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## The World of Karl Marx

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### Capitalism and the Enlightenment Legacy

**M**arx's working life was spent analyzing, criticizing, and attacking capitalism theoretically and politically. In order to understand his social thought, it is important that we learn what capitalism is, his personal background, and his intellectual influences. This opening chapter will begin with a section that provides a more detailed presentation on capitalism. Next will be a brief consideration of why Marx's ideas can still be regarded as important. Third, there will be a discussion of the general themes of this book. Fourth, there will be a consideration of Marx's place within intellectual history, in particular his relationship to the Enlightenment. The fifth section will be a brief biography of his life. The final section is a discussion of his influences.

#### What Is Capitalism?

The majority of Marx's social scientific work was an attempt to analyze what **capitalism** is and identify its tendencies for further development. Many readers may not understand exactly what capitalism is. Before we begin a discussion of Marx's analysis of capitalism, we should provide a brief overview of the features of capitalism. Capitalism will be defined here in two complementary ways: historically and analytically.

## Capitalism Historically

Historically, capitalism began during the late European Renaissance (approximately the 16th and 17th centuries) and continues to the present. Capitalism's historical development has a geographical range as well. During its beginning, capitalism was contained in small Italian city-states, Holland, and England. From this small beginning, capitalism extended outward, encompassing essentially the entire globe by the early 20th century.

Historical periods other than capitalism have also existed. Previous to capitalism, **feudalism** existed in Europe from the fall of the Roman Empire until the complete dominance of capitalism (in approximately the mid-19th century). Marx's term for delineating different periods of technological, economic, and social activity is **mode of production**. For example, capitalism is a mode of production that is different from feudalism. This means that feudalism is also a mode of production.

## An Analytical Description of Capitalism

Capitalism is a historical period, but it is also a term to describe a particular set of economic and social activities. Capitalism can be distinguished from other ways of describing the activities of people's economic and social lives. This means that the economic and social activities people perform within capitalism will be different from the activities that were performed within feudalism. There will be strong similarities, of course, but there is a divergence that makes the two modes of production different. For now, an analytical description of what constitutes the unique economic and social activities of capitalism will suffice. Later sections in this book will discuss the distinction between capitalism and other ways people's social and economic lives can be organized.

Capitalism has the following characteristics: (1) People are free to sell their labor and unemployment is commonplace, (2) private property is a common form of property and inequalities in wealth holdings have no limit, and (3) people exchange commodities in a market and markets are prone to economic slumps. Many other characteristics can be attributed to capitalism, but these three will suffice for an introduction. These three characteristics describe the kinds of activities and common economic results indicative of capitalism and thereby distinguish it from other periods such as feudalism. Each characteristic is explained below.

## The Free Selling of Labor and Unemployment

First, people are free to sell their labor within capitalism. This means that people can choose to sell their labor to whoever is willing to buy their labor. This distinguishes capitalism from **feudalism** and **slavery**. Within feudalism,

serfs were not free to sell their labor to whomever they wished. Serfs within feudalism were legally required to provide a certain amount of labor to their feudal lords on projects the lords selected. They could not become employed by another lord if they wished. Within slave societies, slaves were not free to sell their labor. Their labor was owned by another person, the slave owner. The ability to sell one's labor is a fundamental characteristic of capitalism and distinguishes it from other periods of history.

There are many instances in the history of capitalism in which some people were able to sell their labor and some were not. For example, slavery existed within capitalism as a legal institution in the Americas until the 19th century. In addition, some kinds of labor bondage exist within capitalism even though they are illegal. For example, people are forced into slavery within contemporary capitalist countries, or some people are smuggled into contemporary capitalist countries to work as slave laborers.

The free selling of labor also means that people are free to hire whomever they wish within capitalism. People can select who they wish to perform a certain task. This also means that there is no obligation that people must be hired within capitalism. From the perspective of the employer, this is desirable. They can choose the candidates who best suit their preferences. From the perspective of society as a whole, the free hiring of labor is also desirable. People will compete for positions, and only those seen as exhibiting the desirable characteristics will be hired.

From the perspective of those who seek employment, the unemployed, this is not necessarily a beneficial result. The unemployed suffer from many problems beyond lack of income. They also have poorer health and higher rates of suicide than the employed. The unemployed miss opportunities for training and experience. Unemployment has also been positively correlated with crime (Feldstein, 1978; Hagan, 1994; Philpott, 1994). The problem of unemployment is unique to capitalism. In other modes of production, such as feudalism, people's indenture as serfs prevented them from losing their gainful work. In contradistinction, people are free to sell their labor within capitalism, but this does not mean they will find employment. When this book was written, there were approximately 200 million people worldwide who were unable to find work (ILO, 2012, p. 10). The free selling of labor is for many people only an abstract right. If there are no jobs available then one cannot exercise one's right to freely sell one's labor.

In review, within capitalism, people are free to sell their labor and people are free to buy labor. There are no obligations for people to work for others. In addition, there is no obligation for private individuals to provide people with jobs. The free selling and buying of labor supposedly leads to people being selected for a position who have the desired characteristics. The free selling of labor results in the phenomena of unemployment. People are unemployed

when they cannot find anyone who wishes to employ them. The results of unemployment are poverty, poor physical and mental health, poor training and experience opportunities, and an increase in crime.

## Private Property and Inequality of Wealth

Second, people can own **private property** within capitalism. Private property is when a person or persons own money, land, buildings, tools, machines, raw materials, and other objects exclusively. This is in contradistinction to **public property**, where objects are owned collectively and managed by a political body, such as a town, city, state, or nation.

When property is privately owned, those who own it can decide how it will be used and by whom. The owners of private property can rent it, sell it, use it, or let it lie idle according to their desires. Private property is a regular form of property ownership within capitalism.

The ownership of private property can produce incentives for people to use their property in productive pursuits. People might use their property productively to increase their own wealth and well-being. From the perspective of society, this is beneficial since new goods and services will be offered for sale when people productively use their private property.

A distinctive negative result of private property ownership is that there is no guarantee that people have ownership of certain amounts of property to provide for their subsistence. The possibility for some people to have exclusive ownership of property means that some people can own no property other than their personal effects. The result is that large inequalities in the ownership of property may occur. Inequality in property ownership can prevent many people from starting their own business or being able to afford certain goods and services (Burczak, 2006; Hill, 1998).

Also, private property ownership conveys the right of use to owners only. This means that the owners of a firm will make decisions on how property is used as opposed to the nonowner workers of a firm. If ownership conveys the right of use, then nonowners will be unable to express their interests at their jobs. Nonowners will have to follow instructions as opposed to creatively participating in the production process. Since property can be difficult if not impossible for many people to acquire, the right of use conveyed to owners effectively excludes the majority of people within capitalist nations from creatively participating in the production process.

As will be discussed at many points and at length in the chapter on economics, Marx finds that inequality in wealth holdings allows for workers to be exploited. **Exploitation** is when one person gains at the expense of another. Marx defines exploitation as when a person produces more value during the production process than she or he is paid for. Workers are subject

to exploitation because they have insufficient wealth of their own to productively employ. Workers are effectively forced to work for capitalists due to the inequity of wealth holdings within capitalism.

In review, private property ownership occurs when individuals can have exclusive control over money, land, buildings, tools, machines, raw materials, and other objects. Private ownership of property can encourage people to use their property productively for their own gain. These productive uses may increase the well-being of others in society. The private ownership of property may result in inequalities of property ownership. Inequalities in the ownership of property can thus limit people's ability to start businesses, purchase certain goods and services, and creatively participate in the production process and allows for the exploitation of workers.

### Market Transactions and Market Slumps

Third, transactions between people are self-regulating within capitalism. These transactions are called market transactions. A market transaction occurs when people willingly enter into agreements for the buying and selling of goods and services, usually for money instead of barter. When a person goes to the supermarket to buy potatoes or lottery tickets, she is conducting a market transaction.

