KARL MARX
1818–1883

FRIEDRICH ENGELS
1820–1895

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are central figures in the history of literary criticism and theory and in the development of cultural studies, though neither produced a body of literary-critical work. The young Marx wrote lyrics, attempted drama and fiction, and read deeply in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German philosophy and aesthetics, and the writings of Marx and Engels often refer to and quote literature from classical Greek drama to the novels of Charles Dickens. But as economic historians, social theorists, and revolutionaries seeking to change the world, their main work lay elsewhere, and their direct contributions to literary criticism are scattered and uneven. Yet perhaps this incompleteness makes their comments and observations about literature and criticism all the more suggestive, giving a long line of twentieth-century writers—including GYÖRGY LUKÁCS, Bertolt Brecht, WALTER BENJAMIN, GAYATRI CHAKRAVORTY SPIVAK, and FREDRIC JAMESON—much speculative and interpretive leeway in developing their own Marxist theories of literature.

To many it may seem perverse to study Marxist theory today, given the collapse between 1989 and 1991 of Communist governments in the Soviet Union and in the nations of Eastern Europe. But we must clearly distinguish between Marx and Engels as social theorists, philosophers, historians, and cultural critics and as revolutionaries—or, more accurately, as revolutionaries under whose name Communist leaders and parties seized power. The fall of particular regimes, "Marxist" more in name than in ideas, does little to lessen the impact of Marx's relentless, fascinated, shocked (and shocking) examination of capitalism and its costs to the men and women caught in its grasp. In brilliant passages such as our selection from *Capital* (1867) on the working day, his skillfully modulated prose can be powerfully moving.

For literary and cultural criticism, the seminal passage by Marx appears in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1858–59, excerpted below). Here, Marx emphasizes that he is concerned primarily with the "material conditions of life," the "economic structure of society." On this "foundation . . . rises a legal and political superstructure"; moreover, "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." This formulation raises a number of questions: To what *degree* is consciousness socially and economically "determined"? What is the role of human agency? How closely connected are the base and the superstructure, and can the latter—which includes intellectual work and cultural institutions—affect the former? In the twentieth century, both LOUIS ALTHUSSER and RAYMOND WILLIAMS were later to wrestle directly with these questions.

The answers of Marx and Engels waver. As a famous passage (excerpted below) from the *Grundrisse* (1857–58, *Foundations* or *Outlines*) suggests, Marx found it difficult to explain the relationship between Greek art and the society within which it arose. Engels, too, recognized the limitations of the base / superstructure model. In a letter to Joseph Bloch (our final selection), Engels maintains that "According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life," insisting that economics is not the only determinant and leaving room for the influence of "human minds."

Marx was born in Trier, Prussia (a region now part of Germany), the son of a Jewish lawyer who had converted to Protestantism to protect his job. Marx studied at

the universities of Bonn, Berlin, and Jena, receiving his doctorate in April 1841 for a thesis on the Greek philosophers Democritus and Epicurus. In 1842 he edited a radical newspaper in Cologne, but the German authorities, angered by his criticisms, forced him to resign in 1843. He then traveled to Paris, where he and Engels, whom he had met in Cologne, began their collaboration. Engels, born in Barmen, in western Germany, was the son of a wealthy textile manufacturer; in the 1840s, he managed a factory in England that his father owned, and his horror at the harsh economic and social conditions in Manchester led him to write *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (1845). Engels later said that as he and Marx worked together in Paris, their "agreement in all theoretical fields became obvious."

Marx and Engels's joint work in the 1840s includes *The Holy Family* (1845) and *The German Ideology* (not published until 1932). In these texts, and in Marx's polemical pamphlet *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), they sought to prove that economic and social forces shape human consciousness. This materialism was meant to displace the idealist view that human consciousness shapes economic and social forces and forms. They based their interpretation of reality on *dialectical* materialism, believing that all change results from the constant conflict arising from the oppositions inherent in all ideas, movements, and events. They further argued that the internal tensions and contradictions in capitalism would lead inevitably to its demise.

