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Evil in the philosophy of Karl Marx



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Abstract

While a considerable secondary literature revolves around the issue of whether Marx believed that the concepts of “justice” and “injustice” – and hence, by implication, other comparable moral terms as well – had any non-relative meaning, there is really no doubt that a strong moral vision, with emphasis on the evil aspects of the capitalist system as a system of exploitation, undergirded all of his writings, particularly *Capital*. In understanding the extent to which recognition of evil pervades Marx’s mature thought, the centrality to his analysis of the notion of “exploitation” deserves emphasis. From an historical perspective, it is useful to recall efforts at Marxist-Christian dialogue that occurred during the post-World War II era. Two French philosophers who flourished in the latter part of the Twentieth Century, Michel Henry and Jacques Derrida, deserve special notice for their religious or quasi-religious interpretations of Marx’s philosophy, which in the final analysis can be seen as a critique of profound evil in the world even though it contains nothing resembling a conventional system of ethics. Nor does it, contrary to common assumptions about it, offer a guarantee of a “happy ending” to history. Marx’s greatest contribution to thinking about evil may lie in his insight into the profound immorality of the principle guiding the system of capitalism, both in his day and ours, to wit, that the pursuit of material self-interest is supremely good.

Keywords: Philosophy of Karl Marx, Capitalism, Evil

A good deal of discussion within Marx scholarship, which is a very extensive body of literature, has concerned the question as to whether Marx had an ethic at all. Marx himself gave impetus to this dispute, or at least showed his awareness of its likely development, when he remarked in his “Preface to the First German Edition” of *Capital*, Volume 1, that he wished to avoid possible misunderstanding with respect to his manner of depicting capitalists and landlords. He by no means wished, he said, to paint them “*couleur de rose*.” But in this work, he continued, he was treating individuals insofar as they are personifications of economic categories, who in some cases may try subjectively to raise themselves above the level of the social relationships in which they are enmeshed, but for which they personally are not responsible ([1], p. 10).

This famous text, if taken literally and at face value, has many philosophical implications. It does indeed appear to rule out the possibility of a Marxian ethic in the usual Western sense of the word “ethic,” according to which responsibility is central because we are thought to be free to choose our actions. It suggests that Marx subscribes to a fairly “hard” determinism (though perhaps not a total sort of determinism because Marx allows for the existence of subjective impulses that fall outside the scope of his inquiry), along with a heavily natural scientific bias. (In fact, in the same paragraph Marx says that he is treating

economic history as a form of natural history). And it prepares the novice German reader, dutifully perusing the Foreword before plunging into the work proper, to expect no “demonization”, as our preferred contemporary language would have it, in what is to come – in short, no identification of any serious evil in the world, even though that reader should not expect any fairy tales, either.

During the 1970s and early 1980s in particular, thanks in part no doubt to John Rawls’s discovery that writing philosophically about justice could still be quite rewarding, a portion of Marx scholarship took up the question as to whether there could be anything resembling a Marxian theory of justice. Within the parameters of Marx’s own writings, probably the single text that proved to be most pivotal was one (in Chapter 7, Section 2 of Volume 1) in which Marx, when beginning to elaborate on his central claim, to which I shall return later, that workers are exploited by virtue of being forced to engage in a full day’s production while being compensated with wages equivalent to the added value that they have produced in only a portion of that working day, says that this fact is clearly a piece of good luck for the buyer (the employer), but by no means an injustice or injury to the seller (the worker) ([1], p. 194). The German word used by Marx, which has been translated into English both as “injustice” and as “injury,” is *Unrecht*. This text, combined with the almost complete absence of the very word “*Gerechtigkeit*” from Marx’s writings, led some commentators to assert not only that Marx deliberately refrained from introducing the notion of justice into his theoretical analyses, which is obvious enough, but that he considered the “exploitation” of workers and other non-fraudulent transactions to be, quite simply, just within the capitalist system.

