self-contradictory in universal application, in the second), then this instruction is not law. Marx is not claiming in either case that censorship *per se* ought not to exist: in fact, he concedes that some censorship, of universal (i.e., law-like) form, could be embedded in valid censorship laws. His reasoning is rather that such censorship instructions as are under consideration cannot exist as law because they lack the necessary universal form of law.

Debates on the Law on Thefts of Wood

The articles of October 1842 covering the parliamentary debates, known informally by the above title, advance a similar argument, here applied both to crime and to right, both legal and customary. This will open the door to the application of this argument to thick moral or evaluative terms, which will prove crucial to the general argument I will impute to Marx in the following chapter.

The parliamentary debates in question are those on the definition, punishment, and enforcement of the illegality of the collection of wood that had fallen from trees on private lands. Previously, such fallen wood was collectable by the poor without fear of private property owners' claiming such wood as exclusively proper to the land on which the wood fell. This exception to rights of private property was not legally enshrined, but it was generally recognized by custom and by legal silence on the custom. These debates made it illegal to continue the custom, and furthermore they gave the landowners significant power to use the state to recover the value of the collected wood – value the landowner would set – from the collector.

Marx's arguments begin with a reliance on the existence of "the legal nature of things"¹⁰ or the "objective defining element provided by the nature of the object itself".¹¹ One need not develop a general account of some onerous ontological status that comes to define a thing's "legal nature" in order to understand his arguments here, however. A thing's legal nature, in the most succinct account Marx gives, is understandable by understanding the concept of that object itself.¹² Whether there is anything to be gained here by trying to unravel such a definition is doubtful, and it will fit my purposes simply to hold onto the previous conception that whatever is legal must be universal, joined to the Hegelian idea clearly underwriting Marx's thought here that the law aims to preserve and expand freedom, and is therefore good.

His argument will depend on an understanding of certain evaluations, so I want to make clear the distinction between moral and evaluative judgments, as I shall be arguing that Marx is concerned exclusively with the latter. Moral judgments are a subset of those judgments of what one ought to do, to believe, to be, etc. That is, any moral judgment necessarily contains an – implicit or explicit – 'ought', though not every ought-statement need be a moral judgment. Evaluative judgments, on the other hand, are those that judge something – implicitly or explicitly – to be good or bad.

For clarity's sake, it should be pointed out simply that evaluative judgments and moral judgements are not, at least not generally, intersubstitutable, nor is it clear that one follows immediately and in all circumstances from the other. These two types of judgment may be, and in fact almost certainly are, related, but such a relation will not be of immediate interest.¹³ Instead, my concern here is evaluative judgments, as these will become relevant to motivation in the following chapter.

Now, Marx argues that, "if the law applied the term theft to an action that is scarcely even a violation of forest regulations, then the law lies, and the poor are sacrificed to a legal lie."¹⁴ "Theft" and "lie" both fall under a category of what have been called 'thick' moral concepts or terms.¹⁵ Here, I want to consider these instead as thick

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 229.

¹² Ibid., p. 15.

¹³ These points will be developed further in the following chapter.

¹⁴ MECW, vol. I, p. 227.

¹⁵ These will be defined and defended further in the following chapter. For now, these should be defined as any term that entails both a moral or evaluative conclusion and a description.

evaluative terms.¹⁶ As opposed to ‘thin’ evaluative terms, such as ‘good’, thick evaluative terms entail both a description and an evaluative judgment. This is not to say that they comprise or are composed *exclusively* of these two components, but just the more general position that the single term entails both a description and an evaluative judgment.¹⁷ For example, if an action is theft, then, in a straightforward case, that action both is a taking and is bad. To deny that the description obtains or to deny that the evaluative judgment obtains denies, by *modus tollens*, the applicability of the thick evaluative term.

The attack here is on the evaluative component of the thick term, specifically that there is an evaluative component to what is described as theft. The action up for consideration as theft is not negatively evaluated. Since theft entails an evaluation, there is no theft. If a taking is not evaluated (or is not negatively evaluated, in the straightforward case) then that taking is not theft.

There is much more to be said about how this argument runs in the case of thick evaluative terms, but I want to ignore this until the following chapter. Here I want to consider, first, the specific critique of such a misuse of thick evaluative terms; second, how this differs from the form/content distinction Marx also uses; and, third, how these may allow one to evaluate philosophical positions from the world. This will illuminate far more than just what it means that “the poor are sacrificed to a legal lie”.

First, given that “crime” can be analyzed as “theft” was here, as entailing both an evaluative judgment and a description, then calling something a crime when it cannot be negatively evaluated, or evaluated at all, will “only succeed in converting crime itself into a legal act.”¹⁸ Taken in a direct way, Marx likely here means that the definition of crime, if it can include actions that are not evaluable, cannot actually distinguish criminal acts from legal ones, or at least not by definition.¹⁹

If this were a simple matter of using terms clearly, the objection here is picayune. Such terms as “crime” and “theft”, however, are more important to our actions than descriptive terms that do not entail, or do not *eo ipso* entail, evaluations. To preview the reasoning in the final chapter, a belief that a particular action is a theft, say, is – at least

¹⁶ I will defend my use of thick evaluative terms rather than the more familiar moral terms in the following chapter.

¹⁷ If they were nothing more than the conjunction of these two, it would still be trivially true that they entail their components.

¹⁸ MECW, vol. I, p. 227.

¹⁹ It should be kept in mind that, for Marx, ‘legal’ is not a merely positivist term – at least not at this point in his writings – as seen in the *Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instructions*.

prima facie – a motivation for the believer not to perform that action. Grasping evaluations, so I will argue, is *ipso facto* motivating. While a fuller defence of this is not yet offered, I suggest its usefulness here as simply an accurate account of the way that actual evaluative debate is carried out. “You can’t do that: it’s theft”, does not typically require the clarificatory addendum, “and it’s bad”. This isn’t to convince, of course, just to stave off criticism until these issues can be dealt with in more detail.

None of this yet reveals why it is a criticism to hold that crime would be converted into a legal act if something that could not be negatively evaluated is called a crime, or why the poor are said to be sacrificed to a legal lie in such a case. If one pursues the good, then one pursues those things that are good (performs such actions, develops such beliefs, etc.). For one to pursue those things consciously – not by accident, say – one must have beliefs about what is good. So, on the assumption that goodness is pursued consciously, false beliefs will impede such pursuits. Calling a non-crime a crime or a non-theft a theft leads to incorrect evaluative entailments and is for that reason criticized.

The second point that falls out of this discussion of thick moral terms is the difference between this and at least some instances of the form/content distinction Marx makes. In these articles, for example, Marx considers the content of merely customary rights, such as the right of the poor to collect fallen wood from private lands. This, Marx claims, could take the form of a legal right, i.e., this custom could become a legal right, though the “content...has not yet reached this form”, whereas privileges could not take such a form.²⁰ The reason for this is the universal nature of legal rights, as opposed to the specific nature of privileges, as discussed above. A claim may have the content of a legal right just in case it could take such a universal form, but such content does not entail that it is already a legal right. In Marx’s words, such a customary right is the “*anticipation* of a legal right”.²¹ In this form, then, the argument is only successful in showing what cannot be a legal right, not what is.²²

Marx takes himself to go further than this argument about what could be a legal right by using the Hegelian position hinted at above, viz. that freedom is the basis of law,

²⁰ MECW, vol. I, p. 232.

²¹ Ibid., p. 231.

²² This will avoid the criticism he levels against the Historical School of Law, seen below, which would otherwise temptingly apply to Marx as well, viz. that he substitutes existence for justification.

which yields what *must* be a legal right. Law must ultimately promote freedom; if rights are part of the law, then rights must promote freedom – or so the argument seems to go.

The problem is, even if one assumes that law must promote freedom, one cannot move directly from what is true of a whole to what is true of its parts. Marx may have some other reason to assume that all rights must promote freedom, independent of the position that law as a whole ultimately promotes freedom, but this is kept unclear. To avoid entanglement in an argument about the basis of law or of rights, only the first argument, viz. that a necessary condition of any right (*qua* legal) is its universal scope, is relevant.

The importance of this example is that it denies the descriptive entailment of the term ‘legal right’ when applied to what cannot be made universal (assuming this to be a necessary condition of a right), which will deny that it can function as a thick evaluative term. That Marx does take legal terms to be evaluative is clear throughout his early writings, but what is relevant here is the strategy for blocking the conclusion that an evaluative term can be used. Whereas he earlier denied the evaluative entailment of a term in order to deny its appropriate use, he now denies the descriptive entailment. Any content that cannot be universally applied, which is apparently an account of what must be descriptively entailed by the term, cannot be a right. This is a deeply important strategy that will prove vital in the assessment of Marx’s overall strategy.

The third relevant point from thick moral terms is that these may provide a way in which one can evaluate philosophical positions from the vantage point of another philosophical position without sacrificing the importance of the world to what is evaluated, which will be important in what follows. A thick moral term entails something about the way the world is and something about the correct evaluative account thereof. That is, if something is called a theft, then this entails that it is both a taking and negatively evaluated. If some philosophical position calls a theft what is not a taking, then it does not correspond to the world, and the position thus cannot be correct.

Of course, it is not yet clear what it means to speak of a description as a ‘true’ description of the world. Many actions in the world might physically resemble a description at a general enough level (e.g., theft, borrowing, and buying, as instances of taking, all may be very similar physically), so there is reason to wonder where the true description lies, particularly if descriptions are true of something other than mathematics and superstrings.

Philosophy and the World

Though jurisprudence and philosophy are intimately connected for the young Marx, the former becomes increasingly less important as the latter comes to occupy more of his writings. This expressed focus in philosophy, though, was not an interest in questions for their own sake or questions distant from the conditions of this world, particularly its political, social, and – increasingly – its economic conditions. The interests that occupy his writings are instead considerations that delve more and more deeply into the social conditions in which we find ourselves. What begins as a more abstract interest in the relation of philosophy to the world develops into the most distinctive argument of this period of his thought, namely that our thoughts about the world, whether narrowly philosophical or not, are products of the conditions in which we find ourselves.

The Leading Article in Number 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung

The three articles that jointly bear this title, all written between 29 June and 4 July 1842, address the relation of religion and philosophy. Marx here develops a position and an argument that may be interrelated, although it's unclear exactly how Marx intended that they stand to each other.

The position, set out in the second of the articles, holds that the methodological distinction between religion and philosophy can be captured by looking at the questions philosophy asks. “Philosophy asks what is true, not what is held to be true. It asks what is true for all mankind, not what is true for some people.”²³ Religion, on the other hand, evaluates positions not from their truth, but from whether they conform to the teachings of a particular religion.

In the third article, this analysis takes an unexpected turn. First, Marx equates philosophy to other “spheres of human activity”,²⁴ differing from many such spheres because those others clearly exist first in the world and are only later recognized by the thinking person. Philosophy, on the other hand, exists first in the head, as it were, and only thereafter in the world.

²³ MECW vol. I, p. 191.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 195.

This head-to-world transformation works as follows. Philosophy begins as a “particular system in relation to other systems”. “The time must come”, however, for at least some such systems, “when philosophy...comes into contact and interaction with the real world of its day”, and it then “becomes the philosophy of the contemporary world.”²⁵ The philosophical thought then has its effects on the world in the many ways in which thought generally affects the world, e.g., through “salons, priests’ studies, editorial offices of newspapers, and court antechambers”.²⁶

Before trying to reconcile the universal questions philosophy asks with the apparently society-relative nature of its effects, there is another complication to consider. Marx does not hold that philosophical systems spring *ex nihilo*: “philosophers...are products of their time, of their nation... The same spirit that constructs railways with the hands of workers...constructs philosophical systems in the brains of philosophers.”²⁷ Philosophy comes from the conditions in which philosophers find themselves, and philosophy under some circumstances comes to create those same conditions. In what sense, then, is philosophy striving for “what is true of all mankind”, rather than creating and reflecting what is true at some places and times?

The answer may fall out of one of two spaces. First, the space between the questions philosophy asks and the answers available to it limits those answers to less than what is sought. Reason may be universal and universally accessible under ideal conditions, but this need not entail that any philosopher has ever operated under such conditions. Or, more radically, the answers philosophy is able to achieve may be the only possible answers: there may simply be no such posited, ideal answers. The space between what philosophy believes it seeks and what it actually achieves is necessarily unbridgeable because questions about what is true for all mankind are only answerable relative to the conditions in which the response is formulated. That this second reading is intended is perhaps shown by Marx’s calling each philosophical system that comes to have clear effects in the world, “true philosophy”.²⁸ This would make little sense if there were, over and above these properly corresponding positions, something that is itself true philosophy.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 195-6.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 195.

²⁸ Ibid.

This conclusion need not be completely relativistic, however. There may in fact be certain conditions necessary to humans that persist throughout all human societies. Marx is apparently not sceptical about reason's universal applicability to humans. It is a moot point, however, whether reason is a universal and eternal condition of humans and our societies, since Marx need only establish that it is a – necessary or contingent – condition of humans and human societies now.

What follows from this condition of humans at least as we are now is that we can construct criticisms of the existing state of affairs based on their failure to correspond to what we realize they must be. So, Marx continues, “You must judge the rightfulness of state constitutions...on the basis of the state's own nature and essence...on the basis of the nature of human society.”²⁹ If one must judge a state on the basis of the state's essential nature – or, to state the case in a weaker form, on the basis of whether it fulfils the necessary conditions for any state – then the question of whether the religious state is desirable resolves into a dilemma: either the religious “state corresponds to the realization of rational freedom”, which is the essence of any state for Marx, or it does not.³⁰ If it does, then the call for a religious state is superfluous; if it does not, then the religious state is not a state.³¹ This is a straightforward application of the same argument seen above, that a candidate for a state that does not correspond to a necessary condition for the state's existence is simply not a state, given Marx's criterion.

Marx seems also to rely on an additional argument. He wants to deduce the “natural laws” of the state “from reason and experience, not from theology”.³² If reason and experience are intertwined in philosophy, as the earlier discussion in this article put forward, then our conclusions about the laws of the state come from “recent philosophy...[which] looks on the state as the great organism in which legal, moral, and political freedom must be realized”.³³ “True philosophy” of a time is no more than just a reflection – however abstract – of the actual conditions of its object: conclusions yielded by such a system of thought would be directly about the world itself.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 200.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Marx's reasoning here, more precisely, is that the religious state that does not correspond to rational freedom is a bad state; religion does not want a bad state; therefore religion is contradictory if it wants a religious state that is not a bad state. Since a bad state here seems to be defined as a state that does not correspond to its rational freedom, this account is question-begging. The account above avoids this problem.

³² MECW, vol. I, p. 201.

³³ Ibid., p. 202.

