



Do Social Sciences Threaten the Autonomy of Ethics? Reconstructing the Marxian Metaethical Response

Thodoris Dimitrakos¹

Received: 19 May 2023 / Accepted: 29 April 2024
© The Author(s) 2024

Abstract

In the present paper, I attempt to provide a reconstructed Marxian response to the question of whether the social (and behavioral) sciences constitute a philosophical threat to the autonomy of ethics. I suggest that shedding light on some aspects of the Marxian work (especially the *Theses on Feuerbach*), from the standpoint of the debate on naturalism in contemporary analytic philosophy, can offer valuable philosophical insights against the framework of scientific naturalism. This framework is responsible for presenting the social sciences as a philosophical threat to the autonomy of ethics. I argue that Marx detects and rejects three fundamental presuppositions of scientific naturalism: empiricism, ‘God’s point of view,’ and methodological individualism. I conclude that the Marxian view is a liberal naturalist perspective which allows both the scientific comprehension of the social world and the autonomy of ethics.

Keywords Karl Marx · Naturalism · Normativity · Social sciences · Ethics

1 Introduction

Scientific naturalism is a dominant trend in contemporary analytic philosophy. Its credo was summarized by Wittgenstein¹ more than a century ago:

The totality of true propositions is the whole of natural science (or the whole corpus of the natural sciences) (Tractatus: 4.11)

If we slightly change the passage, replacing the term ‘natural’ with the term ‘empirical’, including also the social and behavioral sciences, the main thesis of

¹ This doesn’t mean that Wittgenstein is a scientific naturalist in the contemporary sense.

✉ Thodoris Dimitrakos
thdimitrakos@upatras.gr

¹ University of Patras, Patras, Greece

contemporary scientific naturalism is reflected more accurately. This trend in academic philosophy has often been related to the ideology of scientism, which entails that the answer to every question is provided by experts of the empirical sciences. In short, both scientific naturalism and scientism threaten the autonomy of the normative realm and those domains that are traditionally considered to be parts of it, that is, ethics, politics, and even epistemology. The counter to scientism is often an idealistic hostility to the empirical sciences and the assumption that there are phenomena characteristic of human beings (the expression of their rationality) that rest outside the reach of empirical scientific understanding.

However, are the empirical sciences really a threat to the autonomy of the normative realm and, in particular, are the social (and behavioral) sciences a threat to the autonomy of ethics? In what follows I attempt to respond negatively to this question by reconstructing Karl Marx's view on the issue. A reconstruction is necessary since Marx didn't face the problem in these terms. Nonetheless, the reconstruction is possible since he faced *de facto* the same problem, I will argue, due to the very nature of his work, which is characterized by both an attempt to understand human society in scientific terms and an attempt to change it based on ethical or political (in short, normative) grounds. In the present paper, I attempt to shed light on Marx's view from the standpoint of the discussion on naturalism in contemporary analytic philosophy. Conversely, I will maintain, Marx's view can offer valuable insights for the contemporary discussion about naturalism and normativity in contemporary analytic philosophy.

My aim is not primarily exegetical. I don't aspire to give an account of what Marx actually believed on the issue. My aim is primarily systematic. I aspire to reconstruct a Marxian response to the question of the threat of the social sciences to the autonomy of ethics, based mainly on the *Theses on Feuerbach*, but also sporadically to any other part of Marx's (and Engels') work which can be helpful for my task. This response is interesting because it takes an intermediate position between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism or idealism. This intermediate position is nowadays often called 'liberal naturalism' (McDowell 2009: 262; de Caro and Macarthur 2010: 9). The interesting part for the (reconstructed) Marxian response lies in the way this intermediate position is achieved, namely, by shedding light on and rejecting the philosophical presupposition of scientific naturalism.

In order to achieve the reconstruction of the Marxian liberal naturalism response, my argumentation will take the following course. In the next section, I will provide a sketchy presentation of the 'Humanist Controversy.' Following Luis Althusser (2003), I call 'humanist controversy' the debate² concerning the (philosophical) category of the human being ('Man') in the Marxian thought and consequently in the Marxist tradition. In the third section, I argue that the humanist controversy is not merely a scholarly debate in the philosophy of the social sciences. It is the result of the tension between two theses which are both part of the Marxian work: (a) the

² An actual debate on the issue took place within the French Communist Party in 1966–1967 and 'ended in an unmitigated political defeat for the Althusserian offensive' (Thomas 2009: 388). However, I use the term to denote the broader conflict between two incompatible lines of thought within Marxist tradition.

