

IDEAS IN CONTEXT

The Young Karl Marx

German Philosophy, Modern Politics,
and Human Flourishing



David Leopold

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THE YOUNG KARL MARX

The Young Karl Marx is an innovative and important new study of Marx's early writings. These writings provide the fascinating spectacle of a powerful and imaginative intellect wrestling with complex and significant issues, but they also present formidable interpretative obstacles to modern readers. David Leopold shows how an understanding of their intellectual and cultural context can illuminate the political dimension of these works. An erudite yet accessible discussion of Marx's influences and targets frames the author's critical engagement with Marx's account of the emergence, character, and (future) replacement of the modern state. This combination of historical and analytical approaches results in a sympathetic, but not uncritical, exploration of topics including alienation, citizenship, community, antisemitism, and utopianism. *The Young Karl Marx* is a scholarly and original work which provides a radical and persuasive reinterpretation of Marx's complex and often misunderstood views of German philosophy, modern politics, and human flourishing.

DAVID LEOPOLD teaches political theory in the Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Oxford, and is a Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford. His previous publications include an edition of Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, for the Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought series.

The Young Karl Marx

IDEAS IN CONTEXT

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THE YOUNG KARL MARX

German philosophy, modern politics, and human flourishing

DAVID LEOPOLD

Mansfield College, Oxford



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For Lucinda

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A note on language, references, and translation

With some reluctance, I have occasionally followed the convention of using not only masculine pronouns and possessives ('he', 'him', 'his') but also the noun 'man' to denote persons of both sexes. This convention may be grammatically correct but it is also, in certain respects, outmoded. I have used it here in order both to maintain consistency with translations which overwhelmingly adopt that usage and to avoid the appearance of anachronism (since, when he wrote in English, Marx followed this same convention).

I have used short titles for works by Marx and some other authors. Those titles are expanded in the Bibliographical Note that follows the main text. Wherever appropriate and possible – and especially for the writings of Marx and his contemporaries – I have provided references to both a German source and an English translation (although I have not always followed the translation cited).

I have throughout resisted the enthusiasm of some translators of German for capitalising what they consider to be extravagant philosophical entities, not least because that device was not available to the original authors. The one exception concerns Marx's parody of speculative method in *Die heilige Familie*, where capitalisation distinguishes the absolute Fruit from finite fruits in an appropriately exaggerated manner.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

I did not originally set out to write a study of the young Karl Marx. The roots of the present volume lie in a broader, and rather different, project which I subsequently abandoned.¹ When I should really have been reading other things, I found myself returning again and again to Marx's early writings. The allure of these texts may not be immediately apparent. After all, they have been described accurately as 'a number of meagre, obscure, and often unfinished texts which contain some of Marx's most elusive ideas'.²

Nevertheless, the writings of the young Marx seemed to me to possess two signal properties: they were *suggestive*, that is, they gave the impression of containing ideas worthy of further consideration; and they were *opaque*, that is, their meaning was far from transparent. It was these characteristics which led eventually to the writing of the present volume. In attempting to understand works which I found interesting but unclear, I hoped to reach a sounder judgement of their worth.

THE 'DISCOVERY' OF THE EARLY WRITINGS

Not everyone has been similarly beguiled by these early writings. They certainly failed to attract much attention from Marx's own contemporaries. Several of the most important of these texts, including the *Kritik* and the *Manuskripte*, were not written for publication, and their existence was discovered only after Marx's death. Other works were published at the time, but in radical periodicals with small and uncertain circulations. Marx's article 'Zur Judenfrage', for example, was published in the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, a journal of which only one (double) edition ever appeared, in a print-run of one thousand copies of which some eight hundred seem to

¹ A fragment of that earlier project – which was concerned with certain aspects of left-Hegelianism – appears in the introduction and apparatus of Max Stirner, *The Ego and Its Own*, ed. David Leopold (Cambridge, 1995).

² John Plamenatz, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man* (Oxford, 1975) p. 33.

have been seized by the authorities.³ At the time, none of these published works attracted either popular or critical acclaim on any scale.

The only writings from the early 1840s which were subsequently reprinted during Marx's lifetime were two pieces of his earliest journalism, which pre-date the early writings as defined here (a somewhat narrow definition elaborated below). These two articles on contemporary German conditions – a comment on the latest Prussian censorship instructions, and a report of the debate concerning freedom of the press in the Sixth Rhineland Diet (both written in 1842) – were reprinted by Hermann Becker under the seemingly inflated title *Gesammelte Aufsätze von Karl Marx* (1851). The rarity of this emaciated 'collection' would be hard to exaggerate. It appears that only a handful of copies were ever printed and that these were never distributed outside of Cologne. (Only recently has the provenance of this exceptionally scarce volume become clearer.⁴)

With this lone, partial, and underwhelming exception, neither Marx nor any of his contemporaries showed much interest in rescuing the early writings from the obscurity into which they had almost immediately fallen. Although he preserved his study notebooks from this period, Marx appears to have been less than assiduous in keeping copies of his own published writings. The 1840s were a turbulent, as well as highly formative, period in his life, during which Marx lived in three different countries – Germany, France, and Belgium – before finally settling into (permanent) exile in England (arriving in August 1849). It is, nonetheless, surprising to discover that he had failed to retain a copy of his first book – *Die heilige Familie* (written jointly with Friedrich Engels, and published in February 1845). It was 1867 before he acquired his own copy, presented by Ludwig Kugelmann (a gynaecologist and communist living in Hanover), who, Marx reported to Engels, 'has in his possession a far better collection of our works than the two of us together'.⁵ As late as 1892, Engels was having to contact Kugelmann in search of the more *recherché* of Marx's publications.⁶

³ These estimates are from Hal Draper, *The Marx–Engels Cyclopedia*, volume 1: *The Marx–Engels Chronicle* (New York, 1985) p. 16. See also Maximilien Rubel and Margaret Manale, *Marx Without Myth: A Chronological Study of His Life and Work* (Oxford, 1975) p. 38.

