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Ambiguity in the Marxist Interpretation of Good, Evil, Right and Wrong

The philosophers of the eighteenth century were for the most part Socratic in their estimates of the good life. To the French writers of the Age of Reason knowledge was virtue, in the sense that the hindrances to the harmonious society of their reasoning were analysed in terms of ignorance entrenched among the unlearned and uneducated. Like Socrates, they were convinced that men's ignorance of their true good and happiness was the source of all their wrong-doing. True knowledge, they urged, would settle the disagreements and perpetual disputes about what is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, and would thus produce uniformity in men's moral judgements and behaviour. In addition, again like Socrates, they insisted that knowledge alone would really make men free and good. The enlightened man, they argued, ought to choose what is good; evil is always prompted by ignorance. It is only by cultivating their rational powers that men will be able to find out where their good lies. The knowledge of good, according to La Mettrie, is always a desirable end of all human actions. 'There is such an inexpressible pleasure', he says, 'in doing good and in retaining a grateful sense of the good done to us by others'.[1]

The appeal to reason in the eighteenth century was directed against dogmaticism and the blind following of traditional beliefs. In spite of the differences between rationalists and empiricists, idealists and materialists, they were in essential agreement with the fundamental assumption that the right manner of human life is a result attainable through knowledge and that good behaviour is capable of being imparted by adequate education to properly qualified intellects. The distinguishing mark of the Age of Reason was the conviction, especially upheld among the French writers, that the harmonious life of human beings had somehow been forfeited but could once again be restored. The progressive process in moral and social fields, it was believed, had been limited by imperfections, superstitious beliefs and immoral practices in the past. Ignorance, social exploitation of man by man, poverty, errors and lack of education were lamentable phenomena of the historical picture of the closing years of the eighteenth century. Echoing Socrates, Holbach indicates that it is possible for at least some human beings to acquire the knowledge necessary to recognise the real and objective distinction

between good and bad acts or ends. 'It is, therefore, ignorance of himself that has prevented man from enlightening his morals'.[2]

Analysing natural morality of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century, one must bear in mind that their ideas of good, bad, right and wrong and their conception of moral norms and principles represent a mixture of rationalist and empiricist approach to moral reality. *The Encyclopaedia* itself had been constructed on the assumptions of sensationalist thought. Condillac argued that moral ideas are traceable to specific sensations. Condorcet, Holbach and Diderot also gave prominence to the sensationalist approach. Condillac, however, retained the rationalist ideal and, consequently, formulated moral laws and principles which satisfied the rationalist demand for the eternal, the universal and the necessary. Not all French writers of the Age of Reason were materialists. 'Many of them, for example Voltaire', according to Plekhanov, 'vigorously combated the materialists'.[3] Hegel refers to them as 'inconsistent materialists'. Marx and Engels also indicate the eclectic character in the ideas of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century.[4] The opposition of French materialism to seventeenth century metaphysics, in their view, has not led to real humanism. On the contrary, French mechanistic materialism remained indifferent to this humanism because its moral ideas, according to Marx and Engels, were based on the belief that they originate in human nature.

In opposition to the view held by the mechanical materialists, Marx and Engels argue that there are no correct concepts about human nature outside dialectical materialism and that, therefore, mechanical materialism could not provide the key to the explanation of moral and social phenomena. If human nature is invariable and fixed, as the mechanical materialists maintained, then, in the view of dialectical materialists, mechanical materialism must accept the fact that it cannot explain the course of the moral, social and intellectual development of mankind. The analysis of everything into ultimate, irreducible physical and psychological constituents, without considering man's place in the system of socio-economic relations, cannot explain anything at all, let alone the phenomena which give rise to the ideas of good and right in human conduct. The appeal to nature and reason as the two absolutes facing man, in Marx's and Engels' view, is merely a bourgeois substitute for the appeal to divine wisdom and intelligence. It is not surprising, therefore, that social and moral concepts of the mechanical materialists proved to be historically and socially ineffective. These materialists fail to see that ideas, principles and norms are the product of socio-economic circumstances, not the product of human nature and environment.[5]

Marx's and Engels' thinking about moral and social problems, however, is definitely permeated with the ideas and categories of the Enlightenment. They share the view of the French writers of the Age of Reason that human beings are born neither good nor bad and that the categories of goodness or badness cannot have a transcendental origin. They also share their belief in progress, especially in the fields of science and technology. The advance of science in the eighteenth century led to a theory that thought is a function of the brain, a product of the social environment and external stimuli. This theory plays an important role in

Engels' conception of consciousness as the seat of moral ideas.[6] Like the French materialists, Marx and Engels argue that thought is impossible without the connection with man's sensuousness. It is not thought by itself that thinks but a human individual motivated by certain impulses, emotions and needs. For Marx and Engels, the human being is a natural as well as a social being and as such is endowed with natural powers which take the form of real, sensuous, finite, particular and conscious qualities. Sensuous consciousness, Marx insists, 'is not an abstractly sensuous consciousness' as in Hegel, but rather 'a humanly sensuous consciousness'.[7]

Beginning with emotions, perceptions and sensations, and rising to the highest stages of theoretical thought, moral consciousness in Marx's view, is a unified process that is closely connected with man's status in society. As man is inseparable from society, it is only in relevant social formations that he can realise his moral and spiritual aims. The mode of human production, it is suggested, cannot be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of human beings, but rather as a definite form of activity expressing their moral and spiritual life. In opposition to the mechanical materialists Marx maintains that men do not begin their cognitive life by standing in a certain passive relationship to the things of the external world but by behaving actively. The view of mechanical materialists that 'all errors of man are physical errors' and that moral ideas and principles have their origin in merely 'natural and physical forces' is rejected because it fails to explain the dialectically contradictory character of cognitive activity. Moral truth cannot be derived from, what Holbach calls, the 'faithful relation of our senses.'[8] It is the totality of socio-economic relations that gives rise to the formation of moral ideas, including the ideas of good, bad and right.

In opposition to mechanical materialism and abstract idealism, Marx advocates dialectical materialism and it is in the name of this materialism that he openly inveighs against all speculative philosophy and moral preaching. According to Lenin, Marx and Engels condemned 'bad' mechanical materialism 'from the standpoint of a higher, more advanced, dialectical materialism' because of its failure to realise that the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis and that nature works dialectically and not metaphysically and mechanically.[9] Progress is not simply the unfolding of mechanical possibilities. Just as effects contain something more than their causes, so moral and social reality, expressed in moral ideas, categories and consciousness, contains an indefinite number of possibilities of emergence of qualitatively new forms and phenomena. As everything in man's social and moral life is permeated with contradictions, the process of moral development, like any other development, combines a unity of the continuous and the discontinuous, physical and mental, relative and absolute, subjective and objective.