‘explanatory reduction of ethics’ thesis (RE_e) and (b) the ‘objectivity of ethics’ thesis (OE_e). In the fourth section, I provide a very brief history of the source of the tension which is no other than the dominant conception of scientific understanding after the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. Next, I will examine the strategies of some Marxist scholars to avoid the tension and show the philosophical costs they entail. In the sixth section, I reconstruct (some of) Marx’s theses on Feuerbach as a rejection of the eliminative or scientific version of naturalism. Finally, I conclude that the Marxian view is a liberal naturalist perspective which allows both the scientific comprehension of the social world and the autonomy of ethics. This view, although incomplete, can provide valuable insights for the contemporary philosophical debates on naturalism.

2 The Humanist Controversy

The humanist controversy took place mainly during the 1960s. It followed the relatively delayed publication of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (MECW 3: 229–348) in 1932 and the corresponding delayed translation of the *Manuscripts* into English (1956) and French (1962).³ It also followed the political turbulence caused by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which denounced the so-called personality cult of Joseph Stalin. These facts triggered a series of theoretical elaborations which, based on the *Paris Manuscripts*, cast doubt on the dominant Soviet interpretation of the Marxian work, which emphasized the scientific dimension of the latter. The elaborations in question were also influenced by philosophical works of the 1920s like G. Lukács’s (1971) *History and Class* and they created a trend of Marxist Humanism which included a variety of scholars. Some of the Frankfurt School thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, French philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but also English-speaking Marxists of the New Left such as E.P. Thompson, are only a few of the most prominent examples of Marxist Humanists. Despite the significant differences among them, the Marxist Humanists agreed on the rejection of the idea that the Marxian work is primarily scientific, in the sense that the term ‘scientific’ is akin to the natural sciences. On the very opposite side of the debate, we find Althusser’s theoretical anti-Humanism.

According to Althusser, the Marxian thought, or what is innovating about it, inaugurates a new science: The science of human history, which is characterized by ‘epistemological unity’ (Althusser 2003) in relation to all other sciences, the natural sciences, of course, included. Althusser famously argued that the Marxian science of human history emerged through an epistemological break,⁴ i.e., the theoretical

³ There was previously a French translation of *Manuscripts* by Henri Lefebvre in 1933, although it wasn’t very widespread. See (Althusser 2005).

⁴ The terms ‘epistemological break’ and ‘epistemological obstacle’ are directly borrowed from the historical epistemology of Gaston Bachelard. Bachelard (2003, 2004) provided a discontinuist neo-Kantian (Bachelard 2005: 94) account of scientific progress. According to his view, every scientific discipline is constituted as such, viz., as scientific, through the rejection of some theoretical principles which function as epistemological obstacles for the emergence of science. These principles are constitutive of the object

elimination of the notion of human being ('Man'), which functioned as an epistemological obstacle for the development of a genuinely scientific comprehension of human history. This break began in 1845 and has as its starting point—but by no means concluding—the *Theses on Feuerbach* and the *German Ideology* (Marx and Engels 1976):

‘[...] something irreversible really does start in 1845: the “epistemological break” is a point of no return. Something begins which will have no end. A “continuing break” [...] the beginning of a long period of work, as in *every other science*. And although the way ahead is open, it is difficult and sometimes even dramatic, marked by events—theoretical events (additions, rectifications, corrections)—which concern the scientific knowledge of a particular object: the conditions, the mechanisms and the forms of the class struggle. In simpler terms, *the science of history*.

‘We can say, then, that this science does not emerge, ready-made, from Marx’s head. It merely has its beginning in 1845, and has not yet got rid of all its past—of all the ideological and philosophical prehistory out of which it has emerged. There is nothing astonishing in the fact that for some time it continues to contain ideological notions or philosophical categories which it will later get rid of’ (Althusser 1976: 66–67, emphasis added).