⁴ Evidence now suggests that it was a hastily printed and poorly distributed fascicle, comprising one fifth of the first volume of a projected two-volume set. Police action against Cologne communists prevented the completion of the project. The rest of the first volume was to have included the bulk of Marx's contributions to the *Rheinische Zeitung*. The precise contents of the intended second volume are not certain. See *MEGA*® 1, 1, pp. 976–9.

⁵ Marx to Engels, 24 April 1867, *MEW* 31, p. 290; *MECW* 42, p. 360. 'I was pleasantly surprised', Marx continues, 'to find that we have no need to feel ashamed of the piece.'

⁶ See Engels to August Bebel, 26 September 1892, *MEW* 38, p. 475; *MECW* 49, p. 543; and Engels to Ludwig Kugelmann, 4 October 1892, *MEW* 38, p. 485; *MECW* 50, p. 3.

A sustained and coordinated effort to publish some of Marx's out-of-print and unpublished writings did take place following his death in 1883. It was directed by Engels, not only Marx's closest collaborator, his literary executor, and a highly respected figure in the burgeoning international socialist movement, but also – in his own estimation – the only 'living soul' who could decipher Marx's notorious handwriting.⁷ However, Engels devoted most of his declining editorial energies to the remaining volumes of *Kapital* and to new editions of those (usually previously published) texts which offered clear and relevant practical guidance to the European socialist movement. The works of the young Marx were adjudged not to fulfil those criteria. (The so-called 'Thesen über Feuerbach' were published, but these form part of Marx's preparatory work on *Die deutsche Ideologie*, and so fall outside the 'early writings' as defined here.) Indeed, Engels appears to have considered the early writings to be of rather limited significance.⁸ Even where their content was of some interest, he maintained that the 'semi-Hegelian language' of works from this period was 'untranslatable' and – even in the original German – had lost 'the greater part of its meaning'.⁹ He resisted proposals for a French translation of the 'Kritik: Einleitung', and dismissed the language of the 'Briefwechsel von 1853' as 'incomprehensible'.¹⁰

At the beginning of the twentieth century – as a result, in part, of Marx's apparent lack of interest and Engels's considered disapproval – even the most dedicated admirer of Marx's writings would not have known of the existence of, let alone have read, the overwhelming majority of the texts which are considered in the present volume. At most, such an admirer might have heard of *Die heilige Familie*, but never have seen a copy of it.

The first serious effort at unearthing Marx's early writings began with the publication in 1902 of Franz Mehring's collection *Aus dem literarischen Nachlass von Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, und Ferdinand Lassalle*. However, this edition included only previously published works by the young

⁷ Marx to Pytor Lavrov, 5 February 1884, *MEW* 36, p. 99; *MECW* 47, p. 93. See also Engels to Karl Kautsky, 28 January 1889, *MEW* 37, p. 144; *MECW* 48, pp. 258–9. Kurt Müller, who learnt graphology in a Nazi prison, subsequently compiled the 'Müller Primer' to help editors decipher Marx's script.

⁸ See, for example, Alexis Voden, 'Talks With Engels', Institute of Marxism-Leninism (ed.), *Reminiscences of Marx and Engels* (Moscow, n.d.) pp. 330–2.

⁹ Engels to Florence Kelley-Wischnewetzky, 25 February 1886, *MEW* 36, p. 452; *MECW* 47, p. 416. The quoted remarks concern his own *Die Lage der arbeitenden Klasse in England*, but Engels maintained that Marx's early writings suffered the same limitations.

¹⁰ See Engels to Laura Lafargue, 14 October 1893, *MEW* 39, p. 146; *MECW* 50, p. 21; and Engels to Wilhelm Liebknecht, 18 December 1890, *MEW* 37, p. 527; *MECW* 49, pp. 93–4.

Marx (such as *Die heilige Familie* and articles from the *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*).¹¹

It was 1927 before the early writings began to appear more fully, as part of the *Marx–Engels Gesamtausgabe* edition (henceforth *MEGA*Ⓢ) directed by David Ryazanov – a figure of enormous importance in the history of the collection, preservation, and publication of the work of Marx and Engels.¹² Ryazanov published scholarly versions of many of the works of the young Marx discussed here (including the *Kritik*, the *Manuskripte*, and the *Auszüge aus James Mill*). However, in the early 1930s, whilst still in its initial stages, this project was effectively cancelled (and copies of the published volumes subsequently proved difficult to locate). The most important of Marx's early writings were now in print, but they could scarcely be described as widely available.