The world of dialectical materialism, according to Marx and Engels, is quite different from the mechanical world of the old abstract materialism. Moral ideas and consciousness are not mechanically determined by any single natural law. While the laws of nature operate with a regularity which is independent of human

awareness, the laws of moral and social development, although also independent of human will, are nonetheless somehow affected by moral consciousness which develops in the context of social consciousness. Considering the relationship between moral consciousness and the 'inexorable laws' of social development, Marx and Engels, however, give us hardly any positive information. Their differentiation between the laws of nature involved in natural morality of mechanical materialism and the inexorable laws of social development envisaged in dialectical materialism is very ambiguous. It may be true, as Engels indicates, that Marxist 'materialism, the negation of the negation, is not the mere re-establishment' of the old mechanical materialism.[10] Yet Marx sometimes praises this mechanical, French materialism for its pioneering struggle against idealism.[11] *Inter alia*, he is very impressed by the 'teaching of this materialism on the original goodness of men' and by its implication that by nature man is neither good nor bad.[12]

Unlike Helvetius and Holbach, however, Marx blames the class structure of society, economic inequality and the ignorance of dialectical laws, not man's ignorance of the composition and function of human nature and environment, for the existence of moral evil and wickedness. 'If man is shaped by environment', Marx says, 'his environment must be made human. If man is social by nature he will develop his true nature only in society'.[13] It is only in classless society that he can develop his realistic ideas of goodness, honesty, rightness and justice. It is impossible for man to form a correct concept of good or of right without considering the interests of his class because all ideas and norms are determined by socio-economic reality. The moral world containing these ideas, in Marx's view, is entirely encompassed within the universe of human beings living in society which is the arena of moral development and the 'true focus of all history'.[14] Because it is socially determined, human behaviour changes its character in different societies. The characteristic feature of human conduct in a non-socialist society is its orientation towards the realisation of private and frequently egoistic aims. In Marx's view, a good man is the man whose moral dispositions lead to the realisation of a common good and whose actions advance the interests of society as a whole. Bourgeois society is negatively individualistic and immoral. The driving force of this society is the hunt for private profits. Based on alienated labour, the social and moral structure of capitalism manifestly reflects the degradation and meaninglessness of the whole socio-ethical process. Because in capitalist society men seek only their private good and private interest, the common good and common interests appear to them alien, natural and meaningless.[15]

Marx's treatment of the moral world is coloured by materialist and rationalist ideas, although in theory he rejects both idealism and mechanical materialism. Human beings, he argues, have bodies which are active, passionate and responsive to sensuous nature. In fact, 'man is affirmed in the objective world both in the act of thinking and in the act of perception'.[16] Laying an unwarranted emphasis on the role of dialectical 'inexorable' laws in the development of morality, Marx, however, strictly speaking, is neither a consistent empiricist nor a consistent rationalist. His claim that his philosophical system 'is based on empirically verifiable facts' cannot be sustained. The method of abstraction is never absent

from his 'practical materialism'. By taking activity from idealism and sensuousness from materialism, he presents his own position as the synthesis of theory and practice which is expressed in 'actual sensuous activity'.[17] Because actuality is dissolved in activity, he thinks that his materialism consists solely in the sensuousness of activity. The nature of practice itself is never explained and the reference to sensuousness is abstract, as the idea of activity of 'a human, natural being' already includes it.[18] Marx's notion of practice is, in fact, based on the abstract and ambiguous opposition between 'being and consciousness' and, as a result, the antithesis between theory and practice is as mystical as in Hegelianism – a mere appearance of human reality. [19]

The materialists of the eighteenth century were convinced that they had annihilated idealism and with it transcendental morality. However, they were mistaken, and by the end of the century an idealistic reaction to materialism asserted itself in German philosophy under the scholarly leadership of Kant and later of Hegel. Both Kant's and Hegel's philosophy are markedly abstract and metaphysical and this is reflected in their ideas of morality. Kant is interested in reason with its logical immanence, its rigid necessity and its perfect universality. The moral laws regulating human behaviour, he, says,

> are valid as laws only so far as they have an *a priori* basis and can be seen to be necessary; nay, the concepts and judgements about ourselves and our actions and omissions have no moral significance at all, if they contain only what can be learned from experience; and should one be so misled as to make into a moral principle anything derived from this source, he would be in danger of the grossest and most pernicious errors.[20]

Moral laws, he adds, 'proceed from the rational will' and it is this will that is the source of goodness and rightness of human actions.[21] In obeying moral principle man is not referring to any external legislator but is obeying a law which is imposed on him by his own reason. Like Kant, Hegel maintains that moral distinctions are not matters of mere expediency or expressions of merely personal inclinations, but, unlike Kant, he accepts the historical fact that positive morality is partly based on unreflecting conventions and customs which vary in different times and countries.[22]

The distinguishing mark of Hegel's conception of moral ideas is the belief that men must not think of themselves as 'private individuals', each seeking his own good independently of the community. Individuality has the meaning of self-consciousness in general, not of a particular, contingent consciousness. In the moral world the 'ethical substance is actual substance, absolute spirit realised in the plurality of existent consciousness; this spirit is the community which, when we entered the sphere of reason in its practical embodiment, was for us absolute essence'.[23] The defect of the Hegelian interpretation of morality is the over-emphasis on the ethos of the people expressed in definite precepts, commands and maxims which is difficult to reconcile with Hegel's belief in dialectical progress.[24] As some moral philosophers rightly indicate, those who are now recognised as having been among the best and wisest in the moral world were not always the most faithful to the traditions and moral aspirations of their own people.[25] If the

laws of morality are rational rather than accidental, as Hegel maintains, then 'living in accordance with the customs of one's nation' cannot be the criterion of moral excellence. Moral regeneration depends on the regeneration of the individual, and the regeneration of the moral individual depends on moral consciousness of the person concerned. Both Hegel and Marx have failed to realise that the development of moral ideas cannot be disconnected from the development of the moral individual. Moral goodness and rightness are inseparable from the intrinsic moral worth of the individual. They are personal, not impersonal characteristics of moral life. It is unfortunate that Marx and Hegel, like Plato before them, were convinced that the only alternative to collective morality is egoistic morality. They wrongly identify all goodness with the collective or common good and all badness with egoism of the isolated individual.