Market transactions can be distinguished from transactions based on tradition or transactions that are the result of command. Transactions based on tradition occur when people exchange goods and services according to the mores and expectations of their society. For example, when Native Americans met to exchange items in a potlatch, they were exchanging items according to tradition. Command transactions occur when individuals and parties exchange goods and services according to authority. For example, when serfs provided labor to their lords, this was done according to the authority of their lord (Heilbroner & Galbraith, 1990, p. 442; Polanyi, 1944).

Market transactions are a distinguishing characteristic of capitalism. They are the dominant kind of transaction that occurs within capitalism. Market transactions are not coordinated by an external authority. Each group of people conducting transactions does so according to its own assessment of its preferences. This means that many groups of people can be transacting for the same purpose. For example, suppose there is an increase in demand for tin. If people have a preference to make money, they will enter into transactions with tin producers, the desired result being that they can hopefully sell the tin at a profit.

The result of an increase in tin purchases can be that the demand for tin is met, the demand for tin is not met, or the demand for tin is exceeded. If the demand for tin is met, then all buyers and all sellers have their preferences

met regarding the exchanging of tin. If the demand for tin is not met, there will be people with an unmet preference to purchase tin. If the demand for tin is exceeded by the amount of tin supplied, then there will be people who cannot sell their tin but would prefer to do so.

Market transactions are an important characteristic of capitalism because the lack of coordination of the various transactions within capitalism causes economic expansions and contractions. Market transactions allow people to enter into economic competition with others. This competition supposedly results in innovation and economic growth. The lack of coordination between market participants can also result in the overproduction of goods and services. Overproduction occurs when there are too many items for sale and not enough buyers. The result of overproduction is an economic contraction, which is also called an economic crisis, a recession, or sometimes a depression. Economic growth slows or stops during a contraction. When an economic crisis occurs, businesses go bankrupt and unemployment and poverty increase (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011, p. 14). The effects of recessions are particularly detrimental for young workers, as their lifetime earnings are adversely affected (Oreopoulos, Von Wachter, & Heisz, 2012).

It is important to point out that the profits capitalists gain from the production process allow them to accumulate wealth holdings that are greater than individual workers' holdings. When economic slumps occur, these wealth holdings allow capitalists to enjoy higher and more comfortable incomes than do workers who have become unemployed or whose wages have been reduced. The dynamics of production within capitalism result in outcomes wherein the ill effects of economic turbulence are unequally shared, with workers in the more precarious position.

In review, market transactions are the dominant form of transactions within capitalism. A market transaction is when people freely buy and sell items. The result of this freely chosen buying and selling can be an economic expansion or an economic contraction. An economic expansion results in economic growth. An economic contraction results in a slowing or stopping of growth, the bankruptcy of businesses, and increases in unemployment and poverty. Also, due to inequalities of wealth within capitalism, workers are in a more vulnerable position during an economic slump.

## Why Read Marx?

The previous section on capitalism hinted at some of the problems that affect people within capitalism: unemployment, inequality, poverty, exploitation, and economic crises. These problems still exist even within advanced

industrialized countries. The current economic malaise, which began in 2008, is a severe but not a unique outcome within capitalism. The world has gone through several economic contractions since Marx's day. Even before the Great Depression of the 1930s, there were the Great Depression of the 1890s and numerous other contractions (Kindleberger & Aliber, 2005).

The ills of capitalism can be minimized by using welfare state transfers, macroeconomic intervention, and coordination between industry and the state. Even though it is possible to reduce unemployment and poverty to negligible degrees and minimize inequality or its effects on opportunity, capitalist nations still have large segments of their populations that are unemployed, in poverty, or unable to take advantage of opportunities. If these problems can be corrected but are not, many people may ask why this is the case. Why do the economic ills of capitalism persist when their cures have been known for several decades? Is there something about capitalism that prevents these problems from being solved?

Marx would answer the last question by stating that the social dynamics of capitalism are intrinsically antagonistic. He finds that the measures that would eliminate the listed ills of capitalism are contrary to the interests of the dominant class within capitalism, which are the **capitalists**, also called the **bourgeoisie**. Thus, Marx's analysis of the social and political dynamics of capitalism advances a hypothesis about the continued persistence of economic ills within capitalism. Marx conjectured that unemployment, poverty, and restricted opportunity are unavoidable results within capitalism and cannot be eliminated without actually changing the fundamental characteristics of capitalism. Stated in a more Marxian fashion, the ills of capitalism cannot be corrected without changing the mode of production from capitalism to communism.

It is useful to restate the heading of this section as a question: Why should people in the 21st century be interested in learning about Marx? People should be interested in what Marx wrote because the capitalism of the 21st century still has not solved many of the same problems that existed in the capitalism of the 19th century. One would be hard pressed today to find a child who has died from overwork in an advanced industrialized country. One can find many children who live in poverty in these advanced countries (Mishel, Bernstein, & Shierholz, 2009, p. 384). In the United States, the number of job seekers can exceed the number of job openings. This had been the case even before the start of the recession in 2008 (Shierholz, 2013). Poverty has increased during the recession even though cash transfers exist to mediate its effects (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Also, one doesn't have to look far to find current factory conditions in China and Mexico or the mines of Africa that are surprisingly similar to the workplace conditions of the 19th century (Malkin, 2005; Robson & Ward, 2012; UN News Center, 2012).

People in the 21st century may wish to read about the possible reasons a social system that has and still does produce amazing wealth does not distribute its gains in a fashion that allows people to move out of poverty and unemployment. Why can opulence and squalor coexist? A short version of Marx's answer to this question is that the motivations and social structures that allow for such amazing growth also prevent the gains from this growth from being shared throughout society. The very social dynamics that allow for capitalism to grow also produce the ills as a necessary result of this growth. The reasons Marx lists for these outcomes are numerous and detailed; they will be discussed at length in later chapters.

If capitalism cannot be reformed, then what other social forms are there? Marx infamously postulated that capitalism would be superseded by communism, a society in which the antagonisms of capitalism will be absent. The most pronounced features of communism are the conversion of the majority of private property into public property and the democratic coordination of economic development and the workplace. Marx seeks not only an elimination of unemployment and poverty but also an expansion of democracy into areas that are currently unheard of. Marx's theory of communism not only confronts the problems of unrewarding work and authoritarian workplaces but also argues for expanding people's engagement and voice into areas few people have direct access to. If people of the early 21st century feel disenfranchised and alienated by politics and their work, Marx speaks directly to these problems.

In review, many of the problems and ills people face around the world have been discussed by Marx in his writings. He tried to show why these problems exist, why they cannot be solved within capitalism, and what he found to be real solutions to these problems. His ideas are fascinating and still address problems that haunt our current societies.

## General Themes

This work will focus on the following general themes in the work of Karl Marx:

1. The influence of technological development and industrialization on human social organization
2. The influence of social organization and technological development on human behavior
3. The potential for human civilization to produce nonantagonistic social relationships



These are abstractions of the concrete work that Marx conducted. These general themes are an after-the-fact appraisal of Marx's lifetime of work. These themes are complicated conjectures about our social world, but we can start to explain what they are and how they are interrelated now.

## Theme 1: Technological Development and Human Social Organization

The first theme of this book on Marx is the causal influence of technological development and industrialization on human social organization. There is a causal connection between the two that is not simply unidirectional. This means that technological development causes changes in human social organization and also that human social organization causes changes in technological development. There is thus a codevelopment between the two. This relationship can also be called a feedback process. A feedback process occurs when a change in object A causes a change in object B and then this change in object B causes another change in object A.

It must be stressed that even though Marx thinks that human technological ability and human social organization are coemergent, he finds technological development to be the ultimate and not the proximate cause of this feedback process (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 155–157). It is beneficial to point this out now since it is an important part of Marx's social theory and it separates him from writers who take the representation of human social organization to be the ultimate and not the proximate cause.