This diagnosis of a kind of total ethical relativism in Marx’s philosophy is well supported by a passage in a book written by Marx’s close collaborator, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), entitled *On the Housing Question*, where Engels, polemicizing against the alleged moralism of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (the same Proudhon whose *The Philosophy of Poverty* had been satirized by Marx in *The Poverty of Philosophy*), says that the notion of eternal justice is nothing but an ideological trick, and that in fact “justice” means something different, not only in different times and places, but even to different individuals at the same time and place ([2], p. 624). It is in any case quite clear that neither Engels nor Marx wanted to try to rely on such ideologically challenged – indeed, ideologically exploited – concepts as aids in their own critiques of the existing economic system and, of course, of the justifications of it that were advanced by those whom they called “bourgeois ideologists”. If justice is supposed to be good and injustice evil, then the view that the concept of “justice” has no fixed meaning would seem once again to rule out the possibility of there being a role for (moral) evil in the Marxian world.

But both the demon-free expectations of the novice reader of Marx’s Foreword to *Capital* and the initial appearance, based on the dearth of typical Western ethical language, of a lack of evil in Marx’s philosophical world turn out to be seriously in error. Before beginning to unearth some of the evil that in fact permeates Marx’s narrative, I should indicate a few caveats concerning the textual evidence to the contrary that I have cited thus far. First of all, one should always be somewhat skeptical about an author’s sweeping initial generalizations, which are often not quite in sync with the body of his or her work; Hegel (1770–1831), the philosophical predecessor from whom Marx learned so much, was explicit in pointing this out with respect to his own prefaces (Hegel 1956). Second, there is a great difference in tone and underlying “feel” for the world between

Engels and Marx, despite the closeness of their collaboration; Engels, easier to understand and generally more given to sweeping generalizations than Marx was, was in fact something of a learned dilettante who lived in the world of the émigré German merchant community of Manchester and equally enjoyed riding to hounds and attending occasional seances (a fad in his day), activities that we would have great difficulty associating with Marx. By contrast to Engels' somewhat breezy manner, Marx comes across as having a certain brooding seriousness about him – a seriousness that is not incompatible, be it noted, with a sardonic sense of humor. Third, and of greater philosophical significance, it seems to me that there is an ultimate disconnect, although it is difficult to make this very precise, between the concept of “evil,” on the one hand, and the notion of what is “bad” in typical Western systems of ethics, on the other. Nietzsche (1844–1900), of course, offers us some instruction along these lines. It is clear that Marx, in certain respects like Hegel in this regard, refused to develop an ethical code of admonitions and prohibitions such as one finds both in the Scholastic tradition and in much of contemporary moral philosophy, but this fact did not preclude him from having a profound sense of evil in the world, as I shall now proceed to explain.

Marx's posthumously-published early writings, known as the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, are best known for their treatment of “estranged labor,” *entfremdete Arbeit*, in which the condition of the modern worker is depicted as being one of alienation from the product of his labor, from his own life activity, from his fellow workers, and indeed from the human species as a whole [3]. The alienation of which Marx is speaking here is of a very deep kind, not merely the “going outside oneself” (*Enttäusserung*) that is a constant characteristic of the process of dialectical self-development in Hegel's thought. Marx's analysis in these manuscripts is redolent of a highly moral tone that is lacking in much (but, as we shall see, by no means all) of his later writings, notably *Capital*. Here he has no compunction about deploring the extreme degradation of industrial workers in his century, freely citing several French and other writers who make the same point in vivid detail. He also devotes a few pages of this work to elaborating on the power of money in bourgeois society, and there he quotes excerpts from Goethe's *Faust* and Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* to drive home his point that money effects a reversal of all normal human values, transforming virtue into vice and vice into virtue, and so on. These last references serve to suggest, better than the citations concerning workers' degradation, that Marx retained a sense of evil in the world that went deeper than a mere disapprobation, however strong.

Goethe reappears in one of the most celebrated passages in Volume 1 of *Capital*, a work that consists largely of many pages of careful, straightforward analysis, interlarded with some lengthy reports of British Parliamentary committee investigations into workers' conditions and capitalist owners' malfeasances (for example, in the bakery industry), but that occasionally breaks into short bursts of soaring rhetoric. The passage in question deals with the historical evolution from the preaching of abstinence and saving that characterized the speech and life-style of early capitalists, to the cult of consumption and luxury that were beginning, in Marx's day, to dominate capitalism in its more “modernized” form. In his characteristically facetious way, Marx, having just cited a very lengthy passage from Martin Luther (1483–1546) in which Luther inveighs against usurers as the greatest enemies of mankind after the devil himself, says that original sin is, alas, to be found everywhere: the original sin is accumulation. Marx next