The wider dissemination of the young Marx's work, and the publication of early writings omitted by *MEGA*Ⓢ, was a leisurely and uneven process. For example, satisfactory editions of the *Manuskripte* appeared in English only in 1956, and in French in 1962. (Earlier translations existed, but they were either incomplete or problematic in some respect.¹³) A central element in the wider story here is the emergence of a new *Marx–Engels Gesamtausgabe* (henceforth *MEGA*Ⓢ), whose first volumes appeared in 1975. Not the least important contribution of this new edition was the commitment to include, for the first time, all of his extant study notebooks. It was Marx's lifelong habit to make excerpts from the books that he was reading, occasionally interspersing his own remarks and criticisms. (Some two hundred of these study notebooks have been preserved.) Notwithstanding many difficulties and some significant editorial changes, the *MEGA*Ⓢ project continues today. It was placed under the 'non-Soviet' managerial auspices of the Internationale Marx-Engels Stiftung (IMES) in 1990, and the first volumes under that new regime were published in 1998. It is scarcely an exaggeration to claim that detailed textual knowledge of the early writings is still in a process of evolution: some interesting texts have only recently been

¹¹ These are the only early writings mentioned in the bibliography attached to Lenin's famous *Granat Encyclopaedia* article 'Karl Marx' (1913). V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, volume 21 (Moscow, 1964) pp. 41–91. This article has been identified as the best indicator of the availability of Marx's works before 1914. See Eric J. Hobsbawm, 'The Fortunes of Marx and Engels's Writings', Eric J. Hobsbawm (ed.), *The History of Marxism*, volume 1: *Marxism in Marx's Day* (Bloomington IN, 1982) p. 332.

¹² See Rolf Hecker (ed.), *David Borisovic Ryazanov und die erste MEGA* (Berlin, 1997).

¹³ The 1962 French translation by Emile Bottigelli, for example, was preceded by the Molitor translation, which was not based on the *MEGA*Ⓢ arrangement of the text and omitted the 'first manuscript'. The 1956 English translation by Martin Milligan was preceded by a version by Ria Stone, which – whatever its merits (I have been unable to obtain a copy) – circulated only in mimeographed form.

published;¹⁴ the occasional piece of correspondence is still discovered;¹⁵ some familiar items have been expelled from the corpus;¹⁶ and certain textual disputes remain without definitive resolution.¹⁷

THEIR CONTESTED STATUS

The main purpose of this abbreviated history is to underline the late appearance of the early writings. It was some fifty years after Marx's death before the bulk of the early writings appeared properly in print. Moreover, the circumstances in which the work of the young Marx was first published and circulated were not entirely propitious. In particular, it occurred at a time when Marxism was increasingly identified with the Soviet experience and with the approved or 'orthodox' body of theory that had begun to solidify around it. That authorised version of Marxism found it difficult to incorporate the language and concerns of the early writings into its systematic world view. The unease of Stalinism with any intellectual work outside of those official parameters was reflected in the fate of the original *MEGA*® project. Following the effective cancellation of this edition, many of its original staff 'disappeared'. Ryazanov himself was first exiled to Saratov, then allowed to return to Moscow after 1934, only to be re-arrested during the great purges, accused of 'Trotskyism', and executed in 1938. This Soviet unease continued in a variety of less dramatic forms. As recently as the 1960s, for example, the collected *Marx Engels Werke* (edited from Moscow and Berlin) posted a symbolic health warning on the early writings by relegating most of them to an unnumbered '*Ergänzungsband*', published outside of the chronological sequence of the other volumes.

Reflecting and reinforcing this hostile reaction, other, less conventional, voices took up the young Marx with enthusiasm, in part as a stick with which to beat that orthodoxy. In such quarters the publication of the early writings was welcomed as a significant event precisely because these works appeared to cast doubt on the authority of Soviet Marxism.

This sharply divided response to the early writings is illustrated by the publication of the *Manuskripte* in 1932. Having lain undisturbed for over

¹⁴ For example, the young Marx's notes on Rousseau's *Contrat social* (discussed in Chapter 4) appeared only in 1981.

¹⁵ See, for example, Marx to Wilhelm Saint-Paul, March 1843, *Marx-Engels-Jahrbuch*, volume 1 (Berlin, 1978) pp. 328–9.

¹⁶ For example, the 1843 article 'Luther als Schiedsrichter zwischen Strauss und Feuerbach' is no longer held to be by Marx.

¹⁷ For example, there is a continuing disagreement about the status and editorial arrangement of the *Manuskripte*.

eight decades, the *Manuskripte* now appeared in two competing German editions in the same year. The MEGA[®] version possessed greater textual authority, but the alternative volume had a significant interpretative impact.¹⁸ The editors of the latter – Siegfried Landshut and J. P. Mayer – maintained that the *Manuskripte* revealed the previously hidden thread that ran throughout Marx's entire output, allowing his later work to be understood properly for the first time, and casting doubt on received accounts of its meaning.¹⁹

This enthusiastic embrace of the apparent heterodoxy of the early writings was repeated in a variety of different contexts. Consider the following two examples, separated by some thirty years and several thousand miles.

Herbert Marcuse would become one of the central figures in the intellectual movement now known as Western Marxism, but it was as an ambitious post-doctoral student of Martin Heidegger, at the University of Freiburg, that he wrote one of the first reviews of the *Manuskripte*. In his review for *Die Gesellschaft* (published in 1932), Marcuse insisted that this newly discovered text could not simply be slotted into existing readings of Marx, but rather required a fundamental revision of those received interpretations. The publication of the *Manuskripte*, Marcuse maintained, was a 'crucial event' precisely because it cast doubt on orthodox accounts of the 'meaning' of Marx's theoretical system, and, in particular, put the entire theory of 'scientific socialism' into question.²⁰ (The date of this review provides a striking reminder of wider historical events; within twelve months Hitler would be named Chancellor, Heidegger would enter the Nazi Party as Rector of the University, and Marcuse and his family would have abandoned Germany.)

