A paradox in Marx's thought (and for Marxism in general) is that while his writings abound in moral judgments (i.e., in commendations, condemnations, prescriptions, etc., made on the basis of a concern for human ill and well-being), they contain, at the same time, the claim that morality is ideology or, to say the same thing slightly differently, that morality is ideological. In the present chapter I shall first distinguish between a global and nonglobal concept of ideology and then give a detailed analysis of Marx's nonglobal (critical) conception of ideology. I will make these distinctions in order to ascertain whether or not morality (i.e., all moral judgments, principles, theories, etc.) turns out to be ideological, according to his criteria. Finally, I shall explore Marx's objections to morality, which seem to have led him to view all morality as ideological (in the nonglobal, critical, negative sense of the term) and argue that regardless of his position on this issue, it is simply false that all morality is ideological in this sense.

To claim that morality is ideology is one thing; to say exactly what this means is altogether something else. On most interpretations of the Marxist concept of ideology, to say of some X that it is ideological is to impute to it the characteristic of being somehow illegitimate and constitutes at least a prima facie case for the conclusion that it cannot be part of a true theory or of a correct worldview. Beyond this point, however, things are less clear. A bewildering number of different characteristics are attributed to ideology, all of which supposedly account for the fact that every X that is ideological is, ipso facto, somehow illegitimate and ought to be eliminated from or not admitted to one's theory or worldview.

In the writings of Marx and Engels, as well as of later Marxists, one finds the following features of theories or sets of ideas spoken of as defining characteristics of ideology, i.e., as the necessary and sufficient conditions a theory or set of ideas must fulfill in order to be properly labeled "ideology" or "ideological": (1) that it is generated within a class society or by a member of a class or social group that is generally sympathetic to the ruling class and/or the social status quo; that it is (2) unscientific, (3) illusory, (4) an inverted ("upside-down" or "topsy-turvy") representation of reality, (5) a result or component of "false consciousness," (6) systematically misleading, or (7) socially mystifying. Other suggested characteristics are that a theory or set of ideas (8) represents the interests of a ruling class as the common interest of society, (9) serves to justify the social status quo and/or the interests of a ruling class, and (10) functions to maintain the social status quo and/or defends the interests of a ruling class. (Notice that characteristic 10 is broader than 9 because not all ways of maintaining the social status quo or defending the interests of the ruling class are ways that justify the social status quo or interests of the ruling class. More on this presently.)

The fact that Marxists and other writers are divided on the question of which of these features are defining (or "essential") characteristics of ideology, together with the fact that a similar ambiguity plagues the term "morality" in the literature, makes the claim that morality is ideology troublesome. The object of this chapter is to determine, on the supposition that Marxist empirical theory is basically correct, whether or not this claim is true. Obviously, such a determination will involve an examination and, possibly, a rational reconstruction of the Marxist concept of ideology. I will, in fact, be proposing another—altogether different—characteristic as being definitive of ideology in the negative, critical sense and will be arguing that certain of the ten characteristics listed above are to be subsumed under it.

Notice that, on the assumption that "X is ideological" entails "X is somehow illegitimate and ought to be eliminated from or not admitted to one's theory or worldview," the claim that morality is ideology (or ideological) has quite significant consequences for Marxism. If it is true, it necessitates that morality as a whole, i.e., all moral judgments, principles, theories, and codes—even moral discourse itself—be given up, repudiated, eliminated from the Marxist (or any adequate) worldview. If this is the case, and if we accept the standard conception of morality on which moral judgments and principles have the characteristics of (1) prescriptivity, (2) universalizability, and (3) being based on considerations of human ill and well-being, then it becomes impossible for the Marxist to condemn capitalism on grounds, say, that it perpetuates pov-
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Property, war, and other major social problems and thus perpetuates human misery or that it restricts human freedom, curtails human self-actualization, and makes the attainment of genuine human community and solidarity impossible. Similarly, it becomes impossible for the Marxist to commend or prescribe socialism and/or communism on grounds that these forms of society will eliminate poverty, war, and other major social problems, expand the boundaries of human freedom, be conducive to human self-actualization and the development of human culture, and make the attainment of real human community and solidarity a genuine possibility. It would become impossible for the Marxist consistently to make these claims for the simple reason that they are moral claims, i.e., claims that primarily function to evaluate and prescribe rather than describe or explain, that are universalizable in the sense that they must be taken to apply to all persons and situations that are relevantly similar, and that are based on considerations of human ill and well-being (in the broadest sense of these terms).

Some Marxists have just bitten the bullet at this point and accepted these consequences. But, as seen in previous chapters, this extreme position is neither in accord with the ethic of human freedom, community, and self-realization implicit in Marx’s writings nor with Marxist practice. Marxist political practice does not rely simply on predicting the abolition of capitalism and the advent of socialism and/or communism nor in explaining how and why this is bound (or at least extremely likely) to occur. Nor does it rely solely on the above propositions plus appeals to the self-interest of workers and other oppressed segments of the population. Marxists, in addition to all of the above, also appeal to workers (and to people in general) on the basis that socialism is better (i.e., morally better) than capitalism: on the basis, for example, that in general it promotes freedom, community, self-actualization, and human well-being better than any form of capitalism or, for that matter, any form of state-socialism; or that it is more just or more likely to respect human rights.

The correct way out of this paradox of Marxist ethics, I shall argue, is to reject the claim that morality (as a whole) is ideology in the negative, critical sense of this term. It is my contention that a correct understanding (or interpretation) of the concepts of ideology and morality will make it clear that such is not the case. The claim that morality (as a whole) is ideology (or ideological) gains credence, I shall attempt to show, only when one is operating with muddled or bogus concepts or morality and/or ideology.

GLOBAL CONCEPTIONS OF IDEOLOGY

Global and Nonglobal Conceptions of ideology

Before taking up the matter of deciding which of our several candidate characteristics (if any) are defining characteristics of ideology, it is important to distinguish between what I shall call the global conception of ideology and the nonglobal conception, both of which are to be found in the writings of Marx and other Marxists though they, unfortunately, do not generally distinguish between them. Briefly stated, the difference between these two conceptions is twofold: (1) the global conception is wider in its application than the nonglobal, and (2) the global conception is used as a purely descriptive expression, while the nonglobal conception is used as a (negatively) evaluative expression.

To make matters even worse, a third conception of ideology can be found in the literature, in which ideology is defined as normative discourse, claims, or theories. According to this concept of ideology, ideological claims and theories cannot be part of a causal theory but can be and, indeed, of necessity are part of an adequate overall worldview. This concept is the basis for Louis Althusser’s claim in “Marxism and Humanism” that humanism (as a system of values) is ideology and thus must be expunged from historical materialism though it can be accepted as the “ideology” of the workers’ movement. But since this is not a normal use of the term, and since we can use other terms to discuss the (normative) claims and theories Althusser has in mind, we can safely ignore this concept of ideology. (Recall my critique of Althusser in chapter 4.)