Also important are Marx's writings collected in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1932; trans. 1959), which contain much of his most passionate, incisive thinking about industrial conditions and the nature of consciousness under capitalism and present an excellent entry point into Marxist cultural analysis. Building on the work of the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, author of *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), Marx is especially concerned here with the origin and impact of alienation. The industrial capitalist economy, says Marx, "alienates" individuals from the work that they do; unable to control their own labor, which they must "give" (sell) to another, they lack control and knowledge of themselves and never achieve their full human potential. However much they resent their situation, they believe—that is, they are conditioned to believe—that it cannot be changed, and that ultimately they have only themselves to blame for their discontent and failures.

Marx and Engels's most significant publication of the decade appeared in London in 1848: *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (soon known by and reprinted with the shorter title *The Communist Manifesto*). In this intense pamphlet Marx (who did the bulk of the writing) describes the triumphs of capitalism; the creation of a world market, world literature, and cosmopolitanism; the misery that capitalism imposes on the masses; the class struggle between the exploiters (owners) and the exploited (workers); the connection of people primarily via cash; the inevitability of revolution; and the dawn of a new, class-free society. Though specifically commissioned to state the principles and objectives of the Communist League (a secret organization composed primarily of German emigrés), it quickly became the position paper of militant working-class movements everywhere.

Because of his political writing and activity, Marx was expelled from both France and Germany in the late 1840s; in May 1849 he settled with his family in London. There, supported by Engels but nonetheless often in poverty, he resided for the remainder of his life. His major works during these decades are the *Grundrisse*, a manuscript of some 800 printed pages (1857–58, published 1939–41); the three book volume *Theories of Surplus Value* (1860s, published 1905–10); and above all *Das Kapital*, volume 1 of which appeared in 1867 (trans. 1886), with volumes 2 and 3, edited by Engels, published posthumously in 1885 and 1894 (trans. 1907, 1909). Volume 4 of *Das Kapital* is the aforementioned *Theories of Surplus Value*, edited and published by Karl Kautsky. Marx also wrote many articles for newspapers in the United States and Europe. Engels's writings include *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science* (1878, usually referred to as *Anti-Dühring*), parts of which later appeared

as a summary of the basics of socialism titled *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1892); *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884); and *Dialectics of Nature* (1925).

A literary theorist and critic reading Marx and Engels may raise questions that the texts do not answer. What roles do writers, critics, and intellectuals play? Do they illuminate for workers the nature of capitalist exploitation, or do they act at the service of those who already and best understand their true circumstances? Should writers be free to state the social and political facts as they see them, or must the goal of working-class revolution always shape their work—and if so, who sets the limits?

Marx has a simple but powerful reply: the answers will come only when the contradictions within capitalism produce them. Capitalism has no remedy for the worst social and economic problems that it creates and that will eventually rend it asunder. Marx is certain that capitalism will end, and why: but no one can know exactly what the roles of intellectuals and critics will be, and what the new society will look like, until the force of historical necessity brings them into being.

Meanwhile, Marxist critics have work to perform, practicing a discipline linked to the goal of radical social change. Thus they must approach literature, literary education, criticism, and theory as integral parts of economic and social life. In *The German Ideology*, as our selection indicates, Marx and Engels emphasize that we must study *real* men and women and *real* processes, not what has typically been said or thought by and about them.

Marx promotes "ideology critique," that is, the demystifying exposure of how class interests operate through cultural forms, whether political or legal, religious or philosophical, educational or literary. It is the nature of ideology to conceal the reality of class struggle from our perception and consciousness; and insofar as working-class people unconsciously absorb bourgeois values, they are unwitting carriers of "false consciousness."

The term *ideology* rarely appears in Marx's *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, but it is implicit in many of Marx's formulations of the difference between the surface and reality of capitalist society. Marxist critics are expected to investigate the systemic masking of the real methods and consequences of existing socioeconomic arrangements. Sometimes, however, Marx uses the term differently, as when he declares in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that we grow aware of and fight the conflict between classes in "ideological forms."

Later Marxists have developed both the positive and negative senses of ideology. One dominant line of inquiry follows from the writings of ANTONIO GRAMSCI, who in his *Prison Notebooks* (published 1945–75) describes ideology as "the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc."; he explores how a privileged social class can achieve cultural "hegemony," the manufactured assent to its beliefs and practices won peacefully through ideology. This concept of hegemony, developed by the British Marxist Raymond Williams (especially in *Marxism and Literature*, 1977) and by those he has influenced (notably STUART HALL and DICK HEBDIGE), has become fundamental to cultural studies. Critics use it in studying classic texts, the relationships and differences between canonical and noncanonical literature, popular culture, the media, education, and publishing—all outlets for ideology.

