

**LOUIS**  
**ALTHUSSER**

**RADICAL-  
THINKERS** } **FOR MARX**

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FOR MARX


*Louis Althusser*

Translated by Ben Brewster



VERSO

London • New York



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Originally published as *Pour Marx* by  
François Maspero, Paris 1965  
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First published in English 1969  
Translation © Ben Brewster 1969  
This edition published by Verso 2005

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3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4

**Verso**

UK: 6 Meard Street, London W1F 0EG  
USA: 180 Varick Street, New York NY 10014-4606  
[www.versobooks.com](http://www.versobooks.com)

Verso is the imprint of New Left Books

ISBN 1-84467-052-X  
ISBN 978-1-84467-052-9

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by CPI Bookmarque, Croydon

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These pages are dedicated  
to the memory of Jacques Martin,  
the friend  
who, in the most terrible ordeal,  
alone  
discovered the road to  
Marx's philosophy  
– and guided me onto it.

L.A.





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## To My English Readers

I should like briefly to present this translation of *Pour Marx* to an English audience, and, on the same occasion, to make use of the time that has elapsed since it was written to take some 'bearings' on the philosophical content and the ideological significance of this small book.

*Pour Marx* appeared in France in 1965. But only its Introduction ('Today') dates from that year. All the other chapters were published earlier, between 1960 and 1964, in the form of articles in French Communist Party journals.\* They were collected together exactly as originally written, without any corrections or alterations.

To understand these essays and to pass judgement on them, it is essential to realize that they were conceived, written and published by a Communist philosopher in a particular ideological and theoretical conjuncture†. So these texts must be taken for what they are. They are *philosophical* essays, the first stages of a long-term investigation, preliminary results which obviously demand correction; this investigation concerns the specific nature of the principles of the science and philosophy founded by Marx. However, these philosophical essays do not derive from a merely erudite or speculative investigation. They are, *simultaneously*, interventions in a definite conjuncture.

## I

As the Introduction shows, this conjuncture is, first, the theoretical and ideological conjuncture in France, more particularly the present conjuncture in the French Communist Party and in

\* With the exception of the article on Bertolazzi and Brecht, which was published in the Catholic review *Esprit*.

† For explanation of terms used see Glossary, page 249.



French philosophy. But as well as this peculiarly French conjuncture, it is also the present ideological and theoretical conjuncture in the international Communist movement.

Of course, the essays you are about to read do not bear on the *political* elements of this conjuncture (the policies of the Communist Parties, the split in the international Communist movement). They deal with the ideological and theoretical problems present in the conjuncture and produced by it. In certain respects these problems are new ones; in others they refer us back to debates which have long characterized the history of the workers' movement.

A consideration of the *recent* elements of this conjuncture reveals that, since Stalin's death, the International Communist movement has lived in a conjuncture dominated by two great events: the critique of the 'cult of personality' by the Twentieth Congress, and the rupture that has occurred between the Chinese Communist Party and the Soviet Communist Party.

The denunciation of the 'cult of personality', the abrupt conditions and the forms in which it took place, have had profound repercussions, not only in the political domain, but in the ideological domain as well. In what follows I shall deal only with the ideological reactions of Communist intellectuals.

The critique of Stalinist 'dogmatism' was generally 'lived' by Communist intellectuals as a 'liberation'. This 'liberation' gave birth to a profound ideological reaction, 'liberal' and 'ethical' in tendency, which spontaneously rediscovered the old philosophical themes of 'freedom', 'man', the 'human person' and 'alienation'. This ideological tendency looked for theoretical justification to Marx's Early Works, which do indeed contain all the arguments of a philosophy of man, his alienation and liberation. These conditions have paradoxically turned the tables in Marxist philosophy. Since the 1930s Marx's Early Works have been a war-horse for petty bourgeois intellectuals in their struggle against Marxism; but little by little, and then massively, they have been set to work in the interests of a new 'interpretation' of Marxism which is today being openly developed by many Communist intellectuals, 'liberated' from Stalinist dogmatism by the Twentieth Congress. The themes of 'Marxist Humanism' and the 'humanist' interpretation of Marx's work have progressively and irresistibly

imposed themselves on recent Marxist philosophy, even inside Soviet and Western Communist Parties.

