In an autobiographical fragment which can be found in his Preface to A Critique of Political Economy, Marx said that after he and Engels failed to find a publisher for the German Ideology the manuscript was left to "...the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose-self-clarification". That Marx meant to say that this manuscript was literally left to the mice seems too banal, rather the point is that the writing of the German Ideology was a necessary process that he and Engels had to go through while working towards the proper viewpoint, vis a vis the arguments of the Young Hegelians. Thus the "mice" which Marx mentioned served as a rather interesting metaphor for the Young Hegelians who were left behind by the invective of the German Ideology: left behind, destined to re-live those heady cigar-smoking Berlin days in the bohemian company of Hippel's Weinstrube. Here the first surprise of many awaits the reader of Derrida's first incursion on Marxian terrain. In his linguistic analysis of Marx, Derrida turns towards the German Ideology and the old debates between the "left Hegelians," debates which raged during the 1840s, for answers to today's questions.

That Derrida should turn, in his latest deconstructive exercise, to the 1840s, is not totally unexpected. (A deconstructive exegesis, one might add, which is not above self-aggrandizement and the establishment of Derrida's own Marxist credentials, for is not deconstruction itself ...."faithful to the spirit of Marx", pp. x, 75, 92, 139 & 176). Also, in the same vein and according to Derrida, a former Soviet philosopher, (surely an oxymoron), once told him that the ...."best translation for perestroika is still "deconstruction" p89). The more one thinks about this phrase the more it disturbs; the fact that it is said with tongue firmly in cheek does not relieve the readers tension. Derrida's ego not-with-standing, this concern with old debates is certainly justified, we are after all, as Habermas would have it, "...all children of the Young Hegelians.".

In Derrida's view, an exorcism is now necessary if the ghosts of Marxism's past are to be chased away. Not only the atrocity of party Marxism of the former 'Eastern Bloc" but also the scholarly Marxism [Editors intro, px, Exordium pxviii] which continues to haunt the seminar rooms and lecture theaters of western universities. Freedom from these Marxism's will encourage a plurality of readings in Derrida's view. (As if somehow we remain in short supply of different readings on Marx? The literature on Marx now resembles the Talmud in terms of intensity of study and sheer bulk of output). However, given the sad history of communism, there is always room for another reading, and here Derrida is in concordance with most Marx scholars. More importantly, the purpose of this exercise in exorcism is one of grandiose philosophical ambition, to enable one ..."to learn to live-alone, from oneself, by oneself". For Derrida this is an ethical position and the goal of this ethic is ..."justice", and the same is allegedly true of Marx. Thus Derrida's allusion to the case of Hamlet, the philosophical Prince of Denmark whose father continually haunts him, demanding that justice be done. So we learn that Derrida's Marx is the ethical Marx, the angry Marx [pp.31-33, pxix-xx, p75, 81-83] of Das Capital. Hence also the reference to the state and its debts of the subtitle, meaning the rich and poor, the lenders and borrowers, unfairness and injustice.

Derrida's "spectropoetics" of Marx make a novel and fascinating reading, of that there is no doubt, but where might it be situated within Marxism and where might it lead? His concern with justice would, in the context of the individualism outlined above, suggest an existentialist Marx who sought a maximization of self-realization throughout society. This is not a new idea and the question remains: does such individualism sit well with communitarian notions of the just where responsibility towards oneself might collide with responsibility to the goals of the community? Most of the German Ideology deals with this vexed question and the greater portion of this text attacks such views when argued by Max Stirner. For it was Max Stirner's complaint against the "communists" that the ghost of the community or wheel in the head, of community and state oppressed the individual, hence the appeal of Stirner to libertarians of both left and right. The point is, if capitalism is to be opposed on ethical grounds which are in turn, rooted in some notion of self-realization then a number of difficult questions remain: should the quality and depth of self-realization take precedence over quantity? If not then such an account begins to look like utilitarianism. If the quality of self-realization is to be the standard, then this raises questions of mis-recognition or bad faith. Individuals might find that they can benefit by lying to the community as a whole...
concerning the true extent of the satisfaction of their needs. Derrida does not concern himself with such problems, thus his attempt to pin the blame for social injustice on capitalism is unlikely to convince non-Marxists that this latter doctrine retains its validity.