The epistemological break, as the Bachelardian conception of Althusser entails, presupposes the rejection of one (or more) epistemological obstacle(s). The obstacle(s) which spring(s) from the bourgeois ideology is no other than the philosophical category of human being ('Man') and its derivatives ('essence of Man', 'subject', etc.). It is only the exclusion of the category of human being from the conceptual framework of the mature Marxian works which paved the way for a new science of history.

‘In 1845, Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man. This unique rupture contained three indissociable elements. (1) The formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels, etc. (2) A radical critique of the theoretical pretensions of every philosophical humanism. (3) The definition of humanism as an ideology’ (Althusser 2005: 227).

Footnote 4 (continued)

of possible experience and, in this sense, they play a thoroughly obscuring role. The rejection of the epistemological obstacles leads to the expansion of the framework of possible experience and consequently to the epistemological break between the previous vulgar knowledge ('connaissance commune') and the scientific perspective which follows. The constitution of a scientific discipline, though, doesn't entail the extinction of epistemological obstacles. Bachelard takes it that the major episodes of scientific change consist in the rejection of principles which function as epistemological obstacles in every given stage of the development of science.

Thus, the transition from the ideological misconception of human society and history to their scientific comprehension takes place on an absolute rejection of 'human being' as an explanatory concept.

'Marx's theoretical anti-humanism, as it operates within historical materialism, thus means a refusal to root the explanation of social formations and their history in a concept of man with theoretical pretensions, i.e., a concept of man as an originating subject, one in whom originate his needs (*homo oeconomicus*), his thoughts (*homo rationalis*), and his acts and struggles (*homo moralis*, *juridicus* and *politicus*). For when you begin with man, you cannot avoid the idealist temptation of believing in the omnipotence of liberty or of creative labour—that is, you simply submit, in all "freedom", to the omnipotence of the ruling bourgeois ideology, whose function is to mask and to impose, in the illusory shape of man's power of freedom, another power, much more real and much more powerful, that of capitalism' (Althusser 1976: 205).

In short, Marx's major contribution is the construction of a genuine science of human history. This science presupposes the elimination of the ideological concept of human being, in other words, the programmatic explanatory reduction of the latter to the material processes described by the mature scientific concepts of historical materialism (social formation, productive forces, relations of production, etc.).

On the contrary, the Marxist Humanists deny precisely this very possibility of the explanatory reduction, and therefore, of the elimination of the concept of human being in order to make human history intelligible. Thompson (1957: 109) is very clear on that:

'[...] it is of first importance that men do not only "reflect" experience passively; they also think about that experience; and their thinking affects the way they act. The thinking is the creative part of man, which, even in class society, makes him partly an *agent* in history, just as he is partly a victim of his environment. If this were not so, his consciousness would indeed trail passively behind his changing existence; or he would cease to change' (emphasis added).

E.P. Thompson's uses as textual evidence to support this view Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach.⁵ His view is symmetrically opposite of Althusser's on the explanatory level. According to Althusser, the concept of human being is dispensable and *a fortiori* harmful for making human history intelligible, while for E.P. Thompson historical change is unintelligible without taking into consideration human agency and therefore the category of human being.

In short, the Althusserian anti-humanism represents a naturalist attitude in the philosophy of history (or the philosophy of social science in general), according to which the concept of the human being (or the 'subject' or the 'agent') does not have a genuine explanatory role. It is eliminable for it must be explanatorily reduced to the material processes described by the conceptual framework of historical

⁵ I will come back to this very thesis in Sect. 6.

materialism (social formation, productive forces, relations of production, etc.). On the contrary, Marxist Humanism represents an anti-naturalist attitude in the philosophy of history, according to which the concept of human being and its derivatives is indispensable in order to fully grasp historical changes.⁶

3 The Essential Philosophical Tension

At this point one may wonder what is philosophically significant about the humanist controversy. After all, similar debates between naturalist and hermeneutic⁷ tendencies in the philosophy of history and the philosophy of social science are, in general, long lasting. The humanist controversy could be considered as the application of this debate in the Marxist research tradition. However, I suggest that it is wrong to suppose that this is the whole story.