The Hegelian moral world is a mystery to the non-metaphysician as the physical world of Newton or Einstein is to those who are ignorant of physics and mathematics. It is simply impossible to understand Hegelian moral ideas without metaphysical knowledge. Metaphysics, he says, is the 'science of things set and held in thoughts – thoughts accredited able to express the essential reality of things'.[26] It is impossible, he warns his readers,

> to escape metaphysics and cease to trace nature back to terms of thought, by throwing ourselves into the arms of atomism. The atom, in fact, is itself a thought, and hence the theory which holds matter to consist of atoms is a metaphysical theory.[27]

During the long period from Descartes to Hegel, the philosophers, as Engels remarks, were impelled partly by reason and partly by the rapid progress of natural science. Under the influence of scientific progress they all stood for wise and steady development in the moral and social realm. Following the progressive ideas of the eighteenth century, the majority of nineteenth-century thinkers, including Marx and Engels, accepted the rationalistic vision of society in which all men and women would be led to the progressive conquest of moral and social evils which impede their enlightenment. The message of enlightenment, they maintained, implies that man's ideas of moral and social life must be reasonable, unbigoted and unhypocritical. In questioning the irrational beliefs of their age and in proclaiming that reason and knowledge could lead human beings to mastery over evil customs, prejudices and intellectual errors, the idealist philosophers in Germany epitomised during the first half of the nineteenth century a new and revolutionary spirit of confident rationalism which appealed to their own and succeeding generations. Sometimes there were attempts to reconcile the 'antithesis between mind and matter'. According to Engels, the Hegelian system itself 'represents merely a materialism idealistically turned upside down in method and content'.[28] With equal vigour, one could argue that the Marxist system represents an idealism – in the sense that it is based on idealist dialectic – materialistically 'turned upside down in method and content'. Although Hegel's philosophy represents moral and social development idealistically, Engels still emphasises that 'there has never been, ever since man began to think, a system of philosophy as comprehensive as that of Hegel'.[29] Lenin frankly admits that Marx's

materialism would mean hardly anything without the admixture of dialectical elements from Hegelian idealism. The emphasis in Marx's and Engels' works, he says, is on dialectic rather than on materialism.[30] In his comments on Hegel's dialectic, Marx stresses that this dialectic contains the fundamental principle of all dialectic. All that is required, he adds, is the removal of its mystified elements.[31]

Marx does not reject the significance of dialectic as a method for comprehending the world reality. He merely rejects the 'mystifying aspect of the Hegelian dialectic'. He certainly does not hide the fact that his own materialist dialectic has been inspired by Hegel's dialectical idealism. Marx's belief that changes in the socio-economic conditions of men are always determined by the conflict of contradictions originates from Hegel's conception of the dialectical process representing everything as being in the state of becoming something different. Not only the idea but everything in the world of nature, Hegel argues, develops through negation. 'When the result is conceived as a determinate negation, a new form has thereby immediately arisen, and in the negation the transition is made through which the progress through the complete series of forms comes about of itself'.[32] The contradictory character of the idea generates a form of motion which entails moments of progress. As the idea always contains its opposite, it will always be capable of continuous development through the dialectical process. Moral consciousness and moral ideas develop through the same process. The dialectical process is intelligible only when analysed in terms of the totality of development, not in terms of the development of particulars and fragmentary facts. This evolutionary aspect of Hegel's idealism is also a distinguished feature of Marx's dialectical materialism.

Maintaining that morality is historically conditioned, Marx, however, categorically rejects the idealist view that man's moral consciousness is the basis of his moral life. In his anthropology, moral consciousness is not simply a matter of contemplating one's own well-being or one's own spiritual fulfilment. This consciousness, containing moral ideas, cannot be separated from the laws governing the development of social consciousness which is a reflection of social being expressed in people's ideas, opinions and attitudes.[33] Marx and Engels, however, are far from being clear about the relationship between social and individual consciousness. If social consciousness exists only in the minds of individual men and women, as they seem to suggest, then surely individual moral consciousness cannot simply be a particle of a mental entity called social consciousness. Moral consciousness, they indicate, may be true or false, objective or subjective, concrete or idealistic, real or illusory. Although, in their view, all theoretical consciousness is inevitably associated with the active process of thought, they fail to explain how one can be sure that this consciousness always faithfully reflects 'objective reality'. Assuming that this reality is 'the production of material life itself', and that there is a constant dialectical interaction between individual and social consciousness, they take for granted that changes in social consciousness and in moral ideas are always initiated by the changes and development of material production as expressed in 'social being'.

In Marx's view, the Hegelian moral world and his teleological anthropology are the creatures of his own making. He criticises Hegel and his followers for reducing human history to the act of thinking and for representing concrete objects and events only as manifestations of spirit.[34] For Hegel, the 'concrete is the mind' and thinking.[35] For Marx, however, the concrete in the moral world is a social and existential phenomenon, accessible to goal-orientated thought but not constituted by any cognitive process. Moral ideas do not belong to the transcendental realm but rather to the material, natural and social reality. The dialectical laws of nature are also the laws of moral consciousness. Both Marx and Engels cling to the belief that the dialectical laws of nature and society are somehow united by their material substratum. Following Hegel, they take for granted that 'everything that surrounds us may be viewed as an instance of dialectic'.[36] Marx, who, unlike Engels, is more interested in the laws of social development than in the dialectic of nature, maintains that the laws of social and moral development 'are not evolved as laws' in an abrupt manner, but at first 'act only as tendencies'.[37] Postulating certain tendencies in moral behaviour, he believes that these tendencies are adequately powerful and predictable to give us a better understanding of human history. As a dialectical materialist, Marx contends that social tendencies must be causally related to the economic structure of any particular society.

Marxism rejects all forms of bourgeois morality and stresses the significance of communist morality for the culture of the new society and for the formation of a new man. While rejecting abstract bourgeois ideals, Marx and Engels defend, although somewhat ambiguously, concrete communist goals and humanistic ideals. These goals, according to Engels, are not derived from moral feelings or ethical considerations but rather from the objective laws of the development of capitalist production.[38] There is no power, German says, that can stop the operation of these laws for the simple reason that they are objective.[39] Ever since man became a social being his moral and social development has been linked with what Marx calls 'the economic law of motion of modern society'.[40] Although Marx invalidates the application of the experimental method to the social anthropology and believes that the historical method is adequate for the treatment of socio-economic wholes, he fails to realise that the 'laws of motion of society' are pseudo-laws and have no similarity to the laws of motion of physical bodies. History, as Popper rightly indicates, is characterised by its interest in actual events, rather than in laws or doubtful and untestable generalisations.[41] If 'tendencies which work out' in the social and moral world 'with an iron necessity towards an inevitable goal' are predetermined by inexorable necessity, then Marxism is a variety of fatalism and it is impossible to maintain that the future history of mankind will necessarily unfold within the framework of communist humanism.[42] In that case, Popper correctly remarks, the Marxist can only interpret social development, but never change it or influence its direction.[43] Rejecting fatalism, some Marxists hold that the laws of social development, including moral progress, 'are affected by men's consciousness of them' in spite of the fact that the same laws are supposed to be independent of 'what any individual man or class of men

would like them to be'.[44] How the laws of social and moral development can move 'with an iron necessity towards an inevitable goal' and also be affected by human consciousness of them, they do not explain.[45]

Marx and Engels wrongly believe that the behaviour of human beings is capable of being explained and predicted on the basis of adequate knowledge of the conditions of economic production. Their differentiation between the historical and moral laws is so ambiguous that it is difficult to see whether there is any room for constructive moral reasoning in their dialectical materialism. The dialectic in the Marxist system, according to Giraldi, 'is not just a metaphysical and historical law but also a moral law. What follows the flow of history is good'.[46] Being a qualitative, 'not necessarily violent change for the better', even revolution is sometimes good. This line of thinking is entirely opposed to the objective moral conception of the *summum bonum* in German idealism. Kant postulates the existence of God, not the existence of social conflict, as the 'necessary condition of the possibility of the *summum bonum*'.[47] Holding that the 'ethical substance reveals itself in the Divine law', Hegel contends that the 'truly good – the universal divine reason – is not a mere abstraction, but a vital principle capable of realising itself. This Good, this Reason, in its most concrete form, is God'.[48] By contrast, Marx's ethics, based on the materialist conception of history, lacks any reference to the divine realm. Good and right are always analysed in terms of terrestrial interests. On the whole, he believes that proletarian good is identical with the good of humanity.