In America in the late fifties and early sixties, the publication of an English translation of the *Manuskripte* generated a similar response, especially amongst those who would form part of the intellectual current subsequently known as the New Left. Marshall Berman has provided an evocative description of his excitement when, as a student at Columbia in 1959, he discovered the '*Kabbalah*' written by Marx 'before he became Karl Marx', and now available in English for the first time.²¹ Berman bought twenty

¹⁸ See Michael Maidan, 'The *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of the Paris Manuscripts', *History of European Ideas*, volume 12 (1990) pp. 767–81.

¹⁹ See Karl Marx, *Der historische Materialismus*, volume 1: *Die Frühschriften*, ed. Siegfried Landshut and J. P. Mayer (Leipzig, 1932) p. xiii. This edition omitted the 'first manuscript', and its organisation of the remaining text differed from that of MEGA[®].

²⁰ Herbert Marcuse, 'Neue Quellen zur Grundlegung des Historischen Materialismus', *Die Gesellschaft*, volume 2 (1932) pp. 136–7.

²¹ Marshall Berman, *Adventures in Marxism* (London, 1999) pp. 6–7.

copies of this 'great new product that would change the world' as Hanukkah gifts for friends and family, revelling in the certainty that he had discovered 'something special, something that would both rip up their lives and make them happy'.²² That 'product' was 'Marx, but not communism'.²³ Berman's reference to Kabbalah is not entirely frivolous. The early writings provided an alternative and esoteric vantage point, with its own sacred literature, which profoundly influenced subsequent generations; the *Manuskripte*, it might be said, became a second Bible to some, at least as venerated as *Kapital*, if not more so.

As the reactions of Marcuse and Berman illustrate, many welcomed the early writings precisely because they appeared to cast doubt on the authority of the orthodox Soviet account of Marx's work. In this way, responses to the early writings became polarised from the very beginning. These texts had to be identified, *either* as rightly abandoned juvenilia, *or* as the long-lost key to a proper interpretation of Marx's entire output. The relative merits of these two sets of disputants is not at issue here. The point is rather to draw attention to the way in which this *Rezeptionsgeschichte* – with its barely concealed political agenda – hampered the study of Marx's intellectual evolution, and distorted the interpretation of the early writings. There are some serious and sophisticated contributions to this interpretative literature, but commentators have found it difficult to get beyond an explanatory framework which offers the impoverished alternative of 'one Marx or two' (the author, either of a coherent body of work whose real achievements are established in its early stages, or of a fractured corpus whose mature accomplishments rest on the abandonment of an earlier false start).²⁴ This simplistic and suspect dichotomy, together with the historical background which produced it, constitutes an ongoing 'external' obstacle to understanding the early writings which should not be underestimated.

Present circumstances are, of course, rather different. Whilst that 'external' obstacle to understanding undoubtedly still survives, the historical context which created and sustained it has been transformed. I am tempted to offer the optimistic conjecture that our own times might prove comparatively congenial to the serious evaluation of the nature and significance of Marx's thought. (There is, at least, some early and anecdotal evidence

²² *Ibid.* p. 9. ²³ *Ibid.* p. 15.

²⁴ Althusser's account, for example, whilst knowledgeable and stimulating, is framed around the implausible notion that a single fundamental division can make sense of Marx's intellectual evolution. Althusser adopts and develops a series of concepts – *lecture symptomale*, *problématique*, and *coupure épistémologique* – whose primary purpose is to justify an 'inventory of possibilities' that he concedes 'may well seem derisory' (namely whether or not the young Marx was 'already and wholly' Marx). See Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London, 1969) p. 53.

of a normalisation of Marx scholarship within academia.) The existence of Soviet communism undoubtedly helped distort our knowledge of his work, and its subsequent collapse might provide an unexpected opportunity, not to bury Marx, but better to understand him.

ADDITIONAL OBSTACLES

Overcoming the distortions generated by the distinctive history of the early writings is not the only interpretative difficulty confronting students of the young Marx. These texts present a formidable variety of additional obstacles, including problems arising from the form, content, status, and polemical focus of these texts.

Perhaps the most obvious difficulty for modern readers is the style of Marx's prose. To adopt a quip made (in a different context) by Engels, all too often the young Marx wrote like 'a German philosopher', which is to say he wrote 'very badly'.²⁵ The language of the early writings can be difficult, largely because it reflects the intellectual currents and fashions of its time.²⁶ These wider historical difficulties are compounded by Marx's occasional enthusiasm for style at the expense of clarity in his own prose. Consider, for example, his use of chiasmus (the left-Hegelian Szeliga's talent is said to be 'not that of disclosing what is hidden (*Verborgne zu enthüllen*), but of hiding what is disclosed (*Enthüllte zu verbergen*)');²⁷ his use of paradiastole (the 'perfected Christian state' is said to be 'the atheist state');²⁸ and his use of contemporary allusion (a reference to the 'out-pourings of the heart (*Herzensergießungen*)' of Friedrich Wilhelm IV is unlikely to remind many modern readers of a collection of essays on art and music by Ludwig Tieck and Wilhelm Wackenroder).²⁹ I do not mean to suggest that Marx was never clear and precise, only that he was not always so. Indeed, the young Marx can sometimes appear keener to press such standards on others than he was to adopt them himself. Consider, for example, his caustic remark about the need to translate Hegel into

²⁵ 'Briefe aus London' 475/386. This comment was directed at Robert Owen, but, elsewhere, Engels identified 'bad, abstract, unintelligible and clumsy' forms of expression as a distinctive feature of the early development of socialist ideas in Germany. 'Fourier' 605/614.

