

emotivism

Stroll, Avrum. *The Emotive Theory of Ethics*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954.

Urmson, J. O. *The Emotive Theory of Ethics*. London: Hutchinson, 1968.

J. O. Urmson

Engels, Frederick (1820–1895)

Born in Barmen, Germany, the eldest son of a textile manufacturer, Engels was brought up a strict Pietist. After leaving gymnasium, he had a technical education designed to train him to run a factory; he also had military training. Unlike MARX (1818–1883), he never attended university. From early on he was involved in radical politics and radical critique. In 1841 he went to Berlin and joined the Young Hegelian circle around Bruno Bauer (1809–1882). However, after his stay in England where he worked in his family's firm in Manchester and where he carefully studied the condition of the working class in England and the development of capitalism in what then was the most developed capitalist society, he moved away from the radical LIBERALISM of the Young Hegelians to communism. In what is arguably his masterpiece, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), he depicted vividly how the working class—victimized by the industrialization that had created it—would be the indispensable instrument of the revolutionary transformation of society from capitalism to communism. He also developed radically democratic principles for the organization of socioeconomic life. Crucial to his communism was the view that, with the advent of a public and collective control of the means of production, the anarchy of production of capitalism would be replaced by a more rational and more humane organization of socioeconomic life without its waste, its gross inequalities, and its system of class domination in which a few, the owners of productive PROPERTY, dominate and exploit the many, the vast army of workers.

Moral Progress and the Development of Society

Engels's work *Anti-Dühring* (1878) provides an account of ethics more extensive than anything written by Marx, though this is not to suggest that their

views were conflicting. The primary source for Engels's views on ethics, the book was enormously influential in the development of Marxism. His views on ethics involve both an appropriation of and a reaction to the values of the Enlightenment. Engels saw how the Enlightenment's emphasis of freedom, EQUALITY, RIGHTS, and justice supported capitalist property relations while containing genuinely emancipatory ideas that contributed to moral progress.

However, unlike liberal democrats and utopian socialists, Engels attempted to establish a sound scientific basis for socialism and his conception of what a progressive development of moral ideas and practices would come to. Engels criticized earlier Enlightenment views for their SUBJECTIVISM. There is much talk of absolute truth, reason, and justice, but each theorist and each social group has a different conception of these notions. Such utopian conceptions spawn a surfeit of ideologies and the sectarian illusion of objectivity rather than anything resembling genuine objectivity. Still, Engels believes that there is moral progress. The epochal social changes that have been going on in human society taken as a whole demonstrate a "process of development of humanity itself"; in this development Engels finds the basis for moral progress. A good understanding of the conflicting material INTERESTS of the different classes, and an understanding of which class during a particular epoch is the rising class and why, will enable us to identify the most crucial aspects of the history of civilization. This history has been the history of class struggles. The conditions of production and exchange determine the direction of class struggle. It is in this way, Engel maintains, that we can best understand all epochal social changes, including the transition from capitalism to socialism.

Utopian socialists without such an understanding of history were limited to a moral critique of capitalism. By contrast, a scientific socialism, which Engels attempted to develop, not only will be a moral critique but also will explain capitalism, indicate historically feasible alternatives, and show something of what must be done to gain a mastery over capitalism so that socialism can be instituted successfully. Scientific socialism will enable us to see how capitalism arises and must for a time persist; it will also enable us to see how, with the development of the productive forces and with the intensification of class struggle, capitalism will in time collapse.

Critique of Ethical Rationalism and Relativism

Like HEGEL (1770–1831), Engels has a holistic and developmental world outlook, but it is also fallibilistic. This is clear in the initial pages of his chapters on morality in *Anti-Dühring* which begin with a critique of ethical rationalism. Engels's view is neither absolutist nor relativist. Like a relativist he rejects the idea that there could be absolutely certain foundational moral truths with a categorical authoritativeness. Rather, there are various moral outlooks whose adherents, lacking a background understanding of the cultural determinates of their beliefs, take them to be absolute when in reality they are the beliefs of a particular people of a distinctive class at a particular time. They have a confused and ethnocentric belief in the objectivity of their own morality. This blocks a recognition of how their moral understanding is skewed to their particular limited perspective.

However, like the absolutist, Engels also believes that there are some very general truths, including moral truths, that it would be insane to deny. But they are so indeterminate that they are of no use to the ethical rationalist bent on articulating a categorically authoritative moral system that would enable us to assess the moralities of various times and places. In the hunt for “final and ultimate truths, truths which are pure and absolutely immutable,” we will find only “platitudes and commonplaces of the sorriest kind” (*A-D*, 97, 99). Moreover, it is a mistake to believe that some philosopher will articulate a foundation for morality that will provide some absolute prescriptivity that will enable us to critically assess the social world. But this does not justify our taking a relativist or subjectivist turn, for some of the extant moralities have more “durable elements” than others.

It is important to see that proletarian morality, though it no more than any other morality delivers ‘ultimate truth,’ has “the maximum of durable elements” (*A-D*, 104). It can yield a coherent conception of a future proletarian emancipation: an emancipation that will lead to a general human emancipation and to the construction of a humane and classless society without exploiter and exploited, master and slave, ruler and ruled. Though their adherents have for the most part been unaware of it, moralities in the past have been class moralities, largely ideologi-

cal, serving the interests of a determinate class and being “the product, in the last analysis, of the economic stage which society” has reached at “a particular epoch” (*A-D*, 105). With the consolidation of the proletarian REVOLUTION, a classless society will come into being; with that, the morality for that social world, proximate though it will be, will not be a class morality and consequently will not be ideological. When the transition to classlessness has been consolidated, morality will no longer be used to justify the domination of some ruling class but will finally reflect the genuine interests of humankind.

