The Moral Assessment and Critique of Capitalism:
A reconstruction and defense of the Marxian theory of exploitation

A Senior Honors Thesis
By
Kory Preston Schaff

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Approved: __________________________ Date: ______-

Thesis Director Signature

Dr. Tim Morris, Dept. of Philosophy

Approved: __________________________ Date: ______-

Second Reader Signature

Dr. Allen Vander Meulen, Dept. of Economics
Thus the question as to how a categorical imperative is possible can be answered to the extent that there can be supplied the sole presupposition under which such an imperative is alone possible—namely, the idea of freedom.

Immanuel Kant, 
*Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785)

For three years past, trade had been getting worse and worse, and the price of provisions higher and higher. This disparity between the amount of the earnings of the working class, and the price of their food, occasioned in more cases than could well be imagined, disease and death. Whole families went through a gradual starvation. They only wanted a Dante to record their sufferings.

Elizabeth Gaskell, 
*Mary Barton, A Tale of Manchester Life* (1848)

All privileged and powerful classes, as such, have used their power in the interest of their own selfishness, and have indulged their self-importance in despising, and not in lovingly caring for, those who were, in their estimation, degraded by being under the necessity of working for their benefit . . . but though the evil may be lessened, it cannot be eradicated, until the power itself is withdrawn.

John Stuart Mill, 
*Principles of Political Economy* (1848)

Capital is, therefore, not a personal, it is a social power.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 
*The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
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This thesis is the final product resulting from a range of experiences, coursework, and intellectual diversions, which I hope reveal the extent and depth of my convictions. Because there can be no better way to end an undergraduate career than to write out of me what I have learned for four years, this has indeed been a challenging and rewarding experience.

I dedicate this work, then, to my mentor, Dr. Tim Morris, in hopes that this is not the last collaborative project which we undertake together.
The present essay focuses on the concept of exploitation in Marx's thought. It should be noted from the outset, however, that the range of Marx's thought covered in this essay is not limited to the concept of exploitation. His contributions in political economy, history, and philosophy cover an equally wide range of concerns: class struggle, the condition of the working population, and even the emancipation of the proletariat through revolutionary means. The concept of exploitation can be derived from all of these topics, and it is at the least implicit within much of Marx's mature economic writings. From class struggle to revolutionary emancipation, from economic investigation to his theory of history, exploitation can be understood in relation to each, insofar as each relates to Marx's sustained critique of capitalism.

The point of this essay is not to derive the concept of exploitation from all these various aspects of Marx's thinking. Instead, this essay attempts to show that the concept of exploitation is fundamental to Marx's overall thought, whether historical, economic, or philosophical. I argue that the core value of his concept of exploitation is a normative one against which all things for Marx are measured. The concept of exploitation in Marx's critique of capitalism is much more forceful in this way. Rather than being limited to the more narrow economic conception that Marx himself articulated, the concept of exploitation is morally embedded, which subsequent empirical descriptions reflect. Marx
was certainly no moral philosopher in the Western ethical tradition, but the lack of an explicit statement on these matters does not mean he was amoral, or for that matter, anti-moral. After all, Marx was human and humans are by their nature “moral animals.”

Much post-Marxian thought concerns itself with the moral status of Marxism: whether Marx had a moral framework, whether socialism is, or must have, a moral standard to measure capitalism against, whether Marxists should concern themselves with moral discussions, given the remarks by Marx that all morality is a product of ideology.

All of these issues manifest themselves in one way or another through the works of Marx, and what I call the “post-Marxian” tradition is the reconstruction and extension of Marx’s thoughts in light of new historical and social conditions, such as the global economy, the welfare state, the role of credit markets, and especially the fall of communism in the East.

No one in this tradition has the final say on any of these questions, especially since Marx’s lack of clarity on the matters, as well as some apparent inconsistencies on his part, has allowed exegetical arguments on both sides of any given question about what Marx said (and so thought) to flourish ad nauseam. In fact, the late 1970’s and early 1980’s witnessed a massive industry in Marx scholarship. In journals, popular publications, and books after book, the arguments over Marx’s position on many so-called “normative” issues were debated. The concept of exploitation became the focal point of this debate,
and one can trace the arguments and their responses through the years, as one critic after another launched counterarguments against the theses of such philosophers and social theorists as Allen Wood, Robert Paul Wolff, G.A. Cohen, John Roemer, and others.

The arguments of these philosophers and social scientists have been grouped loosely together under the title of “analytical Marxism” to denote their similar styles and approaches to the study of Marx. The affiliation among philosophers and social scientists alike has resulted in the body of their work, as well as the methodology they engage in, to be referred to as “analytic.” Among English-speaking philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition of analytic philosophy (following the philosophies of early twentieth century thinkers like Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and G.E. Moore), individuals like Wood and Cohen began to examine central topics in Marxist thought by using “all the rigor and conceptual clarity that characterized that tradition” (Ware 2). Among social scientists, “analytic” means something slightly different. Individuals like the economist Roemer and the political scientist Jon Elster began examining those same topics using standard tools of the orthodox social sciences, such as game theory, mathematical models, and “rational choice” theory (Ware 3).

To characterize this affiliation between philosophers and social scientists under the title “analytical Marxism” as a homogenous group with similar goals would be misleading,
however. "There is no one theory of analytical Marxism," philosopher Robert Ware points out, "not even one way of doing analytical Marxism. It is certainly not a movement, either theoretical or practical, with a core set of beliefs" (5). While it is true that analytical Marxism is not homogenous, there must be some shared assumptions among this loose group of Marx scholars, in order for there to be any discussion at all. I have already alluded to the fact that there is a great emphasis on exegesis of Marx’s texts, and on this point there is no dispute: all of these individuals read Marx both prolifically and sympathetically. There are other assumptions, too, which they share, and the present essay argues that the most fundamental one, the so-called distinction between fact and value in conceptual thought and empirical method, explains why the focal point of the larger debate of Marxism and morality is located on the Marxian concept of exploitation.

It is my thesis that Marx has a normative dimension to his thought, which has been mystified by his attention and commitment to empirical matters of the descriptive and explanatory variety. This mystification results from what I call the fallacy of fact/value, which reflects a belief in the dominant form of Western philosophy that empirical truth is independent of moral truth.⁴ It is easy to understand why Marx is claimed to have little or no normative dimension to his thought. Marx was a thinker who explicitly claimed to be involved in a science of social systems, which included economics and "scientific" history
This claim was accompanied by volumes and volumes of empirical investigation and political commentary, with intermittent, often obscured, comments alluding to his thoughts on moral matters. In this way, the argument against Marx having a normative dimension (one that is important to his critique of capitalism) seems favorably loaded with much ammunition. For all that, however, the issue of morality in Marx’s thought continues to plague Marxism generally. It is my argument that Marx did, in fact, have a “moral point of view” so to speak, but that the possibility of understanding it has been limited by problems characteristic of the post-Marxian tradition, especially that part of it called “analytical Marxism.”

In this paper I aim to present and defend a thesis, primarily through philosophical argument that (1) reveals the inherent philosophical and practical mistakes of analytical Marxism, and (2) reconstructs and defends a concept of exploitation that proves that Marx does indeed have a normative dimension to his thought that is crucial to understanding the larger context of his criticisms of capitalism generally. The argument has two levels, then. First, I seek to show how analytical Marxism really fails to grasp the concept of exploitation as a normative one. I attempt to do this by showing that the fact-value distinction is prevalent in both the methodological assumptions and the definitions of exploitation that analytical Marxists reconstruct. Second, I offer an alternative concept of
exploitation, one whose definition includes the necessary normative component which makes the critique of capitalism an interesting and politically forceful one.

Part I of this paper briefly defines the contours of the major problem with analytical Marxism regarding the fallacy of fact/value, and puts the discussion of Marxism and morality in the historical perspective of this theme in moral philosophy generally. Part II locates the place of Marx’s concept of exploitation on the larger map of his materialist philosophy and theory of history. I shall argue for a position I call “normative historicity,” which claims Marx’s views on these subjects, especially his progressive view of history, are loaded with important values that inform the rest of this thought. Part III narrows the search for Marx’s normativity by looking at the concept of exploitation in post-Marxian thought, specifically in the debate among analytic Marxists. Here I show the shortcomings of this diverse group in understanding the Marxian theory of exploitation by arguing that the fact-value distinction is everywhere in analytical Marxism, even among individuals sympathetic to a normative rendering of it. In Part IV I reconstruct and defend exploitation as a moral concept, and show that its various conceptions derive from a few basic features of it conceived normatively. I reconstruct Marx’s theory of exploitation in an attempt to show that it is “normatively descriptive” in the sense that, as a critique of capitalism, it is both a factual and moral account combined. I then compare this concept
to that of Marx’s predecessor, Immanuel Kant. By reconstructing Kant’s moral argument and its requirements for ethical judgements and action, I hope to illuminate its stark similarities with Marx’s argument that capitalism is inherently exploitative. Whether this is a coincidence or not I leave open to question since my purpose is not to discover Kant’s influence on Marx himself. Rather, my purpose is to show that the similarities are morally important.\(^6\)

Finally, I conclude by leaving open-ended where the post-Marxian tradition is going in terms of Marx’s normative thought, although I make a few gestures regarding the effects of arguing a Marxist position with a depoliticized point of view. My belief is that without a moral concern to motivate action, a critical assessment of capitalism matters very little, thus diminishing the force of Marx’s critique against capitalism, and to this end analytical Marxism fails to carry on the spirit of Marx’s project.

I Fact and value in analytic philosophy and Marx

Ethical concerns, it is assumed, have little or nothing to do with those scientific concerns of explaining physical or social phenomenon. In other words, what one “ought” to do cannot be derived from what “is” and vice-versa. In philosophical argument this problem is called the naturalistic fallacy, and the problem is said to stem from the
separateness of our moral judgements from our rational ones. The primacy of the
cientific world-view resulting from the Enlightenment project in the eighteenth century
continues today, and the social sciences (those empirical methodologies which seek to
explain non-physical, social phenomenon) reflect these same assumptions. As a result, the
dichotomy of fact/value is implicit within the work done by both philosophers and social
scientists, and it is my argument that analytical Marxism is especially guilty of this
problem.

I shall briefly trace the fact-value distinction as it appears in analytic philosophy
generally, following this line of thinking from the empiricist philosopher David Hume in
the eighteenth century to G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell in the twentieth century. My
point is to compare this historical line of argument, and its direct connection to analytic
philosophy, to the history of nineteenth century German idealism in such figures as Kant,
F.W.J. Schelling, and G.W.F. Hegel, as well as subsequent German reactions to idealism
found in Friedrich Nietzsche and Marx. I hope to reveal that the fact-value dichotomy is
almost never at work in the totalizing philosophies of these thinkers, and that in many
cases, the distinction between facts and values is explicitly denied. In this way, I argue
that there is a serious disjunction between analytical Marxist reconstructions of Marx's
thought and the thought of Marx himself. Marx did not see the fact-value distinction as a
tenable one, and any subsequent attempts to analyze Marx in which this distinction is assumed are problematic. I shall take up first that tradition which makes the argument that the fact-value divide does exist, and then show that side which holds such propositions to be philosophically, and sometimes logically, unsound.

The history of moral philosophy is characterized by the argument which attempts to generate a binding moral obligation, whether it be connected to reason or emotion. The ongoing conversation from Socrates forward includes a concern for understanding what, if anything, makes our moral judgements distinct from rational ones. For example, what makes the proposition “x should do y” different than a proposition which we submit to empirical description such as “x is y” is the belief in our ability to make claims about the truth of propositions only with empirical verification. The difficulty in assessing the difference between moral concepts and more descriptive or factual ones has its source in an assumption on our part that there exists a gap between the two. Sometimes this “gap” is called the empirical-normative distinction, the fact-value problem, or the rational-intuitive separation. The gap is especially prevalent in British empiricist philosophy, a form of philosophy reacting to Cartesian rationalism. For empiricists, to reconcile knowledge with human experience had the necessary outcome of concluding that the rationalist project was counter-intuitive and mildly implausible. The British empiricists
held this position, since for them no knowledge could exist independent from experience.

Hume is a central figure in this tradition, so I examine his thought on the fact-value distinction, even though this line of thinking did not begin here.

Hume conceived of this difficulty in moral philosophy as the "is/ought" problem. For him, a proposition of fact could never be derived from a proposition of value. Hume was responding to the rationalist tradition following Descartes, which was characterized by a sense that human reason had no limits. Hume's epistemological response to this tradition was that experience, as the foundation for knowledge, required a science of human understanding, one that recognized the limits of human reason. As a result, Hume claimed that the objects of human reason could be divided into two parts: relations of ideas and matters of fact (78-80; 1988). The former contained within it propositions such as those we find in mathematics generally; for example, the geometrical proposition that the area of a square is the length of its side squared. Matters of fact, on the other hand, are propositions arising from a "contiguity" of our experience, rather than a logical necessity of cause and effect, which rationalists held and which Hume denounced, based on our inability to experience its nexus. "From causes which appear similar we expect similar effects. This is the sum of all our experiential conclusions" (80; 1988). The truth of the proposition that the sun will rise tomorrow does not as a matter of fact require that
its opposite is therefore false; it is only because our experience coincides with the rising sun every day that we are justified in holding as a fact that the sun will rise tomorrow.

The epistemological implications following from this philosophy are detrimental to the status of moral reasoning. For Hume, any proposition that existed neither in the category of relations of ideas nor in the category of matters of fact were cognitively insignificant. In short, they did not properly belong to the scope of reason. The only other category set apart from the limits of reason is one containing either beliefs or feelings. Here is the source of the split between fact and value in all its forms. What is properly the object of reason is not feeling or sentiment since they cannot be subjected to empirical inquiry, and if moral concerns are part of our sentiments, then they are not properly the object of reason. "Reason, said Hume, is the slave of the passions" (Reiman 55; 1990). Because sentiment is the source of morality de facto (since this seems a convenient place to put it given its empirically elusive status), natural facts cannot lead us to moral principles. This is the naturalistic fallacy: "is" never implies "ought," and the motivation for acting on what one should do cannot be independently understood by what is. Reason, Hume argues, "is not alone sufficient to produce any moral blame or approbation," and that it takes a feeling to compel action (83; 1983).
The split between fact and value found in Hume continues in a direct line to the logical positivists of the early twentieth century, such as A.J. Ayer who argued ethical arguments cannot be submitted to true and false judgements, given the very scientific fact that they cannot be empirically verified with the principles of verification (Ayer Ch.6). I argue that the impact of positivism on natural science generally is great, and its impact on social science in particular has been acute, especially because of the insistence by those engaged in the science of social systems that their methodologies meet the rigorous demands of natural science (Kuhn 24-37).