²⁶ Marx subsequently recognised (some of) these limitations. See, for example, his sarcastic reference to the use of a term ('*Entfremdung*') which 'will be comprehensible to the philosophers'. *Die deutsche Ideologie* 34/48.

²⁷ *Die heilige Familie* 58/56. 'Szeliga' was the pseudonym adopted by the Prussian officer, and sometime left-Hegelian, Franz Zychlin von Zychlinsky.

²⁸ 'Zur Judenfrage' 357/156/222.

²⁹ 'Briefwechsel von 1843' 341/140/204. The book is the wonderfully titled *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*.

‘prose’;³⁰ his pointed criticism of Arnold Ruge for making ‘every object the occasion for stylistic exercises in public’;³¹ and his relentless ridiculing of Szeliga’s ‘dialectical reasoning’.³²

There are also problems with the content of the early writings. Some of the central ideas with which Marx is preoccupied – of alienation, ‘objectification’, self-realisation, and so forth – are difficult ones, even considered apart from his occasionally obscuring prose. Moreover, that problem of intrinsic complexity is compounded, for modern readers, at least, by the unfamiliarity of some of those concepts.

The status of many of the early writings also creates problems. These writings include published works, pieces intended for eventual publication but not published, and pieces never intended for publication. The assumption that these various texts should have equal authority is open to doubt. It might seem reasonable to attribute extra weight to those writings which constituted a public statement of Marx’s views.³³ However, the wider political context, including the complexities of contemporary censorship, complicates matters here, and published texts certainly cannot be assumed to include all that Marx might have wanted to say. Unpublished texts are no less problematic. Some of the most important of the early writings appear in study notebooks whose primary purpose was the clarification of Marx’s own ideas to himself. The problem here is not simply that Marx’s prose was never polished for public consumption, but rather that these texts are frequently part of an internal dialogue whose wider meaning is uncertain.

In addition, the polemical focus of these works creates problems for modern readers. It is a striking feature of the early writings that, almost without exception, Marx proceeds by criticising the writings of others. The *Kritik* is a critical commentary on Hegel’s *Rechtsphilosophie*; ‘Zur Judenfrage’ and *Die heilige Familie* are attacks on the work of Bruno Bauer; the ‘Kritische Randglossen’ is a polemic against Arnold Ruge’s journalism; and so on. This adversarial focus may say something about the young Marx’s personality and ambition – all of these targets were older and better known than himself – but it also demonstrates his characteristic way of working. Marx tended to develop his own ideas through a critical engagement with the writings of others, and this creates a number of interpretative difficulties for modern readers. In particular, one cannot rely on the young Marx himself

³⁰ *Kritik* 205/7/61. See also *ibid.* 215/16/72.

³¹ ‘Kritische Randglossen’ 405/202/416.

³² *Die heilige Familie* 67/64.

³³ See, for example, Keith Graham, *Karl Marx, Our Contemporary: Social Theory for a Post-Leninist World* (Toronto, 1992) p. 2.

for an accurate account of his critical targets.³⁴ This is largely the result of Marx taking the reader's knowledge of those critical targets for granted (and not, I think, of any systematic or deliberate attempt to mislead). Given his limited contemporary audience this was not an unreasonable attitude, but modern readers are obviously a very different matter. As a result, in what follows I provide (often extensive) accounts of several authors other than Marx, in particular of G. W. F. Hegel, Bruno Bauer, and Ludwig Feuerbach.³⁵ Without some knowledge of their work, it is not only impossible to understand and judge the success of Marx's criticisms, but also difficult to make sense of his own positive views. The latter have to be reconstructed, at least in part, from Marx's critical assessment of others.

HUMAN NATURE AND THE MODERN STATE

Thus far it might appear as if the present book were limited only by a particular – if (as yet) imprecisely specified – time frame. However, my remit is doubly restricted, bound by both chronology and content. Both of these constraints require some elaboration.

I have already referred to the first restriction (my limited chronological remit) noting, for example, the narrow definition of 'the young Marx' and 'the early writings' that is adopted here.³⁶ To be more precise, I use these expressions to refer to Marx (who was then in his mid-twenties) and the work that he produced (beginning with the 'Briefwechsel von 1843' and ending just before he began writing *Die deutsche Ideologie*) during a two-and-a-half-year period from March 1843 to September 1845. Of course, in adopting this nomenclature, I do not mean to deny the existence of perfectly plausible senses in which Marx was also 'young' in 1846, or his writings still 'early' in 1842. However, this is a close study of a chronologically limited group of writings and some economical way of referring to those texts and their author was required.

The second restriction concerns the content or subject matter of those texts. I am interested, not in all aspects of his early writings, but rather in the political thought of the young Marx. More precisely (if somewhat

³⁴ See David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx* (London, 1969) p. 51; and Allan Megill, *Karl Marx: The Burden of Reason (Why Marx Rejected Politics and the Market)* (Lanham MD, 2002) p. 156.

³⁵ To avoid confusion, Bauer's brothers – unlike Bruno himself – always appear with their first name attached.

³⁶ 'Narrow' since the early writings are often defined more broadly, typically as all of those works written in and before 1845. See, for example, Jonathan Wolff, *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford, 2002) p. 10.

schematically), the present book is concerned with his account of the emergence, the character, and the (future) replacement of the modern state. In exploring these topics, I have been preoccupied with the close, if sometimes elusive, relation between Marx's account of politics and his conception of human nature.

