

Wilde, Lawrence. *Ethical Marxism and Its Radical Critics*.

New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Pp. viii + 189. \$65.00 (cloth).

Wilde defends what he calls Ethical Marxism. This is a familiar view, which many refer to as Marxist Humanism. According to Wilde, Marx holds that there is a human essence which involves freedom and the development of each individual's creative potential. This is achievable, however, only under conditions of economic and political democracy. People are alienated from their essential "social creativity" under capitalism. The essence gives rise to an "ought"—conditions should be changed so that people can be what they *ought* to be. Wilde finds the roots of Marx's theory in ancient Greek thought.

Marx deemphasized his ethical view, according to Wilde, because he believed that change would come only through increased awareness by workers of how capitalism defeats their interests. Appeals to what is right and good would be ineffective. But Marx was wrong that greater understanding would produce change. Thus, for Wilde, a revitalized, modern Marxism needs to emphasize its ethical content.

Wilde does a good job defending his "essentialist" interpretation of Marx. He also argues that Marxism can accommodate the main claims of feminism and the environmental movement. But Marx's understanding of human nature is undefended. Wilde seems to think that social conflict will be diminished and good political decisions will be made if only production is socialized and political decisions are made democratically. The other interests people have—ethnic, occupational, regional, ethical, religious—will cause few significant problems. It's hard to take this seriously in the late twentieth century.

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