The fact-value distinction as a fundamental assumption continues in philosophy today, too, through the influence of British analytic thinkers like Moore and Russell. Moore explicitly addresses this issue by explicating a form of the naturalistic fallacy based on definitions entailing descriptions. He claims that “whatever definition be offered, it may always be asked, with significance, of the complex one so defined, whether it itself is good” (15). Russell, while indirectly connected with this question, did much directly to influence the assumption (by now so ingrained that it is taken for granted) that facts are the primary vehicle for inquiry (Ch.12). Both of these philosophers had tremendous impact on philosophical inquiry, and they did so primarily by contributing to the continuing belief in empiricist philosophy that facts have a kind of primacy, and that values
cannot be submitted to the rigors of empirical investigation. A logical separation is
entailed in this dichotomy, precisely because the inquiry uses facts as a vehicle for
verifying hypotheses which are assumed to be merely descriptive, and therefore silent on
questions of value. While this characteristic assumption is common in Anglo empirical
philosophy (and so social science in its connection to this tradition), the emphasis on the
fact-value divide is not so prevalent in German idealism, and in many cases it is outright
rejected.

The history of German idealism in the nineteenth century, even if Marx reacted
against it, shows the context of thought in which Marx was working to be one where facts
and values are not assumed to be separate objects of inquiry. For example, the connection
between fact and value for Kant is a very real one. I shall not elaborate on this further,
however, for a number of reasons relating to the controversy of this issue in Kant’s
philosophy. Also, I shall take up Kant’s moral philosophy later in this essay and so do
not wish to dwell too much on it at this point in the work. German idealism after Kant is
primarily a reaction to his total philosophy, however, so I only want to mention that the
distinction between empirical and normative concerns in Kant’s thought (“distinction”
being too strong of a word I think) is not anything like that found in empiricist or analytic
philosophy. Kant was concerned to make moral judgement derivative of our practical
reason, so the connection between the two, even in this form, rules out their logical separation.

German philosophers after Kant spent much time on the issue of empirical and normative concerns in an ideal form of philosophy which sought to encompass all human thought and action. Schelling, in his *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*, takes the theme of freedom as the central concern of human thought. In doing so, he argues that previous philosophers fell short in attempting to understand reason, thought, and knowledge. "Since reason, thought, and knowledge are ordinarily accounted distinctive to the realm of spirit, the contrast of Nature and Spirit was at first readily taken up in these terms. This way of looking at the matter was adequately justified by the firm belief that *reason is found only in man*, the conviction that all thought and knowledge are completely subjective and that Nature altogether lacks reason and thought" (Schelling 3). In German idealism, Spirit is *consciousness* and Nature is the *material world*, and the point of philosophical idealism is to explain the reconciliation of Spirit and Nature, so that human consciousness comes to realize its place in the total consciousness of the world.

As one of the early exponents of freedom in the philosophy of idealism, Schelling rejects the notion that thought and objects are logically separate, since all things are part of the totality of Spirit and Nature. His theme of freedom is one which attempts to
totalize or contain all different manifestations of spirit in the material world. “All
philosophy strives only to find this highest expression,” he claims, “It is up to this point
that Idealism has raised philosophy, up to our time . . . Idealism itself is, after all, nothing
less than a finished system” (24). Whether such a “finished system” seems philosophically
sound is unimportant; instead, it is important to note that those distinctions such as
empirical and normative become less tenable in a philosophy which is characterized by its
claims that everything is reconcilable, including Spirit and Nature.

The feature of reconcilability, even between the most seemingly opposed things, is
central to Hegel’s system of philosophy, and it should be noted that many individuals
argue that Marx owes much to his predecessor’s dialectical style (Sayers 99-103). Hegel
uses the dialectic, a process of reasoning out of which paradoxes arise, but in the process
itself are at the same time overcome. Without wandering far away from our issue at hand,
I argue that the fact-value distinction is not an assumption at work in Hegel’s philosophy,
primarily because it is the absolute goal of his system to understand the totality of being in
which Spirit returns to itself.9 The goal of reconciliation for Hegel means thought
becoming adequate to its objects, and this requires the contradictions of spirit and matter,
being and nothing, and concept and object to be reconciled through self-mediation. The
dialectical process promotes this mediation, and the concept Aufhebung, which has the
three-fold connotation of elimination, preservation, and raising, works to unify apparent contradictions in thought. Hegel argues that in the various "spheres of human life, therefore, thinking, under the guise of feeling, faith, or generalised image, has not been inactive: its actions and its productions are there present and therein contained" (20). I take this to mean that no distinctions between fact and value hold insofar as all objects are immanently contained in pure thought itself. Even objects or concepts which appear at first to contradict one another can be reconciled, given their unity in thought thinking about itself. This reconciliation is possible for entire antithetical systems of thought; for example, the tradition which thinks values cannot be part of empirical descriptions becomes absorbed in Hegel's system to include the opposite. Since values are an extension of thought, a different manifestation of itself, it is necessarily connected to the totality of thought returning to itself.

For these thousands of years the same Architect has directed the work; and that Architect is the one and living Mind whose nature is to think, to bring to self-consciousness what it is, and, with its being thus set as object before it, to be at the same time raised above it, and so to reach a higher stage of its own being. The different systems which the history of philosophy presents are therefore not irreconcilable with unity. (Hegel 32)
On this view, Hegel’s system of unity results in the abolition of fact and value. Through the dialectical process, fact and value at once are eliminated as separate, antithetical categories, and raised into a higher stage where the synthesis of the two represents a unity of formerly struggling concepts.

It might be argued that the fact-value distinction is never explicitly taken up by Hegel, and furthermore submitting the distinction to Hegel’s dialectic does not entail a vindication of my claim that fact and value are not separate. These arguments, however, miss the point of what I attempt to reveal. The point is not to assess the truth of Hegel’s system, but to show how certain features of the system cannot be held to the fact-value distinction. Subsequent reactions against Hegel’s idealism, like those found in Nietzsche and Marx, take certain of these features to be relevant, yet deny the truth of the system as a whole.

Nietzsche, for example, responds critically on many counts against Hegel’s highly metaphysical system, but finds some features to be philosophically insightful. The master-servant consciousness is one example, and Nietzsche inverts this relationship to show that Western morality is an attempt by weak-willed individuals to harness the vital impulses of the strong. Another example of German thought in the nineteenth century, Nietzsche’s philosophy outright rejects the fact-value distinction; in fact, he is hostile to the claims of
knowledge primarily because it acts as a facade on the "untruth" of things generally. "This way of judging constitutes the typical pre judgment and prejudice which give away the metaphysicians of all ages; this kind of valuation looms in the background of all their logical procedures; it is on account of this 'faith' that they trouble themselves about 'knowledge,' about something that is finally baptized solemnly as 'the truth'" (Nietzsche 10). For Nietzsche, to embrace a fact is already a kind of value, and this vindicates Hegel’s claim that all supposedly opposing concepts relate back to thought. It is because we are conscious beings that facts are available to us, and we value that insofar as we are beings who are defined by our consciousness. The fact-value distinction is untenable, because "one may doubt, first, whether there are any opposites at all, and secondly whether these popular valuations and opposite values ... are not perhaps merely foreground estimates, only provisional perspectives" (10).

The influence of idealism on German thought is especially true for Marx, who sees himself as turning Hegel's philosophy of idealism "on its head," which is to imply that material reality gives rise to ideas and not the other way around. Regardless of this declared opposition to idealism, Marx utilizes many features of Hegel's philosophy, especially those regarding method applied to a philosophy of history. These include the notion of Entfremdung (alienation) as well as the Aufhebung, which provides Marx with a
process of reasoning to reveal the inherent tendencies of opposites to struggle against one another in an attempt to reach a higher stage. If the preceding sentence sounds oddly like Marx's view of class struggle in history moving toward a communist society, it is because Marx is informed by and utilizes some key features of Hegel's philosophical system. The connection here is crucial in understanding why the fact-value distinction is neither assumed by Marx, nor applicable in reconstructions of his arguments.

Marx's theory of history mirrors the features of Hegel's philosophy which do not allow for the fact-value divide to hold. The lack of distinction between fact and value can be understood especially in Marx's thesis of historical materialism, which is indebted to the Hegelian dialectical method.10

Historical development . . . is divided into a number of distinct stages, or modes of production. Feudal society is followed by capitalism, which in turn gives way to socialism. Each stage arises on the basis of the previous stage, as a higher and more developed historical form. Every stage is therefore a necessary part of the process . . . By the same token, however, no stage is stable or ultimate. Each stage constitutes a merely transitory form, destined ultimately to perish and be replaced by a higher and more developed one. (Sayers 90)
The parallels between Hegel’s dialectical method (as opposed to its outcomes) and Marx’s view of history show to what extent the fact-value distinction does not exist in Marx’s thought. This is primarily because the theory of historical materialism holds all parts of a specific mode of production to be related with all other parts within it, including facts about the material world and those values which reflect them. In some sense, it is like a sociohistorical “mini-model” of Hegel’s metaphysical or spiritual system, one in which the supposed fact-value divide does not exist, or even if it did, it would be collapsed in the process.

While revealing these parallels does not explain the specific place of morality or moral judgements in Marx’s thought, it nonetheless disproves the assumption that facts and values can be separated in his thought, since the entire historical context of nineteenth century German thought does not hold the distinction. And despite the analytical Marxists’ claims that Marx inherited too much of Hegel’s misconceived metaphysics, we should note that Marx abandons it for a more coherent, material and methodological approach in social science. The empirical investigation of capitalism, then, contrary to much post-Marxian thought, does not stand alone from the values which are implicit, either in Marx’s own thought or in his overall project historically. In fact, the argument has been made that Marx commits the naturalistic fallacy, and this charge, of course, is
leveled against him by those who hold the fact-value distinction to be philosophically sound (Sayers 94). Marx’s historical account of societies is *progressive* in the sense that its destination tends toward some *end*, and this is a built in feature of the thesis of historical materialism which reflects some form of value, including, as I have just argued, the lack of fact-value distinctions. Marxism “rejects the view that naturalism is a fallacy, and the rigid fact/value dichotomy upon which this view is based” (95). Furthermore, since Marxism is a form of socialism, “practical ends are integral to it,” so its values cannot be separated from its empirical evaluations (95). Really, Marx’s philosophy of history is a continuation of the Enlightenment project, which sees history as moving forward toward some better end: “Marx was after all an Enlightenment liberal who differed from other liberals *not in their commitment to individual human freedom, but in their notion of what constituted a threat to that freedom*” (Reiman 308; 1989).

So far I have established four relevant things for the completion of my subsequent argument that Marx does have a normative dimension to his thought and that the theory of exploitation is embedded in it: (1) the history of analytic thought holds the fact-value distinction, and even promotes it in arguing versions of the naturalistic fallacy; (2) the history of German idealism in which Marx was both reacting to and working with does not hold this distinction, and the charge that fact and value are logically separate cannot be
leveled against thinkers like Marx who use the dialectical process in conjunction with historical and social theory; (3) Marx’s theory of history uses the dialectical process which mirrors many Hegelian features, not with respect to metaphysics, but in application to empirically verifiable phenomenon; and (4) the thesis of historical materialism is value-laden, in the sense that its descriptions are always at the same time prescriptions with characteristic moral values.

Given what I have just said on the relation of the fact-value distinction to Marx’s philosophy generally, I shall now explicate the theory of historical materialism more completely in order to locate the place of exploitation on its larger map. I also reconstruct Marx’s conception of exploitation specific to the mode of production found in capitalism and link it to his concept of exploitation as a moral issue.

II The place of exploitation in Marx’s thought

Marx analyzes capitalism as a system by searching for the underlying causes of social change, and this empirical investigation proceeds on two levels, containing a theoretical and practical component (Little 41-7). The theoretical component is a set of arguments about the tendencies of history, and the practical component contains the premises on which the theoretical component is built. In the former, Marx lays out his
theory of history, claiming that modes of production which are the defining feature
organizing any given society are part of a process in which one mode of production
replaces another as history moves forward. This theory of history contains some major
concepts that explain social change as it progresses in history as history.

Stated very schematically, historical materialism maintains that facts about
the social and technical properties of the production process in a society--
the forces and relations of production--‘determine’ the properties of
noneconomic institutions, that is, the state, ideology, religion, and the like.

(Little 41)

Historical materialism is the theoretical component, which the practical (empirical)
investigation of the specific mode of production found in capitalism verifies (Little 59-60).

The purpose of the empirical analysis (the “science of society” as opposed to history) is
“to examine the capitalist mode of production, and the conditions of production and
exchange corresponding to that mode” (Marx 19; 1967).

The theory of historical materialism is not merely a descriptive explanation of
history as a concept; instead, it is a value-laden theory about what counts as history, and
more specifically those historical forces that give rise to social change. The mode of
production which characterizes the social whole in terms of a society’s productive
arrangements and capacities includes both the forces and relations of production (Little 41). The forces of production are the material component, the actually existing physical objects of nature, and they make up the material objects in the world that are a prerequisite for productive activity to occur (Little 49). For example, natural resources are part of the forces of production, and productive activity creates their usefulness, just as a processing refinery makes gas from crude oil. The relations of production include the technical structure of production (for example, the kind of productive arrangement available at a point in history) as well as the production process itself (for example, manufacturing in the modern era). Thus, the infrastructure of the processing plant itself, as well as the labor that runs it, comprise the relations of production that channel productive activity to create useful material goods.

The relations of production are what some Marxists call "the base" in a model which tries to provide a functional explanation for the ways in which the productive arrangements are reflected and sustained by "the superstructure," or the ideas and institutions specific to that mode of production (Little 50). A typical example of this arrangement serves to explain why democratic institutions and a liberal ideology always correspond to an economic system based on private property and capital. Marx claims this model explains the source of social change that defines history.
In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (Little 41).