In Hegel's objective idealism there is the inseparable connection between the divine and the human, subject and object, man and nature, the ethical and the natural, the whole and the parts. Everything that exists, he says, 'stands in correlation' and this applies to the ideas of good and evil.[49] In the *Philosophy of Religion* Hegel maintains that sin and evil have a rightful place in a universe which is essentially good. Like Leibniz, he strives to prove that such phenomena as alienation and evil necessarily belong to the nature of finite beings. There is nothing in these apparently negative phenomena which cannot be absorbed in the Absolute and thus contribute to the harmony and perfection of the whole. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, he evidently incorporates alienation and evil into the Absolute. 'Good and evil are the specific differences yielded by the thought of spirit as immediately existent'.[50] Evil itself, he says, is nothing other than the self-centredness of the natural existence of spirit. As a result of this existence, 'good enters into actuality and appears as an existent self-consciousness'.[51]

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel elaborates the Christian conception of good. Man, he says, 'is by nature good; potentially he is spirit' or rationality that has been created in the image of God. 'God is the Good and man as spirit is the reflection of God; he is the Good potentially.'[52] Marx categorically rejects the Hegelian and Christian idea of good. In his view, the ideas of good and evil, right and wrong are neither divine nor eternal but rather 'historical and transitory products'.[53] However, for Marx, as for Hegel, the conflict between good and evil is not eternal or irreconcilable.[54] Good and evil are parts of the whole in which all evil moral and social phenomena will be dissolved in the inevitable

progress towards the humanistic goal. Following Hegel, Marx believes that all particular causal series in human history are always affected by their interrelations as well as their relations to the whole. When a part is analysed in relation to the totality of phenomena, it is immediately seen as being dependent for its existence on the whole which alone is truly real. Marx rejects Hegel's belief that the world is the product of spirit and that the moral world has its origin in the divine Idea. Hegel, he says,

> fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought concentrating itself, probing its own depths, and unfolding itself out of itself, by itself, whereas the method of rising from the abstract to the concrete is only the way in which thought appropriates the concrete, reproduces it as the concrete in the mind. But this is by no means the process by which the concrete itself comes into being.[55]

Although Hegel sometimes uses the term 'concrete' in the sense of 'representing the external', on the whole, he uses it philosophically for that form of knowledge which grasps the dialectical elements and moments indissolubly together in organic unity.[56] The concepts of good and right are abstract and yet concrete because they are elements of the concrete Infinite or Spirit which is immanent in man.[57] Unlike science, philosophy, in Hegel's view, is concrete because it endeavours to comprehend all relations as elements or moments of an idea. In opposition to Hegel, Marx argues that all relations and moral forms 'originate in the material conditions of life' and that the illusory forms of morality cannot be equated with reality.[58] The theoretical abstractions of real and concrete events cannot be reality.[59] The fundamental premise of dialectical materialism, according to Lenin, is the recognition of the external world, of the existence of things outside and independent of our mind.[60] Like Plekhanov, he stresses the materialistic belief that the 'object existed long before the subject' and that, therefore, matter is primary and moral consciousness derivative.[61] It is in terms of the concrete and dialectical materialism that Marx analyses the ideas of good, bad, right and wrong.

In *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx criticises the theologians who try to explain the origin of evil by the fall of man. Starting from the abstract and ahistorical assumption rather than from 'actual economic facts', they merely 'push the question away into a grey nebulous distance' and thus 'explain nothing'.[62] Unfortunately, however, Marx himself gives us hardly any explanation of the origin and nature of good and evil. It is not that he rejects these concepts as the references to good, supreme good, right, wrong and bad are not lacking in his writings. After all, as Tucker rightly remarks, Hegel's idea of moral evil as the beneficent force in human history is also evident in Marx's thought.[63] Marx fanatically believes that the evil and alien force of capitalism will inevitably be followed by the triumph of good and that this triumph, tangibly expressed in 'actual communist action', will lead to the transcendence of all evils of the 'present state of things'.[64] Like Hegel, Marx seems to suggest that there is nothing in evil which cannot be absorbed in the category of good and thus be contributory to common good. The solution of the contradiction between good and evil is found in the idea of dialectical development.

With Hegel, Engels writes,

> evil is the form in which the motive force of historical development presents itself. This contains the twofold meaning that, on the one hand, each new advance necessarily appears as a sacrilege against things hallowed, as a rebellion against conditions, though old and moribund, yet sanctified by custom; and that, on the other hand, it is precisely the wicked passions of man – greed and lust for power – which, since the emergence of class antagonisms, serve as levers of historical development'.[65]

Engels, like Marx, rejects the non-dialectical solution of the antithesis of good and evil. The belief of the French materialists in the natural goodness of man is shallow, undialectical and inadequate. Alluding in a sarcastic manner to this belief, he praises Hegel for his treatment of this antithesis. 'One believes one is saying something great' – Hegel is alleged to have said – 'if one says that man is naturally good. But one forgets that one says something far greater when one says that man is naturally evil'.[66] Without offering any solution of his own in this respect, Engels overlooks the fact that the key to the Hegelian theory is the antagonism in the subject due to its finite-infinite nature. As a Christian philosopher, Hegel clearly sees that moral evil is a matter of the will and refuses to call a man good if he merely exhibits that harmony of nature which appears in beings without will. Both Marx and Engels, however, agree with Hegel that evil is a step to the development of a higher good. Unfortunately, they never describe the nature of 'supreme good', although its existence is assumed. They merely observe that the concepts of good and evil have varied so much from nation to nation and from age to age that they have often been, as Engels puts it, 'in direct contradiction to each other'.[67]

Philosophically speaking, the concepts of good and evil are very difficult to comprehend because of human frailty and the immense distance which these concepts involve in any reasoning. There is a wide diversity of senses, as Ross indicates, in which the term good can be used.[68] Moral philosophers normally distinguish between intrinsic or moral good and extrinsic or instrumental good. It is round the problematic character of the intrinsic or moral good that the main controversies revolve. While Kant contends that the good will is the highest good, although not the only or the whole good,[69] Hume and Bentham maintain that in the last resort pleasure is the only good and pain the only evil. Bentham says that

> Positive good is either pleasure itself or a cause of pleasure; negative good, either exemption from pain or a cause of such exemption. In like manner positive evil is either pain itself or a cause of pain; negative evil, either loss of pleasure or a cause of such loss. [Moral good is above all] pathological good, in so far as human will, is considered as instrumental in the production of it.[70]

Marx categorically rejects Kant's and Bentham's conceptions of good and evil, focusing his attention on the dialectical solution of the contradiction between the forces of good and evil, labour and capital.

