

QU Hongmei

## Marxism and Morality: Reflections on the History of Interpreting Marx in Moral Philosophy

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**Abstract** The well-known paradox between Marxism and morality is that on the one hand, Marx claims that morality is a form of ideology that should be abandoned, while on the other hand, Marx makes quite a few moral judgments in his writings. It is in the research after Marx's death that the paradox is found, explored and solved. This paper surveys the history of interpreting Marx from the aspect of moral philosophy by dividing it into three sequential phases. Then it presents the research on Marx in each phase, points out conflicting questions within the different periods and puts forward the solution in the end. This paper points out that a philosophical viewpoint based on Marx's theory of historical materialism is the key to solving the paradox between Marxism and morality.

**Keywords** morality, Marx, historical materialism, humanism

### 1 Introduction

The intellectual history of interpreting Marx is full of changes and controversies. The reason for this is two-fold. On the one hand, we are confused by Marx with his multitudinous works. Marx's ideas on philosophy were mixed up with his ideas in other fields, such as economics, sociology and political science. We have to search in his writings for fragmentary issues in order to even get a chance of understanding him just a little. As to moral philosophy, surely we cannot find any normative moral theories in Marx's writings. And most perplexingly, Marx changed and broadened his sphere of philosophical interest during his life time. Scholars of Marx dispute with each other mainly on the following questions:

(1) Are there any breaks or shifts in Marx's thought? If so,

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*Received May 25, 2010*

QU Hongmei (✉)

School of Philosophy and Sociology, Jilin University, Changchun 130012, China

E-mail: Qulax@sina.com

- (2) How many shifts are there in Marx's life; and
- (3) Which period is the typical one for representing Marx's views on philosophy?

On the other hand, the situation of the international workers' movements was extremely complicated and dynamic in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. With the forming of some socialist states, the proletarian revolution won a momentous victory, but it also suffered a serious blow with the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the institutional changes in some other countries. Both Marx's followers and his opponents have searched for something useful in Marx's writings to support their own viewpoints. As to the former, they hoped to derive new viewpoints, new sources of illumination and new inspiration to tackle polemical problems in practice, while the latter sought out the reason for the defeat of the communist movements, arguing that Marx made some false predictions in his writings. Diverse interpretations make the research on Marx's philosophy richer and more colorful, but at the same time more intricate and puzzling.

In this paper, I concentrate on the intellectual history of interpreting Marx within moral philosophy, so as to find out the crux of the argument and give my own answer to the questions relating to the following two aspects. The first aspect is about understanding Marx's philosophy:

- (1) Whether Marx is a philosopher; and if so
- (2) What is his view of philosophy?

The second aspect is about understanding Marx within moral philosophy. The corresponding questions are:

- (1) Whether Marx is a moral philosopher; and if so
- (2) What are his viewpoints within moral philosophy?

I divide the history of interpreting Marx within moral philosophy into three "successive"<sup>1</sup> phases in order to find my own answers to the aforementioned questions. More importantly, I find that with the development of research on Marx's contribution to philosophy (especially on his theory of historical materialism), the road to solving the so-called Marx's moral paradox is getting clearer. That is to say, the theory of historical materialism is the key to understanding Marx's viewpoints on moral philosophy.

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## 2 Marx's Moral Paradox in the Embryonic Stage

The 1890s saw the beginning of the first phase in interpreting Marx's moral philosophy. It ended with Marxism being changed into Marxism-Leninism by

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<sup>1</sup> What I mean by "successive" here is that views in the later phases were built up upon criticism to views in the former ones.

Stalin in 1938. In this phase, people regarded historical materialism merely as a set of scientific principles or impersonal doctrines. Accordingly, it was concluded that there is no moral element in Marxist thought.

Both major characters in the Social Democratic Party of Germany, Eduard Bernstein developed a revisionist version of Marxism, while Karl Kautsky responded to him in the name of orthodoxy.

Bernstein's interpretation is as follows:

(1) Historical materialism is a set of scientific principles, which is in fact economic determinism. Within such a framework, the individual human being loses its position on values, falling in control of the proletarian class and its world outlook.

(2) Marx spurned the fact that there is an appeal to morality in his thought, and objected to deducing socialism from ethical principles.

Furthermore, Bernstein finds that Marx's theoretical anti-moralism is inconsistent with its practical application, because in Marx's works, there are many expressions concerning moral judgments, especially when Marx talks about the ruthless exploitation in a capitalist society. Accordingly, Bernstein propounds a scheme to revise Marxist theories. He proposes that, since the economic preconditions of socialism are not ready, other forces would be needed to support the belief of socialism. Bernstein grafts a Kantian humanism into socialism, namely, he renews the appearance of Marxism by applying Kant's categorical imperative to the sphere of political economy.