This "base-superstructure" model is referred to as a functional explanation of social phenomenon. A functional explanation places explanatory primacy on the economic structure in order to explain noneconomic phenomenon like political arrangements, morality, and ideology. Functional determinism claims that the various social phenomena of the superstructure are "determined" by the functional characteristics of the economic structure (the base). According to Little, "the functionalist thesis maintains that (1) when political or ideological elements appear that are inconsistent with the continuing survival of the economic structure, they will usually be weeded out, and (2) when competing superstructural elements appear that are each compatible with but differently suitable to the economic structure, the more suitable will generally survive" (56). The functionalist view is not considered a causal account of the origin of superstructural phenomenon, such
as a is the cause of b; instead, it is only considered an explanation that coincides with existing phenomenon based on whether and how they fit into the functioning of the overall system of the social relations of production. “Thus the economic structure of society is defined by the social relations through which the productive process is controlled and directed, and through which the fruits of production are distributed” (Little 45).

Now, Marx’s practical component is to examine the capitalist mode of production, and in the preface to Capital he states that “it is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society” (20). This thesis is a much narrower one than the theory of historical materialism, but it is ultimately connected to the broader thesis. “This concept [that relations of production shape society] allows one to summarize Marx’s research program in his economics very concisely: Marx wanted to provide a theory of the economic structure of modern society that could serve as the basis for explanations of noneconomic phenomenon” (Little 46). The focus of Marx’s work is empirical in this respect, but I argue that this is so only insofar as it seeks to explain the larger thesis. Think of it in the way that a scientist whose theory of how best to cure cancer requires her to experiment with cancerous cells. Her experimental use of cancer cells injected into lab rats is for the purpose of eradicating cancer, and not to propagate it.

This analogy applies to Marx’s theoretical and empirical components in examining history
and the economic system of capitalism. The point in investigating capitalism is not in hopes of continuing its dominance as a mode of production. This is reflected in Marx’s assessment of the role of philosophers in his *Theses on Feuerbach*. “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways,” Marx says, “the point is to change it” (145; 1978). For Marx, there is no reason to launch a full-scale investigation of capitalism independent from the express belief that it needs to be changed, and that it needs to be changed follows from some belief that there is something wrong with it. This fundamental normative dimension has been altogether missed by many Marxists, who place too much primacy on the results of the empirical investigation itself.

Rather than a theory of history being value-neutral as many Marxists seem to think, the thesis of historical materialism is a “progressive” account of history, and I argue that this “normative historicity” once explained clarifies the place of value in Marx’s thought. Historical materialism is not the conjunction of value-neutral assumptions in an attempt to prove them correct by using merely descriptive empirical data. There is a normative connection in the conjunction, and this conjunction is what counts as the basic concept of exploitation. The philosopher Jeffrey Reiman states the importance of this conjunction well.
In my view, the theory called “historical materialism” is the conjunction of two hypotheses. The materialist hypothesis is that the decisive feature of a social structure is the way in which it channels the productive activities by means of which the material conditions of existence are secured. The historical hypothesis is that all modes of production are forms of exploitation of producers by nonproducers, and that history moves from one such form of exploitation to another. (20; 1987)

This conjunction is what I designate as normative historicity. “Normative” in the sense that it is a theory of history which is embedded in values, and “history” in the sense that it is a normative reading of events and processes through successive stages of time (hence historicity). If the theory of history informs the more practical economic investigation of capitalism, then the results cannot be value-neutral, and no one sympathetic to Marx’s project is going to deny that the empirical investigation in Capital is to be understood in relation to the larger thesis of historical materialism.

Now that I have pointed out the normativity of Marx’s theoretical premises, and placed it in conjunction with his empirical investigation of capitalism, I want to place the location of exploitation as a concept on this larger map. Exploitation has both a general and specific meaning; a general one in relation to value and a specific one in relation to
economic arrangements. The latter is where Marx places his emphasis specifically regarding capitalism, but he does indicate in some places that he has the former, more general and normative concept in mind. In the *German Ideology*, for example, Marx and Engels discuss the events which bring together vulgar political economy with its characteristic emphasis on the theory of utility. When combined, the result is that “only one relation is valid on its own account—the relation of exploitation; all other relations have validity for him only insofar as he [the bourgeois] can include them under this one relation” (Marx and Engels 124; 1986; *my emphasis*). This seems to indicate that Marx does have a sense of what counts as exploitation in a normative, as opposed to an economic, concept. Since all relations are derivative from one kind of relation, it is obvious that Marx and Engels have in mind a general meaning of exploitation. The first part of the *German Ideology*, too, contains multiple references to words like “appropriation” and “expropriation,” both of which connote a wrongful means of acquirement. In one paragraph alone, the word “appropriation” is used when referring to the productive process twelve times (Marx and Engels 191; 1978). However, when this general concept of “exploitation” as a kind of relationship is applied to the specific mode of production found in capitalism, a technical conception of exploitation results. Thus, exploitation as a concept characteristic of capitalism defines the relationship between
producers and nonproducers, and the labor theory of value and the theory of surplus-value play an important and highly specialized role in defining exploitation as a specific conception.

In order to elaborate on the role that exploitation plays as a concept in history generally and as a conception inherent to capitalism specifically, I shall take up each one in turn. By examining how exploitation as a concept can be understood in the context of Marx’s views on freedom, I want to show that Marx has a concept of exploitation that transcends all specific modes of production. It is necessary to understand what Marx thinks of freedom, and more importantly, what he thinks it is. So, in conjunction with his ideas on freedom we should be able to derive a general concept of exploitation from discovering what constrains freedom itself. If we define Marx’s notion of freedom and work backwards to discover the appropriate conditions under which freedom is limited or constrained, then we shall have a concept of exploitation that is normative. Furthermore, I hope to refute the objection that exploitation as a concept is not on all counts the lack of freedom, and the two meanings of “exploitation” are thus not the equivalent of “unfreedom.”

Marx’s ideas on freedom are wide-ranging, and the concept is never explicitly elaborated on either morally or metaphysically. In other words, he does not have an
extended work on subjective judgement or free will. But it should be noted that Marx at least holds freedom as a value, and that capitalism at least detrimentally affects it. George Brenkert’s studies of Marx and freedom point out that there are three dimensions to Marx’s views on freedom, at least ones which he openly acknowledges. The first view of freedom is that it is the participation and control of individuals in their own affairs. “Thus, freedom exists when, through the rational control and direction of the conditions of his existence, one develops his capacities and talents so that he may do as he pleases” (Brenkert 82; 1980). This view of freedom coincides with what is typically referred to in post-Kantian moral philosophy as “autonomy.” The second view is that freedom is interrelated with truth and knowledge, such that it exists through the real association of individuals with themselves and others because of their actual qualities. This kind of freedom necessarily implies the absence of “objectification” in all its negative forms, usually arising from abstractions in the capitalist social system such as exchange based on money (83). Finally, the third view of freedom is one which entails the community of individuals. This view is associated with the understanding that the concept of freedom must first be defined for all so that one individual’s freedom does not entail a limit on the freedom of others in the community. The community is not in opposition to individual freedom as much Western political thought assumes. “Rather, a community exists to the
extent that the separateness of individual interests is overcome in the self-conscious realization by individuals that their lives as particular beings reflect a larger social and rational order” (85).

Taken together, these three views of freedom need not be understood solely in relation to capitalism. Rather, all three can apply with equal consideration to any mode of production. For example, the slave in ancient times experiences a lack of freedom when any of these three forms of freedom are violated. In his case, views (1) and (2) apply to his situation as a slave: he does not have control over his life, and even worse, he is not thought to have a life, insofar as he is considered an object equivalent to property. The interrelation of these three views of freedom transcend all modes of production since they can apply solely or in conjunction with one another. In the case of capitalism, none of these requirements of freedom are fulfilled because private ownership of the means of production results in the constraint or violation of all three for those individuals belonging to the class of workers.

An objection can be raised that the concept of exploitation is being conflated with the concept of freedom, since constraints on or violations of freedom here are taken to be the equivalent of exploitation. Brenkert argues that “exploitation,” if it does not connote injustice, must at the least connote the lack of freedom that the slave experiences under
slavery or that the worker experiences under capitalism (92n). I think this true, but it is important to remember that the argument I propose for deriving a concept of exploitation requires we discover the conditions where the charge of exploitation occurs, and from there see if these same conditions constrain or violate the requirements of freedom that Marx holds. I think that the same results will almost always obtain, whether it be the modes of production found in ancient slavery, feudalism, or capitalism. Where we find the charge of exploitation leveled against a social system, the charge that freedom is being violated on some count is not far behind. So, while it is not a sufficient condition for exploitation to exist when there is lack of freedom, it is a necessary one in order for the charge of exploitation to apply with meaningful force.

Given what I have just said regarding the asymmetry between freedom and the necessary conditions for exploitation to occur, I now want to argue that exploitation as a concept is normative. If freedom is one value that Marx holds, and given his three views of what counts as freedom there is no reason to think otherwise, then the lack of freedom disrupts the value placed on it. We do not require a moral principle to be violated in order to associate violations of freedom, especially as Marx views it, with negative outcomes not only for the value itself but for those individuals who hold that value as well. It would be a mistake to do so since not every violation of individual freedom counts the same as a
violation of an independent moral principle. If I walk into traffic unknowingly, and someone grabs me and constrains me, certainly my individual freedom of movement is violated, but I doubt if I would consider it a violation of a moral principle. The same is true of the correlation I make between exploitation and violations and constraints on freedom. Minimally, we should accept that exploitation as a concept requires one or more forms of freedom to be in violation. That the relationship between exploiter and exploited usually associates a constraint on freedom for the exploited that does not apply to the exploiter indicates the ways in which the lack of freedom accompanies the concept of exploitation. Thus, the value of freedom is violated when there exists a charge of exploitation that obtains.

I have shown a correlation between freedom (or its violation, rather) and the concept of exploitation, and furthermore that the concept is normative because of the value we place on freedom. I now turn to the specific conception of exploitation that Marx associates with capitalism in order to show in what ways it is an elaboration on the concept of exploitation and is not by itself a historically specific to capitalism alone.

Exploitation takes place in capitalism when labor is forced to produce things which have value above and beyond the share of it they receive for their labor. This is the conception of exploitation under capitalism, because it is a technical definition in the sense
that it describes the effects of the relationship between producers and nonproducers, and it depends on certain other premises such as the labor theory of value (the worker creates value) and the labor theory of surplus-value (the value created is above the cost of labor). While many Marxists have argued that the concept of exploitation would stand on better ground without these two theories of labor, I avoid this controversy at this point. It is not my purpose to solve the puzzle of the Marxian labor theory of value. In fact, the question of this theory and the question I raise about the normative concept of exploitation are mutually irrelevant in this sense: even if the labor theory of value must be abandoned, the moral charge of exploitation based on the normative concept still applies.

Marx understood exploitation in the context of capitalism in light of these other theories, and whether they hold to be true does not diminish his conviction that what he described as "exploitation" was an accurate assessment of the relationship between capitalists and workers. This conception of exploitation, then, need not be correct in any empirical sense. For example, if I witness a robbery and in my police report tell the authorities that the victim was held at gunpoint, and later the victim's testimony reveals there was no gun, this misperception of the situation on my part does then mean that the robbery did not happen. I was mistaken in describing the details of the events, but I was not mistaken in calling the event a robbery. If Marx's technical conception of exploitation
fails to obtain, then a concept of exploitation understood in light of its normative content can still make the charge of exploitation stick as the accurate assessment of the relationship between producers and nonproducers. If the Marxian labor theory of value is shown to be false, then the conception of exploitation in its correlation with these is wrong. It does not mean that exploitation as a concept is incorrect. Marx’s empirical description of what he thought to be true could have been misguided, but it does not follow that his original conviction that capitalism is exploitative is untrue as well. This understanding points out the need for reconstructing Marx’s concept of exploitation, what he thought constituted exploitation as a relationship among people, and reevaluating what the charge of exploitation entails in terms of its normative force. To this end, I shall briefly map out the most crucial features of capitalism according to Marx, and identify the ways in which the concept of exploitation is related to them.

The most important feature of the mode of production found in capitalism is private property. The role of property in capitalism differs slightly from its pure form in which it is the domination of natural surroundings. In capitalism, private property comes to represent “domination of labour, particularly of accumulated labor, capital” (Marx and Engels 189, 1978). This form of domination corresponds to the relationship between those who own private property (capital) and those who do not. The private ownership of
the means of production is a vital insight for understanding the social relations of production within capitalism. As it has evolved out of feudalism, property is perhaps the defining feature of liberalism's political and economic beliefs. Marx is responding to this tradition in large part, because he sees private property as the source of class society and conflict. Again, in the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels argue that as a result of private property, individuals are separated, and the only basis for their relationship with one another is subsumed under exchange. Private property at the same time results in a division of labor, and Marx and Engels argue that these two equivalent concepts result in a division between community and individual interests. “Further, the division of labor implies the contradiction between the interest of the separate individual or the individual family and the communal interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one another” (160; 1978). But this division among interests also has the contradictory effect of creating more dependence on one another. As they state, “the individuals themselves are entirely subordinated to the division of labour and hence are brought into the most complete dependence on one another” (190; 1978). What results is a concentration of ways in which human relationships are conceived: as individuals, each are dependent on one another only in terms of exchange, and the nature of human relationships is limited to the parameters of capitalism as it promotes the interests of the ruling class.
What is crucial to Marx’s understanding of private property is not just the ownership of the means of production (accumulated labor or capital)—it is the means of production in the hands of the few with the result of a society divided by classes. On the one hand, there is a class of few people (relative to the numbers of individuals in the other class) who control the process of production through the ownership of industry, business, and commerce. And on the other hand, a large number of people (relative to the numbers of individuals in the other class) exist in what Marx sometimes calls “the propertyless class,” those who own nothing but their productive capacity to work and so sell their labor (30-1; 1987). In the Manuscripts of 1844, Marx often cites the French political economist C. Pecqueur, who uses language to describe this basic state of affairs as something morally connoting slavery. “In order to live, then, the non-owners are obliged to place themselves, directly or indirectly, at the service of the owners—to put themselves, that is to say, into a position of dependence upon them” (31). The role of private property, and especially the uses to which it is put, hold a central place in Marx’s understanding of exploitation. Property is the lever, in some sense, which forces the producers to work for the nonproducers (Reiman 11; 1987).

