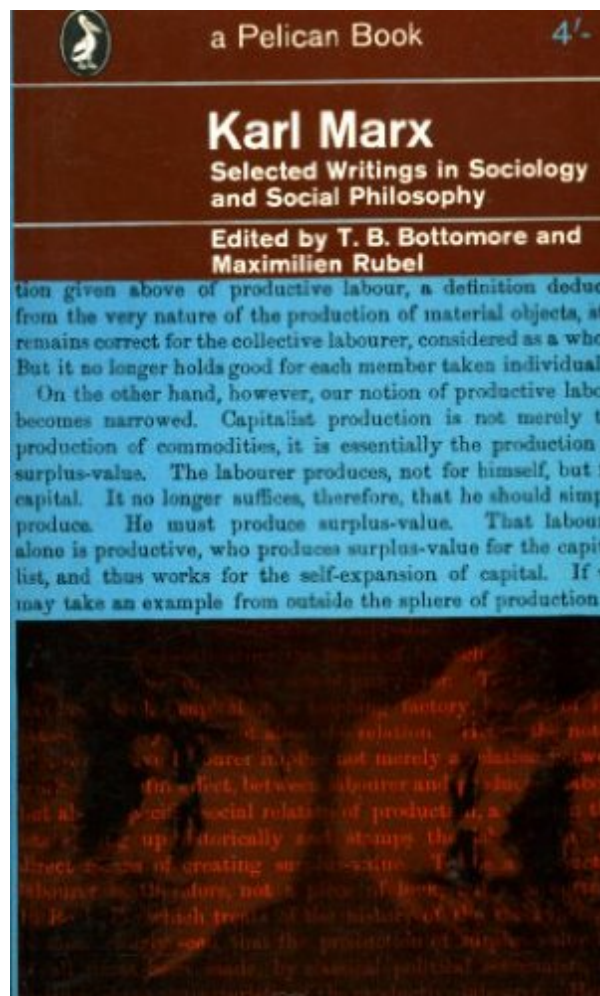


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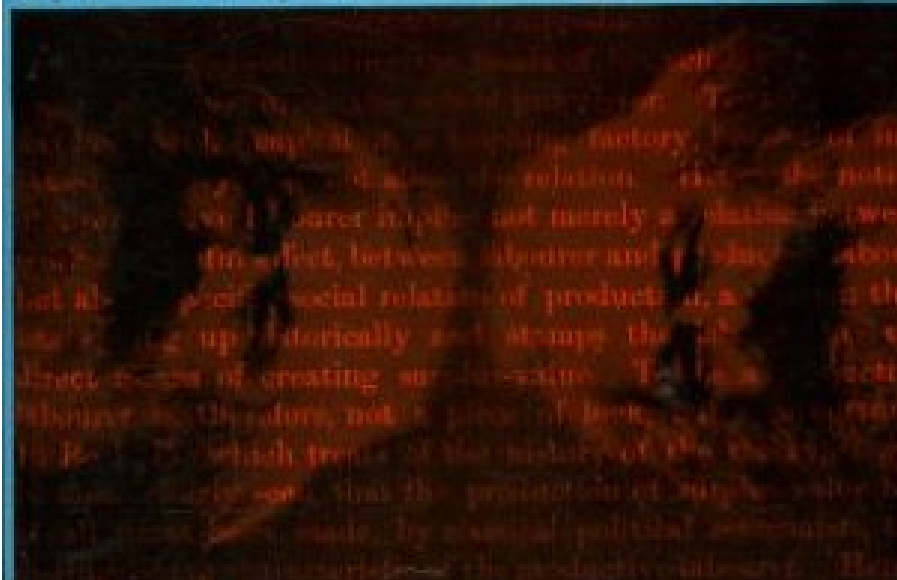
# Karl Marx

Selected Writings in Sociology  
and Social Philosophy

Edited by T. B. Bottomore and  
Maximilien Rubel

tion given above of productive labour, a definition deduced from the very nature of the production of material objects, still remains correct for the collective labourer, considered as a whole. But it no longer holds good for each member taken individually.

On the other hand, however, our notion of productive labour becomes narrowed. Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is essentially the production of surplus-value. The labourer produces, not for himself, but for capital. It no longer suffices, therefore, that he should simply produce. He must produce surplus-value. That labourer alone is productive, who produces surplus-value for the capitalist, and thus works for the self-expansion of capital. If we may take an example from outside the sphere of production of



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## **PDF**

Translated and edited by T. B. Bottomore.

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- 267 pages

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Marx Myths Dispelled in this Excellent Collection

By not a natural

Long before it was fashionable, Tom Bottomore began making a substantial contribution to providing readers with Marx's work in English translation. Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy, which Bottomore translated and edited, was first published in the U.S. in 1956, during the darkest days of the Cold War. The breadth of coverage in this relatively brief book is remarkable, including sources from The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, The German Ideology, A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, The Communist Manifesto, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, the first three volumes of Capital, and much more. The selections were made from thousands of pages covering the more than forty years during which Marx was an active scholar and revolutionary. Much of the material was not published until after Marx's death, and some, notably The Grundrisse, was little known outside a select circle of Marx scholars, most of them European, until the 1970's.