Strictly speaking, the concept of good can never be accurately defined. 'Good and bad, better and worse', Russell indicates, 'are terms which may or may not

have a verbal definition but in any case first come to be understood ostensively'.[71] A thing is good, he says, only 'if it is valued for its own sake and not only for its effects'. The good that is 'good in itself' is characterised by moral philosophers as 'intrinsic good', i.e. good apart from its effects or consequences.[72] Whatever is ultimately good, they maintain, is also intrinsically good and what is intrinsically good is also morally or unconditionally good. Utilitarian moralists and ethical relativists, however, tend to identify the good either with the useful or with pleasure. Marx is very scornful of the utilitarian conception of good. Stressing that pleasure is 'good for nothing', he agrees with those critics who say that the utterance 'pleasure is good' is meaningless unless good is something different from pleasure.[73] Like Hegel, Marx clings to the view that the good is not a thing of the passing moment but of the total life. In his view, good cannot be defined in terms of pleasure or utility. Being an attribute of a certain kind of life, 'good' can only be intelligible when analysed in terms of human activity and in the context of definite forms of social existence.

The attempt to define moral words like good, right and ought in terms of pleasure, happiness, utility or something else is rejected by many moral philosophers. In their view, there can be no definition of ultimates or of ideas which denote the essential elements of beings, events and things. Moore argues that 'good' cannot be defined in naturalistic or scientific terms. The term good or goodness, he insists, can only refer to a non-natural quality. He writes

> My point is that good is a simple notion, just as yellow is a simple notion; that, just as you cannot, by any manner of means, explain to any one who does not already know it, what yellow is, so you cannot explain what good is.[74]

He concludes that good is 'one of those innumerable objects of thought which are themselves incapable of definition because they are the ultimate terms by reference to which whatever is capable of definition must be defined'.[75] Logically, most philosophers agree, nothing can be defined which cannot be treated as part of a higher genus and, it is admitted, there is no higher genus to which good belongs. Like Moore, they maintain that such moral properties as good, right and oughtness are not identical with natural properties. Because moral concepts, including good and right, do not signify some natural and observable sensory properties of objects, any attempt to explain the meaning of 'good' by reference to particular things and actions is to commit what Moore calls the 'naturalistic fallacy'.[76]

On the whole, rationalist moral philosophers and many scientists accept the fact that 'intrinsic good' cannot be apprehended by sense perception or by any empirical method available to man. Indicating that the moral process and the cosmic process are essentially antagonistic, the naturalist T. H. Huxley maintains that valid ethical norms and moral ideas, including the concept of good, cannot be derived from evolution.[77] In his later years he fell back on a sort of moral intuitionism – similar to that of Moore – as the source of ethical norms and principles. The main objection to Moore's intuitionism is the belief that the meaning of 'good' can be understood without reference to particular things and attitudes

to which the term may be rightly applied.[78] Some Marxist-orientated writers point out that Moore's conception of 'good' cannot be sustained because he has failed to see 'its signification in the whole span of the human evaluative activity'.[79]

For similar reasons, Marxists reject the utilitarian and purely naturalistic definition of 'good'. 'If good merely describes certain objects or certain reactions or a certain relationship between them', Ash writes, 'we can only derive from such accounts of the matter statements which are themselves merely descriptive of human behaviour'.[80] These statements tell us what people do and how they act, not what they ought to do or how they ought to act. When we consider the actual use people make of a word like 'good', he says, 'we do find that it may be descriptive, referring either to suitability of an object or to its being wanted; but it may also be prescriptive and play a persuasive or commendatory role'.[81] A similar view is expressed by the Hungarian Marxist Makai. Marxist ethics, she argues, 'expresses the inner unity of cognition-evaluation norms, a unity in which normative propositions develop from cognition and are never separated from it'.[82] Positivists wrongly insist on the non-evaluative character of cognition which they reduce to description, thus denying the interrelationship between the prescriptive and descriptive meaning of good and depriving evaluation of its cognitive character.[83] In ethical subjectivism or emotivism and in pure naturalism or relativism the concept of good 'does not mean anything'. Here there is no logical contradiction 'if one man says that X is good while the other says X is evil'.[84] Thus ethical subjectivism and pure naturalism cannot account for the truly evaluative and objective meaning of 'good'.

Marx and Engels themselves are very obscure and ambiguous about the differentiation between the evaluative and descriptive meaning of 'good'. As a result, Marx's ambiguity in this respect has been interpreted by some commentators as a rejection of 'moral good' altogether. Emphasising the 'amoralist, even immoralist side of Marx', Wood is wrongly led to the conclusion that 'Marx bases his critique of capitalism on the claim that it frustrates many non-moral goods: self-actualisation, security, physical health, comfort, community, freedom'.[85] Although Wood admits that Marx never explicitly draws the distinction between moral and non-moral goods, he gives the impression that Marx entirely rejects the meaning of 'moral good'. Most commentators, however, maintain that Marx's denunciation of capitalism is full of moral indignation and that it is this indignation that gives cogency to his moral attitude. It is true that both Marx and Engels fail to distinguish explicitly between the prescriptive and descriptive use of 'good'. Yet, whenever they state or assume that 'good' is preferable to money or that communism is a 'better' system than capitalism, they use the words 'good' and 'better' evaluatively. The evaluative use of 'good' is obvious in Marx's early writings. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, he categorically rejects the view that 'money is the supreme good' or that money can ever be the 'end in itself'.[86] Like Aristotle, Marx seems to suggest that moral good is the end to which all other so-called ends are really means. In his *Comments on James Mill*, he scorns all those who, like bourgeois political economists, believe that 'a good man' is simply 'a man who is able to pay' and thus buy his 'goodness'.[87] There can be no doubt that

in these works Marx has in mind 'moral' not 'non-moral' goods. In his criticism of the 'ethics of political economy', the notion of that which is good strictly for its own sake is, therefore, the central and fundamental one.

The normative character of the *Manuscripts of 1844* reappears in the *Grundrisse*, although in a somewhat different form. Condemning the treatment of wealth 'as an end in itself', Marx speaks of the evil effects of the conditions of production in capitalist societies on the possibility of free and uninterrupted human self-development.[88] Unfortunately, in *The German Ideology* and *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels focus their attention on the social origins and functions of all moral ideas and on the decisive role of material production in the moral and political life of society.[89] Here criticism of views hostile to the communist world outlook and to the materialist conception of history is a dominant feature of their exposition. This criticism is mainly directed against the idealist conceptions of German post-Hegelian philosophy. The attitude of this philosophy is seen to be contemplative, one-sided and, in Marx's and Engels' view, a distant consequence of the division of labour. Dialectical materialism will fulfil philosophy by transcending it and eliminating all 'hypocritical moral demands' of the ideologists. 'The communist revolution, which removes the division of labour, will be guided not by the social institutions of inventive socially-gifted persons, but by the productive forces'.[90] The emphasis in *The German Ideology* is on non-moral goods, although even here there is no outright rejection of the ideas of good, bad and evil just as there is no outright rejection of morality as such.

