

Fourth Discussion Paper (Due Monday, May 7):

Write a five-page essay on one of the following topics.

1. Marx and Engels argue that commodification is a noteworthy aspect of life under capitalism, that is to say that, under capitalism, all human relations tend to be recast in the commodity form, involving exchange in a marketplace. With reference to some specific examples, explain your view on this thesis. Is this an inherent tendency under capitalism? If not, why not? If so, is it a good thing or a bad thing?
2. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write: “By freedom is meant, under the present bourgeois conditions of production, free trade, free selling and buying.” Compare this perspective on freedom to the view defended by Mill in *On Liberty*.
3. Marx and Engels argue that all culture is determined by the conditions of production. They write that, for the “enormous majority,” culture is just “training to act as a machine.” With reference to the cultural world of today, assess that claim.
4. According to Marx and Engels, under capitalism all “theory” – political theory, economic theory, religious doctrine – is to be read not literally, not as if it’s about what it seems to be about, but instead as serving to legitimate the interests of capital, in other words, to reinforce the social and economic status quo. Consider the example of these words from the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

How would Marx and Engels analyze this argument? Are they right?

5. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes that “Christianity has been the most disastrous form of arrogance so far.” Of Christians he wrote:

People like *this*, with their “equality before God” have prevailed over the fate of Europe so far, until a stunted, almost ridiculous type, a herd animal, something well-meaning, sickly, and mediocre has finally been bred: the European of today . . .

What does Nietzsche mean? Do you agree?

6. Here is Nietzsche on truth:

It is no more than a moral prejudice that the truth is worth more than appearance. . . . In fact, life could not exist except on the basis of perspectival valuations and appearances; and if, with the virtuous enthusiasm and inanity of many philosophers, some wanted to completely abolish the “world of appearances,” – well, assuming *you* could do that, – at least there would not be any of your “truth” left either!

What is your assessment of the view that everything is, in the end, a matter of perspective?

7. One thing that Nietzsche expects of his “philosophers of the future” is that they will forge a new morality. He calls them “men of the future who in the present tie the knots and gather the force that compels the will of millennia into *new* channels.” These new philosophers are to “*create values*,” they are “*commanders and legislators*,” and of them Nietzsche also says that “their will to truth is – *will to power*.” Can you think of examples of moral-intellectual leaders of the kind Nietzsche has in mind? Does it make sense to argue that such individuals create new moral truths as opposed to discovering them?
8. What do you prefer? A “handful of certainty” or an “entire wagonload of pretty possibilities”?
9. Compare and contrast Nietzsche’s “philosophers of the future” with Plato’s “philosopher king.”