The Marxian work, unlike the other research programs in the social and human sciences, consists of both a scientific research program and a political emancipatory objective. According to Marx, the societies where the capitalist mode of production is dominant are characterized by injustice and oppression. Marxist political practice aims exactly at overcoming this injustice and oppression. In short, unlike the other research programs, the Marxian thought, besides a descriptive-scientific project which attempts to explain human history, includes a normative-political project concerned with providing ethical assessment of various aspects of human society and attempting to change them.⁸ I argue that the twofold⁹ character of Marxian thought contains a philosophical tension which is responsible for the humanist controversy. The tension consists of the—at least *prima facie*—incompatibility between the two theses. Let's call the first the *explanatory reduction of ethics* thesis (RE_i) and the second the *objectivity of ethics* thesis (OE_i).

⁶ Roy Bhaskar (1998: 1–2) notes a similar dispute within the Marxist camp between the 'so-called 'dialectical materialists' on one side, and Lukács, the Frankfurt School and Sartre on the other'.

⁷ I will come back to this distinction in the very next section.

⁸ As Andrew Sayer (2011: 15) points out 'Marx's work is both an attempt to develop a scientific theory of capitalism and a passionate critique of its oppressive (hence immoral, unethical) character'.

⁹ At this point, one may object that the presentation of Marx's work as twofold is oversimplistic. For instance, we can detect in his work a third level, that of a teleological philosophy of history, which does not belong either to the descriptive-scientific or to the normative-political level. According to this teleological view, progress is inevitable, rendering any proper moral reflection redundant. It is true that this view is part of the Marxist tradition, either as an implicit conception of history or as an explicit rejection of it. However, the term 'teleology' requires meticulous examination. Given the metaphysical rupture caused by the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see the very next section), the Marxist view of history cannot strictly be considered teleological, without committing a monstrous anachronism. What is often called a teleological view of history in the Marxist tradition is a fatalistic conviction that the succession of different socio-economic systems (feudalism, capitalism, etc.) follow a specific and predetermined course. Given the rejection of Aristotelian teleology by modern science, this kind of fatalism can only be articulated, without ending up as a parody, on the grounds of determinism. Rejecting or accepting determinism is irrelevant here. The point is that determinism clearly belongs to the descriptive-scientific level. Hence, a charitable reconstruction of the Marxist tradition can retain the twofold distinction between the descriptive-scientific and the normative-political levels. I owe this clarification to the comment of an anonymous referee.

The descriptive-scientific project entails RE_t. According to the fundamental principle of the Marxian perspective of history, the dominant normative-ethical judgments in a society are part of the superstructure, which is explained, in the final analysis, by the economic base. The famous passage from the Preface of the *Contribution* states this clearly:

‘In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness’ (MECW 29: 263).

This principle has been central for the Marxian comprehension of ethics since the time of *The German Ideology*:

‘Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness’ (MECW 5: 36–37).

As it is clear from the passage above, morality is part of ideology and as such it is determined by material production. Therefore, making the ethical life of a given society fully intelligible presupposes showing how it is causally related to material production. Therefore, the latter explains the former. This is what we may call the explanatory reduction of ethics.

On the other hand, the normative-political dimension of Marxism entails OE_t. Assessing capitalist societies—or other class societies—as unjust presupposes a notion of an ethical standard which is in some sense objective. Young Marx’s work is based on the notion of alienation, which has a striking normative dimension. The capitalist societies are characterized by some form of ‘pathology’ (Thompson 2015) which demands the revolutionary remedy of a socialist transformation. But also, in Marx’s mature work, there is a plethora of normative or evaluative concepts. Let’s see a few examples from *Capital*:

‘The capitalistic *exploitation* of women and children has been so exhaustively depicted by F. Engels in his *Lage der Arbeitenden Klasse Englands*, and other writers, that I need only mention the subject in this place.

[...]

‘Along with the constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation,

grows the mass of *misery, oppression, slavery, degradation, exploitation*; but with this too grows the revolt of the working class, a class always increasing in numbers, and disciplined, united, organised by the very mechanism of the process of capitalist production itself' (MECW 35: 750 respectively, emphasis added).