cites two lines from *Faust* (Chapter 24, Section 3) about “two souls” dwelling within the same individual, opposing one another, and concludes by asserting that there is, in the capitalist’s breast, “a Faustian conflict between the [sordid] passion for accumulation, and the desire for enjoyment”. (This remains, incidentally, a fundamental conflict within contemporary capitalism – call it, in today’s language, the conflict between profit maximization and consumerism – that only gets resolved, if at all, in an ambivalent, compromising fashion). Marx then goes on, one paragraph later, to intone another line that has become very famous: “Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and the Prophets!” ([1], p: 594–595). I shall return shortly to reflect on some of the philosophical and, as it were, theological implications of this text.

But I would first like to point out the passages in *Capital* that to me seem best to convey Marx’s sense of evil, even better than his numerous descriptions, throughout that work, of the degradation of English laborers in his day. They occur in the relatively brief chapters that constitute the final part, Part VIII, of the first volume, which is, in effect, the historical part, dealing with “so-called primitive accumulation”. Earlier political economists, Marx’s predecessors, had devised this concept as a way of expressing their puzzlement concerning just how the capitalist system got started, or “took off”. Marx finds it to be no puzzle at all; he reviews the historical record especially in England and Scotland, and a little later in Ireland, and cites Thomas More’s *Utopia* for confirming evidence [4]. What happened, in effect, was that the development of the woolen industry in Flanders created a new demand which made it lucrative for owners of great estates in the British Isles to “clear” their lands, as it was called, of families of ordinary persons that had lived on them for generations. At the same time, or soon thereafter, the Reformation under Henry VIII (who, of course, eventually executed his former Chancellor, Thomas More) resulted in the confiscation of many large monasteries, the former populations of the lands connected with which were also driven away. In Scotland, Highland chiefs began to claim ancestral tribal lands as their own private property, resulting in further, even more massive, dislocations. As often as not, the thousands upon thousands of people whose homes had been destroyed and who were banished *in perpetuum* became vagabonds, and they then became subject to extremely harsh new laws which amounted, as Marx puts it, to “reckless terrorism”; wholesale hangings of vagabonds were commonplace. As he says, the various kinds of expropriation that were carried out beginning in the Sixteenth Century “were just so many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation”, creating a capitalist agriculture ([1], p 732–733).

Probably the most poignant chapter in *Capital* is Chapter 31 of Volume 1, which comes just before the penultimate chapter in which, in a manner uncharacteristic of most of the book, Marx foresees the possibility of capitalism’s collapse, the “expropriation of the expropriators”, under circumstances far less protracted, violent, and difficult, as he says, than those that accompanied capitalism’s rise. Of the latter, in the same Chapter 32, Marx gives a one-sentence summary that is worth citing: “The expropriation of the immediate producers was accomplished with merciless Vandalism, and under the stimulus of passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious” ([1], p. 762). But it is the accumulated evidence that Marx provides in Chapter 31, “Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist”, which ranges far beyond the British Isles and Europe, that gives greatest substance to this condemnation. There, Marx takes note of the realities of colonialism – in Africa, India, China, the Americas, in other words worldwide.

The horrors that he recounts there are truly sickening and I shall refrain from repeating them here. Two passages, one from the beginning of the chapter in which Marx quotes from a book by William Howitt entitled *Colonization and Christianity: A Popular History of the Treatment of the Natives by the Europeans in all their Colonies* (1838), the other the concluding paragraph of the chapter, will suffice to convey the tone:

“Of the Christian colonial system, W. Howitt, a man who makes a specialty of Christianity, says: ‘The barbarities and desperate outrages of the so-called Christian race, throughout every region of the world, and upon every people they have been able to subdue, are not to be paralleled by those of any other race, however fierce, however untaught, and however reckless of mercy and of shame, in any age of the earth.’”

“Tanta molis erat, to establish the ‘eternal laws of Nature’ of the capitalist mode of production, to complete the process of separation between labourers and conditions of labour, to transform, at one pole, the social means of production and subsistence into capital, at the opposite pole, the mass of the population into wage-labourers, into ‘free labouring poor’, that artificial production of modern society. If money, according to Augier, ‘comes into the world with a congenital blood-stain on one cheek’, capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt” ([1], p. 751–752 and 760).