Examples will help to demonstrate the codevelopment/feedback causal process of technological development and human social organization. To demonstrate the feedback process, we can use the technological activity of food procurement and the social organization of work tasks. We can begin with the abstract example of settled agriculture, with no different work tasks between people. At this starting point, all people perform the same activities of farming. All people plant, harvest, and store food plants. If we introduce a technological development such as irrigation, we can see how this causes changes in the organization of work tasks. In particular, how will technological development affect the amount of direct labor used in farming and the total amount of produced output? After an irrigation system has been built, we will assume that this increases the production of food plants. The result of the irrigation is that the amount of labor required to grow a certain amount of food is reduced. The upshot of this technological change of irrigation is that labor is freed from farming and can be utilized for other tasks. A society utilizing this freed labor develops the new tasks of irrigation operator

and food warehouse worker. Over time, other tasks may develop, perhaps because of increased production and labor saving due to the new specializations. For example, the development of the new specialization of the animal handler could increase agriculture output due to the use of animal power. This example demonstrates the feedback effect.

In review, a technological change, such as the implementation of irrigation, allowed for less labor to be used in the production of food. This reduction in the use of labor allowed for changes in social organization, which was the development of new specializations. One particular change in social organization was the development of animal handlers. The new social position of animal handler resulted in a new technological development, the application of animal power to farming. This application of animal power allowed for greater food output. As we can see, an initial technological change brought about a change in social organization. This change in social organization resulted in further technological change.

A current example of the codevelopment/feedback causal process of technological development and human social organization is the use of computers for communication. The introduction of computers has allowed groups to take advantage of the labor-saving features that resulted in the computerization of typing, publication, and communication. Groups that were previously unable to communicate information due to the cost of professional typists, printers, and distribution can now do so easily. The technological development of computers allows for nonspecialized groups to perform functions that took several different specialists in the past. These developments have changed the nature of communication from a machine-intensive and costly enterprise to a relatively simple and inexpensive process. Small and nonprofessional groups may attempt to develop and disseminate their ideas and opinions. This change in the social organization of communication dissemination was driven by technological development and the changing nature of the work tasks.

This relationship between technological development and social organization is important for Marx. In many ways, it forms the basis of his outlook of social development (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 4). This feedback process has been identified by many other authors before Marx, including Plato, Aristotle, Locke, and Rousseau. In addition, this notion of technological development bringing about social development and vice versa is now standard in social science literature, such as Diamond (1997), Service (1975), Sen (1999), Jones (2002), and Blanchard (2002).

The idea that there is a causal feedback process between technological development and social organization in Marx's writings has been termed **historical materialism**. It has been given this name because it is a theory of

the development of human societies that considers the material objects of technological change and social organization as decisive causes. Marx started writing about this notion in an unfinished work that is now called the *1844 Manuscripts*. In this work, he describes industry as the actual history of humans as opposed to a spiritual or moral conception of human development (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 90). Later, Marx developed with Engels their theory of historical materialism in the unpublished *The German Ideology* in 1845 and 1846 (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 182). They presented a thorough version of historical materialism in *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848 (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 474). The seminal version of historical materialism, which is commonly cited, appears in the preface to Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, which was written in 1859 (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 3).

We will discuss Marx's conception of historical materialism in greater detail in Chapter 5. For now, a brief overview will suffice based on our previous examples and comments. The examples discussed earlier were developed in order to introduce Marx's theory of historical materialism. Marx understands that human technological activity develops over time, making not only new technologies but also new kinds of societies possible. In the broad scope of human societal development, Marx finds that human civilization moves through the main epochs of an egalitarian society, slave society, feudalism, and capitalism, and there is a strong chance (some readings of Marx find that it is inevitable) that civilization will develop into communism.

Why society moved from an egalitarian society into a slave society and a slave society into feudalism and so forth is due to the effects of technological development. In particular, the reduction of direct labor time and the increase in the products of subsistence (food, shelter, and clothing) caused a change in social organization. The reduction of labor for a particular activity frees up people to work on other tasks. This process, according to Marx, explains the development of human civilization.

Marx is interested in studying the origins of capitalism within feudalism. He studied this change not only to understand the dynamics of capitalism but also to understand how human civilization will move beyond capitalism and into communism. The previous examples of how the development of new technologies makes new work tasks possible contains the germ of how Marx understands the formation of capitalism. During feudalism, the increased ability of people to produce allows for items to be sold and not directly consumed. This in turn allows for trade and production for sale to become increasingly common. Also, the development of technology results in the emergence of new classes. Not only do new classes arise, but the old

ones become antiquated because they are from a period of technological development and social organization that has been surpassed by these new formations. New types of human societies replace the old ones (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 473–483).

In review, the first theme of this work is that technological development and social organization are in a relationship of codevelopment. Marx finds that technological development is the ultimate cause of this codevelopment. This does not mean that social organization has no effect on the development of technology. Rather, Marx finds that social organization can effect change in the development of the technological processes of a society. The codevelopment of technology and social organization occurs through labor-saving technologies and new forms of social organization that take advantage of these labor-saving technologies. Historical materialism is the common term used to describe Marx's theory of human social development.

## Theme 2: Social Organization, Technological Development, and Human Behavior

Marx's materialist understanding of how society developed does not stop at the technological and organizational level. Marx also considered how technological and organizational development causes human behavior to change and how human behavior causes technological development and organizational development to change. This brings us to the second theme of this book. To simplify matters, we can discuss social organization and technological development as a single term: the **mode of production**. The mode of production is the combined social, economic, and technological aspects of a society. Human behavior represents the actions of individuals and the legal, political, philosophic, religious, and moral representations of their actions. We can now analyze how a mode of production can be in various causal relationships with human behavior.

First, human behavior can be affected by a mode of production. This means that people can change from one set of behaviors to another set of behaviors due to the influence of a mode of production. For example, increased pay and desirable working conditions may cause people to accept the goals of the firms they work for as their own goals. Instead of seeing their work as separate from their own long-term plans, people begin to see their work as part of their own plans (Galbraith, 1967).

Another example is when people accept the goals and outcomes of their society. If people accept the goals and outcomes of their society, they will not find these outcomes to be detrimental or unjust. For example, if it is common for people within a society to think that the cause of unemployment is

laziness, then people will find that the outcome of unemployment is the result of individual behavior and not the result of social processes beyond an individual's control. Thus, unemployment is a problem for the unemployed person alone and it is not understood as a social problem. Unemployment could be considered an acceptable and just outcome since it is an outcome of a person's own efforts. If this is the common understanding of people within a particular society, then the social processes of one's society are not understood as unjust regarding unemployment. Also, an individual's actions are understood as the cause of their unemployment.

Second, people's behaviors can affect the development of a mode of production. For example, people may decide that they wish to make more money. In order to achieve this goal, they decide to go to school to receive additional training. This additional training will in turn allow a mode of production to change, since a better-trained workforce can utilize different machinery than in the past and workers can be organized in new ways. Thus, the behaviors of an individual can cause changes in a mode of production.

Let's take the example of unemployment again. If workers become aware that unemployment is actually due to the economic shortcomings of their society, these workers may attempt to lessen unemployment through political action. Their behavior could bring about changes in the mode of production.

The two types of causal relationships discussed are both analyzed by Marx. The development of the technological and social factors of a mode of production can bring about changes in people's behaviors. The classic example is when the normal operations of capitalism cause an economic crisis to occur. The result of this crisis is a change in worker behavior from being favorable to capitalism to being unfavorable to capitalism. The second causal relationship, when behaviors bring about changes in the mode of production, could be the result of this new change in worker behavior. Their new unfavorable opinion of capitalism could result in revolutionary actions that bring about a change in the mode of production (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 480).

Once again, there is a causal feedback process that is between a mode of production and human behavior. The examples attempt to show that developments in technology and in social organization can change human behavior, and developments in human behaviors can bring about changes in technology and social organization. In Marx's theory of historical materialism, the most important kind of change is when people's behaviors develop and this brings about changes in the social organization of society by altering the class structure. This change in the class structure of society can further technological development. In addition, this process can operate in another way when technological development causes changes in the form of social organization and this changes people's behaviors.