Kautsky understands the doctrine of historical materialism in a scientific way as well, but he maintains that this theory is only related to necessity. Kautsky claims that as a self-sufficient doctrine, Marxism does not need to be extended to ethics. Actually, "It is the materialist conception of history, which has first completely deposed the moral ideal as the directing factor of the social evolution, and has taught us to deduce our social aims solely from the knowledge of the material foundations" (Kautsky 1906). That is to say, the moral aim of scientific socialism was changed into an economic one and, for the first time, the moral ideal (*viz.*, the abolition of class) is recognized as a necessary result of economic development in the history of human society. Therefore, Kautsky sees Marx as a complete non-moralist, or even an anti-moralist because of his abolition of morality in communist society.

We now can come to the conclusion that in the first phase:

- (1) Most scholars realized that historical materialism was the key factor in Marx's thought;
- (2) Both the revisionists and the orthodox Marxists regarded historical materialism as an economic doctrine, a scientific law, which is immiscible with subjective experience; therefore

(3) The two schools reached the consensus that there is no moral element in Marx's thought, no matter how different their measures were (the former hoped to add Kantian ethics to Marxism, while the latter thought that there was no need to do so at all).

If historical materialism is merely interpreted into an economic law, there must be no moral element in Marx's thought, because law is dominantly defined as something impersonal and objective, without any involvement of subjective experience such as moral issues. Here we come to the crucial problem: Is it true that there is no moral element in Marx's writings? After some of Marx's early manuscripts had been published, it was found that Marx did express some ethical ideas.

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### 3 Marx's Moral Paradox Discovered

The following 30 years after 1938 saw the second phase of research on Marx's moral philosophy, during which most theorists realized the danger of consolidating Marxism into a rigid doctrine. With some of Marx's early works being published, it can be seen that Marx did open up his mind to morality in his early years. Thus, the debate on Marx's moral philosophy was polarized by two schools, the Marxist humanists and the scientific Marxists.

Compared to the scientific school, the humanist school has a broader membership and is more various in forms. Among this school are many of postwar philosophers with international fame. I divided them roughly into the following groups: (1) some members of Frankfurt school, especially Herbert Marcuse and Erich Fromm; (2) almost all the members of the Praxis school of Yugoslavia, which was founded mainly by Gajo Petrović and Mihailo Marković; (3) scholars from the communist countries of that time and certain third world countries; (4) the Johnson-Forrest Tendency which was formed as a faction in the American Trotskyist movement by Raya Dunayevskaya and C. L. R. James; (5) most of the members of the New Left in the early 1960s, such as the founders of the New Left Review in England like Edward Palmer Thompson and people like Charles Wright Mills in America; and (6) some important writers who did not belong to any branches in the humanist school, including Tom Bottomore, Lucien Goldman and Eugene Kamenka.

As Erich Fromm points out, idea of the humanist school is "no longer the concern of a few dispersed intellectuals, but a movement to be found throughout the world, developing independently in different countries" (Fromm 1966, Introduction, p. 10). The movement was originated from the process of *De-Stalinization*. Scholars at that time thought about the same questions: For

what reasons did a communist change into a totalitarian? Is there any fatal defect in Marxism? Where does the road to the development of Marxism lead to, both in theory and practice? Consequently, some theorists began to focus their attention on the *EPM*<sup>2</sup> which was published only in 1932 when orthodox Marxist ideas had been in vogue, and came to the conclusion that Marxism had currently developed askew due to its ignorance of the *EPM*, which entailed some humanist viewpoints, the true foundation of Marx's philosophy and point of departure to understand his later works properly. In order to show the ideas of the humanist school in detail, I choose Kamenka as an example.

Kamenka argues that "Marx's mature writings notoriously eschew any direct consideration of ethical and philosophical questions; it is in the early writings and private drafts that we can find the key to his ethical views and their puzzling place in his mature beliefs" (Kamenka 1962, Preface, p. 11). In Kamenka's view, the distinction between freedom and alienation is the ethical leitmotif of Marx's philosophical and political development, which he kept throughout his life. Before 1844, Marx's primary interest was the nature of freedom. From 1844 onward, Marx paid more attention to the developments through which freedom would come about. Kamenka proposes that there are two demerits in Marx's view. One is Marx's prediction of future society. The other is Marx's rejection of morality in his later writings. Kamenka explains that in *GI*<sup>3</sup>, Marx proclaimed his materialist interpretation of history, which led to a radical break in the development of his thought, because Marx decided to reject philosophy and morality as an ideology, which are subordinates determined by the economic foundation of society. Kamenka argues that, after the break, Marx is not as sapient as he was in his early work, and the servile character of morality in Marx's idea prevents it from operating in the development of human society as a positive element. Hence, Kamenka suggests that we should not pay much attention to thinking about Marx's thought as a whole, that Marx's later theory should not be an organic part of his real contribution to philosophy. Furthermore, for Kamenka, Marx's disciples, as well as Engels, changed Marx's thinking into a historical science, as a normative criterion establishing new obligations and new principles for conduct, because they did not "grasp the positive distinctions between freedom and slavery, between enterprise and servility, between the untrammelled morality of production and the fetishistic morality of security" (Ibid., p. 195). The former morality is what Marx pursued in his whole life, while the latter one is an anamorphosis which originates from the vulgarizing interpretation of Marx's thought.