At this point, one may object, as Allen Wood (2004) does, that 'Marx bases his critique of capitalism on the claim that it frustrates many important nonmoral goods: self-actualization, security, physical health, comfort, community, freedom'. In this sense, no appeal to the traditional notion of ethical objectivity—or similarly to any kind of ethical realism—is needed in order to reject capitalism and pursue socialism. However, I suggest that the 'nonmoral goods' interpretation is not compatible with the Marxist conception of historical progress. A few months after Marx's death, Friedrich Engels wrote in the Preface to the 1883 German Edition of the *Communist Manifesto*:

'[...] all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social development; that this struggle, however, has now reached a stage where the exploited and oppressed class (the proletariat) can no longer emancipate itself from the class which exploits and oppresses it (the bourgeoisie), without at the same time for ever freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression and class struggles—this basic thought belongs solely and exclusively to Marx' (Marx and Engels 2014: 197).

According to this passage, the emancipation of the working class is not solely emancipation of this class alone; it entails freeing the whole of society from exploitation, oppression, and class struggle. By freeing itself, the proletariat also frees the totality of society. This implies that this very act of emancipation is progressive, and not only from the standpoint of the working class's nonmoral needs. It is genuinely or universally progressive. This further implies that there are some kind of objective ethical standards according to which there is genuine progress in history. That is why, I think, there are many Marxist scholars (e.g., Cohen 1981; Boyd 1988; Peffer 1990) who argue that being Marxist entails a commitment to the objectivity of ethics, viz., to some version of ethical realism.¹⁰

To sum up, the descriptive-scientific dimension of Marxian thought entails RE_t , while the normative-political dimension entails OE_t . However, RE_t and OE_t are incompatible. If the content of morality is explanatorily reduced to the material conditions of a given society, then there is no logical room for the objectivity of ethics. The clearest way to show this incompatibility is, arguably, by taking into consideration Plato's Euthyphro dilemma:

¹⁰ Note that ethical or moral realism is considered here in the broadest possible sense. It does not entail only a robust version. For instance, it can include some version of 'procedural moral realism' (Korsgaard 1996). See next section.

‘Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?’ (*Euthyphro*: 10a).

OE_t goes for the first horn of the dilemma: the pious is loved by the gods because it is pious. Its piety is objective. OE_t is the philosophical assumption that there are objective moral standards, even if people may fail to grasp them or conform their behavior to them. RE_t goes for the second horn: it is pious because it is loved by the gods. What ‘makes’ it pious is the fact that gods take it to be such, that is, pious. Its piety is not objective. RE_t is the philosophical assumption that there are no objective moral truths. The latter are determined by the material conditions of every given society.¹¹ The dominant moral standards of a historical era just reflect the material conditions of the same period. Thus, there is no logical room for failing to grasp a moral truth. What makes it ‘truth’ is exactly the fact that people take it to be such, i.e., moral truth in a given society. And what makes people take it to be moral truth rests outside the ethical sphere. It is determined by the material conditions of the given society and hence it is explanatorily reduced to these conditions. It should be clear by now that RE_t and OE_t are not only incompatible; they are also diametrically opposed from an explanatory point of view.

I suggest that we should not understand the humanist controversy merely as a scholarly disagreement that exclusively concerns the philosophy of social science. The root of the controversy is the essential tension between two logically irreconcilable theses: RE_t and OE_t. However, it seems that both are entailed by two indispensable dimensions of the Marxian thought. The anti-humanists seem willing to abandon OE_t in order to preserve the scientific status of historical materialism, along with the view of the ‘epistemological unity’ of all sciences. On the contrary, the humanists are willing to retain OE_t by rejecting RE_t and by separating epistemologically or methodologically historical materialism from the natural sciences.

I shall come back to the available options for the Marxists in Sects. 5 and 6. But let me close this section by spotlighting a seemingly unimportant translational detail which is, I think, indicative of an essential philosophical tension within the Marxist tradition. In the original version of the *Manifesto*, in the first section, titled ‘Bourgeois and Proletarian’, there is the following passage:

‘We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange. Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political progress [entsprechenden politischen Fortschritt]’.