Marx’s reference in this passage to wage laborers, one of thousands of such references in the book, reminds us of what is probably the most central insight of Marx’s analysis of the working of the capitalist system, as distinguished from all previous systems, namely, that it treats human labor power as a commodity, a thing, alongside all other commodities. But in contrast to all other commodities labor power is characterized by the capacity to produce more than its own exchange value, or what Marx calls “surplus value”, “s” for short. The worker typically produces enough, during a portion of his or her working day, to pay for the minimal amount of compensation, in the form of what is commonly called salary or wages that is needed in order for him or her to subsist. But the “job description” mandates that the worker continue working for, typically again, hours longer than that amount of time, and it is during these additional hours that surplus value is produced and is then, essentially, appropriated by the capitalist. The central equation of Marx’s analysis is the ratio of surplus value over the subsistence wage portion of value produced, to which latter Marx assigns the rather vague and unsatisfactory label of “variable capital,” or “v”: hence, s/v . If during a ten-hour working day, for example, a worker in a given factory produces enough in five hours to cover his or her salary, then the ratio of s/v in this instance would be $5/5$, or 100 %. Marx has two names for this ratio: one, somewhat banal, the “rate of surplus value”, the other, deliberately tendentious, the “rate of exploitation”. In other words, for Marx the exploitation of human beings is the core mechanism of the capitalist system. Is this a merely neutral, descriptive label? I think not.

Hence, the fact that Marx seldom if ever uses the word “evil” in the way in which, for example, Kant (1724–1804) speaks of “radical evil” should not, in my view, cause us any longer to question whether in fact Marx believed that (moral) evil abounds in the world. Some within the Western tradition, especially those with Christian religious

roots, might find it at least paradoxical to associate a strong sensitivity to evil, as they have come to understand this word, with an individual who so clearly rejected theism in general, and not merely its Christian or Judaeo-Christian form. In fact, as can be seen in Marx's citation from William Howitt, Marx saw Christianity itself as having contributed importantly to the evils of the capitalist system, as another famous passage from Volume 1 of *Capital*, in which he comments on Aristotle's conclusion that if some of the machinery that we now associate with the Industrial Revolution were actually possible then there would be no need for slavery, makes evident:

“Oh! Those heathens! They understood nothing ofPolitical Economy and Christianity. They did not, for example, comprehend that machinery is the surest means of lengthening the working-day. They perhaps excused the slavery of one on the ground that it was a means to the full development of another. But to preach slavery of the masses, in order that a few crude and half-educated parvenus, might become ‘eminent spinners,’ ‘extensive sausage-makers,’ and ‘influential shoe-black dealers,’ to do this, they lacked the bump of Christianity” ([1], p. 408).

(I presume that Marx's reference to the “bump” is a little joke about the popular nineteenth-century fad of phrenology, according to which one can read a person's character from the bumps on his or her skull – a subject concerning which Hegel had considerable fun in one section of his *Phenomenology*).

While Marx had great contempt for the deeply hypocritical deployment of Christianity to justify massive exploitation, and worse, on the part of “successful” capitalists who professed to be Christian, he had respect for some elements in the Christian tradition, as his use of the writings of Thomas More and Martin Luther demonstrates. But if there is a single underlying though mostly unspoken theoretical basis of Marx's understanding of evil, it is to be found in his Classical training, especially in his admiration for the thought of Aristotle (“the greatest thinker of antiquity”, as he calls him a few lines prior to the citation above), and specifically in Aristotle's condemnation of excess. This is to be found throughout Aristotle's work (it is a strong element in Plato's philosophy, as well), but it occurs with special obviousness in the section of Aristotle's *Politics* in which he denounces usury as particularly unnatural and hence unethical. This highly negative view of usury – meaning the charging of any interest on loans, and not merely very high interest as it means today – was, as is well known, adopted by the medieval Church and its philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and it underlay the role of wealthy Jews as money-lenders in pre-capitalist and early capitalist Europe, since they were not considered to be bound by the Church's prescriptions in this regard. It eventually found expression in a particularly vehement form in the writing of Martin Luther which Marx cites at the same point in the text of *Capital* as that at which he intones his sarcastic paean to accumulation, mentioned above. Marx's bitter association of Judaism, the religion of his mother and other ancestors (his father had converted in order to be eligible for employment by the Prussian state, which did not hire Jews as civil servants), with filthy lucre in his early work “On the Jewish Question” is explicable in terms of this same historical/ideational set of circumstances. Given this chain of connections, it is no surprise that Marx joined with other Left Hegelians in envisaging the abolition of religion, the “opium of the people”, as a crucial step in the development of an unalienated, or at least less alienated,

future society, although he went on to recognize as deeper, more ultimate needs the abolition of the existing political and above all economic orders.