Equality and Socialist Justice

Some commentators (*e.g.*, Wood, Miller) have argued that neither Engels nor Marx were egalitarians and that they had no conception of socialist justice. They argue that for Engels and Marx belief in equality is a thoroughly bourgeois notion used to rationalize bourgeois morality and that there would be no need for such a conception in a classless society—a society which would be ‘beyond justice,’ egalitarian or otherwise.

Engels does stress that talk of equality has been used to justify the bourgeois order. Indeed, sometimes what in reality has been the brutal subjugation and repression of one people or class by another has been justified in the name of attaining equality. That notwithstanding, talk of equality can in certain circumstances have an emancipatory agitational role. During the rise of the bourgeoisie, it was a progressive move to stress the importance of equal legal and political rights. Still, the firmest form of equality under capitalism was the conception of the equal status of labour. This conception found its “unconscious but clearest expression in the law of value of modern bourgeois economics according to which the value of a commodity is measured by the socially necessary labour embodied in it” (*A-D*, 116). It is to this that we should trace the modern idea of equality, and in doing so we are tracing it back to the economic conditions of bourgeois society. Unlike the guild restrictions of feudal society, capitalist production relations require freedom and equality of rights.

However, this is not the full story of equality. Once it had been set in motion, it was difficult to limit the demand for equality to its ideological role

Engels, Frederick

in the service of capitalism. Proletarian demands for equality emerged as well. They moved from “the bourgeois demand for the abolition of class privileges . . . to the demand for the abolition of classes themselves” (A-D, 117). The demands for equality were extended from a demand for equal political and legal rights to a demand for equality in social and economic spheres as well. Indeed this was the key to making the other equalities more than merely notational.

Where Engels is to be taken as a defender of equality is in his argument for a strong but indirect form of equality of condition. Because people are as different as they are, there can be no guarantee of equality of condition; but where the productive forces are sufficiently developed to sustain it, social arrangements should be made which would not block the achievement of equality of condition. The social INSTITUTIONS of a classless society should not cause unequal life-chances. When classlessness is achieved we will have destroyed the structural basis for inequalities of POWER which make dominating and being dominated part of the fabric of life in class society. With class structures dismantled, and with classes finally becoming a thing of the past, human freedom (self-mastery) will for the first time in history become a genuine possibility for all. Extensive LIBERTY requires equality and equality in turn requires liberty. These two ideals stand and fall together. Engels (and Marx as well) took them both to be key ideals which could be realized only with the full achievement of communism.

Criticisms

Engels's views on ethics have been thought by some to be naive Enlightenment views which confuse ‘more developed’ with ‘better’; take progress as something which is relatively unproblematic; are simplistically naturalistic and historicist; and take over from Hegel incoherent or at least very problematic teleological conceptions. It is far from evident, however, that Engels made any of these mistakes or that his thinking about ethics is as vulnerable as it is rather routinely believed to be.

See also: EQUALITY; EXPLOITATION; INEQUALITY; MARX; MARXISM; OPPRESSION; POWER; PROPERTY; REVOLUTION; RIGHTS; SELF-OWNERSHIP; WORK.

Bibliography

Works by Engels

Anti-Dühring. Translated by Emile Burns. New York: International Publishers, 1939 [1878]. His central discussion of ethics.

The Condition of the Working Class in England. Translated by W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971 [1848].

Engels, Frederick, and Karl Marx. *Selected Works*. 2 vols. Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing, 1962.

Works about Engels

Benton, Ted. “Natural Science and Cultural Struggle: Engels and Philosophy and the Natural Sciences.” In vol. 2 of *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, edited by John Mepham and David Hillel-Ruben, 101–42. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979.

Brenkert, George G. “Marx, Engels and the Relativity of Morals.” *Studies in Soviet Thought* 17 (1977): 201–24. Important interpretive account.

Carver, T. *Engels*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

———. *Marx and Engels: The Intellectual Relationship*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf, 1983.

———. “Marx, Engels and Dialectics.” *Political Studies* 28, no. 3 (1980): 353–64.

McLellan, D. *Engels*. Glasgow: Fontana, 1977.

Miller, Richard. *Analyzing Marx*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984. Major analytical Marxist text; interpretation of Marx as rejecting morality.

Nielsen, Kai. *Marxism and the Moral Point of View*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 1988. Includes a reading of Engels as an egalitarian defending principles of social justice.

Nelsen, Kai, and Steven Patten, eds. *Marx and Morality*. Guelph, Ontario: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1981. Essays on Marxism and justice.

Nielsen, Kai, and Robert Ware, eds. *Analyzing Marxism: New Essays on Analytical Marxism*. Guelph, Ontario: Canadian Association for Publishing in Philosophy, 1989. Interpretive essays on Marxism and ethics.

Wood, Allen. “Marx and Equality.” In vol. 4 of *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, edited by John Mepham and David Hillel-Ruben, 195–220. Sussex: Harvester Press, 1981. Major argument for Marx and Engels not being egalitarians.

Kai Nielsen

engineering ethics

Engineering ethics is the field of study concerned with philosophical inquiry into, and solution of morally laden social problems involving, behaviors of