The intellectual conditions that create and sustain certain conditions of the world, true philosophy, are both limited by the world insofar as true and themselves limit our understanding of the world insofar as accepted. The direction of fit must be both ways, so a simple observation of how the world is does not suffice for criticizing philosophy, nor is a valid deduction from any system of philosophy guaranteed to have sound application to the world itself.³⁴

More subtly, however, the world is prior to philosophy in genesis but secondary in explanation, meaning that the existence of a world is a necessary condition for philosophy's existence, but philosophy as here understood is necessary for any understanding of the world.³⁵ Philosophy, in this rather broad view – which is perhaps just any thinking about the world in more than a demonstrative way – is never criticized from the point of view of the world itself, but only from the point of view of another philosophy which is itself a better or worse fit with the conditions of the world. The better one understands the world, the less one is going to be led astray by false philosophies; however, one is never standing outside philosophy in making such criticisms, only outside the prevailing one.

There are of course questions here both about how one can judge that a philosophy fits better or worse with the world when there are only philosophies of the world from which one judges, as well as how one can know anything about the world at all when one can never come into direct explanatory contact with it, and these will become relevant later. For the time being, this stands as simply a representation of Marx's own argument.

The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law

In a piece written soon after these three articles, Marx again nuances the exclusion argument, this time from another direction. Explanations may be only from philosophy, and better ones more closely conform to the world, but not all explanations that conform to the world are equally valid. Marx thus criticizes the Historical School of Law, a positivist school mentioned in the previous section that, in Marx's pejorative

³⁴ A valid deduction from any *true* philosophical system would have sound application to the world, but its truth is determined by its fit with the world, so this is uninformative as a method of criticism.

³⁵ Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B1-2 (Introduction), and compare A2-3.

formulation, “equates existence with valid existence”³⁶, so that “everything existing serves...[this school] as an authority, every authority serves...as an argument.”³⁷ Speaking of one of its main proponents, Gustav Hugo, Marx continues, “He is sceptical of the necessity of any existence, so he settles on demonstrating simply the existence of things.”³⁸ Marx on the other hand alludes to the necessity of rationality, so that there is at least a difference there.

The point turns on an interpretation of Kant, according to the text.³⁹ Marx claims that Hugo misinterprets Kant, and this misinterpretation seems to be of Kant’s limitations either on what we can know about the world or on what we can know about things-in-themselves: Marx’s comments are ambiguous. The point is apparently that Hugo misunderstands these Kantian limitations on whether the things we know about the world, e.g., that necessary relations obtain therein, are actually true of the world distinct from cognition as opposed to the world as we necessarily cognize it. Marx’s caricatured Hugo takes such precisions about rationality to be a sceptical conclusion that there is no rationality in the world in any sense whatsoever, mind-dependent or not.

Rescuing this point from Kant does not yet demonstrate the fallacy of which Marx accuses Hugo. If Hugo were to take on a general scepticism about necessity and rationality, that would be one thing; Marx accuses him instead of turning bare existence into the criterion for necessity and rationality. For example, since certain institutions have existed since Roman law, they must be rational and necessary on Hugo’s view: he has no other vantage point to determine rationality and necessity.

This, however, seems precisely the criticism that one could lodge against Marx himself after the last article’s argument. If there is no possibility of coming into direct explanatory contact with the world, then explanations are ours, not in the world. If Hugo takes what exists as evidence that all is well with the world, and Marx takes the same as evidence that all is not well with the world, what decides between them?

As will be discussed in the evaluation of these arguments overall, this description of the competing world-views misrepresents at least one of them. The evidence is not evidence of the truth of one explanation in the sense that the explanations are somewhere in the world and are only more or less accurately described. Rather, the

³⁶ MECW, vol. I, p. 204.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 205.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 204.

³⁹ Ibid.

evidence comes from the world insofar as the data from the world verify the explanation and then accept and promulgate one of the two explanations. Marx's criticism would be precisely that Hugo's failure to capture an account of necessity and rationality as distinct from simple existence fails to capture the world in its description, is not picked up by the world and incorporated into the world's philosophy, or both. In short, the criticism of Hugo is not that what exists cannot support a position, but rather that what exists cannot simply support the position that what exists ought to exist: there are competing positions that also draw on the data of what exists, and the Historical School fails for lack of an adequate explanation.

On the Jewish Question

Almost a year after writing the *Debates on the Law on the Theft of Wood*, Marx has here begun to shift from an evaluative critique to a critique of underlying material conditions that lead to evaluations. He argues in this piece that, by removing the conditions that cause persons to be religious, religion will be removed. Rather than arguing against the "religious expression" of underlying "secular antitheses"⁴⁰ – such as that between the general and the private interest – Marx argues for the abolition of the underlying conflicts themselves with the implication that the expression of these conflicts, in any form, will then fade away.

To take just the emancipation aspect of the argument, not the discussion of what unresolved secular conflicts are necessary to sustain religion, Marx first distinguishes civil society from the political state. In civil society persons regard themselves as real persons but also as isolated one from another; in the political state, persons regard themselves as only formal, legal entities but also as interacting in various ways, as members of groups, related to others, and so on.⁴¹ So, Marx concludes, the error in civil society is that persons are not in fact radically individual but are rather variously interacting, and the error in the political state is that persons are not mere formal entities but are rather real persons.

If one accepts that persons actually interact as they are seen to interact in the political state, but they are not purely formal, legal fictions, then one realizes that the relation between civil society and the political state is an impediment to a society that

⁴⁰ MECW, vol. III, pp. 154-5.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 154; cf. p. 167.

would regard itself as it actually is, as composed of real persons variously interacting. As it stands, one views the state as something alien precisely because the persons in the political state's view are not real persons, so, even though the state correctly represents interactions, it does not represent them as the interactions of real persons.

Also, the state is ruling, so that real persons are ruled by a system that only considers formal, legal persons. This rule by a misrepresenting alien system is all the more striking when one recognizes that the state is a human creation, so that real persons have instituted formal, legal doppelgängers of themselves to be ruled, and, more importantly, come to see themselves in the way the state sees them, so that persons hold simultaneously to two self-images, the civil society image and the political state image, both flawed, incomplete, and in part false.⁴²

How does this affect the call for emancipation, then? In relation to religious emancipation – which the argument to which Marx is here responding considers to be the emancipation of the state from a particular religion – Marx argues that an appreciation of the above points would dissuade one from the belief that a political emancipation could be a true and complete one, though a political emancipation may yet be better than no emancipation at all. Rather, “[t]he question of the *relation of political emancipation to religion* becomes for us the question of the *relation of political emancipation to human emancipation*.”⁴³ A political emancipation could only ever be partial, because the political state cannot free humans as such since it does not even consider humans as such, only legal representations thereof.⁴⁴ “The *political* emancipation...of the *religious* man is the *emancipation of the state*...from *religion* in general.”⁴⁵

The more general point about human emancipation is expressed in the following concluding paragraph to the first section of this piece:

Only when the real, individual man re-absorbs in himself the abstract citizen...in his everyday life,...only when man...no longer separates social power from himself in the shape of *political* power, only then will human emancipation have been accomplished.

This simplification of Marx's argument fails to do it justice, to be sure, but it should make things clear enough to allow discussion of a key point.

⁴² Cf. *The German Ideology*, preface, MECW, vol. V, pp. 23-4.

⁴³ MECW, vol. III, p. 151.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

Marx's argument could perhaps be read as the following. If one is to be emancipated, one must first understand what emancipation really is, what it is from, and how it can be accomplished. Therefore, the desire for emancipation is prior to the discussion of how it may be accomplished. Marx himself does little to dissuade one from reading his argument precisely like this, beginning as he does with the uncomfortable 'Jewish question' of how to emancipate the state from Judaism. So the piece seems to be means-end reasoning where the end is given and only the means are disputed.

If this were Marx's argument, then it is unclear why he should spill so much ink on discussions of what real persons are and how they actually interact as well as the illusions generated by using two flawed perspectives. So why this focus?

The structure of the actual argument is, I suggest, the following. Coming to see ourselves as we actually are and actually interact rather than believing illusions about ourselves will have an emancipatory effect. The effect is first in our emancipation from illusions and second in the emancipation that we effect and secure for society based on an unwillingness to be ruled by a system that actively sustains certain illusions about those ruled.⁴⁶

Coming to see ourselves as we are is not, however, a simple matter of seeing things more clearly, being reasoned into a complete understanding. As will become clear in the following texts, a necessary condition for our coming to see ourselves as we actually are is that our actual conditions are changed. The argument, then, is that we should free ourselves from illusions if we are to be emancipated, and we must change our conditions in order to free ourselves from illusion. Why would we change our conditions, though, or free ourselves from illusion?

For this, Marx may point to a general account of goodness, to something that a reasoning evaluator must necessarily value – a point that will be developed in the final chapter – so the discussion is not simply about means to a goal that one may or may not accept: the end is rather one pursued necessarily in all evaluative reasoning.

What remains unresolved here, however, and is becoming difficult to ignore, is how Marx can speak of reality on the one hand and philosophy on the other when he earlier ruled out direct explanatory contact with reality. There, the concern was finding

⁴⁶ Though these two effects are not always kept separate, this is excusable in light of the complete argument.

the most accurate philosophical position, not finding what was real. How this is to be resolved is dealt with in the following text.

Introduction to Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right

This introduction to an unfinished work written earlier in the year was itself written immediately after *On the Jewish Question* and answers many of the questions raised in the preceding discussion, as well as going some way towards a complete picture of the relation between philosophy and the world. It also supports the recasting of that argument, if, that is, Marx's most fundamental positions did not vary in the days or weeks between the writing of the two.

In *The Leading Article in Number 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung*, Marx related philosophy and the world as follows. The world is necessary for philosophy's existence, and philosophy is necessary for any understanding of the world. Philosophy is true insofar as it corresponds (in some way) to the world, but it also, when true, comes to shape or preserve the world it explains. The first question is how can anyone evaluate a philosophical position when it's not possible to stand outside of one to judge? The second question is what sort of a judgment can one make about a position when it corresponds to the world as it is now but not to how it will be in the future? If it's true now, it both corresponds to the world and will help to preserve the world to which it corresponds; what room is there for objection? Understanding the answer to these will shed a great deal of light on some of Marx's most basic views.

As was posited in the previous article, persons labour under a double illusion, one from civil society and another from the political state. Marx proposed that the defects of these illusions would be overcome by both giving them up and changing the political situation so that such illusions no longer existed. I argued that his actual argument was subtler: this piece bears that out.

First, the argument is not that illusions must be given up; rather, it is that whatever causes those illusions must be changed. "The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions.*"⁴⁷ To change a state of affairs, however, another state of affairs must be implemented. Marx's critique of existing German philosophy is, in part, that "it either stopped at the results

⁴⁷ MECW, vol. III, p. 176.

given by philosophy or passed off demands and results from somewhere else as immediate demands and results of philosophy”. Philosophical criticism does not dispel illusions in a way that interests Marx since it doesn’t dispel the conditions that create them.

Where philosophical criticism succeeds, however, is where it is negated or superseded. This point merits attention. Marx claims that the negation of philosophy is a proper goal, but is one not accomplished by a group’s “turning its back on philosophy and with averted face muttering a few trite and angry phrases about it”.⁴⁸ Instead, “*you cannot supersede philosophy without making it a reality*”.⁴⁹ This needs explanation.

A philosophical position may be rendered false when it does not correspond to the world, which is apparently also its negation. Such negation as Marx seems to endorse is not necessarily a negation of all philosophy, but of all “hitherto existing philosophy”, which Marx calls “philosophy as such”.⁵⁰

As for its being superseded, this could be the case independently of its negation. If negated, it is perhaps not difficult to see how one could speak of its being superseded as well, but it could be superseded as *merely* philosophy once it is true, corresponds to the world, or, in Marx’s words, becomes reality. It is then an accurate description, though it may yet be philosophy. Negated philosophy would be superseded, but superseded philosophy need not be negated.

Both negation and superseding will obtain for “hitherto existing philosophy” even though Marx holds that there is some sense in which these prevailing philosophical positions are true: they are true of “*official* modern reality”.⁵¹ From the discussion of the preceding text, the emphasis on “official” is clear: they accurately describe a state of affairs that itself contains illusions. So one may have an accurate philosophy of law built on the illusion of radically separate individuals, but this philosophy is not true all the way down, as it were, since persons are not – at base – radically separate. Making philosophy a reality, then, is not a matter of just accurately describing the world as we come to know it, since that may not capture the world as it actually is.

How one supersedes philosophy is by making the world consistent with this philosophical image of it. This sounds unsatisfyingly indeterminate, since there may be

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 181.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 180.

many images that the world could come to resemble. At least for the sake of the discussion here, however, there are certain facts that entail that some philosophies could not be made fully into practice, could not completely correspond to the world, because they would contradict these facts. Certain facts about humans, in the discussion here, do not immediately yield a correct philosophical position, but they exclude some or, at most, all but one. As Marx applies this here, “the teaching that *man is the highest being for man*” yields “the *categorical imperative to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being”.⁵²

The proper role for philosophy, then, is in what Marx hints at in this last phrase by “the teaching”. Philosophical theory is not sufficient of itself to change existing conditions, since “material force must be overthrown by material force”. But “theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses”, which it does by explaining “the root of the matter”, and, in this case, “the root is man himself”.⁵³ Therefore, when persons are taught and come to understand the underlying facts about themselves, they will be moved to overthrow those relations that contradict those facts.

This isn’t the end of the story, however. First, it is unclear how it is possible in all of this to evaluate what humans are actually like, what these underlying facts are. Two important clues are given, however, and I want to consider their implication. First, Marx holds that “[t]heory can be realized in a people only insofar as it is the realization of the needs of that people”.⁵⁴ Second, Marx asks whether Germany can “attain a practice *à la hauteur des principes*, i.e., ...to the *height of humanity*”.⁵⁵ These two indicate that what humans are actually like, and what makes theory true, is determined by an analysis of what humanity is when fully flourishing.

In the first quotation, a necessary condition posited on true theory is that it realize the needs of the people to which it is directed. It need not be resolved whether needs can be determined without having some end in view, whether humans can be said to need anything if there is no determinate conclusion to “need in order to...”. All that must be established by this is that needs are relevant to any account of humanity since

⁵² Ibid., p. 182. This uncharacteristic generation of an ought certainly merits further attention, but I will leave it aside here.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 182.

they provide the minimum conditions in which human flourishing could take place. If there are unfulfilled needs, there could not be human flourishing.⁵⁶

In the second quotation, which may rest more than appropriate on the apparent equivalence between the two italicized phrases, the height of principles is restated as the height of humanity. If principles are principles in theory – and it is unclear what other kind of principles Marx would be here speaking of – and the height of humanity is synonymous with complete human flourishing, then the height of theory is human flourishing.