I conjectured above that present circumstances might provide a comparatively favourable opportunity to improve our understanding of Marx's work. Of course, one might acknowledge the existence of an opportunity, but question the value of pursuing it. It might be thought, for example, that any rationale for being interested in Marx had collapsed with the Soviet Union. However, that some significant percentage of the world's population had his airbrushed portrait on the walls of their government offices was never the best reason for being interested in Marx's *ideas*. Indeed, that ubiquity conspired against a proper appreciation of his work. Marx was a thinker whom there was no need to consult at first hand; everyone already knew what he said, and what they thought about what he said. Yet today, when people can be persuaded to read Marx's writings with care and thought, they are often surprised and excited by what they find. They quickly discover an author who has unexpected and interesting things to say, and whom they no longer feel that they have to swallow (or spew out) whole. The young Marx's discussion of the contemporary fate of individuals in civil society, his account of the achievements and failings of modern political life, and his vision of the (as yet unrealised) possibilities of human flourishing all resonate with this new audience.

There is, of course, a connection between these two dimensions of my remit (the chronology and the content). It is in this period, and in these texts, that the relation between politics, modernity, and human nature forms an especially clear and consistent thread in Marx's work.

Before 1843, although it is always possible to trace more or less plausible adumbrations, Marx neither was committed to the same view of, nor did he have the same interest in, the *modern* state. For example, his *Rheinische Zeitung* articles (on press freedom, wood thefts, the divorce law, and so on) are primarily concerned with the character of Prussian rule in the Rhineland and not with the nature of modern political life.³⁷ The young Marx would subsequently insist that the modern state was a very different entity from its feudal and other predecessors, and that conditions in politically backward Germany (the subject of his *Rheinische Zeitung*

³⁷ For an interesting attempt to link Marx's earlier journalism with his later work, see Heinz Lubasz, 'Marx's Initial Problematic: The Problem of Poverty', *Political Studies*, volume 24 (1976) pp. 24–42.

articles) could provide little guidance as to its precise character. As a result, the focus of his earlier journalism could reasonably be described as somewhat parochial and limited.

After 1845, although Marx remains interested in the emergence, character, and replacement of the modern state, his account of these matters is less clearly and closely associated with his philosophical anthropology. It is surely not accurate to describe Marx as simply abandoning without trace his concern with this conjunction of subjects, but he does subsequently appear less certain of the relation between politics and human nature. In addition, other, not necessarily related, ideas about the state emerge alongside – indeed come to dominate – these earlier views. It comes as no surprise to discover that many discussions of Marx's work make no reference to the kind of understanding of modern political life which is a central feature of the early writings.³⁸

The account of the early writings propounded in the present work does not depend upon, or entail, any particular view about the overall structure of Marx's intellectual development. I hope that readers with widely divergent understandings of that latter issue might accept my reading of the early writings. My characterisation of these texts as 'early' is not meant to be pejorative – no putative lack of development or maturity is intended – nor is it meant to suggest any barrier between the writings of the young Marx and material written before or after my chronological remit. (The comments above, regarding the evolution and fate of this conjunction of concerns in works preceding and postdating the early writings, should not be thought to undermine this claim to bracket any wider interpretation of the evolution of Marx's ideas. My intention was simply to offer some explanation both of the limited chronological span of this study and of the relative neglect of this relation between politics and human nature in the literature on Marxism and the state.)

DOUBTS AND AMBITIONS

The prospect of another study of the young Marx will not fill all potential readers with unbridled enthusiasm. In particular, three reservations about the present study might be broached here.

First, one might consider the early writings to be without merit, and doubt whether the young Marx provides much interesting reflection on

³⁸ See, for example, the 'instrumentalist', 'class balance', and 'abdication' models of the state outlined in Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge, 1985) chapter 7.

topics of importance. In these preliminary remarks, I shall not respond directly to this reservation. I suspect that anyone convinced in advance that the early writings are not of intellectual interest is unlikely to be moved by any brief observations that I might make here. That so many others have been intellectually engaged by these works does not constitute a very powerful rejoinder to this doubt. As one recent critic has observed, many 'brilliant, nutty writers' – such as Henry George in America at the end of the nineteenth century or Alexandre Kojève in post-war France – have been hugely influential for a generation or two without ever establishing a stronger or more lasting claim to our attention.³⁹ The question whether on reflection, and without the artificial sustenance once provided by the existence of the Soviet Union, Marx might turn out to be 'more like George and Kojève than like Aristotle and Kant' is a serious one.⁴⁰ That said, should readers with such doubts venture further, one ambition of this work as a whole is to weaken their scepticism.

Second, one might take the transparency of Marx's early writings for granted, and question the need for any elaborate exegesis. An effective rejoinder to this doubt is easier to provide. I have already raised some of the interpretative difficulties facing modern readers, and it is hard to imagine a persuasive denial of the need for appropriate critical guidance. Indeed, it has become something of a commonplace to remark upon the notorious opacity of the early writings – to bemoan, as one writer has put it, 'the dead formulae and the (by now often meaningless) Hegelian patter that mars some of the most original pages of Marx' – a commonplace, readers will note, that I have not entirely forsworn myself.⁴¹