In review, the mode of production and human behaviors are codeterminate. Each can cause changes in the other. Additionally, a mode of production and human behaviors can be involved in a casual feedback loop. Marx's theory of historical materialism hypothesizes that changes in a given mode of production can alter people's behaviors from a favorable assessment to an unfavorable assessment of this mode. When this happens, people's behaviors may prompt them to take revolutionary action and alter the mode of production.

### Theme 3: The Possibility of Nonantagonistic Social Relationships

Now let us examine the third general theme: the potential for human societies to produce nonantagonistic social relationships. Before we can understand what nonantagonistic social relationships are, antagonistic social relationships need to be defined. An antagonistic social relationship is when one social actor benefits at the expense of another social actor. In other words, the gains for some people in society come at the expense of other people in society.

The well-known occurrence of slavery will suffice to demonstrate an antagonistic social relationship. The institution of slavery is premised upon the labor of a person kept in bondage being performed for the benefit of another person who owns the person in bondage. The slave owner must gain proportionally more than the slave benefits or the institution of slavery is pointless. If the labor performed by slaves was beneficial to them, there would be no reason to hold them in bondage. They would freely commit themselves to the tasks desired of them. As we can see, the institution of slavery is antagonistic according to its definition, for if it were not, there would be no need for the bondage of slavery.

Now, based on this example, we might want to define a nonantagonistic social relationship as one in which people would freely choose to engage in the relationship on the terms offered. This actually is not sufficient due to the problem of choice under dire necessity, called *voluntarium imperfectum* (Ryan, 1996, p. 103). Choice under dire necessity is the situation in which there is a substantial fear for the loss of life, limb, or health of oneself and one's dependents that influences the decision. Under the conditions of dire necessity, choice is in fact voluntary but is profoundly questionable under all circumstances other than general and widespread dire necessity for a society. This means that one cannot call a choice truly voluntary under the conditions of dire necessity if these conditions are not general and widespread for a given society.

For example, recently freed slaves are still in an antagonistic social relationship if their choice is arduous labor at bare subsistence wages for themselves and their dependents when their employer can afford to pay them more without dooming themselves to loss of life or health. The freed slave has a choice to accept low wages or starvation, but this is a choice that is unnecessarily dire.

Now, we can say that a nonantagonistic social relationship is one in which people freely choose outcomes in which subsistence is not in jeopardy. This may not be enough since human life is about more than mere subsistence. People find fulfillment not only in meeting their subsistence requirements but also in forming relationships with others and accomplishing long-term goals (Staub, 2004). This means that if the current distribution of resources within a society does not allow people to fulfill their desires for social relationships and the accomplishment of long-term goals, then this society should still be classified as having antagonistic social relationships. Added to this definition is the caveat that these resources can be redistributed without generally reducing the potential for people to fulfill their desires for relationships and accomplishments.

For example, a societal member is in an antagonistic social relationship with others if he is unable to reasonably pursue relationships and accomplish his long-term goals (if these relationships and accomplishments can be pursued without harming the prospect for others to fulfill these same ends). There is a lot to be said about what it means to be able to reasonably pursue one's long-term goals and relationship with others. We do not have the space to pursue this point in depth. What is important to the matter at hand is to stress that what constitutes a nonantagonistic society is from the perspective of what can be fulfilling for people given the current conditions. This means that a person has a reasonable claim to alter the social and economic outcomes in her society if these outcomes can be altered without limiting the minimal fulfillment of others.

It is true that employers lose out if they pay their employees more or that men lose out if they no longer can enjoy the free labor of their wives and children or White people may lose economic and social benefits if people of color are treated equitably or that slave owners lose opportunities for gaining profits if their slaves are emancipated. Redistribution of gains should occur up to the point at which reasonable fulfillment of one's long-term accomplishments can still be met. This means that a nonantagonistic social relationship occurs when an optimal mutual benefit is possible. This is a society in which all individuals receive benefits from participating in society and no individual gains at the expense of another individual.

This rule of redistribution is not simply a conclusion derived from the distributive justice literature. It is also a rule of redistribution, which Marx endorses but not as explicitly as it has been stated here. Marx's critique of capitalism is that the control and enjoyment of resources should be redistributed to improve the chance of fulfilling a person's long-term goals while also not lessening the lives of others in any meaningful way. For example, this means that redistribution of capitalists' resources and control over society's wealth should occur, and the loss that the capitalists would suffer is justified (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 484–491).

The justification of this particular amount of loss for capitalists and the requisite gain that would occur to other classes in society will be the subject of many of the discussions contained in this book. Marx thought that it was entirely reasonable to assume that people would seek to alter the distribution of resources in their society to obtain optimum mutual benefit. Marx notes in many places that when a society does not provide a distribution of resources at a possible level of optimum mutual benefit, this society will be subject to revolutionary actions by those who are losing out (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 4, 483).

In review, an antagonistic society is one in which one person gains at the expense of another person. A nonantagonistic society is one in which all individuals receive benefits from participating in society and no individuals gain at the expense of another individual. If in the creation of a nonantagonistic society some individuals lose certain benefits while others gain certain benefits, this is justified if no one is reduced to a situation in which her or his reasonable long-term goals are affected. Marx thinks that a nonantagonistic society of mutual benefit is possible. Marx called this society communism.

## General Themes Overview

The development of technological activities changes the social organization and the behavior of humans. In turn, human behavior and social organization can cause technological development. In addition, human behavior can alter patterns of social organization. The expectations of humans to have a level of fulfillment that is possible for society to maintain for everyone will lead to political action that alters what kinds of social organization exist. This political action will bring about a change in human behavior and further development of technology. Marx thinks humans innately desire to meet their needs and achieve higher levels of fulfillment (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 115, 476, 531). Thus, technological development brings about changes in people's expectations, and these expectations bring about desires to



change human social organization. This in turn changes human behaviors and continues to develop humanity's technological abilities.

Marx's position is that societies develop to meet the expectations of their members. This is where all three themes of this book intersect. Societal change is brought about to fulfill unmet needs. Interestingly, the reason these needs are unmet is because society has changed technologically and these new needs have developed. Even though these needs have been created by society, the distribution of resources within this society does not allow a significant number of people to satisfy their needs. People will, according to Marx, attempt revolutionary action to bring about the fulfillment of their new needs by creating a new society.

In review, the three general themes of this book are causally interrelated, but the ultimate cause for change within Marx's system of social development is technological development. Technological development creates the new needs, which people seek to satisfy through the creation of a new society. Marx's discussion of the history of social dynamics, his analysis of current social formations, and his consideration of possible future states of affairs all have their root in technological development.

## The Enlightenment and Capitalism

Marx's critique of capitalism is an extension of the values of the Enlightenment and a criticism of the procapitalist reading of these values. The Enlightenment was centered in Europe from the 17th century to the early 19th century. This period was characterized by the notion that reason can improve the human world through political reforms and the use of science. Some notable thinkers of the Enlightenment period are Isaac Newton, Leonhard Euler, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Pierre-Simon Laplace, and John Locke.

Two movements within the Enlightenment were of particular interest to Marx: (1) the defense of political freedom and equality as natural law and (2) the theory of the social contract, which considers the individual as the basic economic unit. This section will present a general overview of these two enlightenment movements and will provide Marx's critique.

### Rights as Natural

The natural freedom and equality of humans has been famously argued by many early and late Enlightenment thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. In the late 18th century, the idea of the naturalness of political rights was stated in a number of political documents such as

*The Declaration of Independence and Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.* A small excerpt from *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, which was drafted by the National Assembly of France on August 26, 1789, can help demonstrate these notions and values:

[T]he National Assembly doth recognize and declare, in the presence of the Supreme Being, and with the hope of his blessing and favour, the following *sacred* rights of men and of citizens:

1. Men are born, and always continue, free and equal in respect of their rights. Civil distinctions, therefore, can be founded only on public utility.
2. The end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man; and these rights are Liberty, Property, Security, and Resistance of Oppression.
3. The Nation is essentially the source of all sovereignty; nor can any individual, or any body of men, be entitled to any authority which is not expressly derived from it.
4. Political Liberty consists in the power of doing whatever does not injure another. The exercise of the natural rights of every man, has no other limits than those which are necessary to secure to every *other* man the free exercise of the same rights; and these limits are determinable only by the law. (National Assembly of France, 1789/2003)

As can be seen in this quote, the notion of the naturalness of human freedom and equality is clearly stated. People are naturally entitled to be at liberty, to have property, to be secure, and to be free of oppression. In addition, people are their sovereign authority, at least, existing as a nation. If we ask what any of these rights entail, what are their limits, and how they support or conflict with one another, we are left with few answers.