If this is correct, and this is how one is to determine which facts are (necessarily) true about humans, viz. by whether a complete account of human flourishing would (necessarily) contain those facts, then this would also explain the comments about philosophy's being ultimately superseded by the proletariat's rise, its coming to represent "no *particular wrong* but *wrong generally*",⁵⁷ and its ultimate abolition as a class, which cannot happen "without philosophy[s] being made a reality".⁵⁸ These are explained because the proletariat is the authentically human part of society, whose needs correspond to the needs of all and whose flourishing will be the flourishing of all. Whether one prefers, then, to think of humans under complete flourishing *per se* as the condition under which it is possible to discover these facts of humans or just the proletariat as it would best flourish, these will yield the same conclusion.

This argument is rather interesting, so it is worth summarizing. Considering what humans are (necessarily) like when flourishing will provide (necessary) facts about humans. Grasping these facts will lead to the opposition of any position that would contradict them. What will remain is one or more than one position compatible with those facts, a position in which philosophical speculation about law and society will be at best a purely descriptive matter, and at worst completely irrelevant.

In broadest outlines, this is the most complete account of the descriptions-to-motivation thesis yet put forward, though it has left out the important second part of the position set out in *On the Jewish Question*, that beliefs don't change the world unless the

⁵⁶ This could be true even if left unresolved whether needs could be defined subjectively, relative to what each agent believed that she needed, on the assumption that total human flourishing would not contain false and unfulfilled beliefs about what was needed.

⁵⁷ MECW, vol. III, p. 186.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 187; cf. pp. 184-5.

world has been so changed to dissolve those beliefs. The following two texts address this second – and crucial – component.

Theses on Feuerbach and The German Ideology

The final piece to be discussed here, *The German Ideology*, is by far the most extended development of Marx's thought. The *Theses on Feuerbach*, written in the spring of 1845, serve as something of an introduction to this longer text, written beginning that same autumn, so I consider these two together.

The theses on Feuerbach lay out a position rather schematically with little in the way of actual argument. First, there is a general comment in the first thesis on the “chief defect of all previous materialism”, namely “that things, reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object, or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively.”⁵⁹ Such previous materialism misrepresents reality by viewing it as static and given rather than fundamentally created and maintained by us and therefore susceptible to human change.

This misrepresentation follows from another misconception, which is mentioned in the sixth thesis. The “essence of man” proposed by Feuerbach, an “abstraction inherent in each single individual”, is opposed to the reality proposed by Marx, “the ensemble of the social relations.”⁶⁰ The former is static and does not admit of any obvious revision in light of social evolution, nor is it entirely obvious how it is known. The latter, on the other hand, is dynamic, admits of revision, and is at least indirectly observable.

The fourth thesis builds on this difference in materialist viewpoints: “His [Feuerbach's] work consists in resolving the religious world into its secular basis”, but Marx goes further than this, to assert that the “independent realm in the clouds can only be explained by the inner strife and intrinsic contradictoriness of this secular basis.”⁶¹ Once this secular basis is “understood in its contradiction... then, by the removal of the contradiction, [it is] revolutionized in practice.”⁶²

⁵⁹ MECW, vol. V, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 4. This definition receives a fuller exposition in *The German Ideology*, below.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 7. This phrase is taken from the edition of the theses edited by Engels and differs from Marx's first edition chiefly by the addition of “by the removal of the contradiction”. A

The removal of this contradiction, as alluded to, is the removal of the poor fit between those ideas of the “realm in the clouds” and the “secular basis” which – as will be argued in the following text – form those false ideas. How this poor fit can be remedied is the chief question I take *The German Ideology* to answer.

The German Ideology itself is ostensibly an attack on Feuerbach, Bruno Bauer, and Max Stirner, and most of this large volume is taken up with a look at the work of these three. What I want to focus on here, however, is Marx’s own position, which is laid out in opposition to these, but which does receive some development on its own.

The argument can be set out generally as follows. There is a discontinuity between the conditions in which society actually finds itself and those in which it believes it finds itself: a similar point to the one made in *On the Jewish Question* and the *Introduction to the Contribution* above. Rather than attacking the false beliefs directly, Marx considers the origin of such beliefs, which he puts down to the material conditions in which those beliefs are formed. Seen in this way, the false beliefs are to be dissolved by a change in material conditions, not by trying to attack the beliefs themselves.

The position is actually subtler than this. First, the discontinuity between beliefs and actual conditions of life is true both “about what they [humans] are and what they ought to be.”⁶³ These descriptive and normative beliefs are related in that the latter reduce to the former, and they both reduce to the material conditions of their formation. What is important here, though, is that these “products of their brains have got out of their hands”, so that people are ruled by these false beliefs.⁶⁴

Rather than attacking the false ideas that people maintain, Marx wants to account for their origin. In a well-known phrase, “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness... It is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as *their* consciousness.”⁶⁵ Marx does not consider the ideas themselves as the immediate object of criticism because the ideas come from something about life, namely the social forms of production:

similar thought is expressed in the eighth thesis: “All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice”, p. 5.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 23

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 37. For a schematic account of how consciousness’s origins are social, as these origins are in language and in the division of mental and physical labor, see pp. 44-45. That an account of consciousness’s origins tells us anything conclusive about its current nature, however, is dubious, so I ignore this account here.

The social structure and the state are continually evolving out of the life-process of definite individuals...as they *actually* are, i.e., as they act, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.

...Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking.⁶⁶

These “material limits” are elsewhere called the “activity and the material conditions of [human] life, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity”, and, “the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce”.⁶⁷ So, to understand consciousness, one has to understand the material conditions of life; likewise to alter it.

Marx’s argument for the importance of such material conditions is that, first, “men must be in a position to live in order to be able to ‘make history’”.⁶⁸ They produce “the means to satisfy these needs”, and this production “leads to new needs”, which “is the first historical act”.⁶⁹ The importance of the material production of life, then, is based on a fulfilment of needs, which plays a crucial role in Marx’s reasoning.

In the section immediately preceding this one, Marx criticizes Feuerbach because he “only conceives [humans] as an ‘object of the senses’, not as ‘sensuous activity’, because he still remains in the realm of theory”:

[T]herefore when, for example, he sees instead of healthy men a crowd of scrofulous, overworked and consumptive starvelings, he is compelled to take refuge in the “higher perception” and in the ideal “compensation in the species”, and thus to relapse into idealism at the very point where the communist materialist sees the necessity, and at the same time the condition, of a transformation both of industry and of the social structure.⁷⁰

The communist materialist does not see premises from which it can be concluded, together with other premises, that there is a necessity of transformation; rather, the necessity *itself* is seen. This is apparently a slight change from the discussion of needs in the *Introduction to the Contribution*. The needs of persons are immediately needs for social change.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 35-7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 41.

The materialist is not compelled to say that needs are so basic that they are bare, uninterpreted data. Nevertheless, needs are basic in the sense that they can be very directly described, much as the descriptive entailments of thick evaluative terms can be described. Whether needs are to be analyzed exactly as thick evaluative terms are will be briefly considered later. They do share at least this much in common: they can both find a place in philosophical judgments and descriptions without losing contact with the world, without being ‘theory’ in Marx’s disparaging sense.

In addition to the necessity of such a transformation, the communist materialist also sees the condition of such a change. The condition is not the idea of the unfulfilled needs but the needs themselves, since ideas, even revolutionary ideas, are not themselves sufficient to inspire revolution, on Marx’s account: the conditions for revolution must also be present.⁷¹

This final point suggests a unified strategy for Marx, drawing on the arguments set out in the preceding texts. First, there is the recognition of thick evaluative terms and needs, as descriptively applied to the world. This recognition will be incomplete as long as the recognition is not of what is actually present in the world. By excluding the application of terms that cannot entail their descriptive components and admitting those that can, one will be left with a set of terms that entail certain evaluations – it need not be decided yet if there is only one possible set of such terms. Then, as grasping evaluations, whether direct or entailed, is *ipso facto* motivating, this set is motivating. Moreover, it is motivating to change the conditions of the world so that such beliefs can no longer be formed. The question now is whether this broad strategy can be elaborated and defended successfully, which is the subject of the following chapters.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 54; for more discussion about the actual conditions for this revolution, see pp. 45, 52, and 58-61.

III. Explaining Descriptions

With the components now on the table, this chapter and the next will put these together as an argument to be lodged on Marx's behalf, drawing from what he himself uses, as a way of explaining why he was justified both in avoiding moral condemnation and in apparently holding what some consider to be a moral view. If the argument is correct, then the conclusion will be the following: Marx did not in fact hold a moral view, but he did hold a certain descriptive view that is immediately motivational. While perhaps equivalent in some ways to the oughts that were scorned, Marx's reasons to argue to motivation rather than to ought should prove enlightening.

There are in fact two arguments from the above elements that can be made on Marx's behalf, which run to slightly different conclusions. The first is an explanatory argument about Marx and morality that defends the Tucker-Wood reading of Marx as holding no moral view, but which also tries to explain the misreading of Marx in a distinct way. The second, to be covered in the following chapter, is an argument that Marx is justified in seeing his own work as descriptive without being forced to see it as therefore motivationally inert. Either of the arguments has independent interest, but together they will establish the stronger conclusion that Marx may only rely on descriptions, but the motivations to which these connect are easily mistaken for moral claims.

In preview, the first argument, the explanatory argument, will run as follows. There is a distinction between valuing something as good and bad, on the one hand, and holding that one ought or ought not to do something, on the other; a distinction I call that of the evaluative and the moral. Thick evaluative concepts entail the evaluative necessarily and the moral only contingently. Therefore, Marx's theory, as it does contain thick evaluative terms, contains value implications, but no (necessary) ought implications. This justifies Marx's claim not to have a theory of morality. Nevertheless, as some relation between values and norms is generally assumed, and as the moral is normative while values are not, it is explicable why Marx is often *read* as holding a normative theory, when he in fact may have only held a theory of value.¹ This explains the other side of

¹ By 'normative' I mean broadly whatever can be phrased as an implicit or explicit ought-statement. The 'moral', as I use the term here, will refer to a subset of all ought-statements and therefore is normative, though not the entirety of the normative is the moral.

the Marx and morality debate set out at the beginning by justifying the moral reading of Marx as an understandable interpretation, but not the correct one.

The second argument, the motivational argument, begins from the same premise – that Marx uses thick evaluative terms necessarily entailing values but not norms – but will work to a stronger conclusion. Thick evaluative terms are applicable to the world immediately, so a true description of the world will contain such entailed evaluations. The sense in which such values are in the world will depend on an account of what such value *is*, and a modified Aristotelian notion will support the conclusion that values are truly describable and genuinely in the world. Such an account will also suggest why such values are directly motivating, by taking a detour into the reasons that such values provide. From descriptions of a certain sort, then, one is able to provoke motivation; from such descriptions' being true, one is able to justify the motivation provoked. Therefore, Marx is able to move from descriptions to justified motivations, which will explain why he is correct to call his work descriptive and hold as well that it is motivating.

The Evaluative and the Moral

I previously posited a distinction between the moral and the evaluative. This will serve a crucial role here, so it is worth developing and defending before going on. The evaluative side of the distinction runs as follows. An evaluation is formed by predicating goodness, badness, terms synonymous to these, and terms indicating their comparatives and superlatives of persons, objects, actions, events, states of affairs, or a combination of these.² It is ascribed just as any property is ascribed, though it is not on this surface-level feature of goodness that I wish to place all the weight, though it is a reasonable place to begin.

To focus just on the ascription of 'is good', though all evaluations should share in this analysis, the criteria for its application are of two types. First, it is sincerely ascribed only as a mark of the speaker's commendation, on her publicly directed approval on her own behalf.³ A commendation is not a simple preference⁴, since simple preferences need

² Whether these all depend on the *same* concept of evaluation is here left open.

³ There is a crucial distinction between 'is good' and 'is a good x', where x specifies a type, which distinction may be understood as the distinction between commendation and commendation-as. (Though not made explicit, this may be the distinction J.L. Mackie makes between commendation and functional commendation; *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* [New York:

not be intended to have any effect on others' thoughts, while a commendation necessarily does have such an intention: it is outwardly-focused by nature, an invitation for others to accept the evaluation just as the speaker does accept (if speaking sincerely), or would accept in the other's circumstances.⁵ 'I like x', as the expression of a simple preference, may also carry a certain commendation, but there is no clear contradiction in saying that 'x is good' and 'I don't like x'.⁶

Second, the ascription of 'is good' has some descriptive component, which may or may not be clearly defined in any case, but which makes the ascription defeasible in light of some facts. Which facts these are need not be resolved here, though I will discuss what some such facts must be for Marx in the case of humans. In description, then, as it was for commendation, 'x is good' differs from 'I like x', since only the former is necessarily open to revision in view of facts.

This descriptive element of the predication of 'is good' to some subject may vary with the subject and with certain contexts. The descriptive entailments in any given 'x is good' are determined – at least in part – by the context in which the statement is uttered. So 'is good' as applied to presidents may take on different descriptive meaning from 'is good' as applied to chefs; and, 'is good' applied to a president in the mid-19th century will differ from the same predication in the 21st.

An example should illustrate the above points. 'George W. Bush is good' could be read in a number of ways. Perhaps the current American president is good because of his fine character, his loyalty to his friends and family, his concern with being a role model, and so on. Let us assume, though, for ease of example, that the discussion is about 21st century American presidents, and one asserts the above. Clearly the assertion

Penguin, 1977], pp. 56-8.) Saying of a person that he 'is a good Nazi' cannot be equated to saying, even in the context of Nazis, that he 'is good'. The former predication may be true in part because of the subject's immoral behaviour, which made for a good Nazi; the latter may be true because of his clandestine moral behaviour, say, which made him good despite his being a Nazi. This case reveals that 'is a good x' is precisely to mark out cases in which the speaker intends an evaluation to be of a type other than the one which would be understood by 'is good'.⁴ I use 'simple preference' rather than 'preference' here to avoid confusion later: I intend 'simple preference' to mark out a feeling of approbation that does not seek out or easily respond to evidence.

⁵ It need not be assumed that there is no relation whatsoever between preferences and commendation, as what one commends to others one would commend to oneself in similar circumstances, and therefore likely prefer. The point here is only that there is no obvious logical contradiction in commending that which one does not prefer: the experience of someone more skilled in guiding another's life than his own will surely demonstrate this.

⁶ Except perhaps in cases where the criterion for the thing's goodness is that the speaker likes it, if there should be such a case.

carries a certain commendation, which is outwardly directed. That is, by the assertion I invite others either to accept my evaluation or to challenge it factually: such is the nature of commendation (at least when in an assertion). One would challenge it factually by, say, pointing out that, if he were good, and understood in this context, he would not encourage businesses to write the laws that govern them, would pay at least marginal attention to current events in the world, and would not incite wars that are not in the national interest. If true, these facts may make the evaluation false – assuming such facts contradict the descriptive component of goodness as applied to a person in the context of 21st century American presidents. Importantly, what would not contradict the evaluation is the assertion, ‘I don’t like President Bush’, which would probably be to confuse commendation with simple preference, two states that are logically independent, whatever affective relation they may have.