Generally speaking, ideas of the humanist school have the following qualities.

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<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations used: *EPM*= *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

<sup>3</sup> Abbreviations used: *GI*= *German Ideology*.

First, their conclusions reply to the early, humanist writings of Marx, especially the *EPM*. Second, they are opposite to objectivist tendencies of social theory, in which the agent of history is not of human beings, but rather abstract entities such as laws of history or inanimate entities such as means of production.

In reality, the scientific Marxists aim to hold the position of Marxism. But the methods they take are not Marxist, but of scientific philosophy. Galvano Della Volpe's Positivist interpretation and Louis Althusser's Structuralist interpretation are representatives amongst the scientific Marxists.

What I mean by Positivist interpretation here is an attempt to fuse Marxism with Positivism. As the founder of this school, Della Volpe did much in his life to interpret Marx from a scientific viewpoint. In his idea, Marx's thought is a scientific dialectic. He notes that starting with the *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, Marx takes a radical epistemological break with Hegel, and this break is achieved completely in the 1857 introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (see Galvano 1979); Based on the *Grundrisse* and the *Capital*, Marx demonstrates a scientific dialectic, which aims to understand and expound modern science. For Della Volpe, the self-correcting nature of science is the true embodiment of dialectics, which is different from the abstract speculative metaphysics of Hegel and his disciples. In this sense, Della Volpe stands on the opposite side of both Marxist humanists and Soviet Marxists. In his eyes, Marxist humanists care more about totality and alienation in Hegelian philosophy: What they do is change Marx's thought into abstractly ethical preachment. Meanwhile, Soviet Marxists pay more attention to the Hegelian dialectics: What they did was replace the conception of absolute spirit in Hegel's philosophy with the conception of matter from Marx's thought. Further, Della Volpe infuses Marxist theories with an influence from Aristotle via Galileo to Hume. He defends that Marxism is a science inasmuch that it relied upon a traditional method, namely, a Galilean hypothetico-deductive method, which follows the pattern of Concrete-Abstract-Concrete, and aims to unite natural science and social science. With such a dialectics, the traditional moral philosophy morphed into moral science following the same logic of natural or positive sciences, because in the field of social history, the process of questing for the law of society relates to human praxis and morality. Della Volpe gives the method another name, viz., moral Galileanism, when it is applied in social history. The *Capital* is the best example of this form of Galileanism in practice. Della Volpe comments that it is Marx who provides a scientific foundation for us to interpret moral actions.

Althusser is firstly a Marxist, secondly a structuralist. Through the works of *For Marx*, *Reading Capital* and *On Marx* etc., we can find that the motif of Althusser's thought is interpreting and developing the theories raised by Marx with the influence of structuralism. He believes that the most important

characteristic in Marxism as a science is the function of a structure on its elements, and that humanism is a naive and unproblematic conception of language and consciousness. Althusser argues that the real stage-directors, viz., the relations of production are non-human, objectified structures, but that the Marxist humanists reduce social relations into human relations, which makes humanism unproblematic, meaning that there is nothing but an illusory belief in the autonomy of human beings as thinking subjects. Such ideas are based on Althusser's structuralist position, on which (1) individual human beings are merely unconscious agents of structural forces, in much the same way as organisms are agents for the spread of a disease; (2) science is a theoretical activity, which consists above all, the construction of a conceptual scheme or theoretical system. With such a principle, Althusser proposes that Marx's entire body of work is not a coherent whole, but contains an epistemological break between the earlier humanistic writings and the later scientific texts. The young Marx propounds an ideological view of humanity's alienation and eventual self-recovery, strongly influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach; while Marx in his later age discloses a science, a theory of social formations and their structural determination. Althusser asserts that it was with the *GI* that the sudden departure happens. Marx constructs a revolutionary view of social change with the science of history, viz., historical materialism, which paves the way for Marx's later works, especially the three-volume *Capital*. By assigning primacy to Marxist science, Althusser radically dismisses any form of non-scientific thought—subsumed under the concept of “ideology”—including the pre-scientific thought of Marx himself, which is expressed in the name of “humanism” in his early works.

We can find something in common from the aforementioned scientific interpretations. Their logic is as follows: (1) they believe that historical materialism is a science which can be interpreted in the ways of scientific research; (2) then, the most difficult puzzle for them is how to solve non-scientific problems with the scientific method. Usually, they choose to avoid the concern with the question of whether Marx has moral philosophy, or they give us an ambiguous answer.

In the second phase, progress was made in realizing the dualistic attributes of Marx's thought. On the one hand, some theorists insist that the distinctive conceptual scheme and epistemology arising from historical materialism is valid enough to make a scientific and descriptive analysis of economic structure and process. More importantly on the other hand, the democratic or emancipatory content in Marx's thought is noted and cherished by some humanists.