The formation of class society based on private property is the social dynamic that produces the conflict that Marx believes will eventually end in a communist world, where
the means of production are owned by all and there is no “private property.” Exploitation is central to this process precisely because when the proletariat can no longer take the ill effects of it, they will rise up against the capitalists and transform society in a revolutionary process. The role of exploitation in this way can be both condemned and justified (Miller 79-94). It can be condemned since it is morally wrong (using people instrumentally as a means) and has consequences for individuals themselves (longer working days and less pay). At the same time, it can be justified because its existence is the necessary precondition for transforming capitalism into a socialist mode of production (Brenkert 100; 1980). Note that by itself, exploitation is not a sufficient precondition since its role also entails that the proletariat have become sufficiently aware of its presence and harmful consequences for themselves. Part of the problem surrounding what Marx means by “exploitation” is this seemingly contradictory assessment of capitalism. “Marx’s feelings toward a great historical movement such as capitalism, for instance, are deeply ambivalent and unresolved. They are a mixture of awe at capitalism’s colossal accomplishments in behalf of human development and horror at the human cost which has had to be paid for these accomplishments” (Wood 302; 1986). The apparent contradiction of exploitation being both condemnable on some grounds and justified because of its potential for advancement adds to the mystification of Marx’s concept of exploitation,
especially given the Tucker-Wood thesis that Marx did not believe capitalism to be unjust (Wood 1972, 1986). Marx’s conception of exploitation in capitalism receives some of its technical status because of this apparent contradiction; for some, the necessity of exploitation as the relationship between capitalists and workers results in paying too much attention to this role, and not enough to the grounds which make it at the same time always condemnable on moral grounds. For without some moral value implicit in his judgement, why would Marx be horrified at the human costs of capitalism’s advance historically?

Exploitation as a concept is an important one in Marx’s thought. And while the conception of exploitation to be found in capitalism is central to his economic analysis, the normative historicity of Marx in the conjunction between his materialist and historical hypotheses is more central to his overall thought. It is in this conjunction that the concept of exploitation is vital to understanding the source of conflict that drives social change in all modes of production. From one historical epoch to the next, the relationship between owners and nonowners in all its various manifestations (master and slave, lord and serf, capitalist and worker) manifests in one form or another the concept of exploitation. The conception of exploitation as unfair exchange of labor in capitalism is historically specific, but it need not be a limit on what counts as exploitation morally. Marx thought
exploitation is a feature inherent to capitalism, but the use of the word “exploitation” to describe the relationship between the capitalist and proletariat does not mean it cannot be applied to other modes of production as well. For example, it would be quite easy to level the charge of exploitation (as a form of using) against the master of the ancient world, since his domination of the slave is to gain benefits from the relationship which are not reciprocated. Marx’s concept of exploitation is thus the central one on the larger map of historical materialism because it defines the relationship among owners and nonowners in modes of production, and represents the basic feature carried over from one mode to the next.

III Exploitation and analytical Marxism

Given the language that Marx uses in his opposition to capitalism generally, it is a hard tale to swallow that he did not believe capitalism to be an unjust social arrangement (Husami 28). Nevertheless, many analytical Marxists maintain this view, and influential thinkers like Tucker, Wood, and Miller have gone to great lengths to prove the validity of their claims. That Marx was a kind of social scientist involved in a rigorous, empirical investigation of capitalism is not disputed at all, at least among serious Marxists (Little 5-7). I do not dispute this claim, either. But just because he conceived of himself as a social
scientist of history and social systems, and often explicitly said so, does not mean the
freight of his arguments are not packed with certain values. One of analytical Marxism’s
major contributions to the study of Marx’s thought has been on this topic in an attempt to
answer the question what roles, if any, moral concepts play in Marxian and Marxist ideas
(Buchanan 119, 1987).

The theory of exploitation is at the center of this broader debate about the place of
morality in Marx, primarily because there is much disagreement not only about its
importance in the criticism of capitalism, but also about its relevance in the post-Marxian
tradition. Some philosophers and social theorists have outright abandoned the Marxian
theory of exploitation, claiming that the premises upon which it is based, like the labor
theory of value, are bankrupt arguments (Elster 166; 1985; Roemer 36-7; 1985). Others
have sought to salvage exploitation as a concept by reconstructing Marx’s argument to be
more logically sound, positing distinctions and clarifying concepts which supposedly
promote its continuation as a central feature of Marx’s critique (Cohen 1979). The
diverging arguments result from disagreements over both definitions and concepts, but I
shall point out that all the arguments share the common distinction of fact and value. If it
is true, as I have argued, that implicit within Marx’s charge of exploitation is a normative
content, the diverging definitions and conceptions in the analytical Marxist views commit
the fallacy of fact/value, whereby the assumed distinctiveness of facts in their analysis is applied to Marx’s thought inappropriately. A new concept of exploitation is required, entailing a new awareness of the normative aspects of apparently value-neutral statements, and to this end I argue analytical Marxism cannot provide a philosophically sound reconstruction of Marx’s theory of exploitation.

Analytical Marxists like Cohen and Roemer see themselves responding to the “orthodox” or “classical” position of Marxian accounts of exploitation. Central to the orthodox argument of exploitation are the two theories of Marx which explain the source of value and profit in capitalism, respectively. These two theories are the labor theory of value and the theory of surplus-value, or surplus accumulation. The latter argues that the source of the value of any given commodity is the socially necessary labor time that is required to reproduce it under normal conditions of production (Marx 46-7, 1967). The former argument is claimed to be the “secret” of capitalism, because it reveals the source of profit in the production process. “This extraction of surplus labor or surplus value from the worker and its appropriation by the capitalist without compensation is called exploitation” (Husami 47; *my emphasis*). The theory of surplus-value claims that the worker produces commodities which are exchanged for more than they are worth given the labor theory of value, because the capitalist undercompensates the worker in wages.
By making her believe she is being compensated for her labor in wages, the capitalist is allowed to use her labor-power as a commodity to create value above and beyond what that value of the labor (as opposed to labor-power) is worth in a working day (Marx 187-9, 1967). “What lends credence to this mystification is the fact that the worker gives his day’s labor for wages. The impression that a day’s work is fully compensated is enhanced whenever the worker bargains over his hourly rate” (Husami 52).

By making the distinction between labor and labor-power, Marx is able to account for the source of profits, since a commodity in capitalism is optimally supposed to exchange for its equivalent. If equivalents exchange for equivalents, there would be no profit, so the capitalist must find a way to create surplus-value without it reflecting the value of the labor-power that went into it. This is what Marx calls exploitation: when there is an unfair exchange of labor for compensation, specifically in the form of wages (Marx 208-9, 1967). But notice, too, the importance of ideology as it relates to the relationship of exploitation. The worker must be “fooled” in a certain way into believing that she is receiving the appropriate compensation for her work. In other words, the use of her labor-power must be veiled under the guise that her day’s labor is the equivalent of a day’s wages. The worker ultimately receives less than the actual value which her labor
has created, and this is the *locus classicus* of the charge of exploitation (Cohen 339-41; Wolff 1981).

While not all Marxists have held the line on this interpretation of Marx’s theory of exploitation, even some analytical Marxists like the philosopher Wolff have held most of its major components to be accurate accounts of exploitation. Only by modifying some mathematical assumptions, or conceptual details, the “orthodox” position of exploitation has by and large maintained the truth of Marx’s original explanation (Wolff 115; 1981). The response to this original position has been overwhelmingly negative among analytical Marxists, however. Some find it untenable, given the economic problems inherent in the labor theory of value, while others see the Marxian role of exploitation as minor and irrelevant. Cohen, in his 1979 article “The Labor Theory of Value and the Concept of Exploitation,” goes to great argumentative lengths to show “that the relationship between the labor theory of value and the concept of exploitation is one of mutual irrelevance” (338). And in another more damaging article, Roemer that exploitation theory needs to be abandoned for his own theory of property relations, one which seeks to incorporate unequal distribution of the original assets in the means of production as the real and true source of exploitation (33; 1985).
I shall use the arguments of Cohen and Roemer, respectively, to identify some of the problems of defining and conceptualizing exploitation in the analytical Marxist style.

The argument proceeds in three stages: (1) to reconstruct the concepts of exploitation in both Cohen’s and Roemer’s arguments; (2) to identify the fallacy of fact/value in each, and show how the problems they present as inherent to the concept of exploitation have their source in this fallacy; and (3) to reveal some of the inconsistencies of their argument deriving from narrow definitions excessively weighted in the distributive sense, coupled with the lack of clear moral definition of exploitation. In this last stage I present the “social” concept of exploitation found in Reiman’s work, and use its “force-inclusive” definition to reveal the problems with Roemer’s highly distributive notion of what counts as instances of exploitation. I shall take up Cohen’s and Roemer’s arguments each in turn and proceed through these three stages.

Cohen argues that problems result for the concept of exploitation because it is conflated or confused with the labor theory of value. To that end, he wants to separate the two and show that the one is irrelevant to the other. Cohen’s argument is that problems with the labor theory of value unnecessarily obstruct a simpler form of the theory of exploitation, so his project is twofold: to show the irrelevance of the labor theory of value to the concept of exploitation and to simplify a model of exploitation that
does not rely on the labor theory of value. He begins by constructing a series of premises, some of which are argued to be unnecessary, illogical, or at best, transformable. Here are the first four premises in order:

(1) Socially necessary labor time determines value.

(2) Value determines equilibrium price.

(3) Socially necessary labor determines equilibrium price.

(4) One reason for overthrowing capitalism is that it is a regime of exploitation (and exploitation is unjust). (Cohen 343-2, 1979)

These premises promote two things about the Marxian theory of exploitation: first, exploitation has something to do with value and exchange under capitalism; and second, exploitation is some kind of reason for criticizing capitalism. "Yet many Marxists say that the Marxian concept of exploitation is a purely scientific one, with no moral content. They say that to assert, in the language of Marxism, that a exploits b, is to offer no condemnation or criticism of a, or of the arrangements under which a operates. For them, (4) is false" (341). Cohen then proposes that Marx did hold premise (4) to be true, but he is primarily concerned with its problematic connection to the labor theory of value.

Cohen seeks to reconstruct the theory of exploitation by using premise (4) without any premises which entail the labor theory of value. He introduces six more premises in an
attempt to fill in the gaps left by the first four he introduced as ones common to the
Marxist tradition.

(5) Labor and labor alone creates value.

(6) The laborer receives the value of his labor power.

(7) The value of the product is greater than the value of his labor power.

(8) The laborer receives less value than he creates.

(9) The capitalist receives the remaining value.

(10) The laborer is exploited by the capitalist. (342)

Cohen refers to this argument as the "Traditional Marxian Argument," and claims that it is
incomplete because it lacks an important normative premise. He claims that premises (6),
(7), and (9) all relate to the labor theory of value and on that count can be thrown out for
a simplified statement.

Accordingly, he comes up with two premises that approximate something like the
labor-exchange feature in the new premises (11) and (12). The new argument now looks
like this.

(5) Labor and labor alone creates value.

(11) The capitalist receives some of the value of the product.

(8) The laborer receives less value than he creates, and
(12) The capitalist receives some of the value the laborer creates.

(10) The laborer is exploited by the capitalist. (344)

Cohen then makes his strong claim that the labor theory of surplus value is not necessary for the charge of exploitation to obtain morally. "It does not matter what explains the difference between the value the worker produces and the value he receives. What matters is just that there is that difference" (344).

Cohen's line of thought continues by problematizing the entire argument based on what he sees as the implausibility of premises like (5), which are unable to account for the changes in productive efficiency that make labor easier and less time-consuming. He allows for socially necessary labor time in the past to remain as a guide for socially necessary labor time in the present, "since technical conditions change relatively slowly" (349). The result of all these injected premises is to show the shortcomings of using the labor theory of value as a guide for finding exploitation (350). Cohen comes to the radical conclusion that the labor theory of value shows that value, in fact, is not created by the worker; rather, the worker creates the products that have value. Laborers "do not create value, but they create what has value. The small phrasing covers an enormous difference of conception. What raises the charge of exploitation is not that the capitalist gets some of the value the worker produces, but that he gets some of the value of what the worker
produces" (354). Such a small conceptual change for Cohen is crucial, because he wants
to rid the charge of exploitation of those problems cast on it by the shadow of the labor
theory of value. This results in what he calls "the Plain Argument."

(17) The laborer is the only person who creates the product, that which has
value.

(11) The capitalist receives some of the value of the product.

(18) The laborer receives less value than the value of what he creates, and

(19) The capitalist receives some of the value of what the laborer creates.

(10) The laborer is exploited by the capitalist.

Now, Cohen has proposed a much simpler argument for formulating the charge of
exploitation. The only definition of exploitation we have been provided with, however, is
that the idea entails "a certain lack of reciprocity" (343).

Cohen's simplified form of the argument for exploitation must be coupled with
what Cohen means by exploitation in the relevant sense. The concept of exploitation on
his view becomes more accessible in a later thesis arguing that workers are not forced to
sell their labor power (Cohen 1982). The definition Cohen must have in mind for the
concept of exploitation is to be found in his assertion that workers are not forced to sell
their labor power, since they have acceptable alternatives (8; 1982). According to the
traditional Marxian view, the nature of exploitation is such that workers are *forced* to sell their labor power to the capitalist, since this is the only way to ensure material survival.

Cohen, however, argues that this cannot be the case, for it does not take into consideration the possibility (and actuality) that some individual proletariats *do* escape the working class, and as a result are not subject to exploitation by the capitalist. There is a way to reconcile the potential individual escape from the exploitative relationship and the exploitation of the laboring class. Cohen's novel idea is that even though "each is individually free to leave, he suffers with the rest from what I shall call *collective unfreedom*" (11). This concept is referred to as "proletarian unfreedom" (Cohen 1982; Brenkert 1985; Cohen 1985).

The concept of exploitation for Cohen is *structural*. There are barriers for the proletariat that cannot be overcome as a class because they do not have access to the means of production. Exploitation as the relationship between nonproducers and producers results from the relationship of unequal ownership in the means of production which place the laborers at the disadvantage of being forced *as a class* to take the capitalist's wage offer. The relevant sense of "forced" is crucial, because it implies to what degree exploitation can be considered morally condemnable; for example, the way in which we think a slaves are "forced" to work for their masters. "When I sell my labor
power, I put *myself* at the disposal of another, and that is not true when I invest my
capital. I come with my labor power, I am part of the deal. That is why some people call
wage labor slavery . . . But note that no one would say, even by way of exaggeration, that
having to invest one's capital is a form of slavery" (Cohen 21; 1982). I shall not
reconstruct all of Cohen's argument here. What is important to note is the implication
that two necessary elements must be included in the concept of exploitation: a normative
content (what he calls a premise) and a relevant sense of force to make the normative
assessment apply to the context of capitalism.

Now that I have reconstructed Cohen's argument for exploitation and the
necessary definition of it that the simplified argument entails, I want to show the relevant
problems with Cohen's views stemming from the fact-value distinction.