The power of ideology to mask and obscure is also at work in what Marx calls "the fetishism of commodities," which he discusses in our first selection from *Capital*. Under capitalism, human relations are increasingly characterized by more or less thoroughgoing alienation, monetization, and commodification. Relationships between workers and owners, buyers and sellers, are mediated through the things produced. These commodities become objects of fetishism—seeming to have an objective existence of their own that obscures the individual labor involved in their

production. By being exchanged, they acquire a seemingly inherent value distinct from their use value or physical properties.

As a social and cultural theory, Marxism demands of its followers ongoing critical scrutiny and self-questioning of its own basic texts, which are suggestive but sometimes flawed and often incomplete. Marx and Engels underestimated, for example, the extraordinary power of capitalism to turn back and absorb opposition, and apparently they overlooked the damaging overstatements and reductiveness that mar their arguments. Moreover, though Marx was acutely responsive to the economic and political situation of workers, he appears incapable of actually seeing and making imaginative contact with them and their families, of conveying how they live, think, and feel. Even in his most illuminating work, Marx often mirrors the dehumanizing tendencies that his radical critiques of capitalism condemn. Individuals matter most to him as embodiments of ideas, as components of systems—a form of thinking that the best novelists of his time, such as Dickens and Balzac, brilliantly exposed and corrected.

On the "material conditions of life" and the "economic structure of society," Marx and Engels are sharp and compelling; on the subject of the creative and critical consciousness of persons and cultures, they falter. For foundational Marxist interpretations of cultural life, one must look instead to the work of such later theorists and critics as W. E. B. DU BOIS, Edmund Wilson (in his writings of the 1930s), THEODOR ADORNO, C. L. R. James, and Raymond Williams. They built upon but went beyond the insights that Marx and Engels provide, and their critical projects drew from the literary texts and cultural traditions that Marx and Engels admired but never fully engaged.

Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 **Keywords:** Hegemony, Marxism, Religion, Subjectivity
The German Ideology **Keywords:** Ethics, Hegemony, Ideology, Marxism, Representation
The Communist Manifesto **Keywords:** Globalization, Hegemony, Ideology, Institutional Studies, Marxism, Modernity, Nationhood
Grundrisse **Keywords:** Aesthetics, Epic, Marxism
"Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*" Keywords: Hegemony, Ideology, Marxism, Modernity
***Capital, Volume 1*,** **Keywords:** The Body, Hegemony, Marxism, Nationhood, Representation
"Letter from Friedrich Engels to Joseph Bloch" Keywords: Institutional Studies, Marxism, Nationhood, Religion

From Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844[1]

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We have proceeded from the premises of political economy.[2] We have accepted its language and its laws. We presupposed private property, the separation of labour, capital and land, and of wages, profit of capital and rent of land—likewise division of labour, competition, the concept of

1. Translated by Martin Milligan.
2. The 19th-century social science concerned with the relations between political and economic processes (now often separated into political science and economics).

exchange-value, etc. On the basis of political economy itself, in its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities;[3] that the wretchedness of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and magnitude of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form; that finally the distinction between capitalist and land-rentier,[4] like that between the tiller of the soil and the factory-worker, disappears and that the whole of society must fall apart into the two classes—the property-*owners* and the propertyless *workers*.

Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulae the *material* process through which private property actually passes, and these formulae it then takes for *laws*. It does not *comprehend* these laws—i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property. Political economy does not disclose the source of the division between labour and capital, and between capital and land. When, for example, it defines the relationship of wages to profit, it takes the interest of the capitalists to be the ultimate cause; i.e., it takes for granted what it is supposed to evolve. Similarly, competition comes in everywhere. It is explained from external circumstances. As to how far these external and apparently fortuitous circumstances are but the expression of a necessary course of development, political economy teaches us nothing. We have seen how, to it, exchange itself appears to be a fortuitous fact. The only wheels which political economy sets in motion are *avarice* and the *war amongst the avaricious—competition*.