Both commendation and description are necessary to goodness, at least as we use the term in the simple predication ‘is good’, so the descriptive criteria cannot be constitutive of goodness since there is logical space for one to assent to the criteria’s fulfilment without assenting to the commendation. If this were not the case, then one could be surprisingly informed that one finds something good just because one had described it as fulfilling the necessary descriptive criteria.⁷ The descriptive criteria are necessary to the ascription of goodness, but they cannot be solely constitutive of it.

Neither can commendation by itself be constitutive of goodness, unless one is willing to concede an in-principle irresolvable relativism about the good.⁸ For, on whatever grounds one were to commend something, if the commendation itself were constitutive of goodness, then there could be no disagreement about whether the commended thing were good, only about whether others feel any rational compulsion towards accepting that same judgment: clearly, they need not.

Michael Smith, in a discussion of R.M. Hare’s account of goodness similar to this, but given as a response to naturalism, holds that such an account commits one ultimately to relativism about the good.⁹ This will be the case, in fact, whether one takes

⁷ This point is developed in a related way by R.M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952), pp. 148-50.

⁸ ‘In-principle irresolvable relativism about the good’ designates a relativism that forces one to conclude that goodness is both relative and non-objective. This point is developed in what follows and in the following chapter.

⁹ Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 34, discussion pp. 33-5, commenting on Hare, pp. 145-50.

the descriptive or the commendatory to be wholly constitutive of it. Such relativism bothers Smith, and many others, since it “flouts core platitudes about moral disagreement; platitudes about the objectivity of morality”.¹⁰

This need not pose a problem for Marx, as he seems most comfortable when ‘flouting core platitudes about moral disagreement’ – albeit in a very different way – but the objection raised by Smith and Hare is in any case not a problem for Marx. It is only a problem if either commendation or description is taken to be wholly constitutive of the good, because then the relativism that threatens is inexplicable (if commendation is wholly constitutive of the good) and in principle irresolvable (if either is), which are the problems that arise from relativism’s entailing subjectivity.

While there may be other reasons for which relativism in various guises is troubling, relativism *per se* – i.e., the position that a thing’s goodness is relative to something external to it and is not (wholly) intrinsic – is not threatening to “core platitudes about moral disagreement”: if goodness is relative to places and times, this is no more obviously troubling than the relativity of goodness to different things at the same place and time.¹¹ For example, what may make a knife good (e.g., its sharpness) will make a baseball bad, but this relativity of goodness is obviously untroubling because it is not also subjectivity about goodness.

No, the problem of concern is whether such relativity is explicable and disagreements resolvable, at least in principle.¹² On this, there is an answer available to Marx so that he is not committed to goodness’s subjectivity, though he is committed to a certain relativism. The answer available will show that commendation is necessarily in line with descriptive criteria and is ultimately answerable to these; but, these criteria are determined by an explanatorily prior determination of what is good, so there is an in-principle fact of the matter about what the good is in a given time and place, and the relativism of goodness is thus explicable and disagreement resolvable. This position will be addressed directly in the presentation of the motivational argument.

¹⁰ Smith, p. 35. Note that the objection to relativism is specifically to its entailment of morality’s non-objectivity.

¹¹ To be clear, note that I am opposing relativism to absolutism, and objectivity to subjectivity; many simply oppose relativism to objectivity, though I hope to persuade that such is not necessarily an opposition.

¹² Another reason that relativism may be troubling is that it may simply not allow that what has the form of moral disagreement is truly disagreement, as with emotivism, say, which is a distinct point from its being irresolvable. This will not be trouble for the account here to be discussed, so I ignore this possible relativistic position.

Before turning to 'ought', then, a brief summary of the account of 'good' given so far may be useful. The predication of 'is good' to some subject in some context entails both a description and a commendation. The descriptive criteria of 'good' are for that subject in that context; the commendation is the (non-descriptive) public approval or endorsement that these criteria are fulfilled by this subject in this context and the (at least implicit) invitation that others agree with the one commending (if the commendation is spoken sincerely). The descriptive and the commendatory must both compose goodness if one is to avoid a dangerous relativism. Combined, there may yet be relativism, but it need not entail subjectivism, as will be developed below.

On the other side of the divide from the evaluative is the moral, as I here use the term. I intend by the moral a subset of those sentences or concepts with an implicit or explicit ought, where this ought expresses some norm in line with which one's actions or character will be brought, if one follows the ought. As I raise this category only to set it aside, I consider 'ought' only in the way that ought-sentences relate to is-sentences, typically understood. As the moral will always contain some norm, some ought, the analysis of ought will apply necessarily to the moral.

From Hume until the present, there has been understood to be a difference in kind between is-statements and ought-statements, with the former by themselves never entailing the latter. It is taken from Hume that because "this *ought*, or *ought not*, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason shou'd be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others [viz., *is* and *is not*], which are altogether different from it."¹³ For example, from any number of descriptions of religious truths, it is impossible to deduce what one ought to do without an implicit ought hidden in the descriptions. The syllogism Hume seems to have in mind is this:

¹³ Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, III.i.1. It would be impossible to canvass the literature on just this passage, but it is worth pointing out that there is disagreement whether Hume intended the strong no-ought-from-is claim, the weaker claim that any such deduction needs some (undefined) reasoning, or whether the passage is simply ironic. See A.C. MacIntyre, 'Hume on "is" and "ought"', R.F. Atkinson, 'Hume on "is" and "ought": A Reply to Professor MacIntyre', Geoffrey Hunter 'A Reply to Professor Flew', and W.D. Hudson, 'Hume on *is* and *ought*', in W.D. Hudson, ed., *The Is-Ought Question* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1969). As these each assume that evaluations, as I use the term, are moral, and Hume uses evaluative language throughout, they attempt to resolve this putative tension in Hume: I see no such tension and thus have no reason to engage with this debate directly.

1. One ought to do what god decrees.
2. God decrees: 'Thou shalt not kill'
3. Therefore, one ought not to kill.

When one presents just the minor premise, the conclusion cannot directly follow, except on the assumption of the major premise. So intuitively plausible and difficult to refute is this that many refer to it as Hume's Law.

Now, the strict form of this syllogism is the following:

1. X ought to ϕ if ψ .
2. ψ .
3. X ought to ϕ .

If it is the form of the syllogism that inspires such intuitive acceptance of Hume's Law, as seems most plausible, then the following case would be an instance of Hume's Law. Inserting ' ϕ -ing is good' for ' ψ ' in the syllogism, one has the following case, in which presumably the minor premise will only yield the conclusion on the assumption of the major premise¹⁴:

1. X ought to ϕ if ϕ -ing is good.
2. ϕ -ing is good.
3. Therefore, X ought to ϕ .

The same should hold true for ' ϕ -ing is all-things-considered good', or any other variation with 'good' inserted, as a replacement of ψ . If Hume's Law holds any appeal in virtue of its form, then it is no more obvious how one is to move from goodness to an ought-conclusion than how one is to move from any factual state to an ought-conclusion.

To be clear, this need not suggest that goodness is a fact, unless one has independent reason to think that facts and oughts are all that could populate such a syllogism. For all that is said here, goodness could be distinct from both of these, yet the force of the syllogism's form would still hold.

¹⁴ This reasoning comes from Hilary Putnam, *Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), though he uses it to suggest a different argument.

This is not to assert, of course, that there is no relation between goodness and normativity, hence between goodness and the moral – that would truly be a difficult position to maintain without significant revision to one’s moral concepts – but the relation is not a matter of straightforward deduction, if Hume’s Law is valid. For my purposes here, it should at least be clear that the evaluative and the moral do not share the straightforward deductive relationship that is often assumed – e.g., that what is all-things-considered good is what one ought to do – and that barring some further account of their relationship, an analysis of the evaluative need not account for the moral.

Thick Moral Terms

I make this distinction between the evaluative and the normative, with the moral included in this latter, in order to account for a problem with what are generally called ‘thick’ moral concepts or terms.¹⁵ Concepts such as cruel, crime, strong, suffer, and others too numerous to mention fall under this heading. The extra girth that distinguishes these from ‘thin’ moral concepts or terms, like right and wrong, is supplied by certain descriptive elements that the ectomorphs lack.¹⁶ The difficulty comes in trying to pin down what this descriptive element is like and what relation it bears to the moral element.

Before developing that line of thought, I want to make the case for thick evaluative concepts or terms instead of thick moral ones.¹⁷ Whatever relation is borne between the moral or evaluative side of such a term and the descriptive side, the relation must hold in virtue of the term or the concept. That is, whenever a thick term – moral or evaluative – is applied, it must have both elements necessarily implicit therein.¹⁸ There

¹⁵ Quite a bit turns on whether these are considered as concepts or terms, but for what I say here and for the limited development I give these, this should make no difference.

¹⁶ On the analysis here given of goodness, ‘good’ is not clearly distinguished from the thick terms, as it, too, has descriptive entailments. However, the distinction between thin and thick terms may rest on distinctive features of their respective descriptive entailments. Goodness has more general and abstract entailments that subsume those of any thick term that itself entails goodness, so there is yet a distinction here, though not as simple of one as is generally presented.

¹⁷ It should be pointed out that ‘thick moral terms’ typically refers to the class comprising thick moral terms (in my restricted sense of the moral as a subset of the normative) *and* thick evaluative terms. I hope it will be clear that there is much to be gained by distinguishing the two.

¹⁸ Such necessity may hold even if the terms may call for certain evaluations necessarily where such evaluations are not part of the definition of the term *per se*: the evaluations may be connotatively necessary but not definitionally so. Whether connotations can be necessary without forming part of the definition of a term has its own interest, but the following depends only on the necessity of the entailment, whatever it may be.

could not be a case of a thick term without either its descriptive or evaluative/moral entailment.¹⁹

There are, however, cases in which we seem to apply at least some putative thick moral terms without also applying the requisite moral judgment. For example, if it were determined that torture were the only way to extract information from a person, information without which the lives of many innocents would be lost, say, a case might be made that it would be moral to do such a thing, i.e., that the deliberating agent ought to torture. If 'torture' entailed 'immoral', then one would be committed to doing something by definition (i.e., necessarily in all cases) immoral precisely because it was moral in this case – an apparent contradiction.²⁰

If, however, torture is a thick evaluative term, then torture would be by definition (i.e., necessarily in all cases) bad, though it would be moral in this case. This is not an obvious contradiction, and, depending on how the moral is related to the evaluative, perhaps not a contradiction at all.

Therefore, there is *prima facie* evidence to suppose that at least certain terms that are routinely bandied about as thick moral terms are in fact thick evaluative terms, terms, that is, that entail evaluative judgments necessarily and moral judgments only derivatively, if at all. Specifically, the evidence supports the conclusion that any putatively thick moral term that could be juxtaposed with its contrary moral judgment in some circumstance is therefore by definition not a thick moral term, but is – if, indeed, a thick term at all – a thick evaluative term.²¹

This possible contradiction depends on a thick term's keeping its evaluative component while it would not be able to keep its moral component, so it could have the former necessarily but could have the latter only contingently. As a thick moral term is supposed to be moral by definition, it would have to have its moral component necessarily: therefore, it could have no moral component.

¹⁹ Talk of entailment rather than compositionality here will be explained in the following section.

²⁰ The apparent contradiction is actualized by something like the following reasoning: For a given agent (1) she both ought to ϕ and ought not to ϕ ; (2) if she ought not to ϕ then it is impermissible for her to ϕ ; (3) therefore, she ought to ϕ and it is impermissible to ϕ . Assumption (2) is the point of contention, but it is one that would not be dismissed lightly. See Earl Conee, 'Against Moral Dilemmas', *The Philosophical Review*, XCI, No. 1 (January 1982), pp. 87-97.

²¹ This is not to say that there can be no thick moral terms: any such candidate terms that could not be placed in circumstances where their contrary moral judgment would be given may truly be thick moral terms.

What if, however, it were to keep its moral component but have it overruled or suppressed in the particular situation? To use the language sometimes used with moral dilemmas, what if it were merely to have a *prima facie* ought necessarily, which it kept? It would then be *prima facie* wrong to torture, necessarily, but right to torture in this circumstance. The thick term would keep its *prima facie* moral component but would find it insufficient in this circumstance to direct action.

There is strong reason to resist this assumption that *prima facie* oughts are actually oughts in any relevant and interesting sense. Certainly there is no reason to dismiss talk of *prima facie* oughts if these are understood as a shorthand for what *would be* oughts if circumstances were such-and-such, but the onus is great on one who would take such potential oughts as actual oughts. As the following digression will argue, their putative guidance can be accounted for in other ways, they unnecessarily populate the moral landscape, and they lead most obviously to moral dilemmas, which are surely to be metaethically avoided if possible: that morality may not always yield determinate answers is to concede the claim to omniscience; that it may so easily yield contradictory answers is to admit impotence.

A key point in dismissing *prima facie* oughts as genuine oughts is the following: oughts are distinctively action-guiding, so that one's knowledge of what one ought to do is never motivationally inert.²² Even stronger, what one ought to do is determined at least in part by considering reasons (and perhaps non-reasons, if sense can be made of such a thought) one has for doing something, so oughts are not simply reasons for action, but rather take reasons, circumstances, and so on into account, and thus are – at the very least – strongly action guiding *conclusions* to processes of reasoning on the question 'What ought I to do?'.²³ If one holds to this, cases of putatively conflicting oughts (or conflicting *prima facie* oughts) are actually cases in which there is no clear ought or there is a disjunctive ought (i.e., one ought to Φ or to Ψ).

None of this is to suggest a way out of situations glossed as moral dilemmas – those in which there are strongly conflicting reasons for action – only that talk of

²² Why oughts are necessarily motivational is a question with many responses, none of apparent consensus; however, their motivational trait is the *explanandum*, so I safely take it as given here.

²³ Note that, because this is talk of oughts more broadly than just moral oughts, objections that the moral is not all there is to life (e.g., Bernard Williams, 'Moral Luck' reprinted in *Moral Luck* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981]) have no purchase here. What should distinguish strongly action-guiding from conclusively action-guiding is unclear, but I leave the distinction as a possibility, though not a possibility that I believe can be exploited.

conflicting oughts in moral dilemmas suppresses an important thought, which makes the point here more difficult to establish. This suppressed thought is that, if there is truly an all-things-considered ought (and it is difficult to see how the distinctively action-directing nature of oughts can be maintained if they are not all-things-considered), then there is no conflicting one: there may only potentially be a conflicting one, if circumstances were otherwise.

Talk of conflicting *prima facie* oughts may be explained nevertheless by realizing that it typically implies suppressed talk of contexts. So, for example, a moral dilemma case is one in which one ought *prima facie* to ϕ and to ψ , where to ψ entails that one not- ϕ : then, one asks what one ought to do. But it is conceded by all parties that the final ought is unlike the *prima facie* oughts, precisely because the *prima facie* oughts are only *potentially* action-guiding, not all-things-considered action-guiding. And they are potentially action-guiding in that, if the context were different, they *would* be action-guiding; indeed, they would be oughts.