However, it can be found that each of the two schools interprets Marx from a single dimension, but with the opinions as disparate as poles asunder; the core of the questions within Marx's moral philosophy is still untouched. On one side, the

Marxist humanists prefer to applaud Marx's early ideas, especially those in the *EPM*, and deem his later writings retrogressive and non-humanist. On the other side, the scientific Marxists insist that historical materialism is the true progress that Marx makes when compared to the other masters before him, such as Kant, Hegel and Feuerbach. They pay more attention to Marx's later writings and remark that his earlier thought is immature and unreliable.

The sticking point for the controversies actually is how to discern the foundation of Marx's thought, and further how to evaluate Marx's philosophy. On the one hand, members of the humanist school believe what Marx wanted to do was to criticize the inhuman conditions men suffer under the capitalist society from a philosophical viewpoint. Hence, they see the *EPM* as the truly philosophical writing of Marx, and the *GI* in their eyes is only a kind of manuscript on the science of social history. However on the other hand, insisting that Marx's theoretical foundation should be dialectical materialism, members of the scientific school prefer to focus on the *GI*, though what they read in it is only of scientific content.

The fundamental reason for the controversies between the scientific Marxists and Marxist humanists is that they have different views on philosophy. For the former group, philosophy is a science in the highest level, analyzing the concepts and methods of specific sciences with the tools of formal logic. What philosophers are concerned with is the theory of knowledge (i.e., epistemology). For Marxists, this means that the foundation of Marxism is dialectical materialism which is enriched with the methodological and logical progress in contemporary epistemology. Marxism privileges the economic works of the mature Marx, Engels and Lenin, in order to throw light on their scientific nature and their agreement with scientific philosophy. However, for members of the humanist school, philosophy deals above all with man and human action; it is inspired by the tradition of classical German philosophy and other philosophical currents as well as phenomenology and existentialism. The Marxist humanists pay more attention to Marx's theory of human nature in his early works, because it is in these works (especially in the *EPM*) that Marx elaborates the process of human nature's alienation in capitalist society and its recurrence in communist society. Based on different views of philosophy, the two schools could accept only part of Marx's thought. The Marxist humanists only endorse Marx's humanist critique in the *EPM* when they find that the materialistic idea in the *GI* is developed into a vulgar determinism by orthodox Marxists. Meanwhile, the scientific Marxists have a similar prejudice: They think that Marx's break is a rupture from Feuerbach's humanism to anti-humanism. In their eyes, the humanist tendency in Marx's early works is contradicted with the scientific content in his later works. Therefore, both of the schools admit that Marx is partly a moral philosopher: That is, the young Marx is a moralist. Where they

differ is that the Marxist humanists show a preference for Marx as a moralist, while the scientific Marxists appreciate Marx's scientific spirit expressed in his later writings.

Since both of the two aforementioned schools believe that in Marx's thought, humanism and materialism are two polar opposites, what later Marxian researchers need to solve is how to treat the puzzle between humanism and materialism in Marx's thought.

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#### 4 The Exploration of Marx's Moral Paradox

Since the mid-1970s, research on Marx's moral philosophy entered the third phase and took on a multi-polar form. Based on the research in the second phase, quite a few scholars noticed that there were paradoxes in Marx's moral philosophy. Among those who attempted to solve Marx's moral paradoxes, the analytical Marxists played the most important role when they took the baton of intellectual leadership of Marxian research from the Frankfurt School in the 1970s.

As a matter of fact, the analytical Marxists are just scholars who do individual research on Marx. They do not belong to any fixed institutions or other organizations, except the September Group. However most of them do set out to read Marx non-dogmatically, to find the origin of Marxian thought, to normalize Marxist theories, and to pay more attention to the consistency of Marxian philosophy rather than to his own words. Moreover, from mid-1970s the focal issues of analytical philosophy were changed from semantic analysis to its analytic method applied to society, history, morality and politics etc., and thus some analytical Marxists started to do research on analysis and clarification of Marx concerning practical problems such as theories of institutions, class relationship, exploitation and economic crisis. Correspondingly, some topics were raised and discussed with regard to Marxian ethics and its foundation, especially to the relation of Marxian historical materialism and moral philosophy.

The analytical Marxists share different ideas on Marx's attitude to morality. Lukes finds that there is a paradox in Marx's attitude to morality: On the one hand, Marx claims that morality as a form of ideology serves class interests with an illusory content; on the other hand, Marx's writings are full of moral judgments. For Lukes, the key to solving the paradox lies in drawing a distinction between "the morality of *Recht*," which is condemned by Marx as ideological and anachronistic, and "the morality of emancipation," which is adopted by Marx as his own view on morality (Lukes 1985, p. 29). In Lukes' idea, *Recht* as a concept—which is occupied by the concepts of justice, rights, fairness and obligation in an area of morality—is inherently ideological, because the principles of *Recht* arise from the material relations of people. The resulting

antagonism of people against one another, and its conditions are “historically determined, specific to class-societies, and imminently removable” (Ibid., p. 34). But for Marx, human emancipation devotes to a setting free from the pre-history of human bondage, culminating in wage-slavery and exploitation, and thus it refers to an ideal of transparent social unity and individual self-realization. That is the communist society, in which “the very distinctions between egoism and altruism, and between the public sphere of politics and private sphere of civil society, and the division of the human being into a public man and a private man have been overcome” (Ibid.).