Cohen's claims in the premises of the Plain Argument assumes the distinction
between empirical and normative categories. By showing that the labor theory of value
and the theory of exploitation are irrelevant to one another, he implies that an empirical
description (like the laborer receives less share of the value of what he produces) does not
have a normative content. This is why he commits himself to the view that an ethical
premise must be injected into the relevant premises of the argument, instead of searching
for the normative content embedded in them. Furthermore, Cohen's proposition that
exploitation obtains given the truth of the premises is asserted without the necessary ethical element to make the charge of exploitation a morally relevant one. It is obvious in his simplified argument that it entails nothing more than the technical definition of exploitation under the Marxian conception of exploitation assumed by most Marxists to be value-neutral. Cohen claims that two kinds of Marxist reject premise (4), which states the unjust effect of exploitation is reason for overthrowing capitalism. The first denies it because he denies “that there is any reason,” and the second denies it because she believes that “justice” is not a Marxian value (342; 1979). Now, if we apply these two denials to the simplified form that Cohen proposes, we should not be surprised that we get the same results. The first Marxist can deny the reasons that the worker is exploited just as he did with the traditional premise; the second might as well do the same, especially because Cohen does not provide for her a premise stating what is morally wrong with exploitation. Both these denials stem from the characteristic problem of Cohen’s concept of exploitation: it lacks a normative premise. And this gap in the argument results from the fact-value distinction precisely because on Cohen’s view it is something that needs to be imported into the empirically descriptive argument, rather than being something that is already there.
What results, then, is that the assumption of fact/value works against the Marxian theory of exploitation, because the description of exploitation cannot at the same time imply its moral wrongness. The moral principle must be supplied by some independent premise, and this has to be added to the argument for exploitation, rather than derived from it. This makes the charge of exploitation much less interesting, and certainly much more problematic, if the violation of a moral principle is only true ex post facto. The strength of the Marxian concept of exploitation is that its empirical description of the relationship that constitutes it entails in the first place that something is wrong with it. And no "social system has ever been condemned more radically, indicted more severely, and damned more comprehensively than capitalism was by Marx. It is a system of domination of men by men, of men by things, and of men by impersonal forces. The exploitation associated with private property in the means of production sets class against class" (Husami 27). The concept of exploitation is normative first, and empirical second. The normative component is first because the value that judges it applies before the relationship which constitutes it is discovered, and it is empirical second because its description must be experienced in light of the value that provides its name. This argument is something like Kant's argument for certain forms of a priori knowledge; it is in light of these that our experiences are intelligible to us (Kant 65-7; 1965). On the
concept of exploitation, it is in light of certain values we place on relationships that makes
the description of an exploitative one available to us. I shall not go further into these
claims, since I take them up in Part IV. If this is provisionally taken to be true, however,
Cohen’s assumption that there is a fact-value dichotomy makes his Plain Argument for
exploitation less accessible to us and philosophically unsound given the absence of
normative premises in the discussion. The same results occur in Roemer’s arguments, and
it is to these that I now turn.

“Exploitation, as I conceive it,” Roemer says, “refers to the relationship between a
person and society as a whole as measured by the transfer of the person’s labor to the
society, and the reverse transfer of society’s labor to the person, as embodied in goods the
person claims” (31; 1985). Given this definition, he constructs a series of arguments (1)
on the four uses to which exploitation theory is put, and (2) the failing of these same
arguments to obtain satisfactory accounts of the charge as it is leveled against capitalism.
By showing that typical arguments for exploitation fail to meet the demands of Roemer’s
definition, the verdict is that “exploitation theory is a domicile that we need no longer
maintain: it has provided a home for raising a vigorous family who now must move on”
(33). But Roemer’s sympathy to the Marxist tradition does not allow him to cast away
exploitation as a charge against capitalism without providing an alternative for
condemning capitalism as unjust. He calls this alternative to exploitation (conceived of as unequal exchange) the inequality-of-resources theory, and its simple form is supposed to account for the source of capitalism's various injustices (59).

The problem with Roemer's theses, both his arguments against traditional forms of exploitation theory and his argument for replacing them with his own theory, is that they (1) empty the charge of exploitation of any moral content and (2) because of this emptying, fail to account for the injustices of capitalism. I shall take up both of these problems by arguing that the source of the both mistakes is in the fallacy of fact/value, and that such an assumption not only works to misconstrue the concept of exploitation, it also has the effect of undermining the condemnation of capitalism. I shall take up only three of the four positions Roemer provides for the uses of exploitation theory, excluding position (3) which argues exploitation theory is important in its connection to the concept of alienation.¹³

The fact-value distinction is everywhere in Roemer's theories of exploitation, from his analysis of competing uses of exploitation theory to his own inequality-of-assets theory. These are only parts of the more fundamental assumptions under which Roemer is operating as a social scientist, specifically within the methodological contours of orthodox economics. In the beginning of his paper "Should Marxists Be Interested In Exploitation,"
Roemer asks a series of questions to indicate the motivations for reconstructing and understanding various exploitation theories. One of these questions neatly divides the importance of exploitation as a concept between empirical matters and those considered non-empirical: these matters, of course, being normative. "What are the uses of exploitation theory," he asks, and "More directly, what positive or normative conclusions might we draw from observing that workers are exploited under capitalism?" (31; my emphasis).

This separation between questions of fact and those of value seem to me to result from the paradigm of social scientific inquiry, which is heavily influenced by the logical positivist movement of the early twentieth century. Recall in Part I the argument that the fact-value distinction is implicit within the analytic tradition, and that this assumption continues in the practice of social science through its positivist tendencies. The fact-value distinction exists in social science implicitly, since the method of inquiry attempts to derive certain facts about the social world. No normative content is seen as part of these natural facts, although normative claims can be made independently on any facts which the inquiry uncovers. In organizing data derived from human institutions and social arrangements, a social science like economics recognizes the factual nature of supposedly objective findings without recognizing the subjective normative context within which the inquiry
takes place. Fact and value continue to remain distinct, and this is true, too, of Roemer’s social theory. The obviousness of this fact-value gulf is explicit when he states, “If I occasionally use ‘exploitation’ in its ethical as opposed to its technical sense, the word will be italicized as above” (33; my emphasis).

After this explicit acknowledgment of his assumption that “exploitation” can be conceived of either as empirical or normative, Roemer goes on to separate the “uses of exploitation theory” into four groups, with the fourth receiving a slight modification to fit his inequality-of-assets theory. The fact-value distinction exists in all these arguments for the uses of exploitation, but I shall not elaborate in great detail on each one, since they are all reconstructions of the various Marxist conceptions of exploitation generally.

The first use of exploitation in the Marxist tradition is what Roemer refers to as “the accumulation theory.” This theory is what I have already discussed at some length as the “orthodox” Marxian view, in which exploitation is the charge of unfair exchange resulting from the capitalist secret of surplus-value. Roemer’s argument begins with the claim that the “unique positive (as opposed to normative) claim among (1) through (4) [the four uses of exploitation theory] is the claim that our interest in exploitation is because surplus labor is the source of accumulation and profits” (36). Not only is the fact-value distinction explicitly acknowledged, it is also utilized to argue the shortcomings of
position (1), the "orthodox" Marxian position which "maintains that exploitation is not intended as a normative concept, but as an explanation of the modus operandi of capitalism" (36). Roemer rejects this view by strictly associating it with its tendency to claim that exploitation theory accounts for profits and accumulation, just as Cohen argues that exploitation and the labor theory of value and surplus value are mutually irrelevant.

I agree with Roemer that position (1) is untenable, but not for the same reasons. The question whether exploitation theory explains the logic of capital seems to miss the target of what counts as exploitation altogether. The problem as I see it derives from the separation of fact and value in evaluative contexts. Roemer and position (1) both take that position to be merely descriptive of the facts of the situation, when in fact it is normatively explanatory in that it brings to bear on the situation in capitalism what counts as facts in the first place. For example, the notion of accumulation implies ownership, which is a feature of capitalism that gives rise to describing it in such a way as separate from, and on Marx's view, in opposition to the worker. No use of exploitation theory can exclude the imperative which prescribes that the description is meaningful in some sense.

The Marxian categories are not to be conceived of in passing notice; they were constructed in an engaged science, and one which brought with it a whole series of notions about prioritizing and ordering data (Little Ch.6; Ball 113). There are values
implicit in position (1), even if Roemer does not see them, and the primary one embraces
the primacy of "facts." If the "orthodox" charge of exploitation cannot be tenable, it is not
because it fails to explain the facts as Roemer argues, it fails because it does not articulate
the normative dimension which accompanies the so-called facts. I argued this to be true
of Cohen's Plain Argument, and it is also true of Roemer's highly technical conception of
exploitation. It should be noted that Roemer relies on Wood's thesis that Marx did not
think capitalism an unjust arrangement (Wood 24-30; 1980). The argument of position
(1) fails to be useful not only because its facts are all wrong, but also because there is no
place in Marx's empirical critique for moral matters.

The second use of exploitation theory is called "domination theory," and it is here
that Roemer actually engages the normative dimension of exploitation. If exploitation can
be understood as a kind of domination, Roemer argues, "and if we argue independently
that domination is unjust, then exploitation theory provides at least a partial theory of the
injustice of capitalism" (39; my emphasis). Two types of "domination" are distinguished,
neither of which are independent accounts of its moral relevance: (a) domination by
private property and (b) domination in the structure of production (39). Roemer's
normative attention to this use of exploitation theory is immediately mystified, however,
by his assertion that domination may imply exploitation, but not the other way around.14
Any moral theorist might wonder what sense he is using of the word "exploitation" if it does not imply at least a kind of domination, and the problem with his arguments as they proceed against position (2a) and (2b) is that his conception of exploitation is the same one he refuted in position (1) as untenable because it was technical and without a normative component.

Clearly, the fact-value assumption which is so much a part of his social theory begins to catch up with Roemer. He is arguing against a use of exploitation theory by using a definition which he just finished discounting as a basis for being interested in exploitation as a concept! The circular reasoning is shocking here, but I suspect that he does not recognize his own mistake insofar as he thinks of exploitation in a technical sense, even when he claims to be thinking of it in an ethical sense. The equivalence that occurs, in which "exploitation" is understood technically as opposed to normatively, results, again, from the fact-value distinction. Remember, part of Roemer's argument for exploitation is that it must incorporate injustice as part of its definition. What results is an inability to incorporate the necessary moral component, and a subsequent overreliance on the technical definition of the term obtains. This charge is further leveraged against Roemer because he finds it convenient to package the "ethical" interest of (2a) with position (4) and that of (2b) with "the moral sentiments" of J.S. Mill who applies a moral
analogy to capitalism by calling labor “wage slavery” (39). Roemer’s conflation of
domination by private property in the means of production (2a) with the use of
exploitation theory in position (4) is a neat way of disclaiming the relevance of domination
theory, while at the same time promoting his inequality-of-assets theory.

Roemer’s argument that domination theory does not provide the interest for
Marxists to engage in exploitation theory rests on some rather tenuous definitions, not
only of what constitutes domination, but also of what counts as exploitation as a form of
domination. The argument for interest in exploitation can now be collapsed altogether
into position (4), and its modified account in (4’), which defines exploitation without
reference of anything normative, and conceptualizes it as the product of property relations.
As Reiman argues, “With exploitation stripped both of force and reference to production,
it is indeed not very interesting” (22; 1987). In other words, Roemer’s distinction
between two kinds of domination is plagued by the inability to squeeze any kind of
normative content out of one.

Without a normative content of some kind, one has to wonder how the
“domination theory” meant to use exploitation in the first place. The lack of a normative
component in his theory exists, not because domination lacks a clear moral content, but
because Roemer defines both types in such a way as to exclude it (Reiman 29; 1987).
Domination (2a) results from private property, but Roemer never provides an independent moral justification for what constitutes this domination as morally relevant or interesting.

The same is true of (2b), except that oddly enough Roemer ends up arguing that exploitation does not imply domination in the structure of production (42). But if exploitation occurs in the structure of production, as it does in the technical sense, then of course this does not entail domination *in any normative sense of the word*. Domination still can occur in the technical sense, and Roemer elaborates on a theorem called Exploitation-Domination Correspondence, which states “that any dominated agent is exploited and any dominating agent is an exploiter” (45). The terms domination and exploitation become equivalents in the technical sense, or the “positive sense,” but we are left wondering what happened to the attention to normative concerns which supposedly characterized position (4) and made it different from the others.

The fact-value distinction is not only in operation, it is in *hyperapplication*, so much so that the normative attention which Roemer claims to pay to the domination theory is a continuation of the technical uses of exploitation as the charge of unequal exchanges. There is no interest in exploitation theory used by those concerned with domination, not because domination theory lacks a connection to exploitation as moral condemnation, but because under Roemer’s view the normative status of domination
theory is unclear and outright evasive. The result is that exploitation theory is passed off
as uninteresting by Roemer, since it is viewed as a circuitous way of getting at domination
in the technical sense (63). Here the problem that Cohen faced resurfaces: the fact-value
distinction is working against Roemer, who finds it difficult to import a normative value
into a purely descriptive, empirical conception of exploitation. I now turn to Roemer’s
primary thesis that Marxism must abandon exploitation for his inequality-of-assets theory,
as represented in position (4) and (4’).

Roemer’s basic claim is that the Marxian theory of exploitation needs to be
replaced with one which satisfies all the variable conditions of highly specialized market
economies. Use (4) of exploitation theory is called “the inequality theory,” and its claim is
that “exploitation is a measure and consequence of the underlying inequality in the
ownership of the means of production, an inequality which is unjustified” (32). There is a
special case of (4) and this Roemer calls “the expropriation theory,” in which it is “a
measure of expropriation, of one agent owning part of the product which should rightfully
belong to another agent” (32). These two positions articulate a highly distributive notion
of what counts as exploitation, so the resulting definition of it is a technical conception
which does not contain a normative component. The only normative reference is
“rightfully belong,” but Roemer does not have any account for justifying this part of the
concept. In fact, he never elaborates on what counts as "rightfully" in the relevant moral sense of the term. Notice that the focus of the uses (4) and (4') for Roemer are on the differential inequalities of ownership as opposed to transfer. "I will show inequality in ownership of the means of production, even when ethically indefensible, is not properly measured by exploitation. In particular, it can happen in theory that those who own very little ... are exploiters and those who own a lot are exploited. Hence exploitation (the transfer of surplus value) is not a proper reflection of underlying property relations" (32-3). Two things are important to notice: first, the technical definition of exploitation as unequal exchange is assumed to be the Marxian conception; and second, the concept of exploitation is not the proper measure of property relations, even when they are ethically indefensible. Roemer's characteristic fact-value problem haunts his conception of exploitation in position (4) and (4'): "exploitation theory in many cases coincides with a deeper ethical position—although on its own terms it does not provide a justification for that position" (33). Here the ethical position and the concept of exploitation are offered as separable things, which on some points at least do not entail one another.