For example, let us take equality. The excerpt states that people are born equal and that unequal distinctions will only be allowed due to public utility. This appears to mean that people will only be treated unequally if it is of benefit to the public. Exactly what is of benefit to the public? Does public utility entail democracy or technocracy—that is, the rule by experts? A technocracy may come up with solutions to problems that people may dislike, but is the benefit to the public the people's enjoyment of the solution? As we can see, there are possible conflicts among equality, public utility, and sovereign self-rule.

Another example is the relationship among liberty, equality, and property. Is the holding of property to be equal? If the holding of property is equal, does this increase or decrease liberty? A person exclusively holding a piece

of property may decrease another person's liberty by his no longer being able to use this particular piece of property. Does the limitation of liberty as "whatever does not injure another" include injury to economic well-being or only to physical well-being?

These two examples of conflict between these rights were perceived by people during the 18th century such as Pierre-Sylvain Maréchal in his *Manifesto of the Equals* written in 1796:

Equality! First need of nature, first demand of man, and chief bond of all legitimate society! French people! You have not been more favoured than the other nations that vegetate on this wretched globe! Always and everywhere poor humanity, in the hands of more or less adroit cannibals is the tool of every ambition, the pasture of every tyranny. Always and everywhere men were lulled by fine phrases; never and nowhere did they receive the fulfillment with the promise. From time immemorial we have been hypocritically told: *Men are equal*; and from time immemorial the insolent with the most degrading and most monstrous inequality has weighed down the human race. Since civilized society began, this finest possession of humanity has been unanimously recognized, yet not once realized; equality was only a fair and sterile fiction of the law. To-day when it is more loudly claimed, we are answered: Silence, wretches! Real equality is but a chimera: be content with the constitutional equality: you are all equal before the law. *Canaille*, what more do you want? What more do we want? Legislators, governors, rich proprietors, listen in your turn. (Maréchal, 1796/2003)

In this quote, there is a presentation of the conflict between the professed natural equality of the age and the unequal social distinction of officials and property holders. Maréchal shows the unresolved tensions that existed between the various political values of the Enlightenment. He also points out the dominant means of solving these tensions: a reading that privileges a certain meaning of the values. In the passage, Maréchal mentions that equality is only to be considered equality before the law, which means that people will have the law applied to them equally. Thus, all people will have, for example, the right to legal action or the right to express their opinion publicly. This equality of trial and public expression does not take into consideration the differences in means to exercise these equal rights. Certain people will be more effective in advocating for their desires through the courts because they can hire more or better lawyers. Alternatively, people will have a greater chance of expressing their opinions publicly because they can afford to take out ads in publications, start universities and research foundations to support their opinions, or donate to political campaigns. All people have the right to legal action and public expression within this understanding of Enlightenment values, but they do not have the same substantive equality to utilize these rights.

Marx realized, like Maréchal before him, that the dominant understanding of the democratic and universal political values of the Enlightenment favored the ruling group of his time, which was the capitalists. Marx went further to conclude that the dominant ideas of any age will be those of the dominant class (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 172). In several different works, Marx attempted to show that the current understanding of Enlightenment values does favor the preservation of the current class structure. He notes in *On the Jewish Question*:

None of the supposed rights of man, therefore, go beyond the egoistic man, man as he is, a member of civil society; that is an individual separated from the community, withdrawn into himself, wholly preoccupied with his private interest and acting in accordance with his private caprice. (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 43)

Marx finds that the rise of capitalism and the ascension of capitalists as the new ruling class resulted in an understanding of the rights of man, which takes individual interests as the correct reading of the conflict between the various rights. Thus, an individual's advantage will be given preference over the public good or preference will be given to those who own private property instead of those individuals who have no private property to defend. Marx further clarifies the dominant reading of the rights of man as one that serves not all private interests but the interests of the new capitalist class. Capitalists are "the *true* and *authentic* man" (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 43). He shows that the dominant interpretation of rights theory in Europe during the mid-19th century uses the capitalist as the definition of what a free and equal person is. In addition, this dominant interpretation of rights theory defends the interests of capitalists by stating that these interests are the natural and authentic rights of man.

Marx further examines this dominant interpretation of rights theory, which defends capitalists' interests in *The Communist Manifesto* when he discusses the right of freedom: "By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying" (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 486). The capitalist, or bourgeois, society's conception of freedom takes a particular position on the conflict between property and freedom. There can be a conflict since the freedom of a person depends on her ability to utilize material resources to achieve her desires. Marx finds that all actions require a material basis to actualize. People require the material means of life (food, clothes, shelter, etc.) to live their lives. They require materials to strive toward their goals, to work, to have a family, or just for any activity. Even leisure requires the use of resources to be alive and to be at rest. To be a person means to exist as a living being,

which entails that one must have the resources to survive. Freedom requires the access to resources so one can be free to perform a desired action.

Marx finds that the closure of the debate over the meaning of Enlightenment values precludes attaining the actuality of the Enlightenment vision as noted in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, where people are able to rule themselves and their societies and not be ruled by others according to rank, birth, religion, or wealth. Marx does believe in the political values of the Enlightenment. He advocates the values of freedom, liberty, equality, property, and sovereignty. If one considers just one well-known work by Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, one can find passages advocating for each of these Enlightenment political values and how these values will be achieved within communism.

In review, Marx overall agrees with the professed values of the Enlightenment. He thinks that there is no simple, natural reading of these values and their relationship. Marx advocates a communist reading of Enlightenment values because he thinks this reading would benefit all members of society and not just particular people and particular classes.

### Social Contract Theory

A distinctive break that Marx had with the Enlightenment political tradition is his criticism of the social contract doctrine. The social contract is the idea that humans exist alone as individuals in their natural state. They form groups only by choice. This idea can be found in the work of Hobbes (1994, p. 109), Locke (2003, p. 141), and Jefferson (1774/2003).

Marx finds the social contract doctrine to be not only a historical fiction; it also has political consequences that are dangerous. Marx's critique of the social contract doctrine is twofold. First, he dispels the notion of people existing alone and independent in a natural state. Later, he provides a history to support his critique (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 222). Humans by nature exist in groups and reproduce their social and economic lives as a society. Social reproduction is not an isolated occurrence of a single individual; it engages all members of a community. Second, Marx wants to show that the idea of humans existing with no relationship to resources to provide for their needs is a result of the social contract doctrine. This theory that people in their natural state live isolated and alone gives birth to the idea that people are naturally and always isolated economic actors. It can be argued that it follows from this assumption that economic outcomes should always be considered as the result of people's own efforts. As we discussed earlier, if people live in societies in which their well-being can be affected by others, then the rewards from their work are not what they could be, free from the antagonisms of their society.

The orthodox political economy of Marx's time utilizes the assumptions of the social contract doctrine to support the political conclusion that capitalism is a just arrangement. This is the case because the economic outcomes of capitalism are supposedly due to each individual's effort and are not the result of violence, coercion, or *voluntarium imperfectum*. Marx criticizes this myth of just exchange with his theory of **primitive accumulation**. Since humans are physical beings and require the natural world to provide for their existence, Marx hypothesizes that the only way people could be turned into isolated individuals with no resource other than their labor is if they were forced into this condition (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 433).