During the period of Communist Party hegemony in many countries particularly over more than four decades after World War II, the advocacy of a Marxist-Christian dialogue was a frequently-attempted enterprise. The erstwhile French Party member Roger Garaudy (1913–2012) is among the best-remembered of such advocates, although he was far from being the most sophisticated. (Garaudy's fascinating, quixotic evolution from young religious Communist, through a celebrated American tour during the McCarthy era, expulsion from the Communist Party, and ultimate conversion to Islam is documented in his autobiography, *Mon tour du siècle en solitaire*.) Articles and books on the subject of this dialogue were published in Germany; the Dutch theologian Arend Theodoor van Leeuwen (1918–1993) gave two series of Gifford Lectures on Marx's thought, later published as *Critique of Heaven* and *Critique of Earth*, respectively [5, 6]; a British author, Denys Turner (1942–), proclaimed in his book *Marxism and Christianity* that "Morality is Marxism", since only Marxism provides sufficient intellectual tools to combat the outrage that is contemporary capitalism [7]; there was a lively Marxist-Christian dialogue in Czechoslovakia prior to the Soviet repression of 1968 in that country; and so on. Perhaps the most intense and *praxis*-oriented site of this dialogue was Latin America, in a number of the countries of which a movement known as "Liberation Theology" sprang up, with advocates even among the traditionally conservative Catholic Church hierarchy. This once-vibrant movement, for which the profound evil of capitalist structures exploitative and destructive of the poor was seen as simply a given, was eventually condemned, to all intents and purposes, by the authorities in Rome, who apparently felt threatened in both their dogmas and their dowries; but it continues in another form in the movement known as "Liberation Philosophy", which is very much alive.

One religion-oriented exploration of Marx's thought that stresses his perception of evil is that of the French philosopher, Michel Henry (1922–2002). Here is a crucial passage in his book, *Marx*:

"As has been rightly said: the proletariat is Christ. The proletariat is the one – for, just like Christ, the proletariat is a person – who must go to the very limit of suffering and of evil, to the sacrifice of his being, giving his sweat and blood and ultimately his very life, in order to reach – through this complete self-annihilation, through this self-negation which is a negation of life – the true life which leaves all finiteness and all particularity behind, which is a complete life and salvation itself" [8].

Henry sees this religious basis of Marx's thinking as having come to it indirectly, by way of the religious influences pervading German metaphysics and especially, of course, the thought of Hegel, rather than directly from any actual creed. In any case, Henry's depiction of Marx's proletariat as the modern Suffering Servant remains an especially bold and challenging image within the secondary literature.

Another French author who in an interesting way explored the, let us say, quasi-mystical dimensions of Marx's thought was the late Jacques Derrida (1930–2009) in his book, *Specters of Marx*. Derrida managed to unearth many references to ghosts and hauntings throughout Marx's writings, while paying equal or perhaps somewhat greater

attention to the most haunted (perhaps also the most haunting) play written by Shakespeare, one of Marx's favorite writers – to wit, *Hamlet*. The appearance of the ghost of Hamlet's father, foully murdered by the man who then assumed the throne of Denmark and married the widowed queen, and the ghost's insistence that Hamlet and his comrades swear an oath, leads to Hamlet's famous declaration that "the time is out of joint", a declaration upon which Derrida places particular stress. For he sees this age of capitalist neo-liberal dominance as being equally "out of joint." "Le monde va mal" ([9], p. 129; [10]), as Derrida says at one point by way of commenting on this phrase. The somewhat arcane sub-title of this book is "The state of debt, the work of mourning, and the New International".