Miller describes the paradox in another form: In a very broad sense, Marx is a moralist and sometimes a stern one; at the same time, Marx often explicitly attacks morality and fundamental moral notions. In order to solve the paradox, Miller maintains that Marx’s philosophy is non-moral in the standard philosophical sense of the term of morality which involves equality, general norms and universality. Rather, it is “decent” because Marx successfully occupies the vast and mainly neglected terrain existing between “narrow self-interest and what would naturally be called morality” (Miller 1983, pp. 3–4).

Most important of all, some scholars realize that it is vital to look for the ethical foundation of Marx’s thought from the theory of historical materialism. Cohen, who is famous for his defense of historical materialism using a functional explanation, mentions that there are two theses in Marx’s theory: (1) the productive forces select production relations according to their capacity to promote the development of productive capacity (Cohen 1978, p. 162); (2) there is a tendency for the productive forces to develop. Cohen argues that the development of the productive forces is always in conformity with the development of human capacity both in practice and in Marx’s theory: The improvement of the productive forces is just the rise of man’s working capacity. With this recognition, people would accept that Marx’s emphasis on technological development (viz., the “productive forces” of society) is not to disparage humanity but to highlight Man’s own development. Particularly, Cohen appreciates the idea that with the full development of the productive forces in the communist society, the free activity of an individual would reach an unheard-of level. Cohen’s functional interpretation creates a new path in understanding the content of historical materialism from which we see that the productive forces are no longer an independent power outmatching human beings, but their development involves the activity of men as rational beings to improve their situation and satisfy their wants. That is an important trend which concerns the relevance of human nature to the explanation of historical materialism.

George Brenkert proclaims directly that Marx’s moral theory is part of his scientific views, that is, historical materialism is Marx’s meta-ethics. In the second and third chapter of *Marx’s Ethics of Freedom*, Brenkert gives us a

reinterpretation on historical materialism. Firstly, Brenkert reinstates the foundation of historical materialism. He argues that in Marx's theory, it is not the productive forces, but the modes of production which are the foundation of interpreting historical materialism. Secondly, Brenkert recomposes the content of the modes of production. Labor capacity is one of the most important elements in the productive power and includes skill, training, expertise and experience, scientific and technical knowledge. Besides these, Brenkert adds morality and values to the list, because he insists that one's moral structure and value judgments function in his work as well as the scientific knowledge and training that he prepares for the work (Brenkert 1983, p. 36). Thus, the moral element, as one of the components in the modes of production, is changed from social consciousness into social being.

Obviously, the relationship of historical materialism and morality is not Cohen's research motif, and Brenkert's reinterpretation on historical materialism somewhat departs from Marx's original aim. However, there is a valuable turning point in this period, that is, some scholars realize that it is important to get the ethical foundation of Marxian philosophy from historical materialism. With such a point in mind, I interpret historical materialism in another manner on the basis of Chinese scholars' research on Marxism and argue that there is a possible way to unite the antinomy of materialism and humanism.

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## 5 A Possible Solution to Marx's Moral Paradox

Chinese scholars have made great achievement in Marxist philosophy since 1978. After a serious reconsideration on the Marxist textbook, which originated in the former Soviet Union, Chinese philosophers began to research Marxism with a Sinicized predisposition in the 1990s. Historical materialism became the key point to understanding Marxist philosophy. Quite a few Marxists reached the consensus that the neo-materialism that Marx set up was just historical materialism.

With such an intellectual background, what I need to do first is to check the break in Marx's thought and next to find a possible solution to Marx's moral paradox. Before that, I need to make a summarization on the intellectual history of exploring Marx's moral paradox, which is a dominant character in the research of Marx's moral philosophy. In the first phase, the paradox was neglected because it played a trivial role in Marxism. In the second phase, the basic mode of Marx's moral paradox was disclosed, which was about the contradictory standpoints between humanism in the *EPM* and materialism in the *GI*. In the third phase, the content of Marx's moral paradox was enriched, which entailed the antinomy between the theory of human essence and historical materialism,

the conflict between moral condemnation of class exploitation and morality being abjured as an ideology, and the collision between morality in class society and the so-called Communist morality. Anyone who is about to solve Marx's moral paradox has to obtain a medium through which to reconcile the aforementioned contradiction.

