



## Synopsis

Nearly two years before his powerful Communist Manifesto, Marx (1818-1883) co-wrote The German Ideology in 1845 with friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels expounding a new political worldview, including positions on materialism, labor, production, alienation, the expansion of capitalism, class conflict, revolution, and eventually communism. They chart the course of "true" socialism based on Hegel's dialectic, while criticizing the ideas of Bruno Bauer, Max Stirner and Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx expanded his criticism of the latter in his now famous Theses on Feuerbach, found after Marx's death and published by Engels in 1888. Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy, also found among the posthumous papers of Marx, is a fragment of an introduction to his main works. Combining these three works, this volume is essential for an understanding of Marxism.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

KARL MARX was born in Trier, Prussia, on May 5, 1818, to an intellectual Jewish family. At seventeen he enrolled at the University of Bonn and a year later transferred to the University of Berlin where he became interested in the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel. In 1841, Marx obtained his doctorate in philosophy, having presented a thesis on post-Aristotelian Greek philosophy. As a young graduate deeply involved in the radical Hegelian movement, Marx found it difficult to secure a teaching post in the autocratic environment of Prussian society. In 1842 he became editor of the Cologne newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*, but his probing economic critiques prompted

the government to close the publication, whereupon Marx left for France. While in Paris, Marx quickly became involved with emigre German workers and French socialists, and soon he was persuaded to the communist point of view. His first expression of these views occurred in the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, which remained unpublished until 1930. It was during this brief initial stay in France that Marx became associated with Friedrich Engels. For his radical political activities, Marx was expelled from Paris toward the end of 1844. He moved, with Engels, to Brussels, where he was to remain for the next three years, except for occasional short trips to England. Here Marx wrote the manuscript for The German Ideology and the polemic The Poverty of Philosophy against idealistic socialism. Marx later joined the Communist League, a German workers group, for which he and Engels were to become the primary spokespersons. In 1847 Marx and Engels were asked to write a manifesto for the league conference in London. This resulted in the creation of the Communist Manifesto, one of the most influential popular political documents ever written. Its publication coincided with a wave of revolutions in Europe in 1848. Marx returned to Paris in 1848 but soon after left for Germany, where in Cologne he founded the Neue Rheinische Zeitung, a radical newspaper that attacked Prussian rule. As revolutionary fervor waned, the government suppressed his paper and Marx fled to England in 1849. For the next thirty-four years Marx remained in England absorbed in his work. During this period he composed The Class Struggles in France (1848), The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (1848), Grundrisse (1858), Theories of Surplus Value (1860), Das Kapital (Vol. 1, 1867), and The Civil War in France (1871). Karl Marx died in London on March 13, 1883. FRIEDRICH ENGELS was born in Barmen, Prussia, on November 28, 1820. His father was a very wealthy textile manufacturer who owned cotton mills in both Germany and England. Engels met Karl Marx in Paris in 1844 and soon discovered that they shared similar socialist views. During Marx's lifetime, the two collaborated on a great many projects. After Marx's death, Engels completed the last two volumes of Das Kapital and continued to defend Marxist views. In addition to Engels's coauthorship of the Communist Manifesto, he produced a substantial amount of independent work: Conditions of the Working Class in England (1845), Anti-Dühring (1878), and The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884). Friedrich Engels died in London on August 5, 1895.

Solid print with lots of removed content. Non-standard headings though, which made the reading

group a pain.

## The start of historical materialism

Quite good, except little scrach and fold

The book arrived a day early, which was great. However, 29 pages of the first chapter were ripped out by a previous owner. These 29 pages are integral to the book and I feel somewhat cheated.

The German Ideology indexes Marx's 'break' from a philosophical humanism to a period of revolutionary materialism. This extraordinary book attacks the 'materialisms' of Feuerbach, Stirner, and Bauer in turn, and attempts to formulate a new conception of man as framed in terms of his alienation from the sum of productive forces. Marx's theses on Feuerbach are obviously the most read and oft quoted, and they are true landmarks in the history of political consciousness. Marx is clearly carving out a new space of empirical inquiry, a space which would give rise to a scientific analysis of the material conditions of reality-and to propose a radical political program of revolutionary change. His discussion of Stirner is laborious and painstaking; it is clearly less read and considered than it should be. It's too bad that this text is in such a poor edition-the footnotes do not lead anywhere and no one will take responsibility for the bad translation. Hopefully someone will put together a better edition in the future.