It is true that in this work Marx and Engels are endeavouring to explain the formation of ideas, including presumably the ideas of good and evil, from 'material practice' and they show contempt for the Hegel – intoxicated accounts of 'political, juridical, moral and other concepts' which, in their view, are 'divorced from real history' and material production.[91] The principal error of the Hegelian accounts, they argue, is the insistence that the real material world is the product of the ideal realm or of something that is merely 'extra-superterrestrial'.[92] What Hegel and the Young Hegelians have failed to realise, according to Marx and Engels, is the fact that any realistic explanation of the origin of moral ideas, including the ideas of good, evil and right, must always take into consideration all relevant socio-economic and historical facts. The main fault with their accounts of morality and moral goodness is the exclusion of these concrete facts. Yet, in spite of Marx's utterance that historical materialism 'has shattered the basis of all morality', he continues to make moral judgements and moral assessments. There is no explicit rejection of moral goods. In considering Kant's conception of 'the good will', he does not deny its moral significance. On the contrary, he treats it as being the appropriate basic moral concept, given German socioeconomic and political realities.[93] It is ineffective and defective only because it is completely tied up with 'the world beyond' and separated from historical and socio-economic facts.

Marx shares Hegel's belief that the ultimate good as envisaged in Kant's theory of morality is 'a vague abstraction'. 'By transferring the realisation of good will to the world beyond', Kant, in Marx's view, overlooks the concrete forms of

human suffering expressed in alienation, avarice and cruelty.[94] Marx agrees with Kant, however, that men and women should never be treated as things or mere means, insisting that there can be no true self-realisation independently of the totality of people living in society. The common interests in the class society are always expressed in illusory ideals which lead to self-alienation and imaginary self-realisation. The ruling principle of a higher phase of communism is the full and free development of every human individual. Advocating alienated moral ideals, capitalist morality, according to Marx and Engels, is strongly opposed to the full development of human capacities. This morality consciously keeps every man and woman in the alienated role of the slave, preventing them from satisfying their elementary needs and from promoting their ultimate goods. By contrast, communism is a truly human society which alone can provide the good life for all its members.

Although Marx and Engels are scornful of all transcendental ideals of goodness, especially in *The German Ideology*, they never reject the view that there are some things and acts that are good in every context. In spite of their tendency to connect the idea of the good with class interests, they realise that there are many acts and things in this world that are 'intrinsically good', although they may have nothing to do with the promotion of classless interests.[95] It is true, Lenin repudiates 'all morality derived from non-human and non-class concepts', but even he could not deny that Socrates was a good man and Nero a bad man, or that freedom is to be preferred to slavery.[96] Nobody can deny that there is in Marxist ideology a tacit assumption that moral good or ultimate end is something unique and objective, something that cannot simply be the object of desire or reduced to any natural object. Marx and Engels are constantly aware of this notion, although they refuse to discuss its moral implications.

Almost all moral philosophers agree that the notion of the moral good is different from that of non-moral good. While the moral good, in its application to human beings, has a special meaning in which it stands for moral excellence and a special function in language, commending those acts in human conduct which are the conditions of the attainment of the highest end of life, non-moral and economic goods are merely those objects which are the means of satisfying human wants. Moral philosophers, however, disagree about the nature of moral goodness. Some treat it as a quality and others as a relation between that which has some value and something else, usually but not always some state of mind.[97] According to Hume's phenomenalist view, goodness is simply the outward expression of the emotion of moral approval. The property which causes an object or an act to be approved is not goodness but pleasantness or utility. Moral qualities, he says, 'must be relations' and 'moral good and evil belong only to the actions of the mind'.[98] Kant, by contrast, insists that moral qualities and principles cannot be based on properties of human nature but must subsist *a priori* of themselves.[99] Sharing Kant's view that the moral good is 'the universal of will', Hegel prefers treating this good in terms of relations. 'Quality', he says, 'is completely a category only of the finite and for that reason too it has its proper place in Nature, not in the world of Mind'.[100] Identifying the 'truly good' with the uni-

versal divine reason', he fails to explain the difference between the 'truly good' and the moral good.

Marx is ambiguous in this respect but, like Hegel, gives prominence to the relational treatment of 'moral good' without entirely excluding its non-relational, intrinsic and qualitative characteristics. He seems to be aware of the fact that if 'good' were treated merely as a relation then there could be nothing objective about it. For him, humanism, freedom and human dignity are 'intrinsically good' in all social circumstances.[101] Wealth is 'good for nothing', but freedom and human dignity are good in every context. The value of self-realisation is also unconditionally good. Cruelty, alienation, dishonesty and hypocrisy are intrinsically bad.[102] The objectivity of moral judgements can only be established, as Kamenka indicates, if 'good' is treated as a quality of some sort.[103] By abolishing the distinction between the descriptive and prescriptive meaning of 'moral good', ethical subjectivism and relativism, Makai correctly remarks, conceal the non-relational character of this good and are thus forced 'to mask it in the false appearance of the universally'.[104]

Unfortunately, the same observation can sometimes be applied to Marx's own conception of 'good'. Some commentators point out that this conception is completely class-relative and as such can have no universal validity. As a moral relativist, Marx, they maintain, entirely rejects the abstract universality of philosophers and affirms the material, concrete universality as represented by the proletariat.[105] He scorns class morality not in favour of some abstract goods but rather in favour of the material interests of the working class. According to Hunt, Marx's moral indignation against capitalist interests raises an 'awkward problem'. For if capitalism in fact is an evil force, as Marx maintains, it can only be so because it is in conflict with some objective normative moral principle. 'But the existence of any such principle has been denied.'[106] These comments suggest that in Marx's view all moral principles have only a historically limited validity. In view of Marx's ambiguous and incoherent remarks about 'moral good', Ollman finds it 'difficult to decide just what is his idea of the good?'[107] According to Ollman, 'Marx makes statements which place him on the side of those who view things as relations'. Even the 'thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man'.[108]

In *The German Ideology* Marx says that the 'animal does not relate itself to anything, it does not relate itself at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation'.[109] Only human beings are capable of relating themselves to the external world. Like ideas in general, the idea of moral good is either about men's 'mutual relations or about their own nature'.[110] This emphasis on relation suggests that in Marx's axiology 'goodness' is not an intrinsic quality at all. If so, then 'good' cannot be an objective property or treated objectively. According to Ross, if goodness is merely a relational quality, then nothing could possibly be intrinsically good.[111] In its most fundamental meaning 'goodness' is intrinsic. Moral judgements asserting that a certain action is good as a means to a certain kind of effect, Moore correctly remarks, cannot claim to be universally true.[112] Analysing moral concepts in terms of socio-economic relations, Marx and Engels are led to the conclusion that the ideas of good and right are inevitably relative to

the class structure of society and that, therefore, in class society their form of universality is bound to be restricted.[113] Moral concepts, including the idea of good, become universalised only when in dialectical unity with socio-economic relations.