Precisely because political economy does not grasp the connections within the movement, it was possible to counterpose, for instance, the doctrine of competition to the doctrine of monopoly, the doctrine of craft-liberty to the doctrine of the corporation, the doctrine of the division of landed property to the doctrine of the big estate—for competition, craft-liberty and the division of landed property were explained and comprehended only as fortuitous, premeditated and violent consequences of monopoly, the corporation, and feudal property, not as their necessary, inevitable and natural consequences.

Now, therefore, we have to grasp the essential connection between private property, avarice, and the separation of labour, capital and landed property; between exchange and competition, value and the devaluation of men, monopoly and competition, etc.; the connection between this whole estrangement and the *money*-system.

Do not let us go back to a fictitious primordial condition as the political economist does, when he tries to explain. Such a primordial condition explains nothing. He merely pushes the question away into a grey nebulous distance. He assumes in the form of fact, of an event, what he is supposed to deduce—namely, the necessary relationship between two things—between, for example, division of labour and exchange. Theology in the same way explains the origin of evil by the fall of man: that is, it assumes as a fact, in historical form, what has to be explained.

3. Because labor itself is sold to others, and at a very low price.

4. One who lives on income from land, stocks, or bonds.

We proceed from an *actual* economic fact.

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity*—and does so in the proportion in which it produces commodities generally.

This fact expresses merely that the object which labour produces—labour's product—confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labour is labour which has been congealed in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labour. Labour's realization is its objectification. In the conditions dealt with by political economy this realization of labour appears as *loss of reality* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object* and *object-bondage*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*.

So much does labour's realization appear as loss of reality that the worker loses reality to the point of starving to death. So much does objectification appear as loss of the object that the worker is robbed of the objects most necessary not only for his life but for his work. Indeed, labour itself becomes an object which he can get hold of only with the greatest effort and with the most irregular interruptions. So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the fewer can he possess and the more he falls under the dominion of his product, capital.

All these consequences are contained in the definition that the worker is related to the *product of his labour* as to an *alien* object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over-against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the greater is the worker's lack of objects. Whatever the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.

Let us now look more closely at the *objectification*, at the production of the worker; and therein at the *estrangement*, the *loss* of the object, his product.

The worker can create nothing without *nature*, without the *sensuous external world*. It is the material on which his labor is manifested, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces.

But just as nature provides labor with the *means of life* in the sense that labour cannot *live* without objects on which to operate, on the other hand, it also provides the *means of life* in the more restricted sense—i.e., the means for the physical subsistence of the *worker* himself.

Thus the more the worker by his labour *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of *means of life* in the double respect: first, that the sensuous external world more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labour—to be his labour's *means of life*; and secondly, that it more and more ceases to be *means of life* in the immediate sense, means for the physical subsistence of the worker.

Thus in this double respect the worker becomes a slave of his object, first, in that he receives an *object of labour*, i.e., in that he receives *work*; and secondly, in that he receives *means of subsistence*. Therefore, it enables him to exist, first, as a *worker*; and, second, as a *physical subject*. The extremity of this bondage is that it is only as a *worker* that he continues to maintain himself as a *physical subject*, and that it is only as a *physical subject* that he is a *worker*.

(The laws of political economy express the estrangement of the worker in his object thus: the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the mightier labour becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more ingenious labour becomes, the duller becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature's bondsman.)

Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labour by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labour) *and production*. It is true that labour produces for the rich wonderful things—but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces—but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty—but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labour by machines—but some of the workers it throws back to a barbarous type of labour, and the other workers it turns into machines. It produces intelligence—but for the worker idiocy, cretinism.[5]

The direct relationship of labour to its produce is the relationship of the worker to the objects of his production. The relationship of the man of means to the objects of production and to production itself is only a *consequence* of this first relationship—and confirms it. We shall consider this other aspect later.

When we ask, then, what is the essential relationship of labour we are asking about the relationship of the *worker* to production.

Till now we have been considering the estrangement, the alienation of the worker only in one of its aspects, i.e., the worker's *relationship to the products of his labour*. But the estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*—within the *producing activity* itself. How would the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? The product is after all but the summary of the activity of production. If then the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labour is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself.

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labour?

5. That is, stunted physical and mental development.

First, the fact that labour is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labour.* It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates independently of the individual—that is, operates on him as an alien, divine or diabolical activity—in the same way the worker's activity is not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.