If this ideological reaction, characteristic above all of Communist intellectuals, has, despite some resistance, been capable of such a development, it is because it has benefited from the direct or indirect support of certain *political* slogans laid down by the Communist Parties of the U.S.S.R. and the West. On one side, for example, the Twenty-second Congress of the C.P.S.U. declared that with the disappearance of the class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat had been 'superseded' in the U.S.S.R., that the Soviet State is no longer a class State but the 'State of the Whole People'; and that the U.S.S.R. has embarked on the 'construction of communism', guided by the 'humanist' slogan, 'Everything for Man'. On the other, for example, Western Communist Parties have pursued policies of unity with socialists, democrats and Catholics, guided by certain slogans of related resonance, in which the accent is put on the 'peaceful transition to socialism', on 'Marxist' or 'socialist humanism', on 'dialogue', etc.

The 'humanist' interpretations of Marxist theory which have developed under these definite circumstances represent a *new* phenomenon as compared with the period just past (the period between 1930 and 1956). However, they have many historical *precedents* in the history of the workers' movement. Marx, Engels and Lenin, to refer only to them, ceaselessly struggled against ideological interpretations of an idealist, humanist type that threatened Marxist theory. Here it will suffice to recall Marx's rupture with Feuerbach's humanism, Engels's struggle against Dühring, Lenin's long battle with the Russian populists, and so on. This whole past, this whole heritage, is obviously part of the present theoretical and ideological conjuncture of the international Communist movement.

To return to the recent aspects of this conjuncture, I shall add the following remark.

In the text entitled 'Marxism and Humanism', dating from 1963, I have already interpreted the present inflation of the themes of Marxist or socialist 'Humanism' as an *ideological* phenomenon. In no sense was I condemning ideology as a social reality: as Marx says, it is in ideology that men 'become conscious' of their class conflict and 'fight it out'; in its religious, ethical, legal and

political forms, etc., ideology is an objective social reality; the ideological struggle is an organic part of the class struggle. On the other hand, I criticized the *theoretical* effects of ideology, which are always a threat or a hindrance to scientific knowledge. And I pointed out that the inflation of the themes of 'Marxist humanism' and their encroachment on Marxist theory should be interpreted as a possible historical symptom of a double inability and a double danger. An inability to think the specificity of Marxist theory, and, correlatively, a revisionist danger of confusing it with pre-Marxist ideological interpretations. An inability to resolve the real (basically *political* and *economic*) problems posed by the conjuncture since the Twentieth Congress, and a danger of masking these problems with the false 'solution' of some merely *ideological* formulae.

## II

It was in this conjuncture that the texts you are about to read were conceived and published. They must be related to this conjuncture to appreciate fully their nature and function: they are *philosophical* essays, with theoretical investigations as their objects, and as their aim an intervention in the present theoretico-ideological conjuncture in reaction to its dangerous tendencies.

Very schematically, I should say that these theoretical texts contain a double 'intervention', or, if you prefer, they 'intervene' on two fronts, to trace, in Lenin's excellent expression, a 'line of demarcation' between Marxist theory on the one hand, and ideological tendencies foreign to Marxism on the other.

The object of *the first intervention* is to 'draw a line of demarcation' between Marxist theory and the forms of philosophical (and political) subjectivism which have compromised it or threaten it: above all, *empiricism* and its variants, classical and modern – pragmatism, voluntarism, historicism, etc. The essential moments of this first intervention are: a recognition of the importance of Marxist *theory* in the revolutionary class struggle, a distinction of the different practices, a demonstration of the specificity of 'theoretical practice', a first investigation into the revolutionary specificity of Marxist theory (a total distinction between the idealist dialectic and the materialist dialectic), etc.