This context-relative nature of such *prima facie* oughts must be made clear. Genuine oughts, however they come about, do not spring *ex nihilo*, and it is immediately obvious that a change in circumstances can easily change what one ought to do. So whatever it was that generated the truth of the ought in the circumstances in which one ought to ϕ may no longer generate such an ought when the circumstances are changed. The moral dilemma question is more explicitly posed as: one ought to ϕ if circumstances were relevantly the same except that one did not also have to ψ ; one ought to ψ if circumstances were the same except that one did not also have to ϕ (or if ψ -ing did not entail not- ϕ -ing); therefore, what ought one to do in these new circumstances?

Note that there is no conflict of oughts here, as the situation as a whole is the one that needs an ought, and the proposed oughts never applied to the situation as a whole, only to modified and importantly restricted versions of it. There is still a conflict, of course, and it is made no easier to solve by being more precise with talk of what one ought to do. What such precision does allow, however, is clarity in the point under consideration on thick moral terms.

What is agreed on in the torture case is that, if circumstances were different (there were some other way of getting the information, say), the torture ought not to be performed. The question is whether in *these* circumstances one ought not to torture (and

ought to torture). Circumstances are *not* different, and circumstances are crucial to the determination of what one ought to do, so it is without sense to say that the torture ought not to be done when, in *these* circumstances, it precisely *ought* to be done.

There seem to be two reasons for resistance on this point. First, precisely because oughts are so strongly action-guiding, it is easy to forget just how tied they are to changes in circumstances. This is related to a larger point about oughts' implying can, but one need not make such a claim in order to see the crucial importance of changes in circumstances. Ought I to share my food with the hungry and malnourished person next to me? What if he has more than enough food placed in front of him by another? What if he refuses the offer? What if he is wealthy but too miserly to buy food for himself? What if he is wealthy but so concerned about providing savings for his children that he refuses money on his own needs? My ability to share my food with him does not alter in the slightest, but what one ought to do here may depend greatly on the entirety of the circumstances.

Secondly, if the moral is connected to the evaluative in some as-yet-unspecified way, as seems likely, then the persistence of the (necessary) evaluation that torture is bad and remains so even when it ought to be performed is what leads us to believe that it ought not to be performed even when it ought to be performed. This captures precisely what would be captured by populating the moral landscape with *prima facie* oughts, but avoids their otherwise obfuscatory effects. What reflection will dictate here is that, if circumstances were otherwise, the necessary badness of torture would (somehow) dictate that one ought not to do it. As that badness and its potential normative consequence is ever-present, one is inclined towards the normative conclusion on torture even when it ought to be done – which is abbreviated as a *prima facie* ought-not to torture – but one is not justified in the final leap to saying that it ought not to be done even when it ought to be done.

None of this is to show conclusively that oughts cannot conflict; rather, it is to cast doubt on the usefulness of an analysis that accepts conflicting oughts without a strong argument for the existence of such a conflict. While it may be perfectly natural to speak of two things both of which one ought to do and neither of which allow the other to be done, the above reasoning should be sufficient to make clear that this way of talking cannot be taken to represent what one is actually contemplating in moral dilemma

cases, and thus that thick moral terms – in general, at least, and in perhaps all cases – cede place to thick evaluative terms.

Thick Evaluative Terms

Returning then to thick evaluative terms proper, I have been speaking in the last chapter and the present one of their evaluative and descriptive components as if these are in fact severable. In fact, the components to which I have referred are most properly entailments. That is, if something is torture, then this fact entails that the thing both fits some description and is bad. Both of these entailments are necessary, but there is some question as to whether the entailments are trivial because the entailments are all there are to the terms themselves, or whether such a term is not just the conjunction of the descriptive and the evaluative.

The conjunction approach is perhaps the easiest reading of thick terms, particularly if one is already sympathetic to non-cognitivist ethics. It holds that a thick term is simply the conjunction – one assumes a necessary one – of a description and an evaluative state. So theft is a description of a particular type – defined, of course, without reference to ‘theft’ – and an evaluation; when the two occur together, then theft occurs. As the components are severable, this view would hold that there could be something to which the term ‘theft’ applies which does not have a negative evaluation, i.e., that the evaluation is unnecessary to the application of the term itself.

If sustained, this conjunction view would have negative implications for the proposal I here make on Marx’s behalf, since my proposal requires that the evaluative entailment of a thick term is necessary. John McDowell and Hilary Putnam, among others, have taken exception to the conjunction view, and their arguments will support my assertion that one is permitted the entailment view without thereby being committed to the conjunction view.²⁴

McDowell’s objection to the conjunction view is that the descriptive ‘side’ of a thick term can only be understood by coming to understand the term itself, that it is not independently graspable. Without the concept of ‘theft’, one would have no reason to group certain descriptions into instances of theft, as the only thing that such descriptions have in common is precisely that they are instances of theft. Moreover, turning to

²⁴ John McDowell, ‘Non-Cognitivism and Rule-Following’ in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 198-218; Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 201-216; cf. pp. 127-149.

Wittgenstein's rule-following considerations, there is an innumerable, perhaps infinite, number of descriptions that could qualify as theft, and the only thing that guides our predicate application is the concept itself, with no assurance of certainty provided 'from outside', as it were, from the descriptions as they are 'in themselves'. Therefore, the purely descriptive component of 'theft', when loosed from the evaluative component, is parasitic on having a mastery of the evaluative term.

McDowell's reasoning deserves more space than I give it here, but it should be clear why it need not affect the entailment view at the same time it criticizes the component view. If McDowell is correct, then one must necessarily already occupy a certain evaluative point of view in order to master the thick evaluative term.²⁵ But the argument is not that there is no descriptive side of thick terms, only that they are not independently characterizable, that the descriptions do not belong to an independent type, one graspable without grasping the relevant thick term.

In the same way that I argued that 'is good' is not predicated only in virtue of seeing that certain descriptive criteria are fulfilled, so, too, do I not argue that there are certain descriptions, independently characterizable, which obtain and therefore call for the application of 'is theft'. The argument is rather the other way round: if something is good, or if something is theft, then there is a descriptive element that is necessarily fulfilled. But the evaluative viewpoint is explanatorily prior, meaning that any explanation of 'theft' depends first on understanding the evaluative viewpoint, and only then on understanding the descriptive entailment.²⁶ In a point that I will argue at greater length in the following chapter as it applies to 'good', knowing when to make such ascriptions need not entail that one have knowledge of the (possibly infinite) descriptions that could be entailed thereby, but this point does not entail – and reflection on some basic cases to be given shows that it *cannot* entail – that there is no description, only that the description *itself* does not itself require the ascription of the thick term, without the requisite evaluative viewpoint.

Putnam's line of criticism is similar in many ways, though his objection to the component view runs deeper. He proposes that there is no sense to talking of facts at all in the absence of values because certain values are necessary even to our determining

²⁵ Though it is not entirely clear what is necessary to a mastery of a term, at a minimum this must include the correct application of the term to new and unexpected situations: this is the relevant point for my use of 'mastery of a term' here.

²⁶ This is not to say that one *learns* the term in this order, only that an explanation of the term must proceed in this order.

what count as facts: “Put schematically and too briefly, I am saying that theory of truth presupposes theory of rationality which in turn presupposes our theory of the good.”²⁷ It is a great disservice to Putnam that I will not develop his reasoning to any greater degree here, but I bring it up only to show that even this deeper point does not affect the entailment view, while it would have serious consequences for the conjunction view. If facts are not value-independently specifiable, then the conjunction view loses its motivating dichotomy; however, it does not require one to give up the position that there is some description entailed by the thick term, though that description is itself not ultimately specifiable without reference to ‘deeper’ values.

The reason the difficulty posed by McDowell and Putnam is fatal for the conjunction view is that the conjunction view wants independently identifiable descriptions that, when combined with a certain evaluation, arithmetically yield the thick evaluative term. The objection to this is that there is no reason to believe that such descriptions can be identified without the evaluative term, therefore no reason to assume that there is any sense to the conjunction view.

My proposal here is that there is no reason to believe that such descriptions do not obtain from *within* the evaluative term. In fact, there is strong reason to believe that such descriptions *must* obtain from within, as that meshes perfectly with any debate over the correct application of a thick evaluative term. ‘He didn’t commit theft yesterday: he didn’t stir from his bed all day’, is a clear instance of just the sort of *modus tollens* reasoning Marx uses that would intuitively support the idea that there must be *some* descriptive entailment. The arguments by McDowell and Putnam refine this entailment position, but they do not object to it.

The Explanatory Argument

What Marx uses in the writings under consideration are thick evaluative terms. Above were considered ‘theft’ and ‘crime’, though more famous Marxian examples such as ‘alienation’ and ‘exploitation’ spring to mind as likely in this category as well. If Marx uses thick evaluative terms, then he has an entailed evaluative viewpoint. And an entailed evaluative viewpoint, while surely having some close relation to the moral, as I use the term, does not straightforwardly yield norms, so it cannot straightforwardly be moral. Therefore, Marx is justified in claiming not to have a moral picture – if his

²⁷ *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 215.

conception of morality is sufficiently close to the definition thereof that I draw here – but so are his readers to be excused for seeing a moral reading therein: there is an implicit evaluation to the writings, and that is what is either misread as moral in this restricted sense or is read as moral in the broader sense that includes the evaluative, the sense from which this paper has tried to keep itself. Thus, the Tucker-Wood reading is vindicated, and the intuitive objections to it are largely explained.

What about the category of ‘needs’, introduced in the previous chapter? It seems unlikely that ‘need’ is a thick evaluative term in the way that the others were, if for no other reason than that needs do not clearly require an evaluation, particularly when those needs are relative to some purpose that is evaluatively neutral or even negative. For example, a person may need food to eat, a pen to take notes, or an obedient army to carry out genocide. One would be hard-pressed to make the case that these are simply not needs, but equally it would be difficult to argue that there are necessary evaluations to all such claims. An analysis of needs, then, will require a greater analysis of goodness, which is undertaken in the following chapter.

IV. Motivating Descriptions

From the argument of the preceding chapter, it was concluded that if Marx relies on thick evaluative terms, then he thus relies necessarily on implicit evaluations, but it was neutral on whether these properly figure in true descriptions of the world. If they do figure in true descriptions of the world, then Marx is justified in claiming that his is a descriptive endeavour. Moreover, if they can also be shown to have some link to motivation, then sense can be made of Marx's revolutionary claims as issuing directly from his descriptive account. If the same descriptions are both true and motivating, then such motivation would be justified, assuming the proper connection between the two. So much will hinge on such a connection between descriptions and motivation.

To support the conclusion that values are properly part of descriptions, I will make the argument that the burden of proof is actually on one who would prevent descriptions' inclusion of values, both by arguing against what seems to be the objection to such a view and by supporting Hilary Putnam's positive argument to a similar conclusion. I will then argue via an abbreviated Aristotelian account of the good that values may be directly attached to motivation. Together, these justify Marx's claim to be describing rather than prescribing and his motivational call to revolution.

Values Described

The question whether values can figure in true descriptions of the world is not the same as the question whether values are themselves in the world. The answer to either would not strictly entail the answer to the other, without certain assumptions about what true descriptions can describe and what would make them true. It would be impossible here to provide an adequate and complete theory of descriptions, but, fortunately, it will not be necessary. I will instead make the case that values must be located in descriptions of the world in such a way that any uncontroversial theory of descriptions will have to take this conclusion into account, rather than trying to build an uncontroversial theory of descriptions myself from the ground up. This will limit the force of my conclusion, pending a complete theory of descriptions, but this appears not to be particularly detrimental.

The first case I want to make is that there is no obvious reason to exclude values from descriptions of the world, if ‘values’ are understood broadly. The objection to such a position rests on the failure to distinguish the evaluative from the moral and on a particular world-view that simply begs the question against values’ inclusion in descriptions. Moreover, as a second claim, there is strong reason to think that values are in fact necessary for all descriptions, which makes the claim that they could not then figure in such descriptions a clearly dubious one.

The objection to values of any ethically relevant sort as figuring in true descriptions of the world that I will consider is that from J.L. Mackie’s *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*.¹ This straightforward argument seems to capture in essence, if not perhaps in full complexity, the objection to the view I defend.

Without making the distinction I have made above between the evaluative and the moral, Mackie concludes that any such properties of either type, because of certain features, would have to be ‘queer’, and therefore of suspect existence. Mackie moves from such suspect existence to the literal falsity of their uses in descriptions. There is reason to question such a move, as I did above, but I will here focus instead on the first premise, that their existence is suspect.

The two arguments he uses to motivate the ‘argument from queerness’ are summarized as follows:

“If there were objective values, then they would be entities or qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe. Correspondingly, if we were aware of them, it would have to be by some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else.”²

Mackie’s argument for these two points assumes that, unlike values, he ultimately has a way of pointing to our knowledge of “essence, number, identity, diversity, solidity, inertia, substance, the necessary existence and infinite extension of time and space, necessity and possibility in general, power, and causation”.³ So his argument is not simply that we do not directly perceive value, because one could respond

¹ Op. cit.

² Ibid., p. 38. This ignores Mackie’s other chief argument, the argument from relativity, which proceeds from the observation that there is moral disagreement across cultures and times, and concludes that this is *prima facie* evidence against moral objectivity. I ignore this argument because the account here developed accepts that a certain relativity about values is possible, and I argue that relativity does not strictly entail non-objectivity, so this argument is not clearly a threat and may not even be valid.

³ Ibid., p. 39.

that an overly strict conception of how our knowledge is tied to direct perception would not allow us to perceive probability either. Mackie's argument is, rather, that we can explain our knowledge of these other things starting from a sparse empiricism, but value resists any such explanation.

His support of this point about value is phrased in terms particularly apt to the considerations here. He asks, "What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty – say, causing pain just for fun – and the moral fact that it is wrong?" He answers his question, with no further argument, by saying that "[i]t cannot be an entailment, a logical or semantic necessity." Following the above distinction between the evaluative and the moral, and assuming 'deliberate cruelty' as analyzable as other thick evaluative terms are, then there is no resistance to Mackie's point: that something is deliberately cruel does not strictly entail that it is wrong. With the distinction between the moral and the evaluative in mind, the question really is whether it entails that it is bad.

As Mackie does not make such a distinction between the evaluative and the moral, he would presumably be just as willing to ask the question within the evaluative, rather than from the evaluative to the moral, viz. 'What is the connection between the natural fact that an action is a piece of deliberate cruelty and the evaluative fact that it is bad?' Of course, when phrased in such a way, the intuitive force of Mackie's rhetoric falls away: if it is a natural fact that something is deliberately cruel, then how could it *fail* to be something bad, even if one may not hold that it is necessarily wrong? As I argued in the previous chapter, this is precisely an entailment, though I do not defend what type of entailment it must be.