As to the break in Marx's thought, I believe that the *EPM* and *GI* are the most important works in solving the puzzle of the two Marxes. My idea is that there is a shift between the *EPM* and *GI*, but neither in the sense of methodological break as Della Volpe pointed out, nor in the sense of epistemological break as Althusser argued. It is an extraordinary revolution in Marxian understanding on relationship of humanism and materialism. Let us now take a look at it with a comparative research on the *EPM* and *GI*.

Firstly, we can find that Marx made different judgments on Feuerbach in the *EPM* and the *GI*. In the *EPM*, his comment on Feuerbach was that "[He] is the only person who has a *serious* and *critical* relation to Hegel's dialectic, who has made real discoveries in this field, and above all, who has vanquished the old philosophy," and that one of Feuerbach's great achievements is "to have founded *genuine materialism* and *positive science* by making the social relationship of 'man to man' the basic principle of his theory" (Marx 1844, p. 133). It can be seen that at that time, (1) Marx regards Feuerbach's philosophy as the new philosophy which can be used to oppose to the *old philosophy* (viz., the German idealism); (2) he also sees Feuerbach's materialism as the genuine materialism.

In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, an omen of shift occurred. Marx points out that "the chief defect of all previous materialism (including Feuerbach's)" is ignorance of the concrete and real human activity, or *praxis*, and that "Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of man," and he is "obliged to conceive of the human essence merely as 'species'" (Marx 1845, pp. 116–118). Here, Marx began to doubt the main idea of Feuerbach's philosophy, in which the human essence is abstracted from the commonness of man as a species.

By the time of the *GI*, Feuerbach was one of the major German philosophers who were criticized by Marx and Engels. Their judgment on Feuerbach is as follows: (1) Marx claims that Engels and his remarks on the Young-Hegelian movement will suffice to indicate the standpoint of their criticism and they oppose these remarks to Feuerbach in particular; (2) furthermore, Marx criticizes that Feuerbach "never arrives at the really existing active men, but stops at the abstract 'man,'" therefore, as far as "Feuerbach is a materialist he does not deal with history, and as far as he considers history he is not a materialist. With him materialism and history diverge completely" (Marx 1845–1846). Thus, we can find that Marx tried to set up a neo-materialistic theory in the *GI*.

Secondly, we can find that Marx's views on human nature changed from the *EPM* to the *GI*. In the *EPM*, Marx, following Feuerbach, explains social history

from the theory of human essence. Marx argues that “man is a *species being*” and “free, conscious activity is the *species-character* of human beings” (Marx 1844, p. 84). According to such a concept of human essence, Man as a species-being shall regard his life as the object of his conscious activity, but alienated labor changes the logic as follows: man, because he is a self-conscious being, makes his life activity, his being, only a means for his existence, which is inhuman and estranges man from his nature. In this sense, Communism is “the *positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man*” (Ibid., p. 104).

In the *GI*, Marx starts from the real life of man to explain the appearance of alienation, and the theory of Communism. Here, labor alienation is no longer a theoretic starting point which can be used to interpret other concepts, but a common phenomenon in capitalist society, requiring to be explained. Marx reconsiders his early idea on human essence and admits that it is improper to conceive the individuals “as an ideal, under the name Man,” because in this idea, the whole process of actual life is conceived as the process of the self-estrangement of Man, the evolutionary process of Man. Thus, Marx achieves a mature idea, as he points out, “the average individual of the later stage was always foisted on to the earlier stage, and the consciousness of a later age on to the individuals of an earlier age” (Marx 1845–1846).

With this shift, the idea of *alienation and rehabilitation of man* is abandoned. Marx proposes that there are two practical premises for the abolition of alienation: “emergence of the great propertyless mass of humanity” and their contradiction with an existing world of wealth and culture (Ibid.). Both of the conditions presuppose a “great development of productive forces, which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their world-historical, instead of local, being” (Ibid.). Therefore, Communism in the *GI*, is “not a state of affairs which needs to be established, rather an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things” (Ibid.). From the new starting point, namely, man under social and historical conditions, Marx built up a set of new philosophical principles.

By the comparative study of the two works, I make a prognosis that the theory of historical materialism founded in the *GI* is both a science on social history and a philosophical viewpoint that helps us to survey the world and to think about ourselves from a different angle. In the *EPM*, Marx is still working on the level of “the old philosophy,” explaining the history of society from the theory of human essence. While in the *GI*, Marx has a mature viewpoint, which indicates that he reached a new step in the humanist aspect, explaining the human essence and the phenomena of alienation from the basis of social history. It is the theory of historical materialism that such a shift was achieved. Since the Marxist humanists and the scientific Marxists do not realize that historical materialism is

the theoretical foundation of Marx's thought, they can not endow Marx with a correct position in the history of moral philosophy. With the help of historical materialism, I found the key to solving the problems that the humanist and scientific schools could not solve reasonably. To the former, I say that Marx does express moral concern about the inhuman conditions that men suffered in their lives, but he achieved a mature viewpoint in the *GI*, which makes him reach a new step in the aspect of humanism. And to the latter, I say that the philosophy of the old Marx is definitely not in the sense of Hegel, it is not in the sense of modern philosophy of science either, because the latter is, if not affected by, at least uninterested in the relation of history and man and the function of values which is Marx's lifelong pursuit.