This first intervention is situated essentially in the terrain of the confrontation between Marx and Hegel.

The object of *the second intervention* is to 'draw a line of demarcation' between the true theoretical bases of the Marxist science of history and Marxist philosophy on the one hand, and, on the other, the pre-Marxist idealist notions on which depend contemporary interpretations of Marxism as a 'philosophy of man' or a 'Humanism'. The essential moments of this second intervention are: the demonstration of an 'epistemological break' in the history of Marx's thought, a basic difference between the ideological 'problematic' of the Early Works and the scientific 'problematic' of *Capital*; first investigations into the specificity of Marx's theoretical discovery, etc.

This second intervention is situated essentially in the terrain of the confrontation between Marx's Early Works and *Capital*.

Behind the detail of the arguments, textual analyses and theoretical discussions, these two interventions reveal a major opposition; the opposition that separates science from ideology, or more precisely, that separates a new science in process of self-constitution from the prescientific *theoretical* ideologies that occupy the 'terrain' in which it is establishing itself. This is an important point; what we are dealing with in the opposition science/ideologies concerns the 'break' relationship between a science and the *theoretical* ideology in which the object it gave the knowledge of was 'thought' before the foundation of the science. This 'break' leaves intact the objective social domain occupied by ideologies (religion, ethics, legal and political ideologies, etc.). In this domain of non-theoretical ideologies, too, there are 'ruptures' and 'breaks', but they are *political* (effects of political practice, of great revolutionary events) and not 'epistemological'.

This opposition between science and ideology and the notion of an 'epistemological break' that helps us to think its historical character refer to a thesis that, although always present in the background of these analyses, is never explicitly developed: the thesis that Marx's discovery is a scientific discovery without historical precedent, in its nature and effects.

Indeed, in conformity with the tradition constantly reiterated by the classics of Marxism, we may claim that Marx established a new *science*: the science of the history of 'social formations'. To

be more precise, I should say that Marx 'opened up' for scientific knowledge a new 'continent', that of *history* – just as Thales opened up the 'continent' of mathematics for scientific knowledge, and Galileo opened up the 'continent' of physical nature for scientific knowledge.

I should add that, just as the foundation of mathematics by Thales 'induced' the birth of the Platonic philosophy, just as the foundation of physics by Galileo 'induced' the birth of Cartesian philosophy, etc., so the foundation of the science of history by Marx has 'induced' the birth of a new, theoretically and practically revolutionary philosophy, Marxist philosophy or dialectical materialism. The fact that, from the standpoint of its theoretical elaboration, this unprecedented philosophy still lags behind the Marxist science of history (historical materialism) is explained by historico-political reasons and *also* simultaneously by theoretical reasons: great philosophical revolutions are always preceded and 'borne along' by the great scientific revolutions 'active' in them, but long theoretical labour and long historical maturing are required before they can acquire an explicit and adequate form. If the accent is laid on Marxist philosophy in the texts you are about to read, it is to assess both its reality and its right to existence, but also its lateness, and to begin to provide it with a theoretical form of existence a little more adequate to its nature.

### III

Naturally, these texts are marked, and sometimes sensibly so, not only by errors and inaccuracies, but also by silences or half-silences. Neither the impossibility of saying everything at once nor the urgency of the conjuncture completely explain all these silences and their effects. In fact, I was not equipped for an adequate treatment of certain questions, some difficult points were obscure to me; as a result, in my texts I did not take into account certain important problems and realities, as I should have. As a 'self-criticism', I should like to signal two particularly important points.