The problem in Mackie's question comes from the way it is posed. As John McDowell and Hilary Putnam have elsewhere argued to greater force,⁴ the reason that one can know that something cruel is bad is precisely because the evaluative viewpoint is antecedently necessary to the identification of something as cruel. There is no way of picking out the cruel from the non-cruel unless one already understands the evaluative nature of such predications. Mackie has said too much already on the left-hand side of the question to resist the conclusion he rhetorically opposes on the right.

This, however risks making a straw man of Mackie's rhetorical question. What he clearly intends to ask is what sort of a connection there must be between things' being

⁴ See footnote 24 of the previous chapter.

thus-and-so and their being bad; or, if cruelty is understood to entail badness, then the connection between things' being thus-and-so and cruelty's being present. On this point, his arguments are specifically directed against the view that the thus-and-so in question is simultaneously seen as an arrangement of natural features of the world and seen as wrong, rather than as bad. While this may give even more reason to suppose that the argument of the last chapter was right to wrench apart thick moral terms from thick evaluative ones – these problems with the thick moral terms do not have clear counterparts in the evaluative cases – they reveal what is the heart of Mackie's objection, when reconstrued for the evaluative case.

To make this reconstrual, it must first be clear that Mackie's view of the natural world is a rather impoverished one.⁵ That is, 'natural facts' are bare facts about objects, deprived of all evaluative, aesthetic, or otherwise value-laden language and concepts. And on this sense of 'fact', the question of why a particular thus-and-so arrangement should be an example of cruelty is indeed a good one. But what reason is there to accept that descriptions are true only if they are descriptions of this sort of bare, 'natural fact'? Does this not simply beg the question against a richer sense of 'natural fact'?

His reasons, as cited above, are negative ones: what else could populate the natural landscape, and how would we know about it if it did? So, of course, if answers can be suggested to Mackie's questions, the argument loses its force. One need not settle the issue conclusively against him in order to dismiss the argument, however, since Mackie's argument is not a positive one – one that shows that an acceptance of values as truly 'in the world' would generate a contradiction, say – but is a set of sceptical questions to make one question where such values would fit in the world and how we would know it if they did.

A way of building such an argument against him can actually begin in Mackie's own discussion of goodness.⁶ His explicit attention is on a model of goodness built around what he calls 'functional goodness', something on the 'is a good x' model.⁷ A particular object is a good knife if and only if it fulfils certain criteria, where these criteria are not fulfilled by intrinsic features of the knife, nor by meeting the needs of any

⁵ Mackie would surely prefer to refer to his account of the natural world as rather 'sparse' instead of 'impoverished'. However, since 'impoverished' only clearly differs from 'sparse' by their evaluative senses, and such evaluations are strictly false on Mackie's account, it is surely no disservice to him to use such language, as the two words are synonymous in their strict senses.

⁶ Mackie, pp. 50-63.

⁷ Mackie also recognizes the importance of "egocentric commendation", of which more below.

specific user of the knife: “rather I am saying something between the two, namely that it has certain characteristics ... [that] are themselves introduced obliquely and inexplicitly by some vague reference to the...demands” of the user.⁸

Now, my own account of ‘good’, given schematically in the previous chapter, is not built on the ‘is a good x’ model, but instead takes ‘is good’ as the basic case to be explained. Nevertheless, certain features of the account agree with Mackie’s, most important of which is the concern with the indeterminate characteristics entailed by the use of ‘is good’. While Mackie is at pains to explain what these are and how these connect to the commendation that is a distinctive feature of ‘is good’, my own account avoids these difficulties by shifting the use of the term to one that cannot be understood outside a particular evaluative viewpoint, by making the commendatory role explanatorily prior to the descriptive one.

Two features of goodness led to this conclusion. First, ‘is good’ clearly has some descriptive entailment, given the ease with which we counter ‘x is good’ with an apparently factual, descriptive claim. Second, ‘is good’ can be understood and used without understanding the complete descriptive entailment of its use in any one case. This suggests that a person’s mastery of the term must include an understanding that there *are* certain descriptive entailments to its predication, but this need not be an exhaustive understanding – if, indeed, such an exhaustive understanding is even possible.

Where Mackie’s account falters is in assuming that one can master the term without having such an evaluative viewpoint, that is, by description alone, and by assuming that such a descriptive account must be complete if it is to exist at all. The focus on the description alone allows him to make sense of the functional ascription of ‘is a good x’ in “That is a good sunset, but the beauties of nature leave me cold.”⁹ In such a case, one may simply be restricting one’s functional use of ‘good’ to the descriptive criteria as understood but not endorsed rather than engaging in what he calls “egocentric commendation”, i.e., there would be no genuine commendation to the goodness ascription.

Is this really possible? Has one really acquired a mastery of the word if one merely knows that a particular sunset fulfils the relevant criteria for a good sunset?

⁸ It is not entirely clear whether Mackie intends this “something between the two” as a combination of the two or something wholly different. In either case, the following should apply.

⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

Given the apparently open-ended nature of such criteria and the impossibility of specifying such criteria independently of the mastery of the term – What links together the various criteria if not just that they are criteria of good sunsets? – one could only make such a statement sincerely and with mastery of the term if one already occupied the evaluative viewpoint that allowed one to see that *this* sunset was a good one.

Mackie is certainly right, however, to think that one could have a mastery of such a term without also endorsing on every occasion what the person calls good, without engaging in “egocentric commendation”, but this is only clear in cases of the ‘is a good x’ type, not of the ‘is good’ type. When something is described simply as ‘good’, not as ‘a good x’, it is just not at all clear that commendation can be left out, and the ambiguous talk of “egocentric commendation” does little to make this point easier to understand.

The problem is that egocentric commendation either does not apply to ‘is good’ or does not apply to ‘is a good x’. If the weight is put on the commendation’s egocentricity, then it is nothing more than the expression of a simple preference, which is just to miss the point of how ‘x is good’ is used in distinction to ‘I like x’, though it may very arguably have something to do with the ‘is a good x’ use. If, on the other hand, the weight is put on its commendation, with the addendum that such commendation is made only on the commender’s behalf, not on the behalf of others, then it would be a suitable analysis of a necessary feature of ‘is good’, as described in the previous chapter, though this would not obviously apply equally to cases of ‘is a good x’. Egocentric commendation has done nothing to help generalize from an analysis of functional cases of goodness ascription to all cases.

When he does discuss non-functional cases of goodness ascription, he does this by making reference to some requirements or interests of some agents. When making reference to *all* agents, to “the point of view of the universe”, he claims that such a definition must falter because of the relativity of the uses, that they are used by different persons at different times in different and apparently irreconcilable ways. Indeed, this would pose a problem to the objectivity of the term if the commendatory role were explanatorily subservient to the descriptive role, since one would be at a loss as to which set of descriptive criteria of all the competing proposals was the correct one. This relativism’s subjectivist threat, though, can be diffused by making the evaluative viewpoint – the commendatory role – explanatorily prior.

How does this resolve the concern? In brief, it makes what look to be subjectivist threats into indeterminacy threats in some cases and satisfactorily explains away the relativism in others. The threats here are those that would force one from the view that there is a single set of descriptive criteria for goodness *simpliciter* into the view that there are many competing views, none of which is any more correct than any other. These are made into indeterminacy concerns in some cases because the complete descriptive entailment of any one predication of 'is good' need not be known in order to master the term, but it does allow for reasonable disagreement as what precisely is entailed in any one case, so disagreement need not be *prima facie* evidence of subjectivism on the horizon.

In cases in which such relativism persists through disagreement, this is explained by recognizing that the evaluative viewpoint must be taken up before the descriptive entailments can be picked out as characteristics of goodness, at least in a specific case. If there is irresolvable relativism among evaluative viewpoints, it is only to be expected that there may be relativism among descriptive entailments, and there is no obvious reason to suppose that any single evaluative point of view need encompass all such descriptions in order for these to be correctly applied predications of 'is good'.

Mackie's claim is that his conception of good will not allow for it to be objective, but this is to move from the relativism of 'is good' to the subjectivity of goodness, and such a move is not obviously completed. The Aristotelian model offered below will revisit this move.

The real danger for Mackie's view, though, is that his ways of defining goodness themselves presuppose values,¹⁰ and this is a strong reason to suppose that an entirely value-free sense of description will be seriously impoverished. But there is no reason to focus on Mackie's definition of goodness here, as the point has been made more generally by Hilary Putnam.¹¹ Since his argument focuses specifically on meaning, which is surely a crucial component of any correct theory of descriptions, it is worth seeing his argument.

¹⁰ "A carving knife, for example, is supposed to cut *smoothly*, to enable one to slice meat *thinly*, and to keep on doing this, not to become *blunt* or *wear out too quickly*." (ibid., p. 53), italics added. Can the italicized words be made sense of in purely naturalistic terms? A 'thin slice' is how many nanometers thick, then?

¹¹ 'Fact and Value', ch. 6 in *Reason, Truth and History*, pp. 127-149.

Putnam begins from the idea that ‘rational acceptability’ is necessary to any idea of truth. That is, to accept something as true is to apply standards of rational acceptability to it. Moreover, since it is naïve, post-Kant and Wittgenstein, to assume that “truth is a passive copy of what is ‘really’ (mind-independently, discourse-independently) ‘there’”, then acceptance-as-true, given certain standards of rational acceptability, just is what it means for something to be true.¹² For my purposes here, this point could be restricted to the narrower point that what it means for a description to be true, rather than for a fact, say, to be true, is for the description to comply with certain standards of rational acceptability, but the reasoning will be the same.¹³

By ‘standards of rational acceptability’, Putnam means “a rational way to pursue an inquiry, what...standards of objectivity are, when...to terminate an inquiry, what grounds...provid[e] good reason for accepting one verdict or another on whatever sort of question”.¹⁴ Such standards would include coherence, simplicity, justification, adequacy, and perspicuousness. For one who doubts that such are truly values, Putnam points out that we use precisely these terms to praise, and, if anything, we should doubt whether there is a meaningful gulf between epistemic values and ethical ones.¹⁵

What this supports is the claim that any attempt to reduce values in descriptions to ‘bare facts’ if they are to have meaning at all is immediately to run into the problem of specifying such facts without those same values. Thus one returns to the point developed in the previous chapter, made by both McDowell and Putnam, that it is necessary to have an evaluative viewpoint in order to make sense of value ascriptions, and, so it would seem, even to make sense of fact ascriptions. To conclude that values must be explained in ‘bare factual’ terms, without making use of values, is not only to

¹² Ibid., p. 128; cf. p. 130: “truth itself gets its life from our criteria of rational acceptability”. This point is far too wide-reaching to stand without more argumentation, but, unfortunately, it cannot be done here. For some exploration of the Kant-Wittgenstein critique here mentioned, see Jonathan Bennett, *Kant’s Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), pp. 141-152, 202-214. Cf. MECW vol. I, pp. 195-6 (*Leading Article in No. 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung*).

¹³ Putnam holds that there should be no difference here at all, since, even if descriptions were only true relative to the truth of facts, the same problem occurs with how to determine what makes them true-relative-to something, which is precisely why there is no clear sense of the rational-standards-free fact. See *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 136.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 136; cf. Jaegwon Kim, ‘What is “Naturalized Epistemology”?’ in *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988), pp. 381-405.

beg the question against values' proper place in descriptions, but is likely to ask an incoherent question.¹⁶

This does not prove conclusively that descriptions must include value terms, but it does serve to shift the onus onto the opponent of such a view. There is a problem with giving a characterization of a value in bare factual terms, and the problem seems to arise because there is no sense of 'bare facts' that does not already depend on values for such specification. If there is no evaluative viewpoint, then there is no viewpoint from which facts can be specified. To rule out values from descriptions, then, is far from obviously achieved, and whatever theory of descriptions is ultimately most persuasive must take this into account.

This reasoning can now be turned to some difficult areas picked out in chapter two from Marx's *The Leading Article in No. 179 of the Kölnische Zeitung* and *The Philosophical Manifesto of the Historical School of Law*. In these, Marx discussed philosophy as one of the "spheres of human activity".¹⁷ Philosophy comes into the world, after starting as a particular system of thought or point of view, by coming "into contact and interaction with the real world of its day", where it then comes to have effects on that world.¹⁸ Those effects also serve to shape philosophical views that come into existence, so the interaction is in both directions.

This is where it is important to distinguish Marx's view from the vulgar materialistic view with which he is too easily saddled. It is often assumed that Marx's arguments proceed directly from the world to our minds, and, indeed, in one sense that is no doubt his view. What distinguishes him from the empiricists with similar views, however, is that Marx also makes much of the relation between our minds and the world, how we go about shaping the world, which then in turn shapes our consciousness thereof.

It must be remembered that Marx calls each of these systems that have substantial effects in the world "true philosophy",¹⁹ but he also allows that one can judge such philosophies based on how well they 'fit' with the world. Importantly, though, one

¹⁶ What has been said here has not established that such a question would be necessarily incoherent, as there may be more than one sense of 'value' in play. Even if so, this dual sense seems unlikely to affect the general reasoning, though proof of such a point is not to be attempted here.

¹⁷ MECW vol. I, p. 195.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 195-6.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 195.

never stands outside such a viewpoint – in the loose sense in which Marx uses ‘philosophy’ here, this seems a safe synonym – in order to look at the world as it *truly* is, as it were. From what he says, there seems to be no debate that the world just is a certain way, whether we see it that way or not: this much he shares with the empiricists that preceded him. Our understanding of the world, however, is not a simple mirror: this is the important difference.

If one must have a viewpoint in order to have any explanatory contact with the world, then Marx can make sense of the above reasoning about the inclusion of values in descriptions. Indeed, his use of thick evaluative terms combined with his claim that his is a descriptive endeavour is good evidence that he did think that at least some values could be directly described.

Where he may differ from the above reasoning is in his notion of what makes for true philosophy. The only evidence Marx gives for his view on this is the discussion of how philosophy interacts with the world, so, from that, one is led to assume that Marx’s view is something like the following. Those viewpoints that best fit the world are those, by definition, that come to have effects on the world. Those that have effects on the world are, by definition, true.²⁰ They will also, by their effects, contribute to their own reproduction as viewpoints. But these views are not to be mistaken for static views any more than the world is to be mistaken as a static canvas. As they are reproduced as viewpoints, so is the world reproduced – quite literally, in some cases – for those that live in it. And, eventually, other viewpoints are born and come to have effects. Marx takes himself to be writing from an emerging viewpoint, which has just begun to show its effects, and writing about a dying viewpoint, one whose effects are growing more and more limited.

The question remaining is what Marx’s viewpoint, his philosophy, precisely is. For all that has been said, Marx is justified in allowing values into his descriptions, and it is possible to make sense of what, on his account, would make such descriptions true. But true descriptions that contain values do not yet establish that Marx is justified in his revolutionary call. Indeed, it is not yet clear how it could be that true philosophy has

²⁰ It should be remembered that Marx speaks of philosophy’s being “superseded” so that it is no longer “mere philosophy” when it is fully embraced by the world, which makes his view a bit more subtle than I here present, though it seems unlikely to affect the general argument, depending on what exactly Marx’s view of truth is.

effects in the world: why should *any* descriptions have effects in the world? For an answer to this, I want to lean on a modified Aristotelian account of goodness.