Third, one might assume that the existing literature has already covered the pertinent issues, leaving little scope for further discussion; if anything is worth saying about Marx's writings, then surely it must have been said by now. However, whilst there is no shortage of studies of Marx, not all of that work is of a high standard. It may be appropriate to mention three particular features of that secondary material which I have reacted against in my own work. Discussion of Marx's work often takes the form of (more or less convincing) commentary on a small number of familiar passages from well-known works. Careful readings of single works and discussion of less familiar texts are relatively unusual. In what follows, as well as covering some well-trodden ground, I examine many lesser-known passages and texts. I do so, not only better to interpret the Famous Quotations, but

³⁹ Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999) p. 218.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219. ⁴¹ Isaiah Berlin, *The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess* (Cambridge, 1959) p. 38.

also to shift attention away from them.⁴² An additional feature of much of the literature is that commentators cluster around two equally implausible evaluative poles. There are those who confuse Marx's endorsement of a claim with that claim's being true, and those who confuse Marx's endorsement of a claim with that claim's being false. I have tried to resist the attractions of both of these poles, pointing out obscurities, omissions, and objections, at the same time as attempting sympathetically to make sense of what Marx wrote. Finally, some of the relevant literature underestimates the degree of 'translation' that Marx's ideas require if they are to be understood. I refer here not to the many literal problems of working from texts written in a language other than English, but to the additional difficulties of understanding works written in an unfamiliar intellectual and cultural context.⁴³ Indeed, one might reasonably complain that commentators are often rather better at writing in the manner of the young Marx than at helping modern readers understand what he might have meant by what he wrote.⁴⁴

So much for my defensive comments. Corresponding to these (legitimate) doubts, I have three (modest) ambitions for the present volume. I hope that this book provides some support for the claim that the work of the young Marx contains ideas that are worthy of further study, helps clarify some of the arguments and assumptions of the early writings, and adds something of value to an already voluminous existing literature.

It will become apparent that, in addition to these modest aspirations, I seek to revise some established views about particular aspects of Marx's thought. Perhaps the most central of these revisions concerns the widespread assumption that Marx is irredeemably and without qualification opposed to the state and politics. I maintain that Marx's view of the state and politics, at least in the early writings, is both more complex and more positive than this received account would suggest. Other interpretative commonplaces that I challenge, include claims that the *Kritik* simply reproduces the 'transformative criticism' of Feuerbach; that the *Manuskripte* embody a 'return' to Hegel; that the young Marx's comments on the 'Jewish

⁴² The felicitous capitalisation ('the Famous Quotations') is borrowed from Ben Brewster's translation of 'les Célèbres Citations'. Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 27.

⁴³ On literal problems, Engels' critical comments on the efforts of 'John Broadhouse' (a pseudonym of H. M. Hyndman) are of interest. See 'How Not to Translate Marx'. These linguistic problems are, of course, compounded by historical distance.

⁴⁴ The following 'elucidatory' sentence is taken from a modern commentary (which it might be courteous not to identify here). It purports to explain a passage from the early writings, but could easily pass for an opaque specimen of Marx's contemporary prose: 'In other words, as long as man is political man, that is, an atomistic individual separated from his real social being, religion will continue to be the spirit of civil society, the objectified, alien, social essence; and money will remain the substance of civil society, the objectified, alien, social product.'

question' are antisemitic; that the concept of moral rights is rejected in 'Zur Judenfrage'; and that Marx was relentlessly hostile to utopian socialism. These are just some of the views which I hope do not survive unscathed from what follows.

In addition, I propound some new ways of looking at Marx's contemporaries (notably Bauer and Feuerbach), and at the relation between Marx and some of his precursors (notably Hegel, Rousseau, and Saint-Simon). I hope that these, sometimes extensive, discussions of other authors have a value in addition to the light which they shine on the writings of the young Marx. For example, I seek to cast some significant doubt on the dominant interpretations of both Bauer's antisemitism and Feuerbach's attitude towards politics.

ORGANISATION AND ARGUMENT

Of course, this kind of list – enumerating some of the established views about Marx (and others) that I seek to revise – provides little sense of the structure of the present book. Without pre-empting too much of its substantive content, it may be helpful to close these preliminary remarks with some account of the architecture of what follows. My comments will cover both the overall argument and internal structure of the text.

The present work is organised around three central chapters. These are concerned, broadly speaking, with the emergence, character, and (future) replacement of the modern state, respectively. Each chapter seeks to elaborate and illuminate Marx's account of these topics through an examination of one of the central critical targets of, or formative influences on, the early writings. In Chapter 2, I portray the critical engagement (in the *Kritik* and elsewhere) with Hegel's *Rechtsphilosophie* as providing the frame of reference in which Marx introduces his own understanding of the historical emergence of the modern state. In Chapter 3, I discuss the way in which his rejection (in 'Zur Judenfrage' and elsewhere) of Bauer's antisemitic writings provides the context of Marx's own account of the achievements and failings of 'political emancipation' (the kind of liberation associated with the modern state). Finally, in Chapter 4, from the vantage point provided by an analysis of Feuerbach's philosophical project, I examine Marx's account of the fate of the state and politics in a (future) society based on human flourishing.

These three central chapters are bracketed by two shorter ones. In the first of these (the present chapter), I have provided a brief account of the discovery and reception of Marx's early writings, broached some of the

interpretative difficulties that these texts present, and outlined a few of my own ambitions in undertaking this study. In the second of these shorter chapters (which concludes the volume), I summarise some of my findings and attempt to provide some explanation of the (previously identified) weaknesses and omissions in the young Marx's account of future society.