If I did lay stress on the vital necessity of *theory* for revolutionary practice, and therefore denounced all forms of empiricism, I did

not discuss the problem of the 'union of theory and practice' which has played such a major role in the Marxist-Leninist tradition. No doubt I did speak of the union of theory and practice within 'theoretical practice', but I did not enter into the question of the union of theory and practice within *political practice*. Let us be precise; I did not examine the general form of historical existence of this union: the 'fusion' of Marxist theory and the *workers' movement*. I did not examine the *concrete forms of existence* of this 'fusion' (organization of the class struggle – trade unions, parties – the means and methods of direction of the class struggle by these organizations, etc.). I did not give precise indications as to the function, place and role of Marxist theory in these concrete forms of existence: where and how Marxist theory intervenes in the development of political practice, where and how political practice intervenes in the development of Marxist theory.

I have learnt from experience that my silence on these questions has not been without its consequences for certain ('theoreticist') 'readings' of my essays.

Similarly, if I did insist on the theoretically revolutionary character of Marx's discovery, and pointed out that Marx had founded a new science and a new philosophy, I left vague the difference distinguishing philosophy from science, a difference which is, however, of great importance. I did not show what it is, as distinct from science, that constitutes *philosophy proper*: the organic relation between every philosophy, as a *theoretical* discipline and even within its *theoretical* forms of existence and exigencies, and *politics*. I did not point out the nature of this relation, which, in Marxist philosophy, has nothing to do with a *pragmatic* relation. So I did not show clearly enough what in this respect distinguishes Marxist philosophy from earlier philosophies.

I have learnt from experience that my half-silence on these questions has not been without its consequences for certain ('positivist') 'readings' of my essays.

I intend to return to these two important questions, which are intimately connected from a theoretical and practical point of view, in later studies.

October, 1967



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## Acknowledgements

'Feuerbach's Philosophical Manifestoes' first appeared in *La Nouvelle Critique*, December 1960.

'On the Young Marx: Theoretical Questions' first appeared in *La Pensée*, March–April 1961.

'Contradiction and Overdetermination' first appeared in *La Pensée*, December 1962. Its appendix is published here for the first time.

'Notes on a Materialist Theatre' first appeared in *Esprit*, December 1962.

'The 1844 Manuscripts' first appeared in *La Pensée*, February 1963.

'On the Materialist Dialectic' first appeared in *La Pensée*, August 1963.

'Marxism and Humanism' first appeared in the *Cahiers de l'I.S.E.A.*, June 1964.

'A Complementary Note on "Real Humanism"' first appeared in *La Nouvelle Critique*, March 1965.

I should like to thank all those editors of magazines who were obliging enough to allow me to collect these pieces together into the present volume.





---

## Introduction **Today**



---

## I

I venture to publish together these jottings, which have appeared in various magazines during the last four years. Some of them are now unobtainable; this is my first, purely practical, excuse. If, hesitant and incomplete as they are, they nevertheless make some sense, this should be brought out by grouping them together; this is my second excuse. Ultimately, I must present them for what they are: the documentation of a particular *history*.

Nearly all these pieces were born of some conjuncture: a comment on a book, an answer to criticisms or objections, an analysis of a theatrical production, etc. They are marked by their date of birth, even in their inconsistencies, which I have decided not to correct. I have struck out a few passages of unduly personal polemic; I have inserted the small number of words, notes or pages that had then to be cut, either to spare the feelings of those with certain prejudices, or to reduce my expositions to a suitable length; I have also corrected a few references.

Each the result of a special occasion, these pieces are none the less products of the same epoch and the same history. In their own way they are witnesses to the unique experience which all the philosophers of my generation who tried to think with Marx had to live: the *investigation* of Marx's *philosophical* thought, indispensable if we were to escape from the theoretical impasse in which history had put us.

History: it had stolen our youth with the Popular Front and the Spanish Civil War, and in the War as such it had imprinted in us the terrible education of deeds. It surprised us just as we entered the world, and turned us students of bourgeois or petty bourgeois origin into men advised of the existence of classes, of their struggles and aims. From the evidence it forced on us we drew the only possible conclusion, and rallied to the political organization of the working class, the Communist Party.

