

LETTERS

TO THE EDITOR:

Sidney Hook's review of *Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx*, in the September issue, objects strongly to my effort to reinterpret Marx's thought in the light of the early philosophical manuscripts and to analyze Marxism in religious terms. Since the former point was especially emphasized and moreover involves some issues that until lately have not been much discussed in Anglo-American Marx scholarship, I would be grateful for the opportunity to comment on what was said about it.

Since the review did not summarize the book's argument, let me do so in three sentences here: Marx's 1844 manuscripts contain a first sketch of Marxism in terms of the concept of self-alienation, which he inherited from earlier German philosophy, particularly that of Hegel and Feuerbach. There is a basic underlying continuity between this philosophically formulated "original Marxism," which depicts history as a story of man's self-alienation in economic activity and communism as the transcendence of this alienation, and the "mature Marxism" of Marx's later writings and those of Engels. For while Marx repudiated the term "self-alienation" after 1844, he preserved the essential content of the idea in the special meaning he assigned to the notion of "division of labor," and furthermore he embodied in the figures of the "capitalist" and "proletarian" as projected in *Capital* the forces at war in the alienated man as portrayed in the early manuscripts.

Professor Hook's review attacks the book on the ground that it "dishes up" as the secret of the real Marx "the metaphysical tripe in the unpublished early manuscripts." He suggests that I ought not to have attached such large importance to these "early views which were essentially Hegelian and Feuerbachian and which Marx himself left unpublished." And he asserts that Marxism has no place for a concept of man's self-alienation since Marx holds that man has no "true nature" but only an historically changing one, so "What is the self alienated from?"

As it happens, this question is answered in my book. Marx views human nature as both an historical variable and a constant. Man changes during history with changes in the mode of production, but remains, through all these historical transformations, the producing animal, a being whose nature it is to find self-fulfillment in freely performed productive activities of various kinds. In the 1844 manuscripts Marx postulates such free conscious creativity as the "species character" of man, and this view is implicit in his later writings. Hence what the alienated human self is alienated from during history, according to Marx, is its freely or spontaneously productive nature. Man produces, but not "in a human manner." Marx presupposes that men will realize their nature, finally, in communist society, defined as one in which labor, thanks to the abolition of private property, will be "emancipated" from the acquisitive drive or quest for "surplus value." Thus Marx's concept of man's self-alienation has to be understood in connection with his concept of human self-realization, and the latter forms an integral part of his definition of the very idea of communism.

Not wanting to see that the doctrine of history developed by Marx in the 1844 manuscripts was an "original Marxism," Professor Hook insists on

classifying the views Marx expressed there as “essentially Hegelian and Feuerbachian” (as well as “metaphysical tripe”). I would be the last to deny that the Hegelian and Feuerbachian influences are powerful and pervasive. But that this is Marxism in its original philosophical form of expression is, I believe, shown conclusively by a mass of evidence adduced in my book. For example, the 1844 manuscripts are characteristically Marxian in that Marx, quite unlike Hegel or Feuerbach, here defines alienation as an economic phenomenon primarily, and views economic activity as the basis of all history. The latter proposition is of course a first premise of historical materialism.

As for the point that Marx never published the manuscripts, this is no serious argument against attaching large importance to them in an interpretation of Marx’s thought. I have dealt briefly in the book with the question of why Marx did not publish them, but would now like to add the following. It is common experience for a creative thinker to write his book to himself in voluminous notes before he writes it for publication. One who has done this does not ordinarily publish the raw notes, yet likes to keep them for future reference because they record his thought process at a decisive stage. So it was with Marx. The 1844 manuscripts are, as it were, the notes in which he first wrote down Marxism to himself in the idiom of German philosophy before publishing it to the world. Why should we not, then, expect to find in them an invaluable source of insight into the creative mental process by which Marxism was born, and so of deeper understanding of its meaning?

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PROFESSOR HOOK REPLIES:

I took no exception to Professor Tucker’s attempt to analyze Marxism in religious terms. This is a familiar enough approach and if we disregard the traditional connotations of the word “religion,” may even be useful for some purposes. I did and do take exception to Professor Tucker’s view that Marx’s mature thought can be truly characterized as a restatement of his early Hegelian notions, and that according to Marx, history is a process through which man overcomes his “self-alienation” on the road to a classless society.

The whole notion of “self-alienation” is derived from religious assumptions and presupposes the existence of a self or soul in union with the One or God from which alienation takes place. I pointed out (the argument is developed in the new introduction to the paperback reprint of my *From Hegel to Marx*, University of Michigan Press, 1961), that it is completely incompatible with the Marxian view that man’s nature develops in history, and that he has no original or true self or nature from which he is alienated. To my question: “What is the self alienated from?” Professor Tucker replies that Marx views human nature as both an historical variable and a constant, and that his constant nature is to be “the producing animal, a being whose nature is to find self-fulfillment in freely performed productive activities of various kinds.”