In spite of the voluminous and varied nature of the literature with which he worked, Bottomore made judiciously informed choices with a clear eye to coherence, coverage, and cumulativeness. Nevertheless, beginning with the editor's introduction, it is evident that this book will not be easy reading. Marx may have been a champion of the people, but he rarely wrote in a way that most of us would find easily accessible. Even his journalistic work for popular newspapers in the U.S. and elsewhere requires close attention to complex accounts, heavy-laden with detail, and sometimes containing obscure figures of speech, as well as aphorisms and time-specific truisms rendered in Latin, French, or other languages with which the reader may be unfamiliar. For readers who persevere, however, the intellectual payoff is worth the effort.

I found the introduction especially valuable because it clarifies Marx's influence on Max Weber, which, according to Bottomore, was much more favorable than is commonly claimed. In addition, the introduction alerts us to the fact that Marx had a profound effect on the thinking of Emile Durkheim and George Herbert Mead, principal figures in the development of sociology and social psychology, whose indebtedness to Marx

is rarely acknowledged.

Though working nearly sixty years ago, it is abundantly evident throughout the book that the editor was aware of the conflict emerging between those who held that there was a dramatic difference between the work of the early Marx, author of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and his later work, especially the first volume of *Capital*. As interpreted by Louis Althusser and his structural Marxist colleagues, Marx's early efforts were the product of the poorly informed, undisciplined mind of a philosophical idealist. Only later, after Marx had progressed with his specifically economic research and his thinking had matured, did he become a rigorous scientist, a practitioner of what Engels termed historical materialism

Bottomore, however, rightly takes the position that Marx's lifetime of research and theoretical development was marked by an overarching conceptual consistency, and that there was no epistemological break marking the transformation of Marx the humanistic philosopher into Marx the scientific economist. This judgment is consistent with the wide ranging observations included in the edited volume under review. Marx's materialism, giving priority to lived experience and the objectively conflicting interests separating capital and labor, is emphasized throughout. The concept of "alienation" that figured so conspicuously in Marx's early work is plainly manifest in his later efforts, giving the lie to the often made judgment that Marx had gotten rid of this vestige of humanism as his perspective developed.

It is also clear that Bottomore was not one of those for whom Marx's economic base - institutional superstructure model of society fell out of favor. This scheme, presented in a variety of sophisticated forms, figures prominently in the observations contained in this volume, and it is presented convincingly. The editor highlights this view when he explicitly dismisses the ambiguous causal locution "economic in the last instance" as misrepresenting the unambiguous priority that Marx gave to the material foundation of capitalist society.

When I taught the sociology of education before retiring in 2010, I often found myself stuck with the conclusion that "economic context is everything." It's embarrassing to admit, but at the time I didn't realize that by doing so I was tacitly endorsing the base - superstructure configuration, with educational institutions as superstructural phenomena. Whether or not I recognized the Marxist provenance of this way of thinking, it made perfect sense, especially when evaluating empirical material such as Jean Anyon's *Ghetto Schooling*, John Devine's *Maximum Security*, and Bowles and Gintis' classic *Schooling in Capitalist America*.

In spite of its many virtues, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Psychology* is not a substitute for reading any of Marx's works from cover to cover, nor does the editor intend it to be. The book does, however, bring to the fore Marx's sociological and philosophical work in a way that stimulates and encourages serious readers to read more. I read this edited volume before reading a complete translation of *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, one of the most illuminating experiences I've had with scholarship of any sort.

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Marxism distilled

By J.S.M.

Tom Bottomore's collection is the best place to start to understand Marxist thought. This book was put together in light of the publication in the '60s of many of Marx's early works which had been previously unavailable. They outline the roots of Marx's mature philosophy from a perspective that's more libertarian and romantic than his later writings indicate. Taking on the mature Marx is a daunting task and so it helps to be aware of how his thought was formed. A person can get caught up in his arcane discussions of the

formation of commodities while missing the essential points, or caught up with thinking about value and the labor theory of value without getting why they're important in the first place, so leaving much of that out is no great loss for the beginner. The most important aspect of this book, though, has to be that it shatters the notion that Marxism is a closed, hermeneutic, system which only makes self-referential sense. If you think that Marx only makes sense if you already believe in Marxism read this book to be disabused of you're notions.

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Selected Writings

By A Customer

As the back of the book states, this book is a good way to become acquainted with the thoughts of Karl Marx. It provides insight into his thoughts on the economic theory of human development, and the effect of history as well. It also deals with the social classes, revolution, and the future. A good way to become familiar with the social philosophy of Marx.

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