The War was just over. We were brutally cast into the Party's

great political and ideological battles: we had to measure up to our choice and take the consequences.

In our political memory this period remains the time of huge strikes and demonstrations, of the Stockholm Appeal and of the Peace Movement – the time when the great hopes aroused by the Resistance faltered and the long and bitter struggle began in which innumerable human hands would push back the shadow of catastrophe into the Cold War horizon. In our philosophical memory it remains the period of intellectuals in arms, hunting out error from all its hiding-places; of the philosophers we were, without writings of our own, but making politics out of all writing, and slicing up the world with a single blade, arts, literatures, philosophies, sciences with the pitiless demarcation of class – the period summed up in caricature by a single phrase, a banner flapping in the void: ‘bourgeois science, proletarian science’.

To defend Marxism, imperilled as it was by Lysenko’s ‘biology’, from the fury of bourgeois spite, some leaders had re-launched this old ‘Left-wing’ formula, once the slogan of Bogdanov and the Proletkult. Once proclaimed it dominated everything. Under its imperative line, what then counted as philosophy could only choose between commentary and silence, between conviction, whether inspired or forced, and dumb embarrassment. Paradoxically, it was none other than Stalin, whose contagious and implacable system of government and thought had induced this delirium, who reduced the madness to a little more reason. Reading between the lines of the few simple pages in which he reproached the zeal of those who were making strenuous efforts to prove language a superstructure, we could see that there were limits to the use of the class criterion, and that we had been made to treat science, a status claimed by every page of Marx, as merely the first-comer among ideologies. We had to retreat, and, in semi-disarray, return to first principles.

I write these lines for my own part and as a Communist, inquiring into our past solely for some light on our present which will then illuminate our future.

Neither bitterness nor nostalgia makes me recall this episode – but the wish to sanction it by a comment that will supersede it. We were at the age of enthusiasm and trust; we lived at a time when the enemy gave no quarter, the language of slander sustaining his

aggression. But this did not save us from remaining long confused by this detour into which certain of our leaders, far from holding us back from the slope of theoretical 'Leftism', had actively led us, without the others showing any sign of restraining them or giving us any warning or advice. So we spent the best part of our time in agitation when we would have been better employed in the defence of our right and duty to know, and in study for production as such. For we did not even take this time. We knew nothing of Bogdanov and the Proletkult, or of Lenin's historic struggle against political and theoretical Leftism; we were not even intimately familiar with Marx's mature works, as we were only too eager and happy to rediscover our own burning passions in the ideological flame of his Early Works. But what of our elders? Those whose responsibility it was to show us the way – how was it that they too were living in the same ignorance? This long theoretical tradition, worked out in so many trials and struggles, blazoned by the testimony of so many great texts, how could it have become a dead letter for them?

In this way we came to realize that under the protection of the reigning dogmatism a second, negative, tradition, a French one this time, had prevailed over the first, a second tradition, or rather what, echoing Heine's 'German misery', we might call, our 'French misery': the stubborn, profound absence of any real *theoretical* culture in the history of the French workers' movement. The French Party may have been able to reach its present position by using the general theory of the two sciences in the form of a radical proclamation, it may have been able to make it the test and proof of its indisputable political courage, but this also meant that it was living on meagre theoretical reserves: those it had inherited from the past of the French workers' movement as a whole. In fact, other than the utopians Saint-Simon and Fourier whom Marx loved to invoke, Proudhon who was not a Marxist at all, and Jaurès who was, but only slightly, where were our theoreticians? In Germany there were Marx and Engels and the earlier Kautsky; in Poland, Rosa Luxemburg; in Russia, Plekhanov and Lenin; in Italy, Labriola, who (when we had Sorel!) could correspond with Engels as equal to equal, then Gramsci. Who were our theoreticians? Guesde? Lafargue?