Flamenatz is describing the global conception of ideology as found in the writings of Marx and Engels when he states: “Sometimes, when they speak of ideology, they seem to have in mind the entire system of ideas which men use to describe the world and to express their standards, feelings, and purposes. This is so when Marx and Engels are most self-consciously materialistic, when they are concerned to show how men come to have ideas at all.”1 This conception of ideology is so general as to label all the contents of human belief and value systems “ideology.” Unlike the more narrow, nonglobal conception of ideology, it denotes both ideas and theories concerning nonhuman events and affairs as well as those concerning specifically human (or “social”) affairs; it denotes true theories and perspectival views as well as theories

that are false and views that are misleading or inperspicuous; it
denotes views and theories that promote social progress or human
well-being as well as those that militate against social progress or
human well-being.

This distinction between the global and nonglobal conceptions
of ideology is most clearly brought to the fore by the term’s adjecti-
tival form. The nominal form—“ideology”—serves indiscrimi-
nately to denote either (1) any general set of ideas and/or values
(the global conception), or (2) some set of ideas and/or values that
we wish to indict on one ground or another (the nonglobal con-
ception). But the adjectival form—“ideological”—automatically
communicates the fact that a negative assessment is being made.

The fact that the terms “ideology” and “ideological” differ in
this respect has often puzzled people. Once one distinguishes
between the global and nonglobal senses of the term “ideology,” the
puzzle disappears. The term “ideological” is the adjectival form of
“ideology” in the nonglobal, critical sense and thus conveys that a
negative assessment of some sort is being made. The global sense
of “ideology” has no such adjectival form. Thus, though Classical
Liberalism and Marxism are both ideologies on the global concep-
tion of ideology, Classical Liberalism is an ideology on the non-
global, critical conception, while Marxism is not—at least, that is,
if we assume Marxist empirical theory to be basically correct. On
this assumption, although Classical Liberalism can properly be
described as ideological, Marxism cannot be so characterized.

The point is simply that we cannot properly call a system of ideas
and/or values of which we intend no criticism “ideological,” even
though this system of ideas and/or values can be properly referred
to as “ideology” in the global sense.

In deciding the issue of whether or not morality is a form of
ideology, I shall be concerned only with ideology in the narrow,
nonglobal sense for the simple reason that the claim that morality
is ideology is significant only if the term “ideology” is being used
in this sense. For if it is being used in the noncritical, global
sense—in which any set of ideas and/or values can be properly
described as an ideology—the claim that morality is ideology is
trivially true and thoroughly uninteresting. The philosophically
interesting claim is that morality is ideology in the critical, nonglobal
sense of the term. This is the claim being made by Marxists and
others when they attack morality as a form of ideology. Conflating
these two senses of the term has, of course, engendered confu-
sion, not least in the works of Marx and Engels.

2 According to Elster, An Introduction to Karl Marx, p. 199: “The theory of ideology
is not particularly well and alive, but I believe it can and should be resurrected. Of
all Marxist doctrines, this more than any other has been brought into disrepute by
the stubborn unproductiveness adopted. Sometimes functional explanations accused
of being ‘ideological’—the culprit, sometimes the even less interjectively valid method of looking for ‘sim-
ilarities’ between economic and mental activities. The first step to remedy the sit-
uation must be to draw upon the rich insights of cognitive psychology and its ac-
cumulated evidence about the motivational and cognitive processes that distort
belief formation and preference formation. In fact, there could potentially be a two-
way influence. The Marxist tradition in the sociology of knowledge might be able
to suggest some specific hypotheses that could be tested by rigorous experimental
procedures. One might, for instance, try to specify in a testable way the idea that
the economic agents perception of economic causality depends on their location in
the economic system. Similarly, some forms of ideology have, i.e., the formation of attitudes as opposed to nonanalytical beliefs, such as the motivated
preference for some economic theories rather than others, would not seem to be
outside the reach of experimental research. These are proposals for the future.
The immediate task is to achieve recognition for the fact that the theory of ideology
must have microfoundations if it is to go beyond its present stage, which is partly
anecdotal, partly functionalist, partly conspiratorial, and partly magical.”

For further discussions of Marx’s concept (and theory) of ideology, see Elster,
Identity,” and “A Marxist Concept of Ideology;” H. M. Drucker, “Marx’s Concept
of Ideology,” Philosophy, vol. 47 (Apr. 1972); Lichthein, The Concept of Ideology and
Other Essays; Richard Lichtman, “Marx’s Theory of Ideology,” Social Revolu-
tion, no. 23 (Apr. 1962); J. L. Larrin, The Concept of Ideology, University of Georgia Press,
Athens, Ga., 1979; Martin Seligier, The Marxist Conception of Ideology: A Critical Essay,
156; Miller, Analyzing Marx, pp. 45–50, 253–268; and McMurry, The Structure of
Marx’s World-View, pp. 123–144.
The Marxist Concept of Ideology

Three major positions can be taken on the issue of the relation between morality and ideology (in the negative sense of the term):

1. morality is ideology and therefore must be repudiated,
2. morality is ideology but need not be repudiated, and
3. morality is not ideology and therefore need not be repudiated.

It would seem possible to eliminate perfunctorily the second position from the competition and concentrate our attention on the first and third. This is so because it would seem possible to make sense of the second position only on the condition that the global, noncritical conception of ideology is being employed. If the nonglobal, critical conception of ideology is being used, the statement seems necessarily false. Since "X is ideological" entails, in its nonglobal meaning, "X is illegitimate and, therefore, ought to be repudiated," the statement "morality is ideology but need not be repudiated" would come to the necessarily false statement "morality is illegitimate and ought to be repudiated, but it need not be repudiated."

It might be thought that this objection to the second position can be circumvented by claiming that the Marxist perhaps means by this only that morality must be eliminated from Marxist empirical (i.e., scientific) theory but not necessarily from the Marxist worldview as a whole—a position taken by Althusser and some other Marxists. But one need only realize that if this is what is meant, then one is not claiming that morality is ideological, for the claim "X is ideological" entails, according to the analysis offered here, "X ought to be eliminated from one's empirical theories as well as one's normative theories." Why this is so becomes clear if one assumes, as will be argued below, that a characteristic of ideology that comes close to being a defining one is that ideology functions to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class (in class-divided societies). If this is true, then it is clear that both the empirical-theoretical component and the evaluative or normative component of a worldview can be ideological because it is clear that views taken from either of these components can perform this function. Therefore, those wishing to maintain that morality must be eliminated from Marxist empirical theory but need not be eliminated from the Marxist worldview as a whole are not proponents of the second position but of the third.