The phraseology of the ghostly which distinguishes the Stirner-Marx texts of the period, the Ego and His Own, the Communist Manifesto, the German Ideology and the section on fetishism of commodities in Capital, was one of symbolic representation. These signs represented the categories of bourgeois discourse: such as political freedom, markets, finance and commodities, according to Derrida. These categories amounted to nothing less than a haunting from which we can never escape. In a many layered and rich textual analysis we are invited to think of the ghosts here as the other, that which we see in ourselves and which we may not want to confront. In other words, not only are we haunted by these ephemeral ghosts of capital but there is a little of the bourgeois in every one of us, capitalism is “our” capitalism after all. Thus we fear ourselves. Perhaps Marx even feared the other Marx [p139], the bourgeois individualist, ....“He does not want to believe in them [ghosts]. But he thinks of nothing else”...[p47]. Did Marx view Stirner, the most important protagonist of his life, as his ghostly alter-ego?

Derrida is correct to suggest that in his battle with Stirner, Marx wants to insist on ....“living effectivity” as the only means of distinguishing among apparitions; between our thin grasp of what is supposed to constitute reality and what does not, between honesty and the bad faith of the individual before the community. In a striking phrase Marx said, “Philosophy and the study of the actual world have the same relation to one another as onanism and sexual love” [Gl, 1976, p236]. At least justice is being done to Marx's ambiguous metaphysical positions here, but what does ....“living effectivity” mean when used in this context? One is tempted to think of “praxis”, the much-vaunted Marxist union of theory and practice, as little more than deconstructive technique when elided in this manner by Derrida.

During the discussion of the entanglement between Stirner and Marx one is left with the feeling that clarity becomes a victim [pp.126-163], the most important matter in hand is taken to be the “ontological” ghosts of religion, philosophy, German idealism and their psychological dominance or suppression. All of which leads nicely and rather satisfyingly for Derrida, towards the dark task of Marxian-like deconstruction which critically reveals these same ghosts [p139]. More satisfying would have been some concrete discussion of the way in which Marx's concept of individuality is supposed to be operational within a social context, the fear of not finding a vision of man probably caused him more sleepless nights than any ghost. In any case, there is another and perhaps more important layer of meaning suggested by Derrida in his work; if we fear capital and ourselves, perhaps in analogous fashion, capital now fears for its own existence? [p37 & 151]. Thus, “A specter is haunting Europe-the specter of communism” [p4].

The theme of the conference from which these papers were drawn was the collapse of communism and Whither Marxism? [The name of the companion volume]. It might seem at first glance that in Europe as elsewhere, the world has never been more “free” from that specter of communism. However, as Derrida might have it: Marx is dead, long live Marx! Even if he only survives as a ghostly apparition of a concept of justice which refuses to go away, this is the work of mourning, which also forms part of the subtitle.

Derrida returns to the texts of the 1840s [he has little to say concerning Capital, Marx's most important published work], because it was during that period that German thinkers of the day pondered on the meaning of the notion of the ‘End of History’ as portrayed by Hegel in his Philosophy of Right [p60]. In this classic of modern liberalism, Hegel argued that liberal capitalism was the final evolutionary form of all societies. The abstract principles of the French Revolution had become a reality and these principles in turn were rooted in the Christian world view of pity and compassion; in short, with a mutually-recognitive citizenship. Problems which remained and cast doubt upon the validity of this theory, between the actual and the ideal, such as poverty, would in the last analysis, be solved by human migration. The return to this debate is signified in the final part of the subtitle of Derrida's book, the New International.

Let us recall some of the old internationals: the first great international was the unarticulated economic international of monopoly capital [unarticulated, that is, until the publication of Das Capital]. Next we willfully ignore the political “first international” of labour because it was a figment
of the imagination of a few desperate revolutionary émigrés, and move quickly on to the second great international, the developing ideological and political internationals of workers “representatives”, all of these were strangled at birth by Leninism. Finally, leaving aside the thorny question of whether or not there was an international of totalitarianism during the 1930s, we come to the New International, this time political and economic, that of liberal capitalist democracy. This is the new idea which Derrida has in his sights, the idea of liberal capitalist democracy as the ‘End of History’, an idea which is now nearly two hundred years old. This is the site of the book’s greatest failing because in making the recent book The End of History and the Last Man by Francis Fukuyama his chosen target, rather than Hegel, Derrida sets up a straw man.