Structural Marxists and others inclined to see a sharp epistemological break between the young Marx, still a social philosopher, and the mature Marx, a scientist with a genuinely new method, historical materialism, often point to The German Ideology (1847) as marking the rupture between the two views. Specific individuals are of little or no interest. The emphasis is on entire social systems and the ways that individuals fit into them. As one reads The German Ideology it is clear that class is a characteristic of an entire society, rather than a characteristic of individuals. A society may be organized into classes, but these are structured arrangements of positions to be filled by people. The positions, organized into objectively conflicting sets, are the classes. It makes little difference who occupies the positions, because human beings' historically specific nature and their life course and prospects will be determined by their class location, the role they are assigned in the process of material production. From this vantage point, it is also useful to think of class as a societal-level relational phenomenon: capital and labor are engaged in a struggle across a broad

range of fronts. Capital dominates and exploits because capital owns and controls the means of material production. Labor has nothing to offer but labor, or as Marx referred to it from *The German Ideology* on, labor power. The latter usage emphasizes the one-dimensional character of interchangeable laboring people in a capitalist society: they are the work they can do; that work can be assigned a dollar value; and that is their only valuable characteristic. In this way, labor power is clearly transformed into a commodity, exchangeable for other commodities, whatever they may be. In effect, labor power is reduced to the status of a thing to be bought, sold, and used in ways that maximize productivity, minimize costs, and further exaggerate the difference between the value produced by labor power and the compensation labor receives. In this context, laboring people survive economically only at the sufferance of capital. Again, this is all very impersonal. In the preface to the first edition of the first volume of *Capital* Marx notes that, as a social theorist, he dealt with individual human beings only insofar as they were "personifications of economic categories, embodiments of class relations and class interests." From *The German Ideology* on a heavy emphasis on determinism is quite consistent with Marx's view. Abstract dehumanization, moreover, applies to capitalists as well as to laborers. In *The German Ideology* Marx characterizes the 16th century forerunners of contemporary capitalists as functioning in precarious circumstances fraught with uncertainty as to the nature and stability of the emergent markets in which they participated. The high level of risk that pervaded their social and economic environment imbued them with a "haggardly, mean, and niggardly spirit." They were not born haggardly, mean, and niggardly, nor did they choose to develop these characteristics. Instead the contextually determined nature of their lives determined that they would acquire these unappealing traits. As with the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *The German Ideology* remained unpublished during Marx's lifetime. Now that both are available, evidence of Marx's theoretical development is evident as we move from one to the other. However, reading one after the other reveals nothing contradictory in Marx's developing thought about capitalism and the historically specific nature of human beings. Instead, the two documents seem complementary rather than inconsistent. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx devoted a good deal of attention to discrediting the academic economics of his day. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels did much the same thing for academic philosophy and history. I see ongoing theoretical development, but no epistemological break. Read the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*. There is a good deal of overlap, but I benefited from both.

I've been told this is considered Marx's first fully matured statement about his thinking. It's an

impressive piece on many levels. Not only does he effectively topple the BS uber-abstract tendencies that German philosophy had devolved into at that point (Herder, Hegel, etc.) by positing a system of thinking that was concerned with the actual material conditions of life. He also provides a devastatingly accurate description of the sense of alienation and futility which rampant, industrial-era capitalism helped bring into being. I remember walking through an abandoned shopping mall in suburban Kansas City once, feeling creeped out by all of the closed stores, the empty walkways, the haunting way the muzak still played over the speakers, and just thinking how empty and cold a space could be. Reading this took me right back there.

If you are thinking about buying your own copy of The German Ideology I probably don't need to convince you of the value of this work. Like most things Marx wrote, it is demanding and rewarding--probably more difficult than the Communist Manifesto, less so than Capital or the Grundrisse. If you're not sure where you stand on Marx's style and difficulty preview any of his works free at marxists.orgThat said, if you are looking for a copy of The German Ideology I highly recommend this one. Instead of messing around with lots of distorting introductions it just has a really nice text with footnotes to chart Marx's deletions and rearrangements. So not only does this edition give historical context for the later works like Capital, it also gives a sense of how Marx's thinking and style were changing as he wrote this book. The inclusion of deletions is particularly interesting to see what Marx didn't want to say but almost did anyway.

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