As may already be apparent, this is not a book which propounds a single dominant thesis. It has a number of argumentative threads, not all of which depend upon the others. That said, there is both an intellectual coherence to these various threads and an argumentative structure to the book as a whole. That intellectual coherence is provided by both my subject matter (Marx's account of the emergence, character, and replacement of the modern state) and the distinctive treatment that it receives here (combining analytical and historical concerns). That overall argumentative structure is provided by the contrast between the young Marx's account of the modern state and his vision of what might replace it. Marx's diagnosis of the achievements and failings of the modern state is relatively clear and coherent, whereas his vision of human emancipation remains fragmentary and opaque (not least because its institutional embodiment remains hopelessly underspecified). That latter weakness is identified as flowing, in large part, from Marx's insufficiently motivated rejection of the need to provide 'blueprints' (the various plans, models, and templates) of a possible future society.

So much for the overall structure and argument of the present book. I turn now to address the relation between the young Marx's understanding of the emergence of the modern state and his critical engagement with Hegel's political philosophy.

CHAPTER 2

German philosophy

The extent and nature of his indebtedness to Hegel are perhaps the most fiercely contested issues in Marx scholarship. However, despite widespread and bitter disagreement concerning the *subsequent* development of Marx's thought, the 'Hegelian' character of the early writings is usually treated as incontrovertible. The assumption that it is Hegel who provides the predominant influence on the work of the *young* Marx is shared by proponents of both the 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' accounts of his overall intellectual evolution. Indeed, the purported Hegelianism of Marx's early writings frequently provides the reference point against which these very notions of 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' are defined and defended. The literature typically canvasses only two interpretative possibilities – either Marx ceased to be a Hegelian, or he did not cease to be a Hegelian.¹

I regard this overwhelming consensus about the Hegelian character of the early writings with a degree of scepticism. Not least, its foundations look problematic. It is typically built on two tempting but contestable interpretative tendencies: the first is to treat German philosophy as the only significant influence on the young Marx; the second is to treat Hegel as if he constituted the entirety (as opposed to a part) of German philosophy. I have tried to resist both of these interpretative temptations in the present work, acknowledging the diversity, not only of German philosophy, but also of other possible influences on the young Marx.

In the present context, it is the second of these contestable interpretative tendencies – identifying as 'Hegelian' ideas whose provenance in German philosophical and cultural thought is much wider than that term would suggest – that is most pertinent. Consider two familiar attempts to establish Marx's Hegelianism by appealing to his use of particular philosophical motifs. Evidence of Hegel's decisive influence on Marx is occasionally found in the latter's use of the term '*Aufhebung*' (sometimes translated, rather

¹ See, for example, Jean Hyppolite, *Etudes sur Marx et Hegel* (Paris, 1955) pp. 107ff.

archaically, as 'sublation' in English). The use of '*Aufhebung*' to connote a distinctive and complex combination of cancellation, preservation, and elevation, is widely assumed to originate with Hegel. Accordingly, Marx's use of the term (in anything approaching this sense) is treated as a simple but effective guarantee of his Hegelianism.² However, the term '*Aufhebung*' is used earlier, and in the same way, by other authors with whose work Marx was familiar. For example, Friedrich Schiller uses the term in precisely this sense at several points in his treatise *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795). Schiller adopts it, for instance, to characterise the manner in which certain familiar oppositions (between feeling and thought, passivity and action, matter and form) are cancelled, preserved, and elevated in the idea of 'beauty (*Schönheit*)'.³ The same assumption of Hegelian provenance is made concerning the idea of a dialectical progression from a stage of undifferentiated unity, through a stage of differentiation without unity, to a stage of differentiated unity.⁴ Where this idea appears in Marx's work it is presumed to confirm Hegel's influence. Yet it would be a mistake to identify this dialectical progression with Hegel alone. It constitutes a motif which was common to a number of writers associated (more or less closely) with *Frühromantik*, the period of early German romanticism which flourished in Jena and Berlin between 1796 and 1801. For example, this idea of a dialectical progression forms the organising structure of *Hyperion, oder Der Eremit in Griechenland* (1799). Through a somewhat sentimental narrative, Friedrich Hölderlin recounts a story of the loss, and recovery at a higher level, of humankind's unity with nature and God. (Hölderlin's contribution to German idealism is increasingly recognised, and one commentator has appositely described *Hyperion* as more 'Hegelian' than anything that Hegel was himself writing at this time.⁵) I raise these two examples (the use of '*Aufhebung*' and this idea of dialectical progression), not in order to substitute the claims of Schiller, Hölderlin, or indeed anyone else for those of Hegel, but rather to question some familiar ways of trying to establish

² See, for example, the (somewhat remorseless) cataloguing of Marx's use of '*Aufhebung*' in order to demonstrate his Hegelianism, in Shlomo Avineri, *The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx* (Cambridge, 1969) pp. 36–8, 84, 99, 105, 150, 160, 179, 186, 202–4, 208–12, 221, 243, 250.

³ See, for example, Friedrich Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (Oxford, 1967) pp. 123–5, 172–3. Note also the editorial remarks of Wilkinson and Willoughby, *ibid.* pp. 304–5.

⁴ See, for example, G. A. Cohen, *History, Labour, and Freedom: Themes From Marx* (Oxford, 1988) chapter 10.

⁵ For *Hyperion*, see Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, volume 3: *Hyperion* (Stuttgart, 1958). For the apposite description, see Edward Craig, *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford, 1987) p. 163. See also Dieter Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt am Main, 1971) pp. 9–40; and Eckart Förster, 'To Lend Wings to Physics Once Again: Hölderlin and the Oldest System Programme of German Idealism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, volume 3 (1995) pp. 174–90.