At the same time, I believe that a solution to Marx's moral paradox is possible within the theory of historical materialism. From such a viewpoint, Marxian humanism is a neo-humanism in understanding man, which helps to solve the paradox of two Marxes and to infer that what Marx sets up is not a succession of traditional ethics, but a neo-humanistic theory which is deeply concerned about the immoral conditions men suffered and the developments by which a better status of subsistence for men could come about.

In order to insure that the scientific law of social history is tenable, Marx has to answer the questions from two related areas:

(1) Why did development of history function in such a way (in other words, why are productive forces the basis of the whole history and why the social relations are subordinate to the productive forces)?; and

(2) Why is the law of social development, which involves the activity of human beings with their intentions, objective? These questions are related to Marx's conception of history—the philosophical basis for the law. Marx himself also realizes that he needs to reflect on the significance of the law. Hence, it is important for me to realize that actually there is an implicitly philosophical content behind Marx's dominant theory of science.

Marx sees the production of material life as the basis of social history in his scientific interpretation. In order to explain why the production of material life is necessary to men, Marx has to find something prior to it. What Marx found was "the existence of living human individuals" (Ibid., p. 7). In Marx's eye, it is the first premise of all human existence and all history. As he puts it,

The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life (Ibid., p.16).

On this premise, Marx develops a new conception of history, which is a philosophical foundation for his materialistic interpretation of social history. I shall explicate the premise of historical materialism under the following two main areas.

First, the premise that “Men must be in a position to live” is the final cause of social history from a philosophical aspect. It is necessary to elaborate on men’s “physical organization and their consequent relation to the rest of nature” first (Ibid., p. 7). Different from animals, men have poor native ability to adapt themselves very well to the natural conditions in such a way that they can get enough energy for their existence from the external world with their inborn skills. Some animals can get what they need easily, while for men, life is an endless struggle for subsistence. Fortunately, men possess intelligence to make tools to do the work necessary to satisfy their wants. Because men have no specified biological function, they get the chance to transform in different environments, while animals have to stay in a relatively fixed environment, such as a fish, which has to be in water all the time. Noticing this, Marx changes his idea on the real distinction between men and animal: It is not “consciousness, religion or anything else you like,” but the production for men’s means of subsistence (Ibid.). Marx believes that men are conditioned by their physical organization, and thus have to work with tools in order to live. The necessity of human labor is, therefore, deduced from a prerequisite both in theory and in practice, viz. men’s subsistence. From this premise, Marx establishes a material basis for human history, because “by producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life” (Ibid.). In detail, Marx explains,

[The mode of production] is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite *mode of life* on their part. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce. The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production (Ibid.).

Based on the development of the material production, Marx further argues that “definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations” (Ibid., p. 13). The forms of social relations are therefore determined by the production. Hence, Marx makes a materialistic interpretation on social history from the premise.

Then, why is the development of human society objective? When opposing Max Stirner, Marx says that, “the development of an individual is determined by the development of all the others with whom he is directly or indirectly associated,” and that “the history of a single individual cannot possibly be

separated from the history of preceding or contemporary individuals, but is determined by this history” (Marx 1845–1846). So I say that Marx explains the objectivity of social development from two aspects:

(1) Objectivity comes from the direct interaction of different individuals living in the same society. Each individual has his own will, which is different or even conflictive with the others’. The final result of the intercourse of different individuals does not follow any individual wills, but satisfies their common interests, viz. their interests of subsistence. The result is objective to an individual because it is an external power that he is not able to change, but rather has to come to terms with. Engels explains this clearly:

History is made in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between individual wills, of which each in turn has been made what it is by a variety of particular conditions of life. ... [The result of history] may again in turn be regarded as the product of a power which works as a whole *unconsciously* and without volition. For that to happen, each individual will is obstructed by everyone else’s, and what emerges is something that no one wanted. ... But from the fact that the wills of individuals do not achieve what they want, but are merged into an aggregate mean, a common resultant, it must not be concluded that their value is equal to zero. On the contrary, each contributes to the resultant and is to this extent included in it (Engels 1890, p. 77).

(2) Objectivity comes from the indirect association of the later generations with their predecessors. In Marx’s eye, the later generations get life from their predecessors on the one hand; on the other, they inherit the raw material of their further production from their predecessors. As Marx points out, the development of an individual determined

that the different generations of individuals entering into relations with one another are connected with one another, that the physical existence of the later generations is determined by that of their predecessors, and that these later generations inherit the productive forces and forms of intercourse accumulated by their predecessors, their own mutual relations being determined thereby (Marx 1845–1846).