Aristotle and the Good

It is important before looking at Aristotle's account to see that it is not unfair to impute such an argument to Marx. First, his familiarity with Aristotle is evident from his notes and doctoral thesis. As well, many of the Young Hegelians, Marx included, considered themselves to stand in the same relationship to Hegel as the Greek philosophers afterwards stood to Aristotle, so they were particularly interested in the development of Aristotelian philosophy into post-Aristotelian philosophy.²¹ Whether, of course, Marx actually intended to make an explicitly Aristotelian argument is less important to what I am arguing here than whether such an argument can vindicate the troubling claims set out earlier while being faithful to what Marx did argue.

It is not disingenuous to impute to Aristotle a distinction between the evaluative and the moral, as I have made the distinction, though it would be too much to emphasize this distinction as one that captured his attention at all. Nevertheless, however little such a relation may have played in his recorded thoughts, much of the *Nicomachean Ethics* is exegetically concerned with the good rather than with what one ought to do – though a strong enough relation between the two would make this a mere stylistic point. As I here assume no particular relation between these two, the evaluative side of Aristotle's argument will bear the attention.

The argument here is that we are motivated to pursue goodness because it is understood as goodness, and not necessarily because we *ought* to pursue it. This account will allow for an objective conception of goodness while a non-absolute, relativistic account of the correct predication of 'is good'. Different things at different times and for different persons may be good, though this need not entail that goodness is subjective. On Marx's behalf, such an argument further grounds the case that the value of goodness is descriptively in the world by giving a specific way in which it arises. It will also suggest why this particular value at least has such motivational force.

²¹ For discussion of the place in which Marx, as well as many of the Young Hegelians, held Aristotle, see David McLellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 52-68 *passim*.

Aristotle opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* by taking the good to be what we aim at in our actions and choices, ultimately.²² What follows from this depends heavily on how this assertion is taken. First, this could be a necessary or a contingent fact: I will consider it only as if it were necessary, as the reading of it as a contingent fact is uninteresting to say the least.²³ So, two possible interpretations of this position, if a statement of a necessary fact, are (1) what we aim at is good, necessarily, just in virtue of our aiming at it, and (2) what is (independently) good is what we aim at, necessarily, due to some fact (which could itself be necessary or contingent) about us.

The first interpretation has itself at least two readings. If what is good is good in virtue solely of our aiming at it, then it is necessarily the case that what we aim at is good, no matter what we aim at. If this applies to what an individual aims at, then a person is only criticized for failing to achieve what she aims at, not for aiming at what is not good, which is impossible on this interpretation. A thief is then validly criticized for failing to steal as much as desired, but not for stealing.

A second reading of the first interpretation would identify goodness with what we as a group (e.g., society, nation, etc.) aim at.²⁴ If what a group aims at is the good by definition – assuming that disparate aims of the group’s members are set aside in order to understand this claim – then there is room for criticism of members of the group for failing to aim at goodness, but there is no criticism of the group itself, for reasoning analogous to that above, considering groups as individuals. Both of these readings of the first interpretation are intuitively problematic, since a slide into a subjectivist relativism about goodness itself seems unstoppable. Goodness here is just identical to whatever is aimed at and just because it is aimed at, so there is no independent, objective to ask if something is *truly* good. This would accordingly deny that one could choose to aim at something precisely because it is good, which would be quite a revision to the experience

²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter NE), trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). I, 1: 1094a. The term ‘ultimately’ admits of a strong ambiguity between what we aim at solely, in virtue of which we achieve our other goals, and what we aim at that itself includes other goals, the ‘dominant’ and ‘inclusive’ readings of one’s ultimate end, respectively, according to W.F.R. Hardie, ‘The Final Good in Aristotle’s *Ethics*’, *Philosophy*, 40 (1965), pp. 277-95. This point will lead too far afield, so I will unfortunately leave it ambiguous here, in the belief that any resolution of such ambiguity will not destroy what follows.

²³ Perhaps little actually turns on such a claim of necessity, depending on the type of necessity in play. (See Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1970], pp. 18-20.) I must unfortunately leave this issue ambiguous here.

²⁴ Aristotle makes clear that ‘humanity-in-itself’ and ‘human being’ will have the same good (NE I, 6: 1096b), but the point could perhaps be pushed for groups somewhere between all humans and individuals.

of practical reasoning. In any case, Aristotle's overall argument is one that considers the human constitution, which would be an unnecessary consideration on this first interpretation, so I will consider the second interpretation.²⁵

The second interpretation of Aristotle's initial claim can be taken as an empirical claim or a conceptual claim. The empirical claim would hold that what we do in fact aim at is good because there is an independent fact of what we aim at and an independent fact of what goodness is, and it is empirically the case that the two are coextensive. This, however, would make for an odd place to begin an argument. What does it matter that we aim at the good if this is established only by establishing separately what the good is and what we aim at, other than to comfort us from the beginning that most of our ethical stances are aimed correctly? And how would this establish that the connection were a necessary one?²⁶ Aristotle may have believed that common ethical opinion is generally correct, but this carries no argumentative weight here.

If this is a conceptual claim, it would be something like the following. We in fact aim at the good because we are so constituted to aim at the good, so there is room to speak of an aim-independent good. The fact about our constitution could be either necessary or contingent without affecting the necessity of the connection between our constitution and the good, which was Aristotle's assertion. This still requires an account of the good independent of an account of our constitution and an account of how our constitution leads us to aim at the good.²⁷ This is the most plausible of the substantial interpretations, so it merits further development.

The account of goodness and of our constitution is as follows. There are many goods (for us), but the chief good is *eudaimonia*, or being happily fulfilled overall.²⁸ Whatever it is that is so fulfilling is identical to the good and those other goods take their value directly from their contribution to or diminution of *eudaimonia*. So our constitution

²⁵ Aristotle does hold, quite explicitly: 'People who object that what all things aim at is not good are talking nonsense: whatever seems to all to be the case, we say is the case.' (NE X, 2: 1172b-1173a). This need not favour the first interpretation, however, as it is unclear why things are taken to be the case by all, therefore why common opinion is correct. Cf. 1173a for a counterfactual claim to support my leaving this question unanswered, also David Bostock, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 8-9 and chapter 10, pp. 214-16 and *passim*.

²⁶ This may yet be necessary, and, even if not, one may question whether the necessity asserted above is truly justified, but I cannot here address these questions.

²⁷ These need not be entirely independent, but the account of each could be.

²⁸ '*Eudaimonia*' is translated, alternatively, as 'happiness', 'flourishing', 'well-being', 'fulfilment', 'overall success and prosperity and achievement'. Bostock, pp. 11-12; Crisp, ed., p. 206; Hughes, Gerard J., *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle on Ethics*, (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 22-3.

leads us to identify certain things as good because goodness is what fulfils our function. That is just what it means to be happily fulfilled overall, the fulfilment of our function. We identify those things that fulfil our function and, in so doing, identify what is good. So, if we have come to master the meaning of 'is good', then the things we pick out as good are precisely those that fulfil our function.

This function whose fulfilment is crucial to Aristotle's account of goodness is, in turn, determined by our essence, where such essence is determined by whatever sort of beings we are²⁹, and by our end, which is the end of this function. Therefore, what is good is relative to the essence, function, and end of particular beings. It is not therefore non-objective, however. There is, as it were, a fact of the matter about what is good, but that fact can only be determined relative to other facts, facts about us.

Why does this not make for a subjectivism about what is good? If there is no correct answer for all beings, no correct answer *per se*, then why does this relativism not entail subjectivism? To answer the question, it first needs to be made clear that Aristotle's account deals only with what I have called the descriptive entailments of goodness, speaking as he does from within an evaluative viewpoint. If he did not speak from an evaluative viewpoint, then he would have nothing to regroup as instances of goodness in order to analyze it in the abstract. If his account is generally reasonable both to Marx and to our own sensibilities, then this speaks for Aristotle's evaluative viewpoint as one that differs little, at least in such general ways, from our own. The identification of that which fulfils one's function with the descriptive component of the good only takes places within such an evaluative framework.

Equally, though, only within such an evaluative framework is commendation possible. As commendation is a constitutively necessary part of the correct predication of 'is good',³⁰ then there is no way in which goodness can be fully accounted for without an evaluative framework. One can describe what some other evaluative framework may take to be good in some cases, but only by mastering that other evaluative framework could one make goodness ascriptions from within it.³¹

²⁹ For Aristotle, we are essentially reason-using, thinking beings, having that characteristic uniquely among all organisms. Marx does not take this to be our essence.

³⁰ This does not affect Aristotle's point, as he is concerned with what things are good, not how we correctly ascribe goodness, though there is clearly a strong link between the two.

³¹ It is unclear that one could master different evaluative frameworks in the same way, however. 'X is good for the cannibals' may require a mastery of a different evaluative framework from a

The reason that goodness may be relative on Aristotle's account is that it relates to the functions of the creatures ascribing goodness. The reason that this is not to threaten subjectivity is that there is simply no more objective sense of goodness than that contained in an evaluative viewpoint. The evaluative viewpoint already accounts for the relativity of the functions: when one sincerely declares 'x is good', this is understood only relative to an evaluative framework. Equally, though, that same evaluative viewpoint accounts for the non-subjectivity of the ascription.³²

The reason this does not entail subjectivism about the good is that there are correct answers from within an evaluative framework, and there are no answers from without. When one declares that 'x is good', this is either outside an evaluative framework and therefore meaningless, or it is within an evaluative framework and is therefore correct or incorrect. The demand that there be only one possible evaluative framework in order to stave off subjectivity is to misunderstand the role of the evaluative framework here spoken of. This is not something that one wanders into for goodness ascriptions and then wanders out of for all other talk: if values really are necessary all the way down, as it were, in the way Putnam suggested above, then our sense of objectivity itself is determined from within such an evaluative framework. To turn that sense of objectivity onto the framework itself supposedly from outside the framework is meaningless. Subjectivity and objectivity is a distinction within an evaluative framework: disagreements from outside such a framework can be admitted, but they cannot be admitted as possibilities that one could actually understand.

The attention here given to Aristotle's account then is as an abstract analysis of what we do actually commend from our evaluative viewpoint, but it is not therefore an analysis of what our evaluative viewpoint *ought* to be.³³ It is instead a regrouping of those descriptive components of our goodness ascriptions and an analysis of what these things have in common. Note, however, that this is not a value-free, reductive analysis, so there is no charge that what Aristotle here does would run afoul of McDowell's criticism in the

simple 'X is good', but whether these could both be equally mastered is unclear, particularly given some of the reflections to be offered presently.

³² I speak of subjectivity and objectivity as if the only two possible positions, though there are intermediates. The point here need only be established for non-subjectivity, however.

³³ It could be an analysis of what we *ought* to consider good from within our evaluative viewpoint, but this can be made sense of in terms of coherence, simplicity, and other values already present in that same viewpoint.

last chapter, viz. that there is no way of regrouping the descriptive sides of value terms without making use of those same terms.³⁴

In more detail, then, Aristotle's argument can begin with an identification of what the human essence is.³⁵ For Aristotle, this is our reason, which is not shared by non-human organisms.³⁶ It need not be assumed that it is just in virtue of reason's uniqueness that it is our essence,³⁷ but for purposes here it need only be assumed that humans have an essence.³⁸ For Marx, our essence is determined by our lives as social producers, which is a dynamic essence, one that changes with modes of production.³⁹ For now, though, I will consider the case without taking such a dynamic essence into account.

The above point that there is a good aimed at by humans in actions and choices is linked with our end: "in every action and rational choice the end is the good, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does everything else. So if everything that is done has some end, this will be the good among things done, and if there are several ends, these will be the goods."⁴⁰ There is then a complete and self-sufficient good, which is the ultimate end of these goods or is the end that comprises all these goods.⁴¹ "Happiness [*eudaimonia*], then, is obviously something complete and self-sufficient" because it is chosen for itself, not instrumentally (therefore complete), and because it alone makes a life worthy of choice (therefore self-sufficient).⁴²

³⁴ McDowell's actual criticism applied to thick moral or evaluative terms, and it may not hold when applied to goodness. This seems unlikely, given the analysis of goodness offered here, but it is a moot point, as Aristotle's analysis would not ignore such argument.

³⁵ This is not the order in which Aristotle lays out the argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, but this different arrangement will not affect the overall argument.

³⁶ NE I, 7: 1097b-1098a; however, cf. Thomas Nagel, 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia' reprinted in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 7-14.

³⁷ Cf. C.D.C. Reeve, *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 125-6.

³⁸ At least in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle seems relatively untroubled about justifying the essence of humans: 'For the first principle is the belief *that* something is the case, and if this is sufficiently clear, he will not need the reason *why* as well. Such a person is in possession of the first principles, or could easily grasp them.' NE I, 4: 1095b; Cf. I, 7: 1098a-b; I, 3: 1094b.

³⁹ MECW vol 5, pp. 4, 7-8 (Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach); cf. NE I, 8: 1098b-1099a.

⁴⁰ NE I, 7: 1097a.

⁴¹ Ibid. This can only be made to follow if, at least, one works out whether this complete good, this ultimate end, is 'dominant' or 'inclusive'. See fn. 22.

⁴² NE I, 7: 1097b.

Next, we have to connect the essence of humans to *eudaimonia*. This is done first by arguing that we must have a function (*ergon*⁴³). This can be established by an independent argument that all organisms have a function⁴⁴, or, as it is here, by arguing that it is implausible that humans don't have a function because the alternative to having a function is being inactive by nature (*argon*).⁴⁵

A function of any organism is identified with its essence. "What anything is is defined by its function: a thing really is what it is when it can perform its function... When something cannot perform its function, it is that thing in name only, like a dead eye or one made of stone."⁴⁶ As C.D.C. Reeve points out, however, "a thing's function is also identified with its end: 'each thing's function is its end'.⁴⁷ As Reeve glosses this triple identification of function, essence, and end, "The essence is the function as act; the end is the function as result."⁴⁸

A 'formal explanation' of an organism is both a description of how it typically functions and how it is organized. The explanation of our function will link *eidos* (or form, as one of Aristotle's four types of explanation) and *telos* (or purpose).⁴⁹ Organisms are formally arranged in such a way that they have certain capacities or functions. This purely formal characterization of functions as organizational arrangements, then, implicitly contains both the organism's essence and its end.