A whole theoretical analysis would be necessary to account for this poverty, so striking when compared with the richness of other traditions. With no pretensions to undertake this analysis, a few reference points can at least be established. Without the efforts of intellectual workers there could be no *theoretical* tradition (in history or philosophy) in the workers' movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The founders of historical and dialectical materialism were intellectuals (Marx and Engels), their theory was developed by intellectuals (Kautsky, Plekhanov, Labriola, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Gramsci). Neither at the beginning, nor long afterwards, could it have been otherwise – it cannot be otherwise, neither now nor in the future: what can change and will change is the class origin of intellectual workers, but not their characterization as intellectuals.\* This is so for those reasons of principle that Lenin, following Kautsky, impressed upon us: on the one hand, the 'spontaneous' ideology of the workers, if left to itself, could only produce utopian socialism, trade-unionism, anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism; on the other hand, Marxist socialism, presupposing as it does the massive theoretical labour of the establishment and development of a science and a philosophy without precedent, could only be the work of men with a thorough historical, scientific and philosophical formation, intellectuals of very high quality. That such intellectuals appeared in Germany, Russia, Poland and Italy, either to found Marxist theory or to become masters of it, is not a matter of isolated accidents; the social, political, religious, ideological and moral conditions prevailing in these countries quite simply denied their intellectuals any activity, the ruling classes (the nobility and the bourgeoisie, allied and united in their class interests and supported by the Churches) could in general only offer them servile and de-

\* Naturally this term 'intellectuals' denotes a very specific type of militant intellectual, a type unprecedented in many respects. These are real initiators, armed with the most authentic scientific and theoretical culture, forewarned of the crushing reality and manifold mechanisms of all forms of the ruling ideology and constantly on the watch for them, and able in their theoretical practice to borrow – against the stream of all 'accepted truths' – the fertile paths opened up by Marx but bolted and barred by all the reigning prejudices. An undertaking of this nature and this rigour is unthinkable without an unshakable and lucid confidence in the working class and direct participation in its struggles.

risory employment. Under these conditions, the intellectuals could only seek their freedom and future at the side of the working class, the only revolutionary class. In France, on the contrary, the bourgeoisie had been revolutionary, it had long been able to assimilate intellectuals to its revolution and to keep them as a whole at its side after the seizure and consolidation of power. The French bourgeoisie had successfully carried through a complete, clear revolution, driving the feudal class from the political stage (1789, 1830, 1848), it had set the seal of its own command on the unity of the nation in the process of revolution itself, it had defeated the Church and then adopted it, but only to separate itself at the right moment and cover itself with the slogans of liberty and equality. It had been able to use both its position of strength and its past standing to offer the intellectuals a sufficient space and future, sufficiently honourable functions and a sufficient margin of freedom and illusion to keep them within its authority and under the control of its ideology. With a few important exceptions, who were precisely exceptions, French intellectuals accepted this situation and felt no vital need to seek their salvation at the side of the working class; and when they did rally to the working class, they could not radically cast off the bourgeois ideology in which they were steeped and which survived in their idealism and reformism (Jaurès) or in their positivism. Nor was it accidental that the French Party had to devote a long and courageous struggle to the reduction and destruction of a reflex '*ouvriériste*' distrust of intellectuals, which was in its own way the expression of a long historical experience of continual deception. Thus it was that the forms of bourgeois domination themselves long deprived the French workers' movement of the intellectuals indispensable to the formation of an authentic *theoretical* tradition.

Need I add another national reason? This is the pitiful history of French philosophy in the 130 years following the Revolution of 1789, its spiritualist persistence in reaction, not just conservatism, from Maine de Biran and Cousin to Bergson, its contempt for history and for the people, its deep but narrow-minded ties with religion, its relentless hostility to the only mind worthy of interest that it produced, Auguste Comte, its incredible ignorance and lack of culture. In the last thirty years things have taken another turn. But the burden of a long century of official philosophical



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