Marx accepts one element of the Enlightenment political tradition that the social contract doctrine was used to justify: the right to rebel. The social contract doctrine concluded that if societies could be made by choice, they could be unmade by choice also. In contradistinction to the social contract method, Marx finds that the history of the world is the history of class struggles (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 473). This means that it is part of the ordinary process of social development for new modes of production to replace old modes of production that no longer allow for the development of society (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 5). Marx tries to demonstrate that revolution is a part of human social development. Social revolutions allow for further development of human abilities and their technological capacities.

In review, the social contract doctrine is the idea that humans live isolated and alone in their natural state. They form societies by choice. The social contract doctrine forms the basis for the concept of economic man in mainstream social theory. Economic man is not dependent on others and only enters into transactions with others for their own benefit. Marx found the social contract doctrine to be historical fiction and a notion that precluded the possibility of natural interdependence within economic arrangements. Marx analyzed the social contract doctrine with his theory of primitive accumulation. Marx found that people were forced into unequal economic positions instead of their economic situation being the result of their uncoerced actions. Marx accepted one notion that was part of social contract doctrine, the right to rebel. Marx thought that revolutions were a means for the development of human societies.

## Biography

Karl Heinrich Marx was born in Trier, a town in the Rhineland, on May 5, 1818, to a Jewish family. Marx's paternal grandfather, Marx Levi, was

the rabbi in Trier. Marx's father Hirschel was born in 1782. His mother, Henrietta Presburg, came from a rabbinical family in Holland. Even with such strong Jewish roots, Marx's father changed his name to Heinrich and converted to Protestantism in 1824. The main reason appears to be the anti-Semitic spirit of the time, which made public life for Jewish people extremely difficult. Heinrich Marx was an advocate in Trier and eventually became *Justizrat*, which is equivalent to becoming a Queen's council. Heinrich was a staunch defender for Prussia and disliked the Napoleonic reforms. His patriotism was due primarily to his Enlightenment view, which he perceived in the actions of Frederick the Great (Mehring, 1936, pp. 1–2).

Karl was fond of his father, and his father's letters show that Heinrich loved his son greatly. Even though Marx's father died while Karl was still at university, Marx always had dear thoughts for him and carried his picture with him even in his later years. Heinrich was optimistic for his son since Karl demonstrated great intellectual ability in his youth. Nonetheless, Heinrich was worried that Marx was driven by a passion that might consume his life. It appears that Heinrich was correct, since Marx lived a life mainly in poverty devoted to a cause that brought him little notoriety when he was alive.

In 1830, Marx enrolled at the Trier Gymnasium and completed his studies in 1835. It seems he was interested in contributing to the assistance of humanity even at this early age. The progressive outlook of the young Karl Marx is captured in what he wrote during the summer of 1835:

If we have chosen the position in life in which we can most of all work for mankind, no burdens can bow us down, because they are sacrifices for the benefit of all; then we shall experience no petty, limited, selfish job, but our happiness will belong to millions, our deeds will live on quietly but perpetually at work, and over our ashes will be shed the hot tears of noble people. (Marx & Engels, 1975, pp. 8–9)

In October of that year, Marx enrolled as a law student at Bonn University. His father's letters at the time contained great concern about Marx studying too hard and ruining his health (Marx & Engels, 1975, pp. 645–655). When Marx wasn't consuming books, he was trying his hand at poetry; some of his poems were even published. Heinrich found Marx's early artistic attempts confused and urged him to find a profession other than being a poet. His concern was perhaps driven by Karl's inability to manage his finances. This was a problem that Marx was never able to overcome, for he was always in need of money throughout his life.

Marx was a born bookworm, which is why his father's concern over his health due to overwork was well justified. He also had a reckless side that is noted in his certificate of release from the Bonn University:

In regard to his behavior, it has to be noted that he has incurred a punishment of one day's detention for disturbing the peace by rowdiness and drunkenness at night; nothing else is known to his disadvantage in a moral or economic respect.

Subsequently, he was accused of having carried prohibited weapons in Cologne: "The investigation is still pending" (Marx & Engels, 1975, p. 658). This recorded youthful folly did not affect his studies since the comment for most of the lectures he attended was "diligent and attentive."

Marx left Bonn University to continue his studies at Berlin University in 1836. Heinrich Marx was happy for the change, hoping that Marx's boisterous and spendthrift ways could perhaps be abated at the more conservative and serious institution in the Prussian capital. Heinrich's worry about Karl's tendency to overwork was again realized. He continued his study of law in Berlin. He even tried to develop a philosophy of law. He gave this up after writing several hundred pages and turned his attention to philosophy. He did this all in his first term! Thus, his pace of work was again extreme. He rested in the village of Stralau between terms. Marx returned to university for the second term and recommenced with a feverish pace of work.

He soon discovered the work of Hegel while back at school. Hegel was a German philosopher who lived during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The philosophic system he developed was extremely influential and was still being taught in Berlin (Hegel is discussed in greater detail in what follows). Marx disliked what he initially found, which is often the case for students of Hegel even today. He became intrigued by Hegel's work even if he still had reservations about it (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 7–8).

After Marx began to read Hegel, he became associated with the Young Hegelian club, which was a hotbed of anti-establishment ideas. Critiques of religion and Prussian authority were commonplace. The Young Hegelians were interested in reforming and liberalizing Germany. They thought that intellectual critique was the means to break the chains of superstition and conservatism. Marx was greatly influenced by his discussions with the Young Hegelians, and the result was his dissertation titled *Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*. This work was an analysis of the ancient atomist systems of Democritus and Epicurus. Atomism is a theory in which the world is understood as only atoms and not composed of spiritual or supernatural entities. This seemingly dry topic



was actually an attempt by Marx to learn from the radical ideas of the ancient world. In particular, Marx was intrigued by atomic theories that showed that free choice was possible at the smallest level of matter. Marx's dissertation, while extremely technical, is an attempt to show that freedom of movement for matter is possible. The political implications from such a doctrine lend themselves to reform efforts and not to naturalistic arguments for conservatism.

After receiving his doctorate, Marx attempted to become a lecturer of philosophy in Bonn. The anti-Left Hegelian government made it difficult for him to obtain a position. He thereby entered into journalism to voice his reformist notions about German society. Marx's attempts to avoid government censorship and control were briefly realized when he worked as a contributor and eventually the editor-in-chief for the new liberal paper *Rheinische Zeitung*. During his time at the *Rheinische Zeitung*, Marx wrote his famous piece concerning a new wood theft ordinance. This piece was a critique of the recently established law, which prohibited the collection of wood from forests. Many peasants depended on this collected wood as a source of fuel. The recently established law prohibiting this collection was a limitation of the traditional rights of the peasants. This law protected the property rights of those who owned the forests. Marx was critical of the law since it was a detriment to people with little means to support themselves. The paper was subject to censorship and finally was forced to shut down.

In 1843, Marx married Jenny von Westphalen at Kreuznach in the Rhineland. Marx became engaged to Jenny von Westphalen while he was still at Bonn University. Her father was Privy Councilor Ludwig von Westphalen, who served as a governmental adviser in Trier. While at university, Marx dedicated a book of poems to his fiancée (Marx & Engels, 1975, pp. 521–522). Jenny was 4 years his senior and had a great intellect. Karl's father was quite happy after the announcement of Jenny and Karl's marriage since he felt that Marx's burning desire to assist humanity could best be supported by a brilliant companion. These laudable characteristics were not what the townspeople of Trier remember of Jenny after Karl and she had long left. In 1863 when Karl returned to Trier for his mother's funeral, people still asked him about the most beautiful woman in Trier that he had married. Married life for Jenny and Karl was difficult due to Marx's inability to secure a dependable income as well as their frequent relocation for political reasons. For almost the first decade of their marriage, they moved from country to country in Europe. Several times Marx was exiled due to his political work and writings. Eventually in the early 1850s, they settled in London. They had six children together. Five of them were born before they moved to London. Tragically, Marx lived to see four of his children die.