Thus, the good for an organism (insofar as it has an essence, a function, and an end) is to perform its function well. "For just as the good – the doing well – of a flute-player, a sculptor or any practitioner of a skill, or generally whatever has some characteristic activity or action, is thought to lie in its characteristic activity, so the same would seem to be true of a human being, if indeed he has a characteristic activity."⁵⁰

We, as humans, are so constituted as to seek *eudaimonia*, which is a result, for us, of functioning excellently. This good is not achieved directly (just as happiness is a by-

⁴³ *Ergon* is translated as 'function', 'deed', 'job', 'work', and, perhaps loosely, as 'how something is supposed to work', Hughes, p. 36, fn. 13.

⁴⁴ A.L. Peck, ed., *Aristotle: The Parts of Animals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1968), 645b, quoted in Reeve, pp. 124-5.

⁴⁵ NE 1, 7: 1097b.

⁴⁶ H.D.P. Lee, ed., *Aristotle's Meteorologica* (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1952), 390a, quoted in Reeve, p. 123.

⁴⁷ Reeve, p. 123; quotation from F. Susemihl, ed., *Aristotelis: Ethica Eudemia*, (Amsterdam: Hakkert, repr. 1967), original 1884.

⁴⁸ p. 123; cf. NE IX, 7: 1168a.

⁴⁹ Hughes, p. 35, fn. 11.

⁵⁰ NE I, 7: 1097b.

product of other actions and states of mind), but relates to functioning in accord with the virtues (which, literally, just is to function excellently for Aristotle).⁵¹

With this framework, the question of what is the best for a person is answered by reference to the facts about the person's *ergon*, the person's characteristic activity, or, since it amounts to the same thing, to the person's essence or end. If a person does well what a person is suited to do, then the person's life is, to make the conclusion broader, an ethical one.⁵² The person is living as she is best suited to live.⁵³

A human, just in virtue of being a human (assuming a human essence), has standards of excellence or virtue already there, which she can fulfil or ignore, but that she does pursue excellence in certain areas is dictated by her being human and understanding what is excellent. As Aristotle put the point, "the fact itself is a starting-point, that is, a first principle."⁵⁴

Four points need to be cleared up before seeing how this picture allows one to make sense of Marx's need to connect values to motivation. First, how does this account of goodness connect to the correct ascription of 'is good'? If this account is correct, then 'is good' is correctly ascribed if and only if what it is ascribed to is such as to fulfil our function as humans, as what we are. This need not seem to be such a grand claim in many instances, as there are many trivial ascriptions of 'is good' that may be correct no matter how tangential their link is to our fulfilment. However thin such a link is, however, the correctness of such ascriptions is ultimately justified only in virtue of the account of our function.

Secondly, it should be clear how our having a dynamic essence, as Marx has it, would modify the account. In fact, it would not modify the account, though important differences will arise as the account is applied. Most important of these is that there is no sense in looking to an individual human to what her individual functions are; rather, one must look to a collection of humans at a particular place and time (and hence under

⁵¹ NE I, 7: 1098a. The case has not been made in this synopsis that a person pursues *eudaimonia* via the virtues. Such is the normative upshot of Aristotle's account, but it is unnecessary here.

⁵² Strictly, ethics in Aristotle concerns a person's character, whereas *eudaimonia* concerns how one lives; however, 'ethical' here is used more loosely to mean 'as a life should be' or 'should be lived'. Cf. Bostock, p. 7, Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1993), p. 6 ff.

⁵³ I leave alone the additional claim that Aristotle holds that a person must not only live such a life, but live such a life *just because* it is the best life to live. This is relevant to the Aristotelian picture, but it is less vital to my discussion here.

⁵⁴ NE I, 7: 1098b

a particular mode of production) to see what the essence is of those humans then and there.

Does this prompt a subjectivist relativism, then? The simple answer is: it need not. Evaluative viewpoints rise and fall with other changes, most notably changes in the mode of production, but there will always be an objective answer to the question of what is good and what makes it so, although the answer will change. One may be able to understand, then, why there would be disagreement across evaluative viewpoints, but one would not be able to see the things picked out as good by another viewpoint as truly good. This is just to say that what is good is not absolute in all times and places, but from this non-absolute sense of relativism, there is no necessary danger of a subjective relativism.

If there were a subjective relativism implicit in Marx, however, this would not affect the general analysis of his position. He is speaking from within an evaluative viewpoint to others who understand this same viewpoint, so it does not matter that there are other possible viewpoints: all that matters is that they are not present. If Marx implicitly describes something as 'good', then he need not be troubled by the inability of the member of the future communist society to see his point. If his conception of goodness were both relative and subjective, he could yet take refuge in the widespread agreement on such relative and subjective matters.

The third point is how the Aristotelian account differs from the 'is a good x' model. Aristotle's conception of humans as having functions would certainly seem to lead into the sort of functional analysis of goodness that Mackie gave above. It does not, however, because Aristotle is not left needing to explain commendation: those things that are commended are assembled and then explained. That the analysis ends with an understanding of what functional role all those things have in common does not conflate his account with one that begins by asking what 'is a good x' means and tries to understand commendation only afterwards. The difference is what allows such an Aristotelian model to explain motivation.

Finally, it should be clearer how needs can play the same role as evaluations in some cases, though not in all. When the need is for something that is necessary to fulfil our function, then the ascription of such a need has precisely the same role as the ascription of a negative evaluation. A need for food and shelter is an impediment to functioning in just the way that anything that is bad is necessarily an impediment to

functioning. Likewise, the fulfilment of such needs is conducive to functioning in just the way that anything that is good is necessarily conducive to functioning. While needs cannot be analyzed all at once in the way that thick evaluative terms can be, they can bear precisely the same relations to evaluations, on an Aristotelian understanding of what an evaluation is an evaluation of. What follows should then apply equally to some needs, when those needs are conducive or impediments to functioning.

The Motivational Argument

The ascription of goodness in the 'is good' sense is necessarily a commendation. It is commendation in line with the criteria given by the descriptive entailments of the ascription, but it is not commendation *only* because those descriptive entailments are fulfilled, that is, apart from an evaluative viewpoint that specifies those criteria as criteria of goodness. Understanding what is descriptively entailed will no doubt aid one in discriminating the truly good from the merely apparently good, but it does not eliminate the constitutive necessity of commendation.

Commendation is a reason for action. Reasons are defined – at least in part, if not entirely – by their role in our practical reasoning. Whatever serves both to justify action and to motivate is without a doubt a reason.⁵⁵ Commendation fulfils both of these roles. The evidence for this is immediate from commendation's citation as a justificatory explanation of why something was done and its use in moving one. If commendation were motivationally inert, it would be impossible to make sense of commendation's primary role, which is precisely to move others.⁵⁶

Reasons may be motivating as a necessary feature of their defining role, but they are not therefore conclusively motivating. A reason to act is just that: *a* reason. One may only act intentionally because of a reason, but it does not follow that every reason leads one to act intentionally. Whenever one has to choose among reasons to act, when

⁵⁵ Whether something that fulfils only one of these roles is a reason is less clear. See Bernard Williams, 'Internal and External Reasons', in his *Moral Luck*; John McDowell, 'Might There Be External Reasons?' in his *Mind, Value, and Reality*; and T.M. Scanlon, 'Williams on Internal and External Reasons', the appendix to his *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁵⁶ How it moves one, whether because it is itself motivating or whether it is a belief whose motivational force comes from its conjunction with a desire, is far too broad a topic to tackle here, but it is also not a necessary topic to tackle here. If the conjunction of a desire is necessary to motivation, then its conjunction in humans is an apparently necessary fact about us, though it may not be a logically necessary fact.

different reasons would lead to different actions, some of those reasons will not actually move one to act, though they all provide motivation to do so. There is *some* motivation, then, whenever there is a reason, and this is so simply because there *is* a reason.

The ascription of goodness, then, is motivating, as it is a reason, but it need not be conclusively motivating, as it is only *a* reason. And badness, as the contrary of goodness, shares this same relation to reasons. On this rests the crux of the argument. Marx's descriptions contain implicit evaluations, implicit most clearly in the thick evaluative terms that he uses. Such evaluations, as ascriptions of goodness and badness, are motivating. So Marx's descriptions are motivating.

Marx may never make the case that one ought to overthrow capitalism, but he does make the at least implicit case that aspects of capitalism are regrettable – or simply 'bad' – however necessary the system has been to progress towards communism. Its badness is a reason to remove it; if its badness is sufficient, it may even be a reason to remove it through revolution. This is particularly the case if what would follow the revolution is good.

Descriptions may not only be motivating, but are also true or false. If Marx's descriptions are true, then the motivation towards revolution is, one might say, legitimate or grounded. A false description may motivate, just as the belief in anything false may motivate, but a true description provides both motivation and legitimation of such motivation. This is why Marx's descriptions are not simple polemics, for the most part. He would perhaps be able to motivate by simply stating that much of capitalism was bad – for that matter, one could perhaps motivate simply by scribbling such a phrase on a wall – but revolutions are expensive undertakings, and revolutionary motivation thus requires strong legitimation. Marx's writings are designed to give just this. The revolution to overthrow capitalism on Marx's presentation, then, is not to be undertaken because one ought to have such a revolution; rather, the revolutionary motivation is legitimate because the end of capitalism truly is good.

V. Conclusion

Where does this leave Marx, then? Much of my discussion here has been at least as concerned with what Marx could have argued based on what he did say than what he explicitly did argue. It is an unfortunate consequence of engaging with a writer who was both prolific and profound, but frustratingly often not at the same time. Nevertheless, I hope to have made the case that at least Marx's early writing can support the following conclusions, and indeed likely did support the following conclusions, at least in some form close to the one here presented.

First, descriptions of the world are not simple reflections of what the world 'in itself' is like. Rather, they are influenced by our understanding of the world, which understanding itself shapes and is shaped by the world as we actually live in it. *Our* world is not the world of atoms and quarks, but is the world of people, needs, and production, and it would be unreasonable to expect that our descriptions of the world are true only if they ignore our own understanding thereof in favor of, say, a subatomic explanation of what things are *really* like.

In Putnam's argument, I have supported the even stronger conclusion that, indeed, descriptions of the world, whether at the level of societies or at the level of superstrings, are importantly bound by our evaluative viewpoint. Machines may be indifferent to our values, but our descriptions of them are not, and this reasoning applies to any description, no matter how basic the thing described.

This reasoning allows us to make greater sense of how Marx can be simultaneously descriptive and evaluative, this latter primarily via the thick evaluative terms he uses. While these terms entail certain factual descriptions, they are not simply the regrouping of those facts, but are only understood if one already occupies a certain evaluative viewpoint. This viewpoint is necessary to any description, and it allows for certain evaluations without the need to step out of 'pure' description, as it were.

Once seen that Marx is justified in describing the world in evaluative terms, the question becomes whether and how such descriptions can become motivating. The Aristotelian argument given would make it clear why we are in fact motivated by what we come to know as good and bad, viz. because these values express what aids or impedes our functioning as humans, and there is surely little more motivating than that. It would

also make it clear why needs can have such an important motivating role, since certain needs are fulfilled as a necessary condition of our functioning.

Even if such an account falters, however, or is not Marx's own, it is unclear that any worthwhile accounts of goodness and of motivation would not see goodness as strongly motivating. Few would question the force of 'it was good' as an explanation of why one did what one did, both as a justification and as a sincere report of what was actually used as a reason for action as the acting person deliberated. So it is likely irrelevant whether Marx had a developed theory of motivation and of goodness, since such conclusions must be present in any reasonable theory.

If this is correct as an account of what Marx plausibly held, at least in some general form, then he would have been justified in holding the following. His is a descriptive enterprise. It is necessarily evaluative, but it does not enter into normative debates, particularly about morality. Nevertheless, it provides ample justification for revolution through just the descriptions given.

Bibliography

- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Atkinson, R.F., 'Hume on "is" and "ought": A Reply to Professor MacIntyre', in Hudson, ed., *The Is-Ought Question*, pp. 51-58.
- Bennett, Jonathan, *Kant's Analytic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966).
- Bostock, David, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Buchanan, Allen, 'The Marxian Critique of Justice and Rights', in Nielsen and Patten, eds., *Marx and Morality*.
- Callinicos, Alex, Geoffrey Marshall, and Vernon Bogdanor, eds., *Marxist Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- Cohen, Marshall, Thomas Nagel, and Thomas Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
- Conee, Earl, 'Against Moral Dilemmas', *The Philosophical Review*, XCI, No. 1 (January 1982), pp. 87-97.
- Geras, Norman, 'The Controversy about Marx and Justice', in Callinicos, Marshall, and Bogdanor, eds., *Marxist Theory*.
- Hardie, W.F.R., 'The Final Good in Aristotle's *Ethics*', *Philosophy*, 40 (1965), pp. 277-95.
- Hare, R.M., *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952).
- Hudson, W.D., 'Hume on *is* and *ought*', in Hudson, ed., *The Is-Ought Question*.
- ed., *The Is-Ought Question* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1969).
- Hughes, Gerard J., *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Aristotle on Ethics* (London: Routledge, 2001).
- Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Fate Norton and Mary Norton, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- Hunter, Geoffrey, 'A Reply to Professor Flew', in Hudson, ed., *The Is-Ought Question*.
- Husami, Ziyad, 'Marx on Distributive Justice', in Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History*.
- Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Paul Guyer and Allen Wood, trans. and eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Kelley, Donald R. 'The Metaphysics of Law: An Essay on the Very Young Marx', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 83, issue 2 (1978), pp. 350-67.
- Kim, Jaegwon, 'What is "Naturalized Epistemology"?', *Philosophical Perspectives* 2 (1988).

- Lee, H.D.P., ed., *Aristotle's Meteorologica* (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1952).
- Lukes, Steven, *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).
- 'Marxism, Morality and Justice', in Parkinson, ed., *Marx and Marxism*.
- MacIntyre, A.C., 'Hume on "is" and "ought"', in Hudson, ed., *The Is-Ought Question*.
- Mackie, J.L., *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin, 1977).
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975 [vol. 1] to 2004 [vol. 50]), 50 volumes.
- Marx, Karl, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. I, Ben Fowkes, trans. (London: Penguin Books, 1986),
- McDowell, John, *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- McLellan, David, *Marx Before Marxism* (London: Macmillan, 1970).
- Nagel, Thomas, 'Aristotle on Eudaimonia', reprinted in Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*.
- *The Possibility of Altruism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).
- Nielsen, Kai and Steven C. Patten, eds., *Marx and Morality* (Guelph, Ontario: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1981).
- Parkinson, G.H.R., ed., *Marx and Marxism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
- Peck, A.L., ed., *Aristotle: The Parts of Animals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1968).
- Putnam, Hilary, *Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- Reeve, C.D.C., *Practices of Reason: Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992).
- Rorty, Amélie Oksenberg, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
- Scanlon, T.M., *What We Owe to Each Other* (Harvard University Press, 1998).
- Smith, Michael, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
- Williams, Bernard, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (London: Fontana, 1993).
- *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
- Wood, Allen, 'Marx on Right and Justice: A Reply to Husami' in Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History*.

—— ‘The Marxian Critique of Justice’, in Cohen, Nagel, and Scanlon, eds., *Marx, Justice, and History*.

