Discussion on Marx as philosopher is not reduced to the question: 'What are the main themes and theses of Marx's philosophy?', 'What is the essential meaning of his philosophical thought?', 'What is the historical value and importance of his philosophical work?'. The question 'Is Marx a philosopher at all?' still arouses controversy. There is nothing wrong with the question. But this does not mean that every possible answer to it is equally good.

The thesis that Marx is a philosopher has been disputed not only by many 'experts' and 'critics' of Marxism, but also by many prominent Marxists. During the Second International it was disputed by orthodox revolutionary Marxists (e.g. F. Mehring), by centrist opportunists (e.g. K. Kautsky) and by open revisionists (e.g. E. Bernstein). It is disputed by many contemporary Marxists as well. But all who agree that Marx is not a philosopher, disagree on what he is. The thesis that Marx is a philosopher is most often countered with one of the following: 'Marx is a non-philosopher', 'Marx is an anti-philosopher', 'Marx is a trans-philosopher'. Each of these theses has its particular attractions and its particular 'arguments'. Only these are false attractions and shaky arguments.

One view, once widely accepted and still encountered nowadays, is that Marx was not an opponent of philosophy, but that he himself was never seriously concerned with it, or at least did not make any major contribution to it. Those who share this view differ only on the question why he did not achieve much in this 'field'. His critics are rather inclined to deny him any feeling and ability for philosophy; his followers and supporters frequently insist that he was continuously overloaded with other, more urgent work and so could never find enough time for philosophy. Whatever one may think of these 'explanations', their common presupposition seems acceptable. With the help of Marx's own statements it is...
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possible, for instance, to show that he never realized some of his philosophical ‘wishes’ and ‘plans’. But which author has ever realized all his wishes and intentions? Whatever the amount of his unrealized philosophical plans, one thing is indisputable: Karl Marx, Doctor of Philosophy, left, beside his doctor’s thesis, several expressly philosophical works (A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, The Holy Family, German Ideology, etc.).

In his youth, some people say, Marx was a philosopher, but already in his German Ideology he broke with philosophical speculation to become a critic and opponent of philosophy as such from the positions, and in the name, of empirical, positive science. This is borne out by his explicit statements (‘Phrases about the world cease and real knowledge has to take their place. When reality is depicted, philosophy as an independent branch of activity loses the medium of existence’); this is also testified by the fact that after the German Ideology he stopped working on philosophy and devoted himself to economic, historical and political studies and practical revolutionary activity. Facts are facts, of course, but it is also a fact that Marx’s ‘mature’ ‘non-philosophical’ works do not contain ‘real knowledge’ but also philosophical ‘phrases about the world’ (Das Kapital is written throughout in ‘philosophical phraseology’). It is also a fact that Marx’s ‘non-philosophical’ (‘economic’, ‘political’, ‘historical’) works are in their deepest sense philosophical, for they are directed at the essence of the modern world and man, they present a radical criticism of an alienated society and a ‘non-scientific’ vision of a really humane community.

If Marx is not an a-philosopher or anti-philosopher, perhaps he is a trans-philosopher? Perhaps the most essential thing is Marx’s idea that philosophy should not be simply rejected or ignored, but that, through being realized, it should be superseded? Is it not Marx’s ‘ideal’ that reality should become philosophical, and that philosophy as such should disappear? The idea is very attractive. But for this very reason it must be carefully examined. Convincing arguments do not preclude still more convincing counter-arguments.

One argument says Marx taught that the proletariat cannot be abolished without the realization of philosophy. But how can philosophy realize itself, if it does not abolish itself? – To this one could reply with counter-arguments: Philosophy can be abolished only by being completely realized.