The distinguishing mark of Marx's conception of 'good' is the belief that goodness in man is always the result of struggle and that the road to good must frequently pass through all sorts of evil phenomena.[114] Good is only an aspect of reality. All phenomena and things in the social realm are finite. The totality of finite processes and things, however, is infinite. Thus objective, essentially material, reality is present in all phenomena and things. Nothing in the socio-moral world is self-independent. The history of this world indicates an infinite web of dialectical connections. While these connections and interconnections are absolute, their independence is necessarily relative. As the origin and development of 'good' and 'evil' depend on dialectical interaction, any rigid separation and delimitation of these concepts, according to Marx and Engels, is reprehensible. Contending that each class has its own ideas of 'good' and 'evil', they believe that the victory of the proletariat as a suffering class will lead to the triumph of 'ultimate good'.[115] There is no attempt to explain the nature of this good. The same is the case with the concept of 'evil'.

It is clear from Marx's sporadic references to 'evil' that he does not deny the existence of metaphysical qualities of evil phenomena and things. In *Capital* he speaks of 'evil in itself' and of 'evil' in a relational sense. In curtailed production, he says, a surplus 'is not an evil in itself but an advantage, however it is an evil under capitalist production'.[116] Taking a hint from Hegel that the antithesis between good and evil is difficult to resolve, Marx and Engels are strongly opposed to all metaphysical speculations about these abstract concepts.[117] Any metaphysical inquiry in this respect, they contend, is inevitably illusory and pointless. Unfortunately, however, Marx's and Engels' ambiguity and ambivalence have led some of their followers to the view that 'good' and evil' can only be comprehended relationally. Lenin and Trotsky explicitly state that the ideas of 'good' and 'evil' vary in response to the material and class structure of society and cannot be anything but the conscious expression of socio-economic relations. Whatever promotes the class struggle, in their view, is 'good' and whatever hinders it is 'evil'.[118] 'The appeal to abstract norms', Trotsky writes, 'is not a disinterested philosophical mistake but a necessary element in the mechanics of class deception'.[119] A gun in itself is neither good nor evil. It becomes good in the hands of a proletarian fighting for the classless society; and evil in the hands of a capitalist fighting for oppression and exploitation.[120] This extremely subjective and relational view is also echoed in Zotov's conception of 'good'. 'We cannot consider', he says, 'a good and evil in isolation, outside a class and historical context'.[121] The main objection to this view is that it confuses 'good' with class interest, and by identifying 'good' with the object of interest it simply destroys its objective and evaluative meaning.

Most moral philosophers believe that the view of the identity of 'good' and 'object of interest' is untenable and must be given up.[122] In looking for the intrin-

sically good one is looking for something which is always good regardless of the results it produces. When judging an act to be always good, one does not normally judge it to be any better than a similar act which is sometimes good. The intrinsically good is not good only when it is of instrumental value. Even Feuerbach who refuses to base morality on theology is reluctant to deny the validity of this good. 'The right, the true, the good', he indicates, 'has always its ground of sacredness in itself, in its quality'.[123]

Feuerbach does not elaborate on the distinction between the good and the right but he definitely believes that they are not identical notions. The same belief is echoed in Marx's and Engels' references to 'good' and 'right'. Although they never define or explain the meaning of these concepts in their ideology, they still use them in different ways descriptively and prescriptively, subjectively and objectively. Treating morality in terms of socio-economic relations and refusing to be involved in metaphysical explanations of moral terms, Marx and Engels confine themselves to the socio-economic analysis of 'right' and 'wrong'. In their view these concepts, like the concepts of 'good' and 'bad', are rooted in the fundamental economic structure of human society and thus are bound to vary with changes in the socio-economic development of human existence.[124] Existence may be spiritual or material, illusory or concrete. Bourgeois philosophers and ideologists tend to reduce the real to the spiritual, ignoring the thesis of dialectical materialism that the 'being of men is their actual life process' and that the actual unity of the socio-moral world lies in its materiality. The production of all ideas, including the ideas of 'right' and 'wrong', according to Marx and Engels, is always 'interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men'.[125]

The attempt to prove the reality of any product of thought by the identity of thinking and being, in Engels' view, is 'one of the most absurd delirious fantasies' of Hegelian idealism.[126] According to Marxism, there is nothing supernatural in the world of concrete moral phenomena. The ideas of 'right' and 'wrong', 'arising from the material relations of people', belong, like consciousness, to the material rather than to the transcendental world.[127] In *The German Ideology* Marx criticises Stirner for believing that 'right is a fixed idea', having its origin in the spiritual realm, and for rejecting its material and socio-economic source. Assuming that 'right' and 'wrong' are grounded in some specific claims and that their meaning is profoundly influenced by the particular mode of production, Marx contends that, as completely abstract terms, the concepts of 'right' and 'wrong' can only play an illusive and illusory role in the real world. This contention is groundless because he himself uses these two abstract terms and applies them in the real world as he conceives it. Describing the historical task of the proletariat, he indicates that this most alienated class in society 'claims no particular right' because it has done no particular wrong, although 'wrong generally is perpetrated against it'.[128]

Moral philosophers readily admit that there is a wide divergence between different social groupings as to what they consider to be 'right' or 'wrong'. Most of this divergence is traceable to the difference in religious beliefs and customs. What is striking, however, is the fact that in all known human societies there are some actions which are praised and others which are blamed; some which are

enjoined and others forbidden; some which are applauded as being 'right' and others which are reprobated as being 'wrong'. Some philosophers believe that 'wrong' is more primitive and somewhat more general than the concept of 'right'. Stirner, like Hobbes, holds the view that the concept of right was originally closely connected with power and with the initiative of those who, like kings and rulers, are not bound to obedience.[129] This, of course, is true if one considers 'right' in terms of legality. Legal 'right' and political 'right', however, are, as Hegel indicates, different categories from the 'intrinsically right' or moral right.[130] The morally right, Lewis correctly states, is 'one species of right' that cannot and must not be identified with right in general'.[131] Only voluntary acts, arising from moral consciousness, can be said to be morally right. To say that an act is morally right is simply to characterise it as representing deliberate choice in any moral situation requiring deliberate decision.