Derrida maintains that Marxism remains a valid mode of critique as long as there remains an empirical gap between the actual and the ideal, between the real state of society and the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. This is an observation that might apply equally to the political theories of both of Hegel and Fukuyama, that much is clear [pp80-3 & 86-7]. But when should the persistence of poverty, homelessness, and hunger cast doubt upon the practical efficacy of Hegel’s notion of a society of self-meditations, such as liberal democracy? Clearly human migration, Hegel’s own solution to the problem of poverty in the Philosophy of Right, has not helped anywhere on the planet. It would appear that the haves of most societies are clearly not recognizing [pp.61-2] the basic needs of the have-nots. Fortunately, Hegel did not leave matters there for if he had his sun would have set long ago. Hegel also argued that only the secure and detached universal class of civil servants could truly and objectively mediate between the competing needs of citizens and that the benevolence of enlightened corporations, and that the private organizations of civil society would serve to ameliorate the worst effects of the free market. Failures which persisted could, therefore, be put down either to the political impotency of the civil servants or to a lack of universal consciousness among these same organizations. Here Marx’s own critique of Hegel was wide of the mark and Derrida simply follows here in his own way. Thus it will be of little consolation to Derrida that Fukuyama has now discovered this aspect of Hegel’s political theory in his latest book, [Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity, The Free Press, 457pp. $25, see the witty review of this book in The Nation, September 25th, 1995, p318 by Philip Green].

Never the less, clearly if the empirical gap is the problem then justice is not being done and a certain spirit of Marx might yet have its day, (if by this is meant some practical alternative to Hegel’s notion of the universal class). Had Derrida taken Hegel on his own terms then something really important might have been gained. Instead he allows himself to be sidetracked by Fukuyama’s Nietzschean slant on the problem of recognition.

The second kind of objection to Hegel’s argument is that structural and institutional barriers to equality are simply not the problem, rather it is human nature itself that is in the way. Following Nietzsche and Leo Strauss, Fukuyama argues that the persistence of inequality indicates that people simply do not care about the fate of others. According to this view the material abundance of the wealthy will be seen by them as a tangible expression of their need to be recognized as superior, wealth being a important confirmation of this need. For Fukuyama, the most important problem is then one of how to reconcile humanity with the potentially explosive injustice which will result? However, this is the very notion of bourgeois individualism which Marx was so eager to refute in the German Ideology. Also, for Hegel the need to be recognized as superior is simply a case of mis-recognition, a situation in which the wealthy had not been made to understand their obligations to society by the universal class. Derrida, to his credit, takes the injustices of capitalism seriously, this is the ghost of self-destruction which haunts capitalism, but in accepting Fukuyama’s assumption (and Nietzsche’s), that integral to capitalism is the notion of a natural desire to be superior, he fires his most important salvo; fear of ourselves, towards an argument which begs the most difficult problem of Marxism: to prove that a mutually-recognitive society of free persons is sustainable in principle and incompatible with liberal capitalist democracy. Can we not be afraid of our own selfishness and desire to be treasured individuals, yet still build a world where such recognition is no longer necessary and all within a liberal capitalist framework? Fukuyama’s solution to this problem, on very different terrain, is Nietzschean to the extent that he seeks redemption in great art, the stern defense of “western culture” and an ethics of reconciliation and anti-resentment. The spirits
of Marx whom Derrida wants to conjure up to exploit the contradictions of a capitalism where the Hegelian jury is still out, are woolly and vague. A Marx of "democracy - to - come and thus for justice" [p169], is perhaps his most concrete offering. Hegel's vision of liberalism will not be disposed of as easily as Fukuyama's, the former would have had little difficulty with calls for democracy and justice.

Can justice be gained simply through the spirit of personal independence that Derrida suggests? [p xviii]. It would seem that here we return full circle to the angry Marx where Derrida began, with all that signifies: the class-war Marx of the Master-Slave relation, the revolutionary violence and the communal justice. However, this is the very spirit of Marx which is supposed to be dead, the Marx of organized political revolutionaries [p87], and a spirit incapable of even a limited haunting. It is hard to believe that Derrida the arch revisionist would want to subscribe to such a weary position. Yet in turning to the German Ideology Derrida indicates a need to address the central problem of Marxism today; the theoretical necessity for a continuing critique of liberal capitalist democracy. How little of importance Derrida manages to extract from the classic texts of the canon. In the end this is a book which tries to exorcise too many ghosts at the same time, the ghosts of the Young Hegelians, of Marxism's past, of capitalist contradictions new. If only Derrida had really tackled the ghost that haunts the latter quarter of the twentieth-century, the ghost of Hegel's political theory. Hegel scholarship and Marxist theory would undoubtedly be the better for it.

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