In 1888, Engels revised in common with Samuel Moore the English edition of the *Manifesto*, translated by the latter. The last part of the passage above was revised as follows: ‘[...] Each step in the development of the bourgeoisie was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of *that class* [entsprechenden politischen Fortschritt dieser Klasse, emphasis added]’. I suggest that the revision

¹¹ See a similar distinction in (Sayer, 2011: 3).

expresses—self-consciously or not, that’s irrelevant—the tension between RE_t and OE_t . The initial formulation reflects a universalist or unconditional conception of political progress which is compatible with OE_t . The revision, on the other hand, reflects a conditional or context-specific conception of progress which is entailed by RE_t .

4 Reason and Nature

The tension between RE_t and OE_t is necessary only within a specific conceptual space concerning (scientific) explanation: the conceptual framework that emerged after the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which caused the collapse of the dominant Aristotelian teleology. In the context of Aristotelian teleological metaphysics, on the contrary, such tension could not possibly be articulated.

4.1 The Aristotelian Teleology and the ‘Modern Scientific Worldview’

According to Aristotle (*Posterior Analytic*: 71b), scientific knowledge ($\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$) is equated with accounting for the causes which necessarily bring about a phenomenon. As it is well known, the Aristotelian conception of causality is completely different from the modern one. Aristotle’s causal theory is pluralistic, for it contains four kinds of causes: the material, the formal, the efficient, and the final cause (*Metaphysics*: 983a). What is important for my line of argument here is, of course, the final cause. In the pre-modern teleological conception of nature, explaining natural phenomena involves final causes. This entails a humanlike (or more precisely an organism-like) image of nature, according to which there is no metaphysical gap between phenomena (essentially) involving human rationality and other kinds of happenings in nature. The logical form of explanation is the same for all kinds of phenomena and final causes are an indispensable part of this logical machinery. This means that, within this conceptual framework, normativity is embedded in nature. In this sense, there is no tension between the objectivity of normative relations¹² and their scientific understanding. In other words, there is no tension between RE_t and OE_t .

The tension emerged when the metaphysical unity provided by the dominant Aristotelian teleology was rejected in the course of the major conceptual upheavals caused by the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The new Galilean physics that took their mature form in Newton’s work expelled purpose ($\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omicron\varsigma$) from nature. In other terms, the logical form of explanation favored by the new science of nature excluded final causes. Descartes (2008: §55) is very clear on this:

¹² Ethics, of course, is a subset of those relations.

‘I judge that the whole category of causes that people are in the habit of seeking by considering the purposes of things [final causes] is of no use in the study of physics.’¹³

The exclusion of final causes from the physical (or even natural) realm is what we often call the disenchantment of nature. As E.A. (Burt 2003: 89) points out:

‘Till the time of Galileo it had always been taken for granted that man and nature were both integral parts of a larger whole, in which man’s place was the more fundamental. Whatever distinctions might be made between being and non-being, between primary and secondary, man was regarded as fundamentally allied with the positive and the primary. In the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle this is obvious enough; the remark holds true none the less for the ancient materialists. [...] *Now, in the course of translating this distinction of primary and secondary into terms suited to the new mathematical interpretation of nature, we have the first stage in the reading of man quite out of the real and primary realm*’ (emphasis in original).

And,

‘This form of the primary-secondary doctrine in Galileo is worth a moment’s pause, for its effects in modern thought have been of incalculable importance. It is a fundamental step toward that *banishing of man from the great world of nature* and his treatment as an effect of what happens in the latter, which has been a pretty constant feature of the philosophy of modern science, a procedure enormously simplifying the field of science, but bringing in its train the big metaphysical and especially epistemological problems of modern philosophy’ (*Ibid.*, emphasis added).

Banishing man from nature, in this context, means nothing more than banishing the normative relations—and the underlying concept of human rationality—from the realm of nature. This entails a logical gap between the normative and the descriptive fields. The most characteristic and most radical expression of this gap has been attributed to David Hume. In the twentieth century, the idea that no ought-statement can be deduced from an is-statement has been called Hume’s Law¹⁴ (Hare 1977). Given the logical gap in question, it has created the conceptual space for the tension between RE_t and OE_t , as part of the central metaphysical problem of modernity: the relation between reason and nature.