Le monde va mal. In the French language in which Derrida wrote his book on hauntings, "mal" can be either an adverb, as it is here, meaning "badly", or a noun, meaning either pain/illness or, simply, "evil" of various degrees of intensity. It is perhaps paradoxical, but as I believe nevertheless true, that Marx the materialist, the supposedly tough-minded social analyst with aspirations to being scientific, depicts the evils of the system that he is describing with poignancy reminiscent of his contemporary Charles Dickens (1812–1870). He does not think that he needs to have recourse to any metaphysical explanation, any satanic entities, or some alleged diabolical quality of human nature to account for the horrendous facts of past and present history that reveal human beings' inhumanity to one another. For him, this is simply the way it was and is.

But at the same time, of course, Marx was an unwavering believer in the power of the dialectic and in the ultimate reality of historical progress. It is worth recalling here the view of history that was held by his intellectual predecessor, Hegel, according to which "what has happened, and is happening every day," as he says at the end of his *Philosophy of History*, "is not only not 'without God,' but is essentially His work" ([11]: 457). There are passages in these Hegelian lectures on history that, while seldom as replete with concrete details as are the concluding chapters of Volume One of *Capital* to which I have alluded, are in their own way just as bleak or even more so, suggesting that a deep bitterness of spirit may be the most obvious reaction to the spectacle of history as nearly perpetual shipwreck. Nevertheless, for Hegel human history is at once the ever-greater realization of God and of freedom in the world – triumph emerging out of, and through, tragedy. Marx, while eschewing Hegel's theological hypothesis, nevertheless also envisages a "happy ending", arguably even happier than the one envisaged by his predecessor. The outcome whereby the expropriators are expropriated, "predicted" in *Capital*, is echoed both in the triumphant conclusion of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, jointly written by Marx and Engels – to the workers of the world: the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains, and a world to win – and in much of Marx's informal correspondence.

Why, then, have I placed the word "predicted" in scare quotes? Because, to put it simply, the systematic, quasi-mathematical framework of Marx's analysis of capitalism in his *magnum opus* is such as to allow for the conceptual possibility of an indefinite postponement of capitalism's demise. For example, a sufficiently large and ongoing decrease, made possible through technological advances, in what Marx called "socially necessary labor time," that is, the amount of time required for the production of a single type of product, if replicated across enough different products, could by itself bring about a lengthy postponement of the system's collapse. But this is just one of

several variables in Marx's scheme which, if they deviate sufficiently far beyond the range anticipated in his analysis, would jointly result in such a postponement even if one does not challenge the basic elements of the scheme itself – in particular, Marx's heavy reliance on the notion that labor power is the source of the exchange value of commodities. In short, within Marx's own theoretical frame of reference and despite his exuberant optimism about society's, and the world's, future, he offers us no more dependable guarantee of an end to evils than does any other thinker.

Marx's greatest contribution to the history of thinking about evil, then, as it seems to me, lies in his uncanny instinct for tracing the implications of the deeply evil principle that lay at the core of the dominant economic system in his day, as it still does in ours. This was and is the idea that the pursuit of one's material self-interest rightly trumps all other goals and is, in the final analysis, supremely ethical. Although some may believe that the form of capitalism familiar to Marx was crude and simple by comparison with the complex forms that it has now assumed, this is true only to a limited extent. For example, Marx was familiar with the phenomenon then known as "joint stock companies" and foresaw their expansion and evolution; he anticipated what we call "globalization", identifying it, near the beginning of Volume III of *Capital*, as one of the principal countervailing factors to the tendency of the rate of profit to fall; and near the end of Volume I he predicted in quite dramatic terms, *à propos* of the monstrous evils committed by the British government in Ireland, the rise of the American republic whither so many displaced Irish had emigrated. Over the one hundred thirty-three years that have passed since Marx's death, there has been talk of "the final stage of capitalism" (Lenin) and of "late capitalism" (Habermas and others), political upheavals of the highest order of magnitude have occurred in Marx's name, vast areas of the world in which capitalism still had virtually no foothold prior to the Twentieth Century have become fully integrated into its structures, and of course there have been technological advances far beyond his dreams (at least as far as we can know what those dreams were!); but the core principle undergirding the ideological justifications of the system has remained essentially constant. An uncannily large number of the citations that Marx offers, in his very extensive footnotes, from the economists of his time read exactly like the slogans which the cheerleaders for the existing system still purvey today. So, while there turn out to be, unsurprisingly, more things in heaven and on earth than were dreamt of in Marx's philosophy, the rottenness, the condition of being "out of joint," that he identified at the core of early modern life still pervades, not only the state of Denmark, but the entire globe.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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