Since we are interested only in those claims about the issue of morality and ideology that use the nonglobal, critical conception of morality, we are faced with choosing between the first and third positions. The first position—that morality, as such, is ideology and therefore ought to be repudiated—is usually taken by Marx and Engels as well as by their more orthodox followers and, as documented in chapter 4 of the present work, by such recent and contemporary philosophers as Lewis Feuer, Donald Clark Hodges, Allen Wood, Andrew Collier, and Anthony Skillen. I shall refer to this position as the orthodox Marxist position.

The third position—that morality is not ideology and therefore need not, as a whole, be repudiated—though not often defended by Marxists in its explicit form, can be expected to find favor among those Marxists and left-leaning philosophers who wish to argue for a Marxist ethic or who wish to argue from a Marxist ethic or Marxist moral and social theory to other (e.g., practical or political) conclusions. I take it that this would include all Marxists once they really thought the issue through. At present, it includes those who view themselves as Marxist Humanists as well as most contemporary Analytic Marxists, as I have previously described this school. (Wood, Collier, and Skillen are important exceptions.)

Most arguments for the orthodox Marxist position are of the form:

1. X is the defining characteristic of ideology,
2. morality (i.e., all moral concepts, principles, theories, codes, etc.) has characteristic X, therefore,
3. morality is ideology.

On the assumption that the nonglobal, critical conception of ideology is being used, we could then conclude that morality must be

1. In his 1980 essay, "Marxism, Ideology, and Moral Philosophy," Nielsen tentatively endorses position 2—morality in ideology but need not be repudiated—by (apparently) holding that "X is ideology" establishes only a prima facie case in favor of eliminating X from one's theory or worldview, a case that may be overridden by other considerations.

Though I readily admit this way of construing the concept of ideology is not totally implausible, it is, I think, the best way to go, especially since I am not convinced that all moral ideologies (in the global sense of the term) are "touched by the distortion" that reflecting class interests (supposedly) involves. At any rate, Nielsen has since given up this tentative defense of position 2 in favor of position 3. His new position is recorded in his 1981 essay, "Justice and Ideology: Justice as Ideology."
eliminated from or refused entry into one's worldview on pain of its being judged inadequate. I would like to argue, however, that in all such arguments either the first or second premise is false and that the argument is therefore unsound.

A classic example of this form of argument with a false first premise appears in Feuer's "Ethical Theories and Historical Materialism." Feuer first quotes Engels' statement that "ideology is a process accomplished by the so-called thinker consciously, indeed, but with a false consciousness. The real motives impelling him remain unknown to him otherwise it would not be an ideological process at all." Feuer uses this statement as a definition of ideology. He then gives the Freudian analysis of the function of ethical terms (i.e., of morality) quoted in chapter 4 of the present work and concludes that all ethical theories and views are ideological.

It is important to bear in mind the social psychology of ethical terms because we are thus enabled to understand the ideological character of ethical theories. . . . such theories are elaborated within a "false consciousness," . . . they are propounded with an ignorance as to the underlying motives.\(^4\)

Though Feuer hints at another characteristic that might be definitive of ideology when he speaks of "ethical terms" being "vehicles of social manipulation," the main thrust of his analysis of ideology is that it is a result of "false consciousness." Thus, for a view to be ideological, it is only necessary to be ignorant of one's underlying motives for having accepted it. Adopting a Freudian analysis of the inculation of mores or moral values, Feuer argues, in short:

1. Being a result of false consciousness is the defining characteristic of ideology.
2. Morality ("ethical theory") has the characteristic of being a result of false consciousness, therefore,
3. Morality is ideology.

But this argument is unsound. Being a result of "false consciousness" is not the defining characteristic of ideology. To say a characteristic is the defining characteristic of an X is to say that it constitutes the necessary and sufficient conditions something must fulfill in order to be properly labeled an X. But being a result of "false consciousness" is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for something being properly labeled "ideology" (or "ideological"). It is not a necessary condition because some views or theories are ideological even though they lack this characteristic. Since the Freudian theory of inculation is primarily concerned with evaluative attitudes rather than factual beliefs, any descriptive-explanatory view or theory that is ideological (for example, "vulgar" economic theory or the Horatio Alger myth concerning the correlation of hard work with material success) seemingly would lack this characteristic.

Furthermore, it is at least logically possible for a person to be perfectly cognizant of all the underlying motives and psychological factors that cause him or her to accept a certain set of mores or moral values, so that it cannot be said that they are the result of "false consciousness," and yet for this set of mores or moral values to be ideological. On the Marxist view, this set of values would still be ideological if it were the same or similar to, say, Classical Liberalism, Right-Libertarianism, Burkeian Conservatism, or the "moral" ideology of fascism—all of which function to preserve the social status quo and defend the interests of the ruling class in capitalist society and thus militate against the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition.

Nor is "being a result of false consciousness" in this sense a sufficient condition for an X being properly labeled "ideology." There are views that have this characteristic but seem, nevertheless, not to be ideological, for example, the view that property rights are not as important from the moral point of view as people's basic rights to well-being (e.g., their security and subsistence rights) and that, therefore, if the two are (in some situation) incompatible, the former consideration must give way to the latter. Even if it were a result of "false consciousness" in the above sense, this view is not ideological. I suggest this is because it does not function to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class nor militate against human well-being.

But even some Analytic Marxists disagree. In the following passages, Allen Wood suggests an analysis that is in important ways similar to Feuer's:

The term "ideology" is used in several different ways in Marx's writings, but for our present purposes I think we may regard something as "ideological" in Marx's usual pejorative

\(^4\) Feuer, "Ethical Theories and Historical Materialism," p. 242. (This quote is from a letter to Franz Mehring dated July 14, 1893, which can be found in Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence, p. 434.)
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 243.
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sense if it possesses the following three features: 1) it is (or is part of) a system of beliefs, thoughts and feelings which is socially prominent or influential; and 2) it belongs to this system because of the way in which it serves to sanction a mode of production or to promote definite class interests; and 3) its content includes features which mask feature 2, that is, features which tend to make people disregard or deny the fact that its social prominence or influence is due to the economic or class function it serves.

Morality as Hegelian Sittlichkeit can be seen in the light of historical materialism to have all three of these features. 1) It is a system of beliefs and thoughts about what is supposedly universally rational and individually self-fulfilling, to which powerful feelings (closely related to self-worth) are attached. 2) The system serves to meet the demands of the existing social order. Its appeal to us, however, is presented in terms of our subjective freedom or autonomy, of which moral conduct promises to be the fulfillment. But 3) according to historical materialism such an appeal is necessarily a fraudulent one, which serves to mask the fact that moral norms are valid or "actual" because of the social or class interests served by the influence which moral beliefs, thoughts and sentiments have on us. Morality, therefore, is necessarily ideological in the characteristically pejorative Marxian sense of that term.6

Although I do not believe the three characteristics suggested by Wood are either individually necessary or jointly sufficient to regard something as ideological in the "pejorative" sense of the term, it is the third characteristic I want to concentrate on here. The characteristic that a set of ideas or beliefs must have features that mask their real significance in terms of how they function to sanction a mode of production or promote definite class interests is analogous to Feuer's claim that something is ideological if, and only if, it is the result of false consciousness (as Feuer explicates this concept). As such, Wood's analysis is open to the same objections as Feuer's.