¹³ According to Descartes, the reason is ‘that it could only be rash of [us] to investigate God’s purposes’. Despite the metaphysical justification, the point is that the new physical science excludes final causes from its logical armor.

¹⁴ Of course, there are also different interpretations of Hume’s view. For an alternative interpretation see (MacIntyre 1959) and more recently (Smith 2016). However, the correct exegesis of the Humean work is not the point here.

4.2 The Eliminativist Tendency

From the very beginning of the emergence of the new conceptual framework, there was also the emergence of an eliminativist perspective in dealing with the relation between reason and nature. The eliminativist view entails that every act of making things intelligible in normative terms should ‘be reconstructed out of conceptual materials whose home’ (McDowell 1996: xviii) is the empirical scientific understanding. It goes without saying that the latter is taken in its modern (value-free) sense. The programmatic idea is that making a phenomenon fully intelligible presupposes placing it in the “ordinary stream of explanation” (Turner 2010: 11), which is no other than the network of explanations employed by the empirical sciences. This entails the explanatory reduction of each and every act of making a phenomenon intelligible in normative terms to an act of making the same phenomenon intelligible in terms of the empirical-scientific understanding. And exactly because this attitude is programmatic, it entails that the normative content is *eliminable*, through its ongoing explanatory reduction to the empirical-scientific explanation. Finally, it entails that the normative content is not genuinely explanatory or objective. In short, the eliminativist view deals with the relation between reason and nature by (explanatorily) collapsing the former to the latter.

Also from the very beginning, this view was related to empiricism. The empiricist philosophers applied their eliminativist attitude first and foremost in ethics by revising the traditional terms ‘free will’ and ‘(practical) reason.’ According to Hobbes (1998: 140),

‘[...] from the use of the word free-will, no liberty can be inferred of the will, desire, or inclination, but the liberty of the man; which consisteth in this, that he finds no stop, in doing what he has the will, desire, or inclination to do.’

While according to the famous Humean aphorism:

‘We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’ (Hume 2007: 266).

While Hobbes’s and Hume’s metaethical conceptions have a lot of differences,¹⁵ their works serve as a source of aspiration for the philosophical tendency to reduce the realm of ethics to empirical-scientific understanding.

The eliminativist view didn’t restrict itself to ethics. In the twentieth century particularly, the naturalistic tendency was expanded in the domain of knowledge and especially in scientific knowledge. The milestone is, of course, Quine’s (1961, 1969) work. In general, we can notice a general ‘naturalized turn’ (Paller 1986) in the philosophy of science and the epistemology of the post-logical empiricism era. The naturalized turn aims to treat episodes of knowledge as mere natural

¹⁵ See (Korsgaard 1996: ch. 1, 2).

phenomena and to provide an empirical-scientific explanation for the historical course of science. As in the case of ethics, the normative content of these episodes is directly threatened by its programmatic explanatory reduction to empirical statements about contingent factors concerning the bearers of (scientific) knowledge. This kind of general eliminativist view in both knowledge and ethics is called scientific naturalism and it is taken to be (Rorty 2010: 57; Leiter 2006: 2; Kitcher 1992: 54) the dominant trend in contemporary analytic philosophy.

The naturalistic tendency is expressed in the philosophy of social science with the philosophical tenet of the methodological and explanatory unity of all sciences, regardless of their special subject matter, that is, regardless of whether they attempt to cognitively grasp human actions and beliefs, non-rational animals, or inanimate matter. The demand for methodological and explanatory unity was first formulated by the positivists of the nineteenth century and it culminated in the logical-positivist era. The most articulated logical-positivist conception about scientific explanation is the Deductive-Nomological model of Hempel and Oppenheim (1948). Hempel is also one of the most prominent representatives of the idea of unity among all of the sciences. With regard to history, he argues:

‘It is a rather widely held opinion that history, in contradistinction to the so-called physical sciences, is concerned with the description of particular events of the past rather than with the search for general laws which might govern those events. As a characterization of the type of problem in which some historians are mainly interested, this view probably can not be denied; as a statement of the theoretical function of general laws in scientific historical research, it is certainly *unacceptable*. [...] general laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences, that they form an indispensable instrument of historical research, and that they even constitute the common basis of various procedures which are often considered as characteristic of the social in contradistinction to the natural sciences.’