As a result, therefore, man (the worker) no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.

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1844 1932

From The German Ideology[1]

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The fact is, therefore, that definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations. Empirical observation must in each separate instance bring out empirically, and without any mystification and speculation, the connection of the social and political structure with production. The social structure and the State are continually evolving out of the life process of definite individuals, but of individuals, not as they may appear in their own or other people's imagination, but as they *really* are; i.e., as they operate, produce materially, and hence as they work under definite material limits, presuppositions and conditions independent of their will.

The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the mental intercourse of men, appear at this stage as the direct efflux of their material behaviour.[2]

1. Translated by S. Ryazanskaya, based on an earlier translation by W. Lough.
2. That is, the actions that human beings take in their relationship to the productive forces of their society.

The same applies to mental production as expressed in the language of politics, laws, morality, religion, metaphysics, etc., of a people. Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc.—real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process. If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside-down as in a *camera obscura*,[3] this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process.

In direct contrast to German philosophy[4] which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process. The phantoms formed in the human brain are also, necessarily, sublimates of their material life-process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises. Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as *their* consciousness.

This method of approach is not devoid of premises. It starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment. Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions. As soon as this active life-process is described, history ceases to be a collection of dead facts as it is with the empiricists[5] (themselves still abstract), or an imagined activity of imagined subjects, as with the idealists.

Where speculation ends—in real life—there real, positive science begins: the representation of the practical activity, of the practical process of development of men. Empty talk about consciousness ceases, and real knowledge has to take its place.

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1845–46 1932

3. Literally, "dark chamber" (Latin): an apparatus invented in the 17th century consisting of a darkened box with an aperture (usually a lens) through which an image is projected (inverted) on the opposite wall.

4. That is, idealism, which holds that reality and knowledge derive not from perceptions but from ideas or the workings of the human mind or spirit; idealists include IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804) and GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831).

5. Those who believe that experiences, especially of the senses, are the only sources of knowledge; for example, DAVID HUME (1711–1776).

But the difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model.

A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish. But does he not find joy in the child's naiveté, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm? There are unruly children and precocious children. Many of the old peoples belong in this category. The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. [It] is its result, rather, and is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone arise, can never return.

1857–58 1939–42

From Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*[1]

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The first work which I undertook for a solution of the doubts which assailed me was a critical review of the Hegelian philosophy of right, a work the introduction to which appeared in 1844 in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*,[2] published in Paris. My investigation led to the result that legal relations as well as forms of state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but rather have their roots in the material conditions of life, the sum total of which Hegel, following the example of the Englishmen and Frenchmen of the eighteenth century, combines under the name of "civil society," that, however, the anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy. The investigation of the latter, which I began in Paris, I continued in Brussels, whither I had emigrated in consequence of an expulsion order of M. Guizot.[3] The general result at which I arrived and which, once won, served as a guiding thread for my studies, can be briefly formulated as follows: In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in

1. Translated by Robert C. Tucker.

2. *German-French Yearbook*. The German philosopher GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831) described his political philosophy in the *Philosophy of Right* (1821); Marx's essay was "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right."

3. François Pierre Guillaume Guizot (1787–1874), French statesman and historian who supported the idea of a constitutional monarchy; he was the chief power in the government between 1840 and 1848.

general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come in conflict with the existing relations of production, or—what is but a legal expression for the same thing—with the property relations within which they have been at work hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an epoch of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production. No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed; and new, higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society itself. Therefore mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve; since, looking at the matter more closely, it will always be found that the task itself arises only when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation. In broad outlines Asiatic, ancient, feudal, and modern bourgeois modes of production can be designated as progressive epochs in the economic formation of society. The bourgeois relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production—antagonistic not in the sense of individual antagonism, but of one arising from the social conditions of life of the individuals; at the same time the productive forces developing in the womb of bourgeois society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism.[4] This social formation brings, therefore, the prehistory of human society to a close.

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1859

From Capital, Volume 1[1]

From *Chapter 1. Commodities*

SECTION 4. THE FETISHISM OF COMMODITIES AND THE SECRET THEREOF

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding

4. That is, socialism—the final "mode of production," which is in the process of emerging through the class struggle of the bourgeoisie and proletarians.

1. Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, and edited by Engels.