The concepts of 'moral right' and 'moral wrong' are used properly only within the sphere of moral valuation. We do not call the actions of irresponsible beings, like infants and animals, 'right', although they may not be wrong. Nor do we pronounce morally indifferent actions in general to be 'right', unless we wish to indicate their moral value as not being wrong. Strictly speaking, the adjective 'right', as Westermarck remarks, 'refers to cases from which the indifferent is excluded. A right action is, on a given occasion, the right action, and other alternatives are wrong'.[132] While Westermarck is correct in believing that only normal human beings are capable of forming the ideas of right and wrong and that this formation begins with the dawn of moral consciousness and increases with the evolution of the intellect, he is wrong in defending the Humean subjectivist view that these ideas are ultimately based on the emotions of approval and disapproval. According, to Hume, right and wrong, like good and bad, are the products of feeling, not of reason. Reason is 'incapable of fixings, the boundaries of right and wrong', he says.[133]

Humean subjectivism is categorically rejected by Kant who argues that the rightness of human actions has nothing to do with sentiments and emotions. For him, the right is *sui generis* and reason alone can determine its validity. 'Feelings which naturally differ infinitely in degree', he writes, 'cannot furnish a uniform standard of good and evil, nor has any one a right to form judgements for others by his own feelings'.[134] The ideas of right and wrong belong to the understanding and denote certain real characteristics of human actions. 'An action that is consistent with the autonomy of the will is permitted; one that does not agree therewith is forbidden'.[135] From the deontological point of view represented by Kant and Price, rightness and wrongness of actions have an independent status which is determined by the universal moral law.[136] Truth-speaking is right because it confirms this law, and lying is wrong because it violates it. Every lie is a broken promise and an offence against mankind and truth. Although a little lie is a little wrong, it is still something that no honest person ought to do. The essence of wrong-doing in the moral world, Kant argues, consists in making exceptions. Promise-breaking is a kind of moral action which cannot be universalised and is, therefore, wrong.[137] The Kantian position that the moral law commands us to

base all judgements exclusively on the autonomy of the human will without any reference to needs, wants, desires and inclinations, and the Kantian belief in the fixity and eternity of the ideas of right and wrong have no place in dialectical materialism. The principles of good and right, in Marx's and Engels' social theory, are dependent on the social life of existing men and can only exist in human history.

The conviction that the ideas of good and right belong to the realm of absolutes is rejected by Marx and Engels. If disputes about right and wrong revolve around supernatural entities, then, Fisk says, such disputes must remain unsolvable because 'there is no way of determining what those entities really are'.[138] Fisk overlooks the fact that Marx and Engels also employ the same concepts, although pretending that they are derived from the 'material relations of people' and are class-related.[139] When Engels sometimes relates right and wrong to the material and class structure of society, he is not entirely depriving the concepts of right and wrong of their moral denotation. Dühring's formulation of the natural law of the division of labour, he says, 'is right only for bourgeois production'. As a whole, his formulation 'is wrong'.[140] In the moral context, Engels suggests, the wrong action is always in some measure reprehensible or blameworthy, and the individual who acts wrongly ought to be reproached or condemned. While denying the validity of 'eternal right', he still assumes that the moral judgement containing the word 'right' must be universalisable in the sense that it applies to a whole series of human actions.

In *The Civil War in France* Marx stresses that the Paris Commune (1871) 'was perfectly right in telling the peasants that its victory was their only hope'.[141] It is obvious that the term 'right' in this context is used in the absolutist sense. Here normative ethical relativism is ruled out. Marx is well aware of the fact that it is impossible to defend the statement that two contradictory moral judgements or categories or principles are both true or right. Moral relativism is scepticism which fails to solve any problem in man's real life. Being abstract, it can justify 'any sophistry' and point of view. The moral sceptic either believes that his own attitude is the right one or he asserts nothing. It is for this reason, Lenin indicates, that Marx and Engels reject 'absolute scepticism'.[142] Scepticism, Engels says, is never able to arrive at any definite conclusion.[143] Although Marx and Engels are obscure and ambiguous about the use of the ideas of right and wrong, it is impossible to deny that they adhere to the belief that their own moral judgements are right and that those of their bourgeois and idealist opponents are wrong.[144] Rejecting the attempts to confine the significance of 'right' and 'wrong' to the purely spiritual world, they insist that these concepts must be related to the cognition of dialectical and social development.

In its genesis and phenomenal functioning, moral cognition, according to Marx and Engels, is essentially a social process, reflecting the dialectic of absolute and relative truth. In the materialist dialectic, however, Lenin reminds us, the 'recognition of objective truth is essential'.[145] Objective truth is 'absolute truth' and human thought is capable of conceiving it. Unlike Hegel, who speaks of the 'presence of dialectic in the spiritual world',[146] Marx focuses his attention on the 'real dialectic of history' expressing itself in human practice rather than in theoretical

speculation. The advance through dialectical contradictions, in Hegel's and Marx's view, is essential to the dialectical interpretation of the concepts of good and evil, right and wrong.[147] Following Hegel, Marx believes that the conflict between good and evil springs from the dialectic of the relative and absolute. This view is implicit in Engels' observation that the 'conceptions of good and evil' have always varied in the history of morals.[148] On the basis of his comments on 'truth' and 'error', one can safely conclude that in his view 'both poles of the antithesis become transformed into their opposites': evil in the right situation being gradually transformed into good, capitalism into communism, egoism into humanism. According to Mao Tse-tung, 'what is right always develops in the course of struggle with what is wrong. The true, the good and the beautiful always exist in comparison with the false, the evil and the ugly and grow in struggle with the latter'.[149] Unfortunately, these views are based on the wrong assumption that moral progress is a continuous process and that regression is impossible.

It is clear from Marx's and Engels' writings that their analysis of the concepts of good, bad, evil, right and wrong is fragmentary, ambiguous and incoherent. They strongly reject the subjectivist view which subordinates the right to the good conceived as pleasure, realising that some things are good in every context. They also deride the Kantian conception of the good will as being the only unconditional good. According to their philosophical reasoning, in an inanimate world, deprived of the 'material relations of people', nothing could be called good or bad, right or wrong. Marx and Engels, however, fail to elaborate a consistent and unambiguous conception of 'good' and 'right'. On the whole, they merely scorn the views of their ideological opponents without substituting them with anything constructive and concrete. Criticising Sterner in *The German Ideology* – Marx and Engels mock his ideas of right as being 'higgledy-piggledy' – utterly confused – because not a word is said 'about the content of right'.[150] What this content should be, they do not explain. The ambiguity in Marx's remarks on 'good' and 'right' has led his followers to the equally ambiguous and sometimes opposing views of these concepts. The fact remains that Marx and Engels vacillate in their conception of 'good' and 'right' between relativism and absolutism, subjectivism and objectivism, description and evaluation, from the assumption that 'good' is an indefinable quality of some kind to the assumption that it denotes a relation between people and something else and from the assumption that 'right' is, at least in some situations, absolute to the historicist position that it is derived from power or might. The dominant view, expressed in *The German Ideology*, is that the concept of right cannot be divorced from the empirical reality which is 'its real basis'.[151] There is no such thing as 'innate' or 'fixed' right; right has its origin in history and is always related to the material life of individuals. As a result of Marx's and Engels' vacillation and ambiguity about the meaning of 'good' and 'right', it is not surprising that Marxists themselves are far from being unanimous in their interpretation of Marx's and Engels' true conception of what is objectively right and what is morally good. On the whole, like Marx and Engels, they never deny the moral significance of 'goodness' and 'rightness' in human activity.