Roemer's case for the inequality-of-assets or property-relations theory is something like a straw man. "Having defined exploitation distributively, he is able to show the weakness of the concept so defined. From this he infers that the problem is with
the concept of exploitation. But this doesn’t follow, since the problem might be with his
definition of it” (Reiman 22; 1987). Roemer posits that the Marxian concept of
exploitation and the inequalities in ownership of the means of production do not coincide.
But this disjuncture results from Roemer’s narrowly conceived definitions, as well as the
fact-value distinction which does not allow a moral value to be understood in the context
of the charge of exploitation. “I must say exploitation theory, in the general case, is
misconceived. It does not provide a proper model or account of Marxian moral
sentiments; the proper Marxian claim, I think, is for equality in the distribution of
productive assets, not for the elimination of exploitation” (53). But exploitation by
Roemer’s definition can be excluded, because in its highly distributive sense it is shown to
fail in highly specialized models, models which never ask what exploitation includes that is
morally valuable in assessing capitalism. Since it is at this point that Roemer’s argument
turns on the technically distributive notion of exploitation, I now want to turn to the
“social” definition of exploitation which attempts to answer these criticisms against the
Marxian theory of exploitation by revealing several problems with defining exploitation so
narrowly.

Many Marxists engage these claims of Cohen and Roemer with critical
undertaking, arguing among other things that these highly distributivist definitions of
exploitation fail to satisfy a clear concept of exploitation. Analytical Marxists began to be challenged by "social" Marxists, who revealed the shortcomings of the models that people like Cohen and Roemer were constructing as irrelevant to the charge of exploitation. The defining feature of analytical attempts to conceptualize and reconstruct exploitation in Marx's thought is its heavy emphasis on distribution, or rather unequal distribution, as the source of exploitation in capitalism (Reiman 21; 1987). The premises of Cohen's Plain Argument for Exploitation, as well as his structural theory of proletarian unfreedom, and the opening lines of Roemer's article defines exploitation in such a way as to conceive of it in distributive terms. Reiman has correctly argued that the concepts of exploitation for both Cohen and Roemer, which must include injustice as part of its definition, do not clarify the Marxian theory of exploitation at all, and in fact mystify it through the use of what he calls "distributive" Marxism (330; 1989). The "distributive" Marxism of both Cohen and Roemer is problematic, not only because of the fact-value distinction, but also because the definitions do not include in them an adequate normative component of "force" as a morally important assessment of capitalism.

The definitions of exploitation in Cohen's and Roemer's arguments have three components: "(1) The injustice in exploitation is ultimately a distributive injustice . . . (2) Force is not essential to exploitation . . . (3) Exploitation need not occur in production; it
can occur in exchange" (Reiman 300; 1989). Roemer holds all three of these positions, as witnessed in his inequality-of-assets theory, and Cohen believes at least the first two, since his theory of proletarian unfreedom argues that workers do have acceptable alternatives to selling their labor power. What results from these three elements is a decidedly uninteresting concept of exploitation (or “expropriation” in Roemer’s view), since the nature of exploitation as a distinctive social relation between producers and nonproducers is now ruled out. Roemer’s final claim that there is no interest for Marxists in exploitation theory is a consequence of his distributive definition and not an accurate reflection of what should concern Marxists about exploitation. “In my view,” Reiman says, “what he actually proves is that Marxists should not be interested in exploitation defined as the unequal transfer of labor without reference to the fact that the transfer is forced” (21; 1987). I shall use Reiman’s arguments against the three distributive elements to show that the attempts by analytical Marxists (particularly Roemer) to “reconstruct” the Marxian theory of exploitation misses the moral point of the theory in the first place, and as result ends up arguing for a concept of exploitation that is morally and politically useless.

Reiman argues that the kind of injustice that is implicit in the charge of exploitation is social and not distributive. In this sense, both Cohen and Roemer misconstrue the concept of exploitation to be concerned with matters purely of a distributive nature,
meaning that exploitation’s only concern is with outcomes. But this surely misses the point of the charge of exploitation in at least two ways: first, there is no concern for what processes generate the outcomes; and second, the normative force of the argument is relegated to finding equitable formulas for distribution. The former is a problem, because it assumes, among other things, a kind of “end-state” theory, which implies that outcomes can be examined without the prior context that generates them. 15 The latter is an even greater problem, primarily because the moral indictment of capitalism can be mitigated by more efficient ways of distribution, even though the structure of production never changes. This is why a social definition of justice is better suited to the concept of exploitation, if it is to include a normative component that provides it with political force. I shall not attempt to elaborate on this particular line of thought, since in the next section it serves as the impetus for connecting Marx’s indictment of capitalism with Kant’s theory of morality.

Instead, I shall continue my argument that the “force-inclusive” definition of exploitation posited by Reiman is a much more accurate one of what counts as exploitation than the excessively distributive notions of Cohen and Roemer. A “force-inclusive” definition of exploitation is this: “A society is exploitative when its social structure is organized so that unpaid labor is systematically forced out of one class and put
at the disposal of another” (Reiman 3; 1987). This definition of exploitation is a normative one, in which injustice is in its very meaning, and it applies particularly to the context of capitalism. “Indeed, I contend that what Marxists call capitalist ideology boils down to little more than the invisibility of structural force. And libertarian capitalism is the theory that results when the love of freedom falls prey to that invisibility” (Reiman 16; 1987). The kind of injustice implied in the “force” of extracting labor out of one class is not distributive, because its focus is not on the outcomes of the relation, but on the prior conditions of the relation itself. For example, “it is a particular power relationship between people that is at issue in the injustice of exploitation, rather than a particular distribution of things among people” (Reiman 301; 1989). In other words, the distribution of goods that results from the exploitative relationship is not our concern, but the very relation of exploitation itself, or what is more, the conditions under which the exploitative relationship exists. In this way, the “force-inclusive” definition of exploitation more adequately addresses the Marxian concept of exploitation: “Force serves the purpose of keeping the point of the concept sharp . . . Moreover, this gives us a way of explicating the relationship between the Marxian sense of exploitation that includes force and the general sense that does not” (Reiman 329; 1989). The central role of “force” is absent in Roemer’s reconstruction of exploitation because its focus is on outcomes rather than the
source that generates them. Since Marx himself did not believe that “end-states” could be examined without examining the historical and social processes which give rise to such outcomes, I argue that distributive notions of exploitation misconstrue Marx’s concept of exploitation altogether (Marx 238-45; 1978).

Cohen’s reconstruction of exploitation, as I have previously argued, lacks a normative premise that is part of the definition of exploitation itself. The importation of one will not serve, since the fact-value distinction which is implicit in the argument will not facilitate the normative reading of any one empirical premise. Without a normative meaning to the concept of exploitation, we cannot level the charge of exploitation, since to level it as a charge implies that somewhere a wrong is being committed. This is why the distributive definitions of Cohen and Roemer cannot politically make a difference in the assessment of capitalism without the moral component implicit in the Marxian concept of exploitation. For, to level the charge of exploitation as something empirically true does nothing more than describe what is taken to be empirically true. Without some normative assessment, what is empirically true remains untroubled politically.

Roemer’s reconstruction of exploitation turns out to be far less interesting than he purports it to be. Whereas Cohen argues for a structural force that is exercised over individual workers, and so maintains exploitation as a distinctive social relation between
classes, Roemer's mathematical and economic models obfuscate the social relations entirely. These models are generally of the two-party variety, in which it is shown that exploitation of owners can occur by nonowners: for example, the “Karl and Adam” counterfactual, in which the initial unequal distribution of seed-corn results in Karl exploiting Adam for his seed-corn, even though Adam is richer than Karl (Roemer 58-9; 1985; 93-5; 1987). Of course, the mathematics of the model are much too difficult to engage here. But suffice to say that his mathematics requires certain assumptions to be true, like Karl being clever enough to utilize Adam’s hard-work ethic, or Adam having a work ethic that makes him susceptible to Karl’s exploitative strategies for seed-corn distribution. The use of “utility-functions” further serves to enhance the plausibility of these models, but the premises of the argument, which are constructed, make these functions mathematically inappropriate (Christie 278). In short, the examples serve Roemer well, but only because they are forced, so to speak. Roemer states that “the most consistent Marxian ethical position is against inequality in the initial distribution of productive assets; when exploitation accounts reflect the unequal distribution of productive assets in the proper way (that the rich exploit the poor), that is what makes exploitation theory attractive. But if that correlation can fail, as it has, then no foundation remains for a justification of exploitation theory” (59; 1985). Of course, Roemer’s models
claim to show where the correlation fails, and because he sometimes proves by these models that exploitation can go "the wrong way," we are to abandon the Marxian theory of exploitation.

Again, the problem with Roemer's inequality-of-assets theory, or his productive relations theorem which denounces the Marxian theory of exploitation, is that it lacks the normative component to make his claim a critical assessment, and this stems from failing to show how the concept of force in the relevant sense is necessary to exploitation. "For Marx, the class relation is the axis along which capitalist exploitation runs, so to speak, from owners of means of production to nonowners. But with exploitation defined distributively, it is possible--as Roemer as has shown--for owners of means of production to exploit one another" (Reiman 26; 1987). Roemer's characteristic mistake is defining exploitation distributively (to make his models accurate) and failing to add force to its formula. This is, of course, very un-Marxian. Without showing how the system works in such a way as to force unpaid labor out of one class and into another, Roemer can only describe the conditions where it is possible for exploitation to work inversely. Not only does his argument rely on the "end-state" formulas which fail to take into account the context which makes exploitation possible, it also fails to show why injustice as part of the definition of exploitation counts on this distributive view of property-relations and
inequality-of-assets. If we accept Roemer’s argument (which we cannot in light of its severe shortcomings) and abandon the Marxian concept of exploitation, we are left without the means to level any charge against capitalism. In this respect, the social “force-inclusive” definition of exploitation is much more coherent, and the concepts of exploitation understood technically and distributively fail to account adequately for the Marxian charge of exploitation. In the next section I argue that the most appropriate means for assessing capitalism is in Marx’s theory of exploitation understood normatively.

IV Marx and the morality of exploitation: A Kantian interpretation

I have already discussed at some length the normative nature of the Marxian theory of exploitation. Having shown that the fact-value distinction is a problem for analytical Marxists like Cohen and Roemer in attempting to reconstruct arguments for exploitation, I now argue that Marx’s concept of exploitation is a moral one. The normative nature of the theory of exploitation can best be understood in light of the appropriate parallels that can be drawn between it and Kant’s theory of morality. Furthermore, I hope to show that in some ways Marx owes much to Kant (conceptually) in that the charge of exploitation against capitalism is at the same time Marx’s moral assessment of it as a social system. I shall do this by showing in what ways Marx’s views
of freedom and its corresponding values coincide with Kant's discussion of freedom and its complementary values. Given those views, the description of exploitation as a relationship among people always entails a moral assessment of it, and both Marx and Kant demonstrate that while there can be different ways of talking about freedom and duties, both think that in human relationships there is necessarily a fundamental issue of morality. Finally, the Marxian theory of exploitation, grounded in these views of freedom, demonstrates a value of moral obligation, which is a compelling analysis for condemning morally the relationship in capitalism between producers and nonproducers.

Marx's three views of freedom, again, are autonomy, self-determination, and community. It may be helpful to understand that he articulates these views implicitly in his discussion of social and economic phenomenon. In other words, since he is not explicit in saying "these are the values I uphold," we shall have to interpret them as such, given the context of the evidence that demonstrates both textual and logical consistency. The first of these views of freedom, what we call "autonomy," amounts to saying what seems to be most intuitive to the concept of freedom itself: individuals are able to make decisions and act on them independent from external influence. But in capitalism the worker is forced to sell himself in some sense, since in order to survive he must work for the capitalist. "What the worker exchanges with capital is his labour itself (the capacity of disposing over it); he
The disposing of labor requires the worker to divest himself, too, of his autonomy, or the ability to freely undertake action resulting from self-made decisions. This makes sense in light of Marx's major contention against capitalist wage-contracts. Although the legal system designates such contracts as freely undertaken by two or more parties, Marx thinks claims that this is a gross misrepresentation, an *ideological mystification*, of the contractual arrangements.¹⁶

Lastly, it [the subsumption of the worker under the capitalist] dissolves the relationship between the owners of the conditions of labour and the workers into a *relationship of sale and purchase, a purely financial relationship*. In consequence the process of exploitation is stripped of every patriarchal, political or even religious cloak. (Marx 130; 1986)

The ability of individuals to freely choose their own ends and act upon them is severely limited by the relationship of exploitation in which they find themselves. I shall return to the ways in which the relationships found in capitalism between producers and nonproducers violate the value of freedom. For now, however, it should be clear that at least Marx's view of freedom as autonomy implies the necessary normative component that applies to human action.¹⁷ If individuals cannot act upon decisions they make, in short if they are not autonomous, then they are not free.
Marx's second view of freedom overlaps to some extent with the theme of autonomy just described. Self-determination is a vital component of freedom, and this naturalistic component of freedom is perhaps the most *morally* relevant feature of all ethical beliefs. For instance, Aristotle believes that human flourishing is the end toward which human action tends, and this amounts to saying that individuals should determine their own development by exercising good judgement. Even a utilitarian in the strictest sense finds the value of self-determination especially relevant, since the interests of the individual and the collective are thought to harmonize, promote, and reinforce each other. The value of self-determination for Marx works in this same way: in order for individual humans to become the best they can be, they must be free to develop themselves as authentic, *non-alienated* beings. "First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind" (Marx 72; 1987). To freely self-determine one's individual development requires undertaking those forms of activity in life that *enhance* the human capacities for virtue or good rather than retard them. The close connection between autonomy and self-determination work in the same way that driving from one town to the next requires a road; without the appropriate
avenue for my action, I could still make the decision to drive, but it is meaningless since
the necessary preconditions to do so are constrained externally. In some sense, Marx’s
first two views of freedom correspond to one another, since decisions to act must
correspond to the range of choices available to act upon, and this should be kept in mind
when I later show their connection to Kant’s categorical imperative.