I also have reservations about Wood's claim that morality as a whole meets all three of his requirements for calling something ideological. I find especially dubious his claim that moral systems of belief always "serve to meet the demands of the existing social order," at least if he means by this the existing social status quo

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(as Marxists usually do). I believe that, at bottom, Wood's objection—and probably Marx's—is that morality is always conservative in this sense, but this is clearly false. (This will be discussed in more detail in the last section of the present chapter.) Similarly, I find dubious Wood's claim that "moral norms are valid or 'actual' because of the social or class interests served by [them]." If by "valid" he means "justified"—which he presumably does—this is also rather obviously false. I will discuss this issue in more detail in chapter 8.)

In any case, it is my contention that none of the ten characteristics previously listed—except possibly the last—are defining characteristics of ideology because it is possible in each case to produce counter-examples to the claim that the characteristic is either a necessary condition or a sufficient condition for properly labeling something ideological. Furthermore, I see no reason to believe that any combination of them—to the exclusion of the last—is jointly sufficient for something to be ideological. The last characteristic listed—that X functions to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interest of a ruling class—is, I contend, a good first approximation of a defining characteristic but, on further analysis, fails also. The rest of the characteristics, or at least those that are at all viable, prove to be ways in which ideas, theories, or views fulfill the function of maintaining the social status quo and/or defending the interests of the ruling class.

For purposes of analysis we can group characteristics 1 through 9, as listed above, into three sets. The first set consists only of characteristic 1, which is the least viable of any of the proposed defining characteristics of ideology and the easiest to eliminate from serious consideration. It can even be eliminated as a way in which ideas and theories are generally ideological, i.e., as a cause of ideas and theories meeting condition 10 and thus being ideological. The second set is composed of characteristics 2 through 7. These characteristics generally represent ways in which descriptive-explanatory ideas or theories (as opposed to evaluative ideas or theories) go wrong and, as a consequence, tend to lead away from a correct understanding of human beings and their societies. In turn, such wrongheaded views usually lead away from effective political action and thus function to maintain the social status quo. On the other hand, characteristics 8 and 9 are generally ways in which evaluative theories and views can be ideological.

The first characteristic—that X be generated within a certain class society or historical epoch or by a member of the ruling class

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or a member of a class or social group that is generally sympathetic to the ruling class and/or the social status quo—translates into the proposition that “an X is ideological if and only if it meets one of these conditions.” The fact is, however, that these conditions are neither necessary nor sufficient for an X to be ideological and thus this is not a defining characteristic.

The thought behind the first part of this characteristic is that the ideas or theories generated within a particular class society or historical epoch will bear the mark of that society or epoch and be supportive of the existing status quo. Though Marx does sometimes speak loosely about such connections (especially when utilizing the general conception of ideology), he recognizes the fact that not all ideas and theories produced by a given society or historical epoch are supportive of the social status quo. The “communist consciousness,” which, according to Marx, is produced among the working class or at least some of its members (and even among members of other classes “through the contemplation of this class”), together with his own theory and view of society (which, in part, embodies this “communist consciousness”), provides—at least for the Marxist—conclusive counter-examples to the thesis that all theories and views generated within a particular class society or historical epoch are supportive of the existing social status quo.

The second part of this characteristic is no more plausible than the first. Though there is certainly an empirical trend that views and theories produced, accepted, and supported by the ruling class and classes and social groups sympathetic to it are supportive of that ruling class and the social status quo, there is always a minority of theorists from these classes and social groups whose theories and views do not support the social status quo. Again, Classical Marxism affords a perfect example: among its progenitors, Engels was, according to Marx’s structural criteria of class and class membership, a member of the middle bourgeoisie, and Marx, Lenin, Luxemburg, and Trotsky were all from petty bourgeoisie or “middle class” backgrounds. Nevertheless, their theories and views presumably do not function to maintain the social status quo or defend the interests of the ruling class. Thus characteristic 1 is neither a defining characteristic of ideology nor even a standard cause of theories being ideological.

Our second set of characteristics (2 through 7) is more important to our analysis. Though some of these are more useful or perspicacious than others, they all represent ways in which a theory or view can have epistemic failings and, for this reason, be ideological. The presupposition here is that there is a strong tendency for false or misleading descriptive-explanatory theories or views concerning our social world to serve the interests of the ruling class and/or function to maintain the social status quo.

However, the fact that X is false or misleading is not absolute proof that X is ideological. In order to fulfill the function of maintaining the social status quo and/or defending the interests of the ruling class, X must be importantly misleading; it must either directly or indirectly have a significant impact on social and political circumstances. A perfect example of a descriptive-explanatory view about our social world that is false but—at least from the Marxist point of view—not importantly misleading is the “vulgar” interpretation of the labor theory of value, namely, the proposition that the exchange value of a commodity (i.e., the price of a commodity in equilibrium market conditions) is determined by the actual amount of human labor that went into its production. This proposition is false according to Marx and other proponents of the labor theory of value, who claim that it is the socially necessary labor time, at any particular point in the development of society’s productive forces, that determines its value in the sense of its price as a commodity in equilibrium market conditions. But this proposition is not ideological because it (presumably) does not meet the requirement of functioning to maintain the status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class. The wide acceptance of this proposition in a capitalist society, in fact, may even function to destabilize the social status quo and work against the interests of the ruling class. Furthermore, it is arguable that even the technically correct interpretation of the labor theory of value is false. If so, then this theory also provides a counter-example to the claim that something is ideological if it is false, even if it isn’t importantly misleading.

For the Marxist, paradigmatic examples of descriptive-explanatory views that are ideological because of their epistemic failings (i.e., because they are false and importantly misleading) include:

1. Religious and “philosophical” (e.g., Hegelian) worldviews that misrepresent our social world and the ways in which it can be changed;

2. Theories and propositions concerning society, history, human nature, etc., that are importantly misleading. For example:
the sole creator of exchange value, and the fetishism of capital, which cloaks the fact that the capitalist class extracts unpaid labor from the working class in the form of surplus value, are, for Marx, the paradigmatic examples of theories or views that are socially mystifying. By hiding the real nature of social relations within a society, such theories and views obscure the vision that “subordinate,” “ruled,” or “exploited” classes have of their own self-interest, stop up the springs of social and political action on the part of these classes, and thus function to maintain the social status quo and defend the interests of the ruling (capitalist) class.