After marrying Jenny, Karl began working on *Contribution to a Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Law* while they were still in Kreuznach. One can find Marx developing his materialist critique of Hegel in this work and the earliest forms of his philosophy of history. In October of that year, the newlyweds moved to Paris, where Marx intended to publish the journal *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Only one issue was printed due to difficulties in distributing it in Germany without the knowledge of the authorities. Marx became acquainted with Frederick Engels through their correspondence for work on the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*. Marx and Engels became lifelong friends and wrote several books together.

The year 1844 was a profound one for Marx in Paris. He worked on a set of manuscripts, which are today called the *1844 Manuscripts*. These writings contain one of his first forays into political economy. They also contain his seminal writings on alienation and a rather exact critique of Hegel's philosophy. One can see a definite shift in his thinking toward attempting to understand human action in a materialist fashion. In August of 1844, Engels and Marx began work on their first cowritten work, *The Holy Family*. This is the first work in which they analyzed the Young Hegelians from a materialist perspective.

During this time, Marx contributed to a German newspaper published in Paris called *Vorwärts!* The critical nature of the newspaper toward the Prussian government caused the French to capitulate to demands to have Marx exiled. In 1845, Marx moved to Brussels. His young family and Engels followed him shortly. While in Brussels over the years 1845 and 1846, Marx and Engels worked on the manuscript called *The German Ideology*. This work was a continuation of their materialist critiques of the Young Hegelians. This work contains one of the most detailed attempts by Marx and Engels to construct a materialist theory of history. It also contains his seminal theoretical treatment of ideology.

In 1847, Marx wrote *The Poverty of Philosophy*, a critique of Proudhon. This is Marx's first sustained work on political economy. Marx and Engels joined the League of the Just, which later changed its name to the Communist League. They worked on and published *The Communist Manifesto* during the French Revolution of 1848. On March 3, 1848, the King of Brussels ordered Marx to leave. He arrived in Paris on March 5. By this time, the revolution had spread throughout Europe. In April, Marx and Engels went to Germany to take part in the German Revolution. He began to publish a daily newspaper in Cologne called the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. The publication was a troubled affair with financial difficulties and pending censorship by the government.

The year 1849 was a turbulent one for Marx. Early in the year, Marx was put on trial for insulting the authorities in his publication of the *Neue*

*Rheinische Zeitung*. He was eventually found not guilty. Even with all this disruption occurring, Marx published *Wage Labor and Capital* in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung*. This was another early political economic critique that did not contain the advances of his later works. He was eventually exiled from Germany on May 16. He returned to Paris with the expectation of an imminent workers' uprising, but none emerged. He was again exiled from France and moved to London, which became his family's home for the remainder of his life.

In the early period of Marx's new life in London, he published *The Class Struggles in France* in 1850 and *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* in 1852. Both of these works were attempts to interpret the 1848 French Revolution from a materialist perspective. They were also works that developed many conjectures about the nature of class consciousness, class alliances, and ideology. Marx provided a thorough class analysis of the counterrevolution that occurred in France. In addition, during his early years in England, Marx became the London correspondent for the *New York Daily Tribune*; this generated a meager income for his family. He contributed articles until the time of the United States Civil War. In the early 1850s, Engels moved to England to work in Manchester's industry. He started to provide dearly needed material support for Marx and his family. This support continued throughout Marx's lifetime.

The 1850s were a time of study for Marx. Other than writing articles for the *New York Daily Tribune*, he studied economics and utilized the resources at the library of the British Museum. In 1857, Marx worked on a series of notebooks that have become known as the *Grundrisse*. This work contains not only fascinating economic examinations but also some detailed statements concerning method and the social nature of humans. The *Grundrisse* was never published, but in 1859, Marx published *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. This work began to demonstrate many of his mature economic positions. This work contains the seminal statement on historical materialism in the preface.

The 1860s were a period of continued work on economics for Marx; this was the decade when the first volume of *Capital* was published. In the early 1860s, Marx worked on a series of manuscripts that are now called *Theories of Surplus Value*. These documents contain critiques of other economists' positions and many details on economic crises. In 1865, Marx wrote *Value, Price and Profit*, which is a short statement of his mature economic ideas including a discussion of exploitation. In addition, *Value, Price and Profit* contains an important refinement of Marx's understanding of the tendency of wages to fall within capitalism. As opposed to his earlier statements on the topic, he discusses how wages can fluctuate due to several factors.

Finally, after years of study and writing, Marx published the first volume of *Capital* in 1867. Marx's ideas about economics are quite complex, and the corpus of his economic writings spans greatly beyond the first volume of *Capital*. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx provides a detailed account of the labor theory of value, the origin of surplus value, the necessity of exploitation within capitalism, the nature of commodity fetishism, the factors that determine fluctuations in employment, and the theory of primitive accumulation, which is a conjecture of how the working class came to exist.

Marx continued his work on the remaining two volumes of *Capital* for the rest of his life. They were never completed, but Engels edited the manuscripts and published them after Marx's death. Volume 2 was published in 1885 and Volume 3 in 1894. After the publication of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx was busy with political work and became sick in his later years. One of his great post-1860s writings is *The Civil War in France*, published in 1871. This work analyzes the proletarian revolution in France, which eventually failed. *Critique of the Gotha Program* was written in 1875 and was published by Engels in 1891. This is one of Marx's few statements regarding the problems of remuneration within communism. Marx also discusses the possibility of communist societies having developmental stages.

Jenny Marx died on December 2, 1881. Karl's health declined after his wife's death and he died on March 14, 1883. He was buried on March 17 in Highgate Cemetery in London. Engels gave a speech at his funeral in which he discussed his social scientific accomplishments and his political work. He concluded with these words: "His name will endure through the ages, and so also will his work" (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 682).

## Influences on His Work

As noted, Marx received a doctorate and wrote his dissertation on ancient philosophical theories of atomism. His intellectual interests spanned beyond his university education and encompassed three main influences: Hegel, Feuerbach and other Young Hegelians, and the classical economists. Each of these thinkers and groups of thinkers was read and criticized by Marx in his published and unpublished writings.

### Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was a philosopher of the German Idealist school who lived from 1770 to 1831. Hegel was a famous and renowned philosopher during his lifetime, a feat enjoyed by few philosophers. He produced

a number of important works of great influence, including *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, *The Science of Logic*, and *The Philosophy of Right*. Hegel's philosophy has been of tremendous influence during the 19th and 20th centuries. As with Marxism, many philosophical schools have developed as a response to Hegel's work, including existentialism, phenomenology, and even analytical philosophy. Hegel's philosophy is of incredible complexity, so only a fraction of his work can be discussed here.

Hegel's work is influenced by the German Idealist thinker Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant developed an idealist understanding of epistemological and moral phenomena. An idealist philosophy basically finds that not all concepts that people have of the world are derived from their sensations. This means that people have concepts about the world that are innate to the structure of their minds. For example, Kant argued that the concept of cause and effect is not derived from our observation of objects. Say one sees a white billiard ball move across a snooker table, which collides into a red billiard ball, and then this red billiard ball falls into a side pocket of the table. The event of the sinking of the red ball by force exerted by the white ball is not an observation. Rather, idealists find that the event of the sinking of the red ball is the organization of sensations by our mind. This means that our minds organize sensory data into events, which we classify as cause-and-effect occurrences. Other concepts that Kant argued were idealist in origin include quantity and quality.

Hegel developed these idealist theories about how the mind organizes sensory data in new directions. He found that the mind not only organizes sensory data, it also contains all possible permutations of physical and social events. He applied this theory to the development of human history. Hegel theorized that human history must move through certain stages of development, which culminates in a fully developed culture. A fully developed culture understands what necessary social interactions are and why they must be this way. Hegel argued that this culture is one in which people have become truly free (Hegel, 1991, pp. 35, 189). The values of freedom, equality, and property defended by Enlightenment theorists are accepted by Hegel, but he finds that these values would not be properly understood in a natural state unimpeded by society. The full realization and full understanding of these Enlightenment values comes about by the process of cultural evolution. People realize after centuries of cultural development what it means to be truly free and why private property should be valued. The past mistakes of a culture affect the refinement of its valuations.