It is easy to understand that the later generations are determined in “the physical existence,” because they are propagated by the former generations as the same kind. As to the other aspect, I shall argue my point by analyzing Marx’s famous proposition: *the productive forces determine the productive relations*. This originally meant that when people begin to create their own history, they are not

free to choose their productive force, because the productive force as the product of valuable activity is an existed force that they have to accept, and yet, their productive relation as the interrelation of one-to-one happens in the process of production is assuredly determined by the acquired productive force from the beginning, even though with the development of their productive force, there may be new kind of the productive relation engendered. Hence, every later generation has no choice but to exploit under the circumstance handed by the preceding generation. Within this, the actual performance of the former supplies the latter with the starting point of social activity, but it also conditioned the activity of the latter as an objective status. Thus, based on the premise of men's subsistence, Marx obtains a method to interpret the fundamental cause of the law of social development, that is, the relationship of social being and social consciousness is actually the relationship of man to man, both among his contemporaries, and between the successive generations. With such a method, Marx overcomes the obstacles of the old materialism, including Feuerbach's.

Secondly, Marx's premise is also an axiological and humanistic principle in understanding men themselves, which is in opposition to the abstract conception of human nature. In this aspect, Marx achieves a revolutionary change from German philosophy. He starts to explain human nature and its historicity from the basis of social history, in other words, from the subsistence of human beings, not vice versa.

The subtitle of the *GI* is *Critique of Modern German Philosophy According to Its Representatives Feuerbach, B. Bauer and Stirner, and of German Socialism According to its Various Prophets*. The reason for Marx's choosing German philosophy as his opposing target is that, "the Germans judge everything *sub specie aeterni* [from the standpoint of eternity] (in terms of the essence of Man)" (Ibid.). In German philosophy, (1) *the essence of man* is presupposed as an existing thing, a supreme thing; (2) human activity and enjoyment are determined by human essence. Marx criticizes that what the German Philosophers do is "create an ideal of man and put it into the heads of other people" (Ibid.).

Unlike the German philosophers, Marx proposes a reversed relation: It is the activity of men which conditions their nature. Marx's logic is as follows: (1) given the fact that "life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things" (Ibid., p. 16), men in nature are to satisfy their subsistent needs: It is the first and most important value for men because it is the cause of material production as aforementioned; and it is men's ultimate and eternal value, because the existence of men is the biological premise for men as subjects who make valuable judgments. (2) Setting out from the same premise, Marx insists that the development of consciousness should be merely reflections and echoes of men's real life-process, and that it is the

material life which determines consciousness, not vice versa. Marx explains that his conception of history,

depends on our ability to expound the real process of production, starting out from the simple material production of life, and to comprehend the form of intercourse connected with this and created by this (i.e., civil society in its various stages), as the basis of all history; further, to show it in its action as State, to explain the whole mass of different theoretical products and forms of consciousness, religion, philosophy, ethics, etc., and trace their origins and growth, by which means, of course, the whole thing can be shown in its totality (and therefore, also the reciprocal action of these various sides from one another). It does not need to, like the idealistic view of history, look for a category in every period, but remains constantly on the real ground of history; it does not explain practice from the idea but explains the formation of ideas from material practice (Ibid., p. 28).

(3) Since different generations are left under different circumstances by their predecessors, and yet men have different needs to meet their existence in different times, the character of human nature is not abstract and fixed but determined by the actual life of men. As Marx points out,

[The] sum of productive forces, forms of capital funds and social forms of intercourse, which every individual and generation finds in existence as something given, is the real basis of what the philosophers have conceived as “substance” and “essence of man” (Ibid., p. 29).

The content of human nature changes along with changes in its foundation. Meanwhile, justice, equality and other concepts concerned with humanistic content as the products of human activity are not permanent either, but rather change with the development of men’s modes of production.

By means of interpreting men, nature and the relation of men and nature in terms of the basis of all the human history, Marx solves the contradiction between materialism and humanism, and presents us with a humanistic foundation in the heart of his philosophy. I need to specify that humanism in Marx’s idea is no longer in line with the idea of classical German philosophy. Actually it is a neo-humanistic idea. Marx does not focus on the eternal and universal character of human nature anymore. Accordingly, the concepts of justice, equality and liberty etc., which derive from the classic theory of human nature, lose their sense as long-standing principles. What Marx cares about is a humanistic outlook concerning more about man and his subsistent condition in social life. Every form of society has its own criterion on humanism. What is

unchanged is that any humanistic criterion should not violate men's interests of existence. Therefore, Marx's humanistic idea is new because it is combined with his materialistic conception of history. The contribution that Marx makes to moral philosophy is that he opens the way of understanding the essential nature of man from the basis of human history, instead of interpreting the social history from abstract human nature.

By reflecting on the history of research on Marx's moral philosophy, we find two roads: One is that Marx's moral philosophy is becoming recognized more and more; the other is that the function of historical materialism in Marx's thought is being highlighted more and more. When the two roads meet, we can obtain the way to solve the puzzle between Marxism and morality.

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