Thus the characteristics of being systematically misleading and socially mystifying—though not defining characteristics of the concept of ideology—indicate the major ways in which, based on Marxist theory, a descriptive-explanatory theory or view can be ideological. The rest of the characteristics in this set (i.e., characteristics 2 through 5) can either be discarded completely as not even good candidates for the ways in which descriptive-explanatory theories can be ideological or can be subsumed under the two above-named characteristics. Let us consider them in order.

Characteristic 2—that of being unscientific—may, at first glance, seem a viable candidate for an important way in which a theory or view can be ideological, but it must be rejected. The problem here is that the term “scientific” is often used in a peculiar way by Marxists to mean, approximately, “that which is in agreement with Marxism” or “that which is in agreement with my (or our) interpretation of Marxism.” If this persuasive definition is being used, then the proposition “X is unscientific” is roughly equivalent to the proposition “X is not in agreement with (some interpretation or other of) Marxism,” a most uninteresting claim.

On the broader, more legitimate definition, “scientific” is that which is based on or in accordance with the principles and methods of science. The “principles and methods of science” are those relying on empirical evidence as the basis for confirming or, more importantly, disconfirming theories and propositions. (But this is

See Marx’s chapter on the fetishism of money and commodities in Capital, vol. 1, and his chapter on the Trinity Formula in Capital, vol. 3. See also Norman Geras, “Essence and Appearances: Aspects of Fetishism in Marx’s Capital,” New Left Review, no. 65 (1971); John Mepham, “The Theory of Ideology in Capital,” Radical Philosophy, no. 2 (1972); John Maguire, “Marx on Ideology, Power and Force,” Theory and Decision, vol. 7 (1976); and chapter 5 of G. A. Cohen’s Karl Marx’s Theory of History. It should be noted that even if it is false that labor creates all exchange value of products, it may still be true that only labor creates products. (Capital is viewed by Marx as nothing more than embodied labor from the past.)
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not to be interpreted so narrowly as to rule out all systematic theory concerning our social world on the basis that it is not directly testable or easily falsifiable.) On this broader definition, it must be allowed that a considerable number of theories that are ideological are also scientific. On the above definition of "scientific" and on the assumption that Marxist empirical theory is basically correct, it is the case that many systematic theories found in "bourgeois" social science are ideological (because they are false and, more importantly, seriously misleading) but, nevertheless, scientific. (On a slightly different definition, to say that X is unscientific is to say that X is a descriptive-explanatory theory or view that is not susceptible to rational empirical investigation and confirmation. But pseudo-scientific theories of this sort can best be subsumed under the characteristic of being systematically misleading.) Similarly, to the extent that they are useful at all, the characteristics of being illusory (characteristic 3) and an inverted representation of reality (characteristic 4) can be subsumed under the characteristics of being either systematically misleading or socially mystifying.

When Marx is speaking of religious and "philosophical" illusion and, in particular, when he is polemizing against the Hegelian and neo-Hegelian worldview or theory of history, the characteristic of being illusory is best subsumed under the characteristic of being systematically misleading. When he is speaking of political illusion or of illusion in the realm of the social sciences, the characteristic of being illusory is best subsumed under the characteristic of being socially mystifying. That Marx distinguishes between these two basic sorts of illusion is borne out in The German Ideology: "While the French and the English at least hold by the political illusion, which is moderately close to reality, the Germans move in the realm of 'pure spirit,' and make religious illusion the driving force of history." 8

Such illusion and systematically misleading theories as the historical theory of the Hegelians tend to function to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class. According to Marx, seeing history as determined in accord with the (Hegelian) Idea or in accord with peoples' ideas or consciousness not only obscures the truth of social and political processes but leads to the conservative and misleading strategy of improving human consciousness in order to improve the human condition:


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The Old Hegelians had comprehended everything as soon as it was reduced to an Hegelian logical category. The Young Hegelians criticized everything by attributing to it religious conceptions or by pronouncing it a theological matter. The Young Hegelians are in agreement with the Old Hegelians in their belief in the rule of religion, of concepts, of an abstract general principle in the existing world. Only, the one party attacks this dominion as usurpation, while the other extols it as legitimate.

Since the Young Hegelians consider conceptions, thought, ideas, in fact all the products of consciousness, to which they attribute an independent existence, as the real chains of men (just as Old Hegelians declared them the true bonds of human society) it is evident that the Young Hegelians have to fight only against these illusions of the consciousness. Since, according to their fantasy, the relationships of men, all their doings, their chains, and their limitations are products of their consciousness, the Young Hegelians logically put to men the moral postulate of exchanging their present consciousness for human, critical or egoistic consciousness, and thus of removing their limitations. This demand to change consciousness amounts to a demand to interpret reality in another way, i.e., to accept it by means of another interpretation. The Young Hegelian ideologists, in spite of their allegedly "world-shattering" statements, are the staunchest conservatives. 9

(To this, of course, Marx responds: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." 10)

When Marx uses "illusion" language in talking about bourgeois economic and sociological theory, the characteristic of being illusory is best subsumed under the characteristic of being socially mystifying. Speaking of the fetishism of capital, he speaks of the "complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production," the "false appearance and illusion" and "the world of illusion" from which even the classical bourgeois economists such as Smith and Ricardo could not escape. This form of ideology—the mystification of social relations—is, for Marx, the most pernicious form because, on his view, it is the most difficult to "see through."

Finally, let us consider characteristic 5—that something is a re-

* Ibid., p. 113.
result or component of "false consciousness." As our earlier discussion of "false consciousness" in the context of Feuer's argument for the proposition that morality is ideology should have indicated, the characteristic of "being a result or component of false consciousness" is neither a defining characteristic of ideology nor an important way in which theories and views can be ideological. Being a result of "false consciousness," in the Freudian or quasi-Freudian sense Feuer and others intend, is not a good indication that a theory or view is ideological because all moral theories and views, or, at any rate, the moral values or evaluative attitudes underlying them, are a result of "false consciousness" in this sense. Yet a great many of them do not support the social status quo. Some systems of moral values and principles—such as that which is implicit in Marx's writings and even, I would argue, the core of Rawls' theory of social justice—actually function to promote the cause of socialism, at least when combined with Marxist empirical theory of society and analysis of capitalism (more on this presently).

Being a component of "false consciousness" is no more a sign that a theory or view is ideological than being a result of "false consciousness." In fact, for Marx and Engels—for whom the term "false consciousness" had no Freudian connotations—to say that a theory or view is a component of "false consciousness" is to say no more than that it is wrong or false.

To sum up our assessment of the second set of characteristics (2 through 7), we can state: (1) they usually involve epistemological weaknesses or epistemological weaknesses; (2) none is a defining characteristic of ideology; and (3) only two—the characteristics of being systematically misleading and socially mystifying—are important in which a theory or view can be ideological.