The final view of freedom involves the community. While it is often thought the
community curtails an individual’s freedom, on Marx’s view the only possible form of
freedom to be realized is in and through the community. As Marx and Engels state
explicitly, “Personal freedom becomes possible only within the community” (Brenkert 84;
1980). Marx’s analysis of class struggle shows to what extent a community is divided in
the capitalist mode of production. In conjunction with this concern, his attention to
individual freedom in the context of community shows to what extent Marx believes there
is a universal, transcendent value that can be attained by eliminating those features of
capitalism that work to promote conflict. Nowhere is this belief in a universal value more
apparent than in the 1844 Manuscripts, where Marx refers to mankind’s essential nature
as “species being.”

Man is a species being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts
the species as his object (his own as well as those of other things), but--and
this is only another way of expressing it--but also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being. (75; 1987)

The statement resonates with Martin Heidegger's discussion of "Being" nearly a century later: individual Beings (*Dasein*) are the only beings which express the value of being to and for themselves in a finite, temporal world. This last view of freedom expresses the relationship of the individual to the community in which freedom is equalized: an equal, compatible form of liberty can and should exist for all (Peffer 135-6). With Marx's final view of freedom, it is clear that a very coherent picture takes shape regarding the necessary values which are implied in the themes of freedom as they overlap and intertwine. Marx values the ability of individuals to act on their own decisions in an environment where avenues exist for freely determining one's development, open and compatible for all individuals in a given community.

Given what I have just said regarding Marx's views of freedom and the appropriate values that correspond to those views, I now turn to Kant's moral philosophy. Showing the parallels that exist between Marx and Kant requires some deft maneuvering, especially because the complexity of their thoughts requires elaborating on them each in turn. The roughness of the argument as it proceeds results from being forced to juxtapose
the two, without the benefit of synthesizing them. Once I establish Kant’s parallel views of freedom and value in a reconstruction of his argument for a universal moral obligation, I shall show how these are relevant to the Marxian theory of exploitation (1) by discussing Marx’s assessment of capitalism, and (2) demonstrating how the charge of exploitation morally condemns it.

Kant begins the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* by arguing that the only possible thing to think of in the world (or out of it) as good without qualification is a “good will” (7; 1983). But this is not because good itself is the result of those actions arising from the will; rather, a will is good only because it is good in itself. Immediately, Kant moves to question this fundamental assumption, and searches for a connection between reason and the human will. “But inasmuch as reason has been imparted to us as a practical faculty, i.e., as one which is to have influence on the will, its true function must be to produce a will which is not merely good as a means to some further end, but is good in itself” (9). Kant argues that moral obligation stems from the practical reason of humans, and duties correspond to the will in different degrees. There are duties, both perfect and imperfect, that require action, both in relation to one’s self and to others. Perfect duties are those that do not require a compelling reason to act on them other than for the sake of fulfilling the obligation itself. Examples that violate these duties are lying,
cheating, and killing. One refrains from killing others, for instance, not because of the legal consequences, but because killing violates a moral obligation (a perfect duty) one has to others. Imperfect duties, however, are those moral obligations that happen to coincide with some additional benefits independent of the duties in themselves. For example, I fulfill my obligation to pay taxes every year, not because I believe paying taxes to the government is in itself right, but because I want to avoid the consequences entailed if I do not pay them. For Kant, these distinctions are vital because the unfolding of his argument as it moves to its next stage requires showing how a moral obligation is both binding and universal.

There are three important stages to Kant’s argument for a binding, universal obligation: autonomy, dignity, and “the kingdom-of-ends.” Each of these three values can be understood to connect as Kant reformulates the categorical imperative to demonstrate the logical implications that follow one from the other.18 A categorical imperative is a binding, unqualified directive for moral action, arising from maxims which serve as moral principles that differentiate between right and wrong. Kant says, “imperatives are expressed by an ought and thereby indicate the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that is not necessarily determined by this law because of its subjective constitution” (24, 1983). Since duty “is the necessity of an action done out of
respect for the law," it necessarily follows for Kant that "the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it nor in any principle of action that needs to borrow its motive from this expected effect" (13). No consequences can influence the subjective maxim which wills an individual's action, and what is "moral" in the strictest sense of the term is nothing but the good of the willed action itself. It is important to note here that Kant is a strict deontologist, and argues that obligation constitutes the core of what we call "morality." The categorical imperative spells out this obligation as a binding, universal requirement for action: "I should never act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (14). The imperative for action here requires an individual to refrain from action that could not logically be consistent with the actions of others. For example, if I lie I cannot at the same time expect that other people should tell me the truth; my actions are inconsistent with the ways in which I would want others to treat me.

The value of autonomy here is crucial. For in order to be able to act morally, I have to be able to judge and act independent from influence other than my own will. Kant argues that there is no empirical method to demonstrate that an action is morally good, since individuals can, and often do, conform to moral principles as a way of deriving some kind of benefit for themselves. Because of the "dear self, which is always turning up, and
upon which the intent of our actions is based rather than upon the strict command of
duty,” Kant argues that individuals must at all times be free to think, make choices, and
act: “the question at issue here is not whether this or that has happened but that reason of
itself and independently of all experience commands what ought to happen” (20). An
individual is free precisely in the sense that she is a rational being whose will acts on moral
principles. If she is not free to use her reason, in short if she does not enjoy an
autonomous will which acts on her guiding moral principles, then there is no binding and
universal moral obligation. It is precisely because individuals are free to act on their own,
that an objective moral law is possible a priori, or independent of experience (32). Kant’s
central claim is that for the judgements of an autonomous will, morality is first in order of
importance.

Hence everything empirical is not only quite unsuitable as a contribution to
the principle of morality, but is even highly detrimental to the purity of
morals. For the proper and inestimable worth of an absolutely good will
consists in the fact that the principle of action is free of all influences from
contingent grounds. (34)

Having derived the categorical imperative a priori from practical reason, Kant goes on to
extend the logical implications for action of the moral principle.
The second value formulated by Kant is dignity and it logically follows from the first. In fact, the second formulation of the categorical imperative is equivalent to the first.

"Now I say that man, and in general every rational being, exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will. He must in all his actions, whether directed to himself or other rational beings, always be regarded at the same time as an end" (Kant 35). The value of dignity here is affirmed, since people are to be taken seriously as individuals only, and not because they can serve some purpose or do some good. Kant indeed holds humanity in high regard, and the moral treatment required of rational individual beings is expressed in the imperative: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means" (36). The second imperative logically follows from the first: I cannot use someone instrumentally for my own purposes without them knowing it, because I would never hold that anyone else should do the same to me.

The dignity of all human individuals is universal, so the first imperative which requires that action conform to a universal moral law limits my actions toward others. The equal moral dignity of all individuals constrains my freedom, but only insofar as there is an equal compatible moral freedom for all. "This principle of humanity and of every rational nature
generally as an end in itself is the supreme limiting condition of every man’s freedom of action” (37).

Following from the two previous formulations of the categorical imperative is what Kant calls “the kingdom of ends.” The first value of autonomy allows individuals to act on moral principles (Kant calls this the principle of the autonomy of the will), the second value of dignity is necessarily entailed when autonomous individuals are understood as ends in themselves, and the third value results when the first two values are extended outward to all members of the moral community. “By ‘kingdom’ I understand a systematic union of different rational beings through common laws . . . A rational being belongs to the kingdom of ends as a member when he legislates in it universal laws while also being himself subject to these laws. He belongs to it as a sovereign, when as legislator he is himself subject to the will of no other.” (Kant 39-40; my emphasis). The moral community that Kant imagines is one where free individuals treat each other with dignity, never using one another instrumentally, and this treatment applies equally to all individuals.

Marx imagined the same moral community in his vision of communist society (Brenkert 1980; Miller 1991; Ball 1991). The parallels between Marx’s views of freedom and Kant’s formulation of a moral theory are too striking to be coincidental. Both
demonstrate an equal degree of clarity on moral matters, and this stems from the fact that freedom is not understood as a delimiting principle, but as a restrictive one. Rather than defining freedom for each individual, Marx and Kant think it is important to define freedom for all and derive the conditions and limitations of freedom for each individual. Such a belief intuitively meshes with what we think counts as moral obligation which constrains us from acting in certain ways towards others, since “every free act is potentially coercive in its effects on the freedom of others” (Reiman 94; 1981). For example, the juxtaposition of the following quotes from them demonstrate the parallels between Marx and Kant on matters of value. First, in the third volume of Capital Marx states explicitly his concept of freedom as a value.

Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers . . . and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom. (441; 1978; my emphasis)

In the Groundwork Kant says much the same thing regarding the value of dignity, as opposed to its price.
In the kingdom of ends everything has either a price or a dignity. Whatever has a price can be replaced by something else as its equivalent; on the other hand, whatever is above all price, and therefore admits of no equivalent, has a dignity. (40)

I now turn to the Marxian concept of exploitation, in order to show that these parallels between Marx and Kant require us to understand the moral force of the charge of exploitation as it applies to capitalism.

The contested definition of exploitation as the unfair exchange of labor for goods misses the moral point of the charge of exploitation that Marx levels against capitalism (Reiman 1987; 1989; pp.248-9, 1990). Capitalism is exploitative because it takes advantage of the workers who produce the goods, and it requires no great amount of empirical investigation to come to this conclusion. For Marx, the observable fact that many workers live in impoverished conditions while their bosses live in the lap of luxury demonstrates to what end the worker is getting the short end of the stick. His laborious and technical theory of the labor theory of value and surplus-value is only one way of empirically accounting for the source of this wrongness. But the failure of many analytic Marxists and non-Marxists alike to recognize that the description of exploitation can be an inaccurate picture of the relationship empirically, but still be morally correct, continues to
plague the spirit of Marx's critique of capitalism. Clearly, Marx thinks that the relationship between workers and capitalists is wrong, just as we think the relationship between slaves and masters is wrong. A Kantian interpretation of the relationship between producers and nonproducers, then, serves as a device to bring to light what matters most about the Marxian theory of exploitation, and what matters most, of course, is that the moral objection contained in the concept of exploitation indicts the instrumental use of persons.

Everything in Marx's descriptive language indicates that exploitation constitutes a relationship among people, in this case between the proletariat and the capitalist. At least no one disputes that exploitation describes relations. Instead, the dispute about exploitation takes place on two different grounds: an empirical one where the theory of exploitation is thought to be untrue, and a normative one where key moral terms are contested. The first I have already dealt with, arguing that even if Marx's empirical theories of value are misguided and do not account accurately for the real picture, the moral indictment of the relationships still applies. The second area of dispute I have already discussed at some length in section III with respect to the "force-inclusive" definition of exploitation articulated by Reiman. I now want to show that the focus of
exploitation on the relationship between classes counts the most morally, and Marx's critique of capitalism seen in this light is most forceful.

A very simple definition of exploitation "is roughly a matter of being taken advantage of by someone who has power over you" (Arneson 224). That Marx thought the working class is taken advantage of by the owners is hard to dispute. His polemic and programmatic statement *The Communist Manifesto* contains the most explicit references to this arrangement. It is important to quote Marx at some length here to get the full effect of his revolutionary fervor, which I think can best be explained by understanding that he intensely believes capitalism is immoral.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors,' and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment.' It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. *It has resolved personal worth into exchange value*, and in the place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom--Free Trade. In
one word, *for exploitation*, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has
substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. (475; 1978)

In many other writings, too, Marx makes clear that exploitation occurs because the
capitalist exercises force over workers, thus coercing them into producing. The force,
however, is not direct and violent, as Marx makes clear in the preceding passage. Instead,
it is subtle and “invisible” in some sense, softened by the religious beliefs and political
system that make exploitation *appear* legitimate. But the force is present nonetheless.

Marx argues that capital (which I take to mean both the capitalist and the very structure of
the system itself) “obtains this surplus labor without an equivalent, and in essence it always
remains forced labour—no matter how much it may seem to result from free contractual
agreement” (440; 1978). Or again, the worker “only feels himself outside his work, and in
his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is
working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*” (74; 1987).

Now, even if the theory of surplus value is dismissed as inappropriate, the
exploitation that constitutes the relationship between worker and capitalist still exists.
Profit comes from somewhere, (even if the theory of surplus value cannot account for it)
the worker still lives in poverty, the capitalist still lives in luxury, and the disjuncture
between these two shows to what degree workers are used instrumentally and economically in the capitalist system. In order for the relationship to count as immoral, we do not require a theory of justice to elaborate on appropriate patterns of distribution. The minimum argument needed here is that we recognize that there is an inappropriate violation of the categorical imperative, which morally prohibits individuals (even systems arising from individual and collective action) using others merely or solely as a means to further their ends. In the *1844 Manuscripts*, when discussing the alienating relationship between the laborer and his labor, Marx says his activity "is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it . . . Lastly, the external character of labor for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another" (74).

From this last statement it is clear that Marx's critique of relationships in capitalism amounts to a moral assessment of capitalism, given his explicit views on freedom in terms of autonomy, self-determination, community, and the corresponding limits on action that these values entail. Even more clear are the ways in which these views and the subsequent critique of capitalism coincide with Kant's moral theory. In capitalism, a worker is not free to act on his will autonomously, another is treated with less dignity than her status as
a moral agent requires, and what is more, a whole class of individuals is not accorded the
equal freedom which others enjoy at their expense. That the capitalist is guilty of these
violations, especially when using workers merely as a means to an end, is reflected in the
very nature of profit: it is not for the sake of the worker that the capitalist makes a profit,
it is for his own sake, or at least for the sake of profit itself. A Kantian interpretation of
the Marxian theory of exploitation gives us precisely the moral focus we need to
understand why Marx vigorously condemns capitalism and argues just as forcefully to
overthrow it.

The concept of exploitation understood *morally* makes the Marxian critique of
capitalism a forceful one. When we understand that Marx's motivation for thinking in the
vein he did, and acting on what he thought, amounts to a conviction that capitalism is
immoral, both in its treatment of individual workers and in its effects ranging from
poverty, starvation, and massive disparities in income and the means of life, then the force
of his assessment of capitalism can be understood in its true light. The central place of the
concept of exploitation in Marx's thought is best explained, then, precisely because it
describes the relationship between workers and capitalists that matters most *morally*. I
claim that Marx understood this relationship of exploitation to be fundamentally wrong,
not only because its effects violate the values he places on freedom, but also because as an
example of human relationships it is *prima facie* immoral. It constitutes some individuals using others merely as a means to their own ends—even if the workers do benefit from it in some respects. According to Marx, “the non-worker does everything against the worker which the worker does against himself; but he does not do against himself what he does against the worker” (84; 1987). There can be no clearer demonstration of how the concept of exploitation is a violation of the categorical imperative than this explicit statement. That the systematic nature of capitalism mystifies, disguises, or removes the blame of exploitation from the shoulders of the private owners of the means of production does not amount to a moral vindication for either the system or its chief architects. Marx clearly saw how exploitation works structurally: “The slave is the property of a particular *master*; the worker must indeed sell himself to capital, but not to a particular capitalist, and so within certain limitations he may choose to sell himself to whomever he wishes” (134-5; 1986).