It is important to note that Hegel understands each stage in the development of a culture as a mirror image of a concept the human mind has of

the world. It can be argued that a culture moves through these stages because the human mind is structured in a certain way. This means that a culture develops according to a pattern of concepts contained within the human mind. The causal force of cultural and social development is the prearranged structure of the human mind. Hegel mentions that our self-conscious minds are driven to understand themselves. Thus, our minds seeking knowledge of themselves drive a culture to develop (Hegel, 1977, p. 51). The values of a culture develop because the human mind seeks their development. All humans have the same structure of mind, even if they have different personalities. This means that a set of people collectively as a culture seek to fully understand themselves and to fully realize the values of their culture. Human culture developed because the minds of its members are prearranged to seek out truth through an exploration of a pattern of concepts. The development of a culture is the progression of this pattern of concepts.

Marx discovered Hegel during his university days, but Marx's acceptance of Hegel's philosophy was always conflicted. In Marx's earlier writings from the 1840s, he subjects Hegel's work to a materialist critique (Marx & Engels, 1978, pp. 16–25, 53–65, 106–125). In the afterword to the second German edition of the first volume of *Capital*, Marx comments on his relationship to Hegel:

My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, *i.e.*, the process of thinking, which, under the name of 'the Idea,' he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos [God, the creator—JPH] of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought. (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 301)

In this passage, we see that Marx set himself apart from Hegel's idealist philosophical outlook. Marx finds that concepts are derived from sensory data instead of the prearranged structure of humans' minds. The chapter on ideology will deal with Marx's theory of ideas in greater detail.

Marx was always critical of Hegel's work and method, but he took dialectic reasoning seriously as a description of the world. As discussed, Hegel understood that the development of a mind's concepts would eventually allow a culture to fully develop. For Hegel, the history of humans is a movement from one concept to the next, all interconnected by the flaws of the previous concepts. A flawed idea allows a new concept to emerge, and the new concept tries to correct the flaws of the previous concept.

Marx took this Hegelian development of ideas and found a similar movement in the development of human societies. For Marx, a society was organized according to the structure of class relationships. These class relationships determine who can use what natural resource, building, or machine in production. In addition, these class relationships determine who receives what amount of the total product within this society. These class relationships must be seen as natural and just for society to reproduce itself. A society develops until these class relationships for organizing social life are called into question. At this point people no longer find the class relationships to be natural and just. A social crisis ensues, the old society falls apart, and a new society that addresses the problems of the old society develops.

There are some strong general similarities between Marx and Hegel's theories of history, but Marx diverges greatly from Hegel's outlook. Hegel understood that the development of a culture was driven by a particular concept, whereas Marx understood human productive ability to be the main driver of history. Hegel's thinking was the dominant philosophic system of Marx's young life. Marx subjected this system to critique and moved beyond it by the time *The Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848. Hegel's influence on Marx's theory of history is obvious even if Marx radically changed the content. Marx's theory of history is called historical materialism and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Hegel's outlook on the world is divergent from that of the majority of contemporary social scientists. Hegel lived and worked at a time when social science was becoming distinguished from philosophy and theology. His theories do not embrace the generalized materialist outlook that is standard within the social sciences. Hegel finds that culture and technology are a reflection of ideas that are innate to the human mind (Hegel, 1991, p. 365). In contradistinction, contemporary social science, and the work of Marx, understands culture to be the product of previous cultures and technology to be the accumulation of tools and their application. Marx's pioneering work on the evolution of societies is more at home in contemporary social science than in 19th-century philosophy.

## Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, a series of thinkers developed Hegel's ideas in new directions and also critiqued what Hegel had said. These thinkers have been called the Young Hegelians and included David Strauss, Bruno Bauer, Karl Friedrich Köppen, and Ludwig Feuerbach. Many of these thinkers were interested in subjecting religious views to scientific scrutiny. Strauss's work is of particular importance. In 1835, Strauss published

*Life of Jesus*, which was a historical analysis of Jesus's life and Gospel stories. Strauss's book attempted to find historical events to connect with Biblical stories. His book's viewpoint was thus an attempt at a scientific appraisal of belief. Strauss did not try to defend the stories of the Bible as literal. This was quite shocking in the mid-19th century since it called the authority of the Bible into question. Bauer continued Strauss's work on ascertaining the veracity of Bible stories. His conclusions were even more shocking. He concluded that there was no historical basis for the events documented in the Bible. It was all a fantasy (Mehring, 1936, p. 22).

Ludwig Feuerbach persisted with the Young Hegelians' assault on religious philosophy. Just as Strauss and Bauer had argued that Bible literalism had no factual basis, Feuerbach tried to demonstrate that Hegel's own work was only divine inspiration with the divine absent. Instead of examining one's mind to understand the truth of the world, Feuerbach thought people should look to nature and other people to comprehend reality. Feuerbach loved rural life and enjoyed the seclusion it offered. Feuerbach's work was a product of observing and reflecting upon nature and what he found to be humans' true existence. He hoped that the essence of man could be discovered by understanding what natural man is. Feuerbach attempted to develop a materialist understanding of humans without the recourse to the religious aspects of Hegelian systematic philosophy.

Marx was influenced by Feuerbach's materialist outlook, but he found that Feuerbach's materialism did not take human productive ability into account and was thus not historical. Feuerbach took the world as he found it to be, a source of insight into the human condition. Marx criticized Feuerbach for neglecting the social dynamics, which made the world what it was at the moment of observation (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 170). Marx describes the shortcomings of Feuerbach's materialism in 1845 as "Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity" (Marx & Engels, 1978, p. 143).

## Economists

After Marx criticized Hegel and the Young Hegelians, his work significantly shifted perspective away from the philosophy of the time and toward political economy. Works like *The Poverty of Philosophy* and *The Communist Manifesto* demonstrate a concern with the problems of poverty, class antagonisms, inequality, and economic crisis rather than critiques of philosophers. Marx began a serious study of economics in the 1850s when he had to move to London after being exiled from Brussels, Germany, and France due to his political opinions. Marx read the contributions of political economists from



the 18th century to his own time, including Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and Mill. His notes and comments on this research are published as *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, and *Theories of Surplus-Value*.

In particular, what Marx received from his economic predecessors was a consideration that the origin of economic value was through laboring as opposed to utility. Marx developed and refined the labor theory of value. It forms the general outlook of his economics and is the basis for many of his contributions. Marx's explanation of the origin of surplus value is based on the labor theory of value. This theory allows Marx to argue that surplus value extraction is exploited, unpaid labor.

In addition, economics takes material factors such as population, income, trade, and employment to be factors in the development of a society. These are materialist factors. Marx's interest in a materialist explanation of the development of human civilization is addressed by these economic thinkers. Marx was intrigued by how these materialist ideas were developed by these previous authors, but he found their outlook to be mainly an apology for capitalism. To Marx, these authors ignored the actual occurrences of capitalism, which include exploitation, crises, unemployment, and poverty. Marx subjected their theories to critique and developed his own theory of capitalism. Marx thought that his own theory of capitalism demonstrates why capitalism is prone to slumps, explains why growth does not eliminate poverty, and shows why unemployment and exploitation are necessary features of capitalism. An analysis of these economic concepts Marx developed will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on economics.

## Conclusion

This introductory chapter introduced the broad outlines of Marx's influences and his reception of them. The next chapter will provide a more detailed presentation of Marx's social scientific project and the assumptions he utilizes to construct his theories. Before we turn to an examination of Marx's materialism, here are a few questions for thought:

- What does Marx take from and add to the legacy of Enlightenment values?
- How is Marx's social theory different from social contract theory?
- What do Marx's writings tell us about the limitations of capitalism regarding human liberation, and do these limitations still exist within capitalist societies?
- How did Hegel's philosophy influence Marx and how did Marx break with Hegel's philosophy?
- Why is the development of the productive forces such an important aspect of Marx's explanation of the evolution of societies?