Our last set of characteristics (8 and 9) represents ways in which evaluative theories or views can be ideological. Characteristic 8—that a theory or view represents the interests of the ruling class as the common interest—has its genesis in Marx's remark that each new class which puts itself in place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interests as the common interest of all the members of the society, put in an ideal form; it will give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.11


Since there are many theories and views that lack this characteristic but are, nevertheless, ideological, this is not a defining characteristic. It is, in fact, but a specific form of characteristic 9, that of justifying the social status quo and/or the interests of the ruling class. This characteristic is, I submit, a third major way in which theories or views can be ideological. Whereas the characteristics of being systematically misleading and socially mystifying are major ways in which a descriptive-explanatory theory or, better, the descriptive-explanatory component of a theory or view can function as ideology, characteristic 9 is the major way in which evaluative theories or views can function as ideology.

Besides a theory or view representing the interests of the ruling class as the common interest of society—which a good example is the claim often made in capitalist society that the institution of private property is in everyone's interest—there are many other ways in which a theory or view can justify the social status quo and/or the interests of the ruling class. Such justifications can appeal either to prudential or to moral considerations. The claim that the interests of the ruling class are the common interests of society is a factual claim which, if accepted as true, functions to get people to accept that society as "justified," at least so far as one is judging from the prudential point of view. This judgment may, of course, be taken as grounds for judging a particular society morally justified as well, but its primary thrust is based on considerations of self-interest.

But theories or views that provide moral justification for the capitalist social status quo and/or the interests of the ruling capitalist class are multitudinous. The paradigm case of such theories is the moral and social theory of Classical Liberalism and its most backward twentieth-century descendant, Right-Libertarianism. The first is best represented by the theory of John Locke and the second by the works of Robert Nozick, John Hospers, Milton Friedman, and, at the level of popular exposition, Ayn Rand.

Normative views or theories that justify the social status quo and/or the interests of a ruling class—whether they are as sophisticated as the view that property rights are indefeasible, before any and all other moral considerations or as unsophisticated as the view captured by the phrase "my country, right or wrong"—obviously have a strong tendency to function to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class and thus to be ideological. Characteristic 9 is not, however, the defining characteristic of ideology because it is not a necessary condition for designating a theory or view as ideological. A theory or view can
also be ideological because its descriptive-explanatory component is importantly misleading.

To sum up our analysis of the concept of ideology, we can say—at least as a first approximation—that the defining characteristic of ideology is characteristic 10 (functioning to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interest of the ruling class), and that the characteristics of being systematically misleading, socially mystifying, and justifying the social status quo and/or the interests of the ruling class (i.e., 6, 7, and 9) are the main ways in which theories or views meet this criterion and are thus ideological.

On further reflection, however, it is clear that this definition of the Marxist concept of ideology is still not wholly adequate. It is not the case, for Marx and Marxists, that a theory or view that functions to support the social status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class in the context of a socialist society is ideological. (The ruling class is, of course, the working class according to Marx’s conception of socialism.) Though few Marxists consciously realize it, the real (but submerged) defining characteristic of the Marxist concept of ideology is, I submit, the characteristic of militating against human well-being or, more grandly, against the amelioration and/or the improvement of the human condition. (Let us call this eleventh characteristic the “normative characteristic.” Note that I have phrased this characteristic at a very abstract level so as to be neutral between consequentialist and deontological moral views.)

I believe that the reason Marxists have not generally distinguished between characteristics 10 and 11 is that, in the Marxist’s empirical theory concerning society and history, the way in which theories and views are ideological, that is, the way in which they militate against human well-being (or amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition) in this historical epoch, is that they function to maintain capitalist societies and/or defend the interests of ruling capitalist classes. Assuming that Marxist empirical theory is basically correct—that, for example, Marx’s analysis of the class dynamics of capitalist society and his theses that (1) planned socialist economies are more efficient (in terms of the utilization of available natural and human resources) than capitalist economies, and (2) civil liberty and political democracy are, under favorable circumstances, perfectly compatible with socialist property relations are basically correct—it would seem that socialism is preferable to capitalism on almost any major moral theory concerning social arrangements. The only notable exceptions that come to mind are Right-Libertarianism and the moral theory of fascism—if such can be said to exist. And if it is true that socialism is morally preferable to capitalism, and that this is so because socialism is much more conducive to human well-being (i.e., to the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition), then those theories and views that function to maintain capitalist societies and/or defend the interests of capitalist classes (i.e., those theories and views conforming to characteristic 10) pretty much constitute the set of theories that are ideological. In short, from the Marxist point of view, characteristics 10 and 11 are virtually coextensive in presently existing historical circumstances. (Notice, however, that not all ideology that functions to maintain bourgeois society is “bourgeois” ideology. Though religious ideology functions to maintain the status quo in bourgeois societies, religious ideology is not bourgeois ideology. It seems as though the criteria of individuation for kinds of ideology—feudal, bourgeois, petty bourgeois, etc.—have to do with the conditions of their historical genesis or with their content or both.)

However, in the context of a genuinely socialist or communist society (should one exist), the empirical (nomological) link between characteristics 10 and 11 is broken. If Marxist empirical theory is basically correct, theories or views that function to maintain the socialist social status quo (against capitalism and other historically regressive forms of society) and defend the interests of the “ruling class” of a socialist society (i.e., the working class, which will eventually be the only class in a socialist society) are not ideological because it is not the case that such theories and views militate against the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition.

Under these circumstances, however, it is easily understandable that characteristic 10 has generally been taken to be the defining characteristic of the Marxist concept of ideology (both by Marxists and non-Marxists) rather than the normative (or moral!) characteristic underlying it, characteristic 11. But the fact that theories and views exhibiting characteristic 10, in reference to a socialist society, do not—assuming Marxist empirical theory to be basically correct—qualify as “ideology” or as “ideological” disproves the thesis that characteristic 10 is the defining characteristic of the Marxist concept of ideology.

We can summarize this analysis of the Marxist concept of ideology by noting that characteristic 11 is the defining characteristic of that which is ideology or that which is ideological, but that char-
characteristic 10 is the major way in which theories and views are ideological in this and other pre-socialist historical epochs. Furthermore, characteristics 6, 7, and 9 are the primary ways in which theories and views fulfill the conserving function put forward in characteristic 10. That is, (a) being systematically misleading, (b) being socially mystifying, and (c) justifying the social status quo and/or the interests of a ruling class are the main ways in which theories and views (d) function to maintain the social status quo and/or defend the interests of the ruling class. In turn, this is the main way, under present historical circumstances, that theories and views (e) militate against human well-being and the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition.