But sell themselves the workers must. Even when a worker benefits from the sale because his employment puts food on the table, this “would therefore be nothing but *better payment for the slave*, and would not conquer either for the workers or for labor their human status and dignity” (82; 1987). What makes exploitation in capitalism especially insidious, even morally contemptible, is that it promotes the appearance of not
taking advantage of the workers, and of allowing them some freedom to choose from a
restricted range of jobs and life prospects, even when the ultimate results still obtain—the
workers are used merely or solely as a means to ends other than ones they choose freely
for themselves. Exploitation is immoral, “not only because it violates principles of
distributive justice but also—and more fundamentally—because it violates the value of
freedom” (Peffer 163; my emphasis). This is the forcefulness of the concept of
exploitation rendered normatively, and even if Marx did not articulate it explicitly, the
moral conclusions follow from his entire critique of capitalism as a social system.

V Marxism: Moral and political

Some concluding remarks are in order, given the depth and range of the materials
covered in the present work. I began this work with some sense of self-assurance,
thinking my original idea that Marx does have a moral value that subsequently informs the
theory of exploitation was, in fact, the correct idea. In hindsight, I still think this idea
worthy of the effort with which I pursued it. However, given the range of material and
ideas that I canvassed and (in some cases) drowned in, I am still troubled by many issues
particular to Marxian studies and more generally to questions of the nature, scope, and
limits of moral philosophy itself. I would like to illustrate this tension between Marx and
moral philosophy, in order to show that (1) moral philosophy itself is challenged by Marx's ideas, and (2) it is troubling that analytical Marxism itself tends to strip Marx and Marxism of its moral and hence its political significance.

Marx must be understood in light of his political commitments, and Marxist ideas must be recognized for the practical activity that such ideas entail. As Reiman has pointed out, "Marx was no neutral observer, no scholarly wallflower," and Marxism as a political set of beliefs "invites partisan political practice" (143-4; 1991). With this in mind, we must understand, I think, that Marx's political commitments implies in itself a kind of commitment to certain values. Marx himself, not to mention the many Marxists that followed in his footsteps, dedicated his life to activity that placed him in direct danger.

That many revolutionaries in this tradition--not to mention those non-revolutionaries who worked in other ways to bring about the social change Marx yearned for--gave their lives to the cause of these ideas is indicative of their commitment to an ideal that can only be understood as compelling enough to be a moral ideal, or a vision arising from the values they held and expressed. I shall not refer to those most infamous Marxists because I believe they used Marx to further their own gains, and so did precisely what Marx thought was most morally inappropriate about human relationships in the world--the use of others as mere means to some other end.
Marx’s political convictions match what I take to be his moral convictions in this appropriate way. While I do not believe that “Marx starts with a moral rejection of capitalism and then theorizes about capitalism in order to support that rejection,” I do believe that the empirical, descriptive, and massive investigation done by Marx was an objective effort to reveal the real conditions of mankind as something morally problematic (Reiman 144; 1991). All this points to the ways in which Marxism and moral philosophy are intimately connected: in order for the Marxian critique of capitalism to be a moral one, we must have moral philosophy to discover the appropriate and logical principles that apply, and in order to have moral philosophy that can do so, we must find ways to defend it against the Marxian critique that morality is ideologically rooted and corresponds to the sociohistorical circumstances. Clearly, this is another subject for another time. But for now I think it is enough to say that the moral interpretation of Marx that I have argued for is plausible and defensible in light of his political views and programs for action.

The political component is an unavoidable element in Marxist ideas it would seem. It is precisely for this reason that I have spent much time arguing that analytical Marxism cannot adequately reconstruct the connection between Marx and morality. Without the necessary (not sufficient to be sure) moral value to motivate action, analytical Marxism fails to be political. Literally, it is an academic enterprise whose discourses in
microfoundations, game theory, mathematical models, and rational choice theory result in Marx being stripped of political significance. I am not arguing that all Marxists in this line of work are apolitical; on the contrary, many of them are dedicated scholars of Marx, who see themselves as continuing the tradition of Marx's critical enterprise. But even the best intentions can go awry, as modern history has seen in socialist revolutions from Russia to China. The problem with analytical Marxism is that its work is "analytical" to the point of being politically superfluous, and even worse it analyzes to the point of confusing and obfuscating what matters most about Marx morally and politically.

The present work has been an attempt to show both why Marx's critique of capitalism is a moral one and why that matters to the degree of it being politically relevant in the world. I have concentrated on that part of Marx's thought related to the theory of exploitation, arguing for a normative rendering of it. Exploitation describes the relationship between classes, a relationship among people, so it is the primary concept to be examined when searching for the connection between Marx and moral philosophy. Indeed, in light of the connections between Marx and Kant, the theory of exploitation is the conjunction of Marx's hypotheses on sociohistorical societies and moral philosophy itself. Kant's moral philosophy allows us to see the ways in which the concept of exploitation in Marx's thought is fundamentally moral. Marx believed historically that
classes conflict because it is in the interest of the ruling class to subordinate and to use the producing class to its own ends. The charge of exploitation was leveled against capitalism (and can continue to be leveled against it) because capitalists have everything as a result of those workers who have little or nothing.

What is morally problematic about capitalism is that prevailing ideas connected to it fail to see this relationship in its true light. Marx clearly thought this ideological tendency was morally significant: "So long as one is a bourgeois, one cannot but see in this relationship of antagonism a relation of harmony and eternal justice, which allows no one to gain at the expense of another" (Husami 38). All subsequent empirical investigation on the part of Marx and Marxists alike reveals the relationship to be exploitative and not moral or "just" as capitalism attempts to make it appear. I hope to have shown in what ways the Marxian theory of exploitation, understood to be consistently an ongoing violation of the Kantian forms of the categorical imperative, is at once a moral description, assessment, and conclusion about the nature of capitalism itself.
I do not mean to argue here that at all times humans act on moral principles (as Kant does); instead, by the term “moral animals” I simply mean to state what Aristotle took to be true about all human activity, namely that it is characterized by its “social” setting among relationships with other humans.

With respect to the “post-Marxian” tradition, I have here in mind the loose “movement” called “analytical Marxism.” I use post-Marxian to denote this movement’s reconstruction and extension of Marx’s own arguments in light of new theoretical, philosophical, and social scientific methods advanced by such individuals as Elster, Roemer, Cohen, Wood, and others. See Elster, 1985; Cohen 1979, 1982; Wood 1972, 1986. For discussions on the nature and practice of “analytical Marxism” see Buchanan 1987; Ware 1989; and Reiman 1989.

The historical and social conditions of today do make a difference regarding the relevance of Marx’s arguments against capitalism, not because they are irrelevant as such, but because they must be shown to apply to the changed conditions of capitalism in the late twentieth century. Especially important regarding the status of Marxism is the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of actually existing socialism across Eastern Europe. Along with the development of markets in Chinese Communism, these events are taken to be a vindication of capitalism as either the “natural” order, or as the best kind of order. But we should see that many of Marx’s criticisms still apply, and that analytical Marxism has worked to maintain its status as critical and relevant. Unfortunately, this form of Marxism is so depoliticized (thanks to its normative shortcomings) that it fails to carry on the spirit of Marx’s ideas as engaged beliefs. See Buchanan 1987; Nielsen 1989; Reiman 1987 and 1989; Farr 1991; and Ball 1991.

I use the word “mystify” intentionally, since my argument entails showing how the fact-value dichotomy which places an emphasis on facts does not accurately reflect Marx’s arguments, which do not hold the fact-value distinction to be tenable.

One novel way of arguing that Marx does have a moral dimension to his thought is to employ both a realistic and practical argument: realistically, no human individual can be considered amoral, since all
thinking individuals express values; and practically, no human individual would take on the monolithic project that Marx did without some prior motivation that made one think that the all this work "mattered" for one reason or another. Since these arguments will not satisfy the curiosity and confusion of philosophers, however, I shall search for alternative, more difficult arguments to prove such.

6 This is an important matter to clarify before I undertake the arguments against analytical Marxism's rendering of Marx and morality. The connection between Kant and Marx is not argued to be historical or even intellectual (this would require another more controversial route of argumentation); rather, I take the similarities in their thinking to be morally relevant. That is, even if Marx never read Kant (which seems unlikely) the moral implications of his critique against capitalism parallel Kant's moral implications for rational human action: duties to self and others, both perfect and imperfect, as well as maxims which logically imply imperatives. Just as the criticism that capitalism exploits workers implies a moral wrongness that requires that it end, so the maxim that one acts in such a way to will that action universally requires the imperative that one never use another as a mere means. The similarities are too striking between these two philosophers' projects to be considered a coincidence unworthy of our attention.

7 For example, if no moral principle can be shown to be binding in a world of empirically driven method, then the separation that is necessarily entailed results in an inability to ethically judge empirical events. A brief example seems to me to be the Final Solution by National Socialist Germany against the Jews during World War II. Because it had all these descriptive ("empirical") beliefs about Jews, no ethical judgement was brought to bear on their genocidal policies to eliminate the presence of Judaism in the death-camps. In fact, the opposite was true: the perpetrators thought of it as their "duty" to murder. This results from what I call the fallacy of fact/value in Western thought. Ingrained in our habits of thinking is the assumption that descriptions do not contain normative judgements, and resulting from this assumption is a whole area of knowledge (science and social science especially) which perpetuates this, even as it continues to play a greater role in social decision-making and the discovery of knowledge.
I avoid this controversy, since my point is not to defend Kant's moral theory in its entirety. I shall take up more of these issues as they relate to the comparison of Kantian and Marxian theories of exploitation in Part IV.

The complicated idealism of Hegel's system is not being invoked here to excuse my ignorance of Hegel's thought. My point is only to show that the logical implications of certain aspects of his thought (including the unity of thought and object) show to what extent the logical separation between fact and value cannot ultimately hold in such a system. If values are an expression of consciousness, then facts about the material world are only expressions of what matters to the thought (consciousness thinking) seeking to make itself adequate to the objects which it is describing. In some sense, fact and value in Hegel's system "imply" one another, rather than hold as "distinctive."

Marx is not a metaphysician like Hegel, and his use of the "dialectic" occurs only in his method of critically assessing the fundamental assumptions of systems of thought. In the spirit of Socrates, Marx questions the premises which are assumed to be true about liberalism and capitalism, and this parallels Hegel's reaction against Kant's first principles, such as the "thing-in-itself" and the phenomena-noumena distinction.

I avoid the problem of the labor theory of value in its connection to exploitation since it is not relevant to my argument that exploitation is a moral reading of capitalism and not just a description of its *modus operandi*. At least two arguments favor my position: (1) a very general labor theory of value serves to show how unpaid labor is forced out of one class, and this general theory can be something like a moral principle (see Reiman's "The Labor Theory of the Difference Principle," 1983; see also Reiman 1987); and (2) even if the labor theory of value is a failure, the moral charge of exploitation still sticks, and it is my position that the Marxian theory of exploitation is precisely this moral charge.

Wood's thesis that Marx did not believe capitalism to be "unjust" relies on an excessively legalistic notion of "justice" that always corresponds to the mode of production. The problems with this view have been argued closely by Husami 1978; Reiman 1987; and Sayers 1989.
I avoid the connection between exploitation and alienation at this point, not to deny its applicability, but because its role is not as important in rendering exploitation as a normative concept based on relationships among people. Certainly, exploitation can result in "estrangement" among people and for oneself. I shall take up this aspect of the connection between exploitation and alienation in Part IV, where I show how Marx’s views of freedom correspond to Kant’s duties to oneself and others.

Any serious moral philosopher might question why domination does not imply exploitation with a simple definition of each. If domination is exercising power or will over others, then it is for some purpose, even if that purpose is to maintain power. This is still a kind of "using," which is a simple definition of exploitation. And, of course, exploitation implies domination, since to use someone for one’s own ends requires the exercise of power over another, even if it is subtle and not overt.

Marx himself argued that these “end-state” theories of political economy, or theories like orthodox political economy that ignored historical and social context, and pretended to have justified their explanations of events, are bogus. See *Grundrisse* 1978. For a more explicit and recent criticism of “end-state” theories or “time-slice” theories, see Robert Nozick’s *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*; 1974.


By way of illustration, if I believe my personal freedom to be violated by the actions of another, a moral principle is applicable to the actions which amount to constraints on my freedom. A value implies a kind of principle, even if it is not explicate. Marx values freedom, so it follows that violations of that freedom imply a certain kind of action that refrains from or does not result in such violations.

The use of the word “value” here is controversial, since Kant’s project to derive a binding moral obligation based on the principle of autonomy *a priori* is thought to be independent from any question of value. However, I am not saying that there is a value at the center of Kant’s philosophy. As I stated regarding Marx, a moral principle implies a corresponding value; this, of course, can occur in hindsight,
but it does not mean that the value was not present to begin with. Just as a value implies what kinds of actions are appropriate, so too does a moral obligation imply what values give rise to it.

19 For an excellent discussion on this as the appropriate way to do moral philosophy, see Reiman p. 95, 1981. “[The fallacy of libertarian capitalism] stems from doing moral philosophy backwards, starting from the single individual and multiplying this to all instead of starting from the conditions of freedom for all and deriving from these the conditions of freedom for each. If this is correct, I think it strongly suggests that something like the method used by Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (as distinct from the principles he derives from the method) is the proper starting point for moral philosophy.”

20 See Rawls, p. 102. “The social system is not an unchangeable order beyond human control but a pattern of human action.”

21 I am not arguing here that Marx saw his project as the moral kind I have defended; instead, I argue that the ways in which the Marxian concept of exploitation coincides with Kant’s moral theory shows to a remarkable degree how the parallels between the two are morally relevant in assessing the morality of capitalism as a social and economic system.
Works Cited


“Exploitation, Force, and the Moral Assessment of Capitalism:


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