And,

‘[...] there is no difference [...] between history and the natural sciences: both can give an account of their subject-matter only in terms of general concepts, and history can “grasp the unique individuality” of its objects of study no more and no less than can physics or chemistry’ (Hempel 1965: 231 and 233 respectively, emphasis added)

One final remark is needed here. Sometimes within Marxist literature the naturalist attitude in the philosophy of social science is equated with positivism. While it is true that positivism is a form of naturalism in the philosophy of social science, the terms are not coextensive and hence not interchangeable. Naturalism is a broader term. Positivism is characterized by some core commitments like the regularity theory of causality and a monolithic nomological conception of scientific explanation. On the contrary, endorsing naturalism does not entail commitment to the Humean view on causality and explanation; it may coincide, for instance, with a causal-mechanical conception of explanation (e.g., Salmon

1984; Machamer et al. 2000). Furthermore, it does not entail a monolithic nomological conception of explanation for all sciences. Recently, there are plenty of approaches that are naturalistic but also defend some version of explanatory pluralism, viz. the idea that there is not a single type of scientific explanation (e.g., Mitchell 2012; Mantzavinos 2016). What makes them naturalistic is that they reject the assumption that there is a substantial gap or cleavage between the natural sciences on the one side and the social and human sciences on the other. Even though they detect differences in the explanatory patterns used by the various scientific disciplines, they don't take these differences to follow a clear-cut division between the world of human beings and the rest of the natural world. This is the main distinguishing feature of naturalism in the philosophy of social sciences: 'Naturalism [in philosophy of social sciences] may be defined as the thesis that there is (or can be) an essential unity of method between the natural and the social sciences' (Bhaskar 1998: 3).

4.3 Resisting Elimination

The philosophical resistance against the eliminativist tendencies took two main strands in the post-scientific revolution era: (a) the traditional rationalism and (b) the German idealism. Traditional rationalists attempted to rescue the autonomy and the objectivity of the normative realm by appealing either to a non-natural ontological territory (e.g., the Cartesian *res cogitans*) or to some kind of non-natural faculties like mental intuition. Traditional rationalists preserve a robust version of substantial moral realism. 'Substantive moral realism is the view that there are answers to moral questions *because* there are moral facts or truths, which those questions ask *about*' (Korsgaard 1996: 35, emphasis in original). Our capacity to grasp moral facts or truths is founded on faculties like mental intuition. This philosophical move secures the autonomy and hence the ineliminability of the normative realm. However, the appeal to metaphysically queer entities or faculties makes traditional rationalism incompatible and even hostile to naturalism.

Another strategy for avoiding the programmatic elimination of the normative realm, which is not—at least according to some interpretations—at odds with naturalism,¹⁶ is that undertaken by the German Idealists. Of course, there are huge differences among them, but we can say that one principal thought which all share is that reason, self-consciousness, and freedom are one (Rödl 2007). 'Being free is being subject to a causality of thought and, hence, is placing oneself under an order of reason' (Rödl 2007: 112). The idea that freedom and normativity springs from the reflective nature of the human mind¹⁷ begins, of course, with Kant, who famously uses the categorical imperative (Kant 1997, 2017) to demarcate the cases of genuine expression of (practical) reason, and therefore of freedom, from the

¹⁶ It is at odds with some versions of naturalism, that is, scientific naturalism, but not with naturalism per se. I will come back to the different versions of naturalism in Sect. 7.

¹⁷ '[R]eflective distance from our impulses makes it both possible and necessary to decide which ones we will act on: it forces us to act for reasons' (Korsgaard 1996: 113).

cases of acting by some psychological or other contingent factor. In this sense, Kant defends a procedural version of moral realism. ‘The procedural moral realist thinks that there are answers to moral questions *because* there are correct procedures for arriving at them’ (Korsgaard 1996: 36). This kind of moral realism received the charge of ‘empty formalism’ by Hegel. While Hegel (1995: 429–430) acknowledged that Kant’s moral theory represented progress with respect to the dominant ‘happiness theory’¹⁸ of his time and agreed that the unity of reason, freedom, and self