Morality, Ideology, and Moral Theory

The question with which we are now faced is: does morality as a whole have characteristics 6, 7, or 9 or in some way conform to characteristic 10 and thus to characteristic 11? For the orthodox Marxist claim that morality is ideology to be correct, the answer to this question must be yes. There are several points to be made at this time. The first is that in this analysis of ideology it may be a priori impossible to show that all morality is ideological. This is because the ultimate (normative) criterion for doing so presupposes morality. The very notions of human well-being and the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition are moral notions.

The second point to note is that to falsify position 1 (morality is ideology and therefore must be repudiated) and make position 3 (morality is not ideology and therefore need not be repudiated) the most reasonable to accept, there need be only one moral theory or view that does not meet these conditions. The most obvious candidate for a counter-example to position 1 is Marx's moral theory (or set of moral values and principles) as elucidated in part I of the present work.

The third point concerns the claim that—as Allen Wood puts it—"Marx was operating with... a conception of morality which assigns to morality an exclusively conservative social function." But, as argued in some detail in the last section of chapter 4 of the present work, this position simply cannot be defended. While many moral theories or views clearly are conservative in nature in that they defend the social status quo and/or the interests of the ruling class in class-divided societies, many others are not. Even Engels—and, I have argued, Marx—recognized this fact. In a passage worth quoting again, Engels writes:

As society has hitherto moved in class antagonisms, morality was always a class morality; it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class or as soon as the oppressed class became powerful enough, it has represented the revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed [emphasis added].

The obvious fact that the belief that one has a moral obligation to respect a picket line during a labor strike or to support the struggle for socialism is not conservative but, rather, progressive in nature would hardly require comment, except for the fact that certain Marxists incessantly—and at times vehemently—deny it.

But how then are we to account for the fact that theoreticians of the intellectual stature and sophistication of Marx and Engels took the position expressed by proposition 1, that morality is ideology and therefore must be repudiated? Assuming that Marx and Engels were, for the most part, operating with a concept of ideology similar to that which we rendered previously, we can only conclude that Marx and Marxists generally have been operating with concepts of morality that are, to one degree or another, in one way or another, muddled.

That this should be the case is, of course, no great mystery. It has been only relatively recently—the last several decades, in fact—that philosophers have begun to get a handle on the nature of morality, i.e., the nature and function of moral discourse and the structure of moral arguments. In Marx's day, the concept of morality must have still seemed puzzling and mysterious. Not only had the techniques and methods of analytic-linguistic philosophy that would prove to be fruitful in the analysis of morality not yet evolved, but the questions that constitute the subject matter of metaethics had not even been formulated. It is thus small wonder that Marx, Engels, and all other pre-twentieth-century philosophers and social theorists harbored somewhat muddled conceptions of morality.

One important misconception Marx and Engels exhibit has to do with the supposed fact that the use of moral discourse (i.e., the

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12 Engels, Anti-Dühring, p. 105.
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making of moral judgments, etc.) commits one to unacceptable ontological or epistemological positions that are not in line with the sort of rational, scientific, and materialistic worldview to which they were committed. A second misconception is that the use of moral discourse commits one to the view that the propagation and inculcation of moral theories or principles is the primary or, at least, one of the most important ways to attain the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition.

The first misconception of morality exhibited by Marx and Engels—that the use of moral discourse or making of moral judgments commits one to unacceptable ontological or epistemological positions—seems to have had to do with the fact that they could not find a place for evaluative discourse in their materialistic and scientifically oriented worldview. If a statement such as “X is good” does not refer to some observable property of X, does not describe or explain, then their assumption seems to have been that it is superfluous and ought to be eliminated.

If, on the other hand, a statement such as “X is good” does describe or explain, it must do so, they seem to have assumed, by means of the term “good” referring to some unobservable, non-material entity, property, or principle. The term “good” would (purportedly) refer to some “eternal, immutable, entity” or to some “transcendent” moral principle (as in “the word of God” or “natural law”), or to some moral principle immanent in world history or the development of the World Spirit (as the Hegelians put it). Examples of each of these concerns can be found in the writings of Marx and Engels. The objection that to indulge in moral discourse is, ipso facto, to accept the existence of transcendent moral entities is found, for example, in the “Communist Manifesto” when they are considering “bourgeois” objections to their doctrines:

“Undoubtedly,” it will be said, “religious, moral, philosophical and juridical ideas have been modified in the course of historical development. But religion, morality, philosophy, political science, and law, constantly survived this change. . . . There are, besides, eternal truths, such as Freedom, Justice, etc., that are common to all states of society.”

Their answer to this, in part, is to claim that all past societies have one characteristic in common—“the exploitation of one part

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of society by the other”—and that this accounts for the similarities in moral ideology pointed out by their opponents. Another part of their answer consists in claiming that, like all ruling classes in the past, the bourgeoisie has been induced, by its selfish misconceptions, “to transform into eternal laws of nature and reason, the social forms springing from [its] present mode of production and form of property” (emphasis added).

Later on, in the course of a polemic against the liberal humanist Heinzen, Engels writes:

Herr Heinzen appears to be alluding . . . to the fact that Communists have made fun of his sterner moral demeanor and mocked all those sacred and sublime ideas, virtue, justice, morality, etc., which Herr Heinzen imagines form the basis of all society. We accept this reproach. The Communists will not allow the moral indignation of the honourable man Herr Heinzen to prevent them from mocking these eternal verities. The Communists, moreover, maintain that these eternal verities are by no means the basis, but on the contrary the product, of the society in which they feature.

In Anti-Dühring Engels again attacks such “eternal verities or principles.” There he claims that “We [communists] . . . reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate, and forever immutable moral law on the pretext that the moral world too has its permanent principles which transcend history and the differences between nations.”

A large part of their worry here, of course, is of a political rather than a metaphysical nature. They undoubtedly are concerned that the view that moral truths are “eternal” and universally valid will play a conservative social and ideological role since the more well-established (and conservative) moral principles—such as the (supposedly) immutable right to private property (both personal and productive)—would seem to stand to gain more from its acceptance than less well-established and more radical moral principles and precepts. Nevertheless, there is still a strong hint of metaphysical concern. How can such nonmaterial entities exist to begin with, let alone be eternal and immutable? For the hardheaded nineteenth-century materialist there seems to have been no way to

15 Ibid.
17 Engels, Anti-Dühring, p. 103.
account for the timeless quality of moral principles, so they tended simply to deny their "existence" and hence their validity or applicability altogether. One can suppose that this objection to morality was at the back of many a Marxist's mind.

Moral principles that are supposedly immanent in history are treated, by Marx and Engels, with similar disdain. Hegel had proposed that Freedom, i.e., the ethical component of the Absolute Idea, had embodied itself in the state and, in particular, the constitutional monarchy. It is rare today to have this position seriously put forward. But since this was the view of Hegel and of many of his followers, it is not surprising to find Marx and Engels still combating it. Marx attacks another version of this position in The Poverty of Philosophy, his 1846 critique of Proudhon. According to Proudhon, society in all its historical manifestations is governed by what he variously refers to as "Social Genius," "General Reason," or "Human Reason," whose telos or goal is equality. For Proudhon, Marx claims,

the good side of an economic relation is that which affirms equality; the bad side, that which negates it and affirms inequality. Every new category is a hypothesis of the social genius to eliminate the inequality engendered by the preceding hypothesis. In short, equality is the primordial intention, the mystical tendency, the providential aim that the social genius has constantly before its eyes as it whirls in the circle of economic contradictions.18

In a letter written just prior to The Poverty of Philosophy, Marx gives the following account of his objections to Proudhon's general approach:

M. Proudhon sees in history a series of social developments; he finds progress realized in history; . . . he merely invents the hypothesis of the universal reason revealing itself. Nothing is easier than to invent mystical causes, that is to say, phrases which lack common sense. . . . In short, it is not history but old Hegelian junk, it is not profane history—a history of man—but sacred history—a history of ideas. From his point of view man is only the instrument of which the idea or the eternal reason makes use in order to unfold itself. The evolutions of which M. Proudhon speaks are understood to be evo-

18 Marx, The Poverty of Philosophy, p. 119.

solutions such as are accomplished within the mystic womb of the absolute idea.19

Although Proudhon believed the Social Genius to demand equality and therefore the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a communal society of petty commodity producers, Marx knew quite well that a Social Genius or any moral principles that it might postulate may just as easily—perhaps more easily—support the existence of capitalism and thus play a conservative rather than a progressive role in the class struggle. Moreover, he naturally regarded Proudhon's vision of socialism as a society of small craftsmen, shopkeepers, and farmers as utopian and reactionary. The only way forward, on Marx's view, was through expanding large-scale industry, not through abolishing it.

The point is that the existence of either transcendent or immanent moral principles of the eternal, immutable variety is obviously noxious to hard-nosed materialists like Marx and Engels. They must have thought that to accept morality or engage in moral discourse under these circumstances would be tantamount to accepting systematically misleading views into one's theoretical fold and thus indulging in ideology. Therefore, the most reasonable thing for them to do was to repudiate morality and moral discourse.

The misconception of morality involved here is the basic one of taking evaluative discourse to have the same structure and function as descriptive-explanatory discourse and, more specifically, of taking statements of the form "X is good" as attributing the property of being good to X, just as "X is red" attributes the property of being red to X. But the real function of statements such as "X is good" is not to describe but rather to commend or prescribe. For this reason, were Marx and Engels alive today and familiar with recent and contemporary metaethical theory, they would, I think, be much less likely to insist that morality is systematically misleading or ideological in this way, or that it must, on these grounds, be repudiated. If one distinguishes between description and evaluation as two logically separable modes of human discourse and repudiates the view that making moral judgments of the form "X is good" or "X is right" or "X is just" commits one to recognizing "eternal verities" or transcendent or immanent moral principles, there is absolutely no reason to continue to reject morality as a whole on the grounds that it is metaphysically dubious.

Though I am presupposing a noncognitivist or at least prescrip-

tivist metaethics, I don't think this affects the conclusions drawn here because contemporary cognitivist and descriptivist metaethical theories would, so far as I can see, reach the same conclusion; namely, that Marx was mistaken in thinking that moral judgments of the form "X is good" commit one to recognizing "eternal verities" or transcendent or immanent moral principles. That is to say, cognitivist/descriptivist metaethical theories no more commit one to a nonnaturalistic ontology than do noncognitivist/prescriptivist metaethical theories.

The second sort of misconception of morality—that making moral judgments entails one's acceptance of the notion that the propagation and inculcation of moral values and principles is an effective way to attain the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition—seems to be behind Marx and Engels' claim in *The Holy Family* that "morality is 'impuissance mis en action' [impotence in action]. . . . Every time it fights a vice it is defeated." This misconception is also behind Marx's vehement attack on a passage in the Gotha Program, which speaks of a fair distribution of the proceeds of labor.

What a crime it is to attempt . . . on the one hand, to force on our Party again, as dogmas, ideas which in a certain period had some meaning but have now become obsolete verbal rubbish, while again perverting, on the other, the realistic outlook, which it cost so much effort to instill into the Party but which has now taken root in it, by means of ideological nonsense about right and other trash so common among the democrats and French Socialists.

The doctrine that moral preaching can cause fundamental social change and thus a fundamental betterment of the human condition was characteristic of the utopian socialists as well as of religious and other traditional moralists. As Sidney Hook once pointed out,

All his life Marx . . . was compelled to take a stand against abstract ethical idealism, not only as a consequence of his social theories but as a necessity of revolutionary practice. In every country eloquent voices were preaching a new social evangelism in the name of justice, love and brotherhood. Weitling, Feuerbach and the *wahre Socialisten* in Germany, St. Si-
criticism of capitalist reality was only of secondary importance to him. And the explicit ethical justification of socialism as his cause was the least important for him. These have misled some of his interpreters who have come to the wrong conclusion that there necessarily was no place for ethical ideas in Marx's theory.  

However, the doctrine of moralism, when incorporated into the concept of morality, renders a misconception of morality. There is absolutely no contradiction in accepting morality (and utilizing moral discourse), on the one hand, and rejecting the doctrine of moralism, on the other. Therefore, the doctrine of moralism cannot be a part of the concept of morality or of a correct theory about morality or moral discourse. Though the doctrine of moralism is, in Marxist empirical theory, undoubtedly ideological, morality does not entail and need not accept this doctrine and thus is not (for this reason, at any rate) ideological. This does not mean, of course, that no moral theories, codes, principles, etc., are to be rejected as ideological. A great many—perhaps the vast majority of—moral theories will probably still turn out to be ideological based on the criteria developed in the previous section.

On the other hand, it is crucial that Marxists not reject moral theories simply because they have been developed by thinkers who are not Marxists or socialists. Furthermore, one must separate the moral component from the empirical component of moral and social theories in order to be able to judge the merits of each. It is not always the case that both components of a moral and social theory are ideological when that theory as a whole is ideological. Conversely, even if Marxist empirical theory is not basically correct, the Marxist concept of ideology—under the analysis I have given it—is not thereby vitiated. Although certain of the ways in which a theory or view can be ideological may be vitiated, and though the penultimate criterion of supporting and defending the social status quo may fail, the ultimate (normative) criterion of militating against the amelioration and/or improvement of the human condition will still remain. Thus, if Marxist empirical theory is wide of the mark, and capitalism is the best way of ameliorating and/or improving the human condition, then Marxism itself—as its bourgeois opponents have long contended—will turn out to be ideological and, indeed, a major, world-historical form of ideology (in the negatively critical sense of the term). That my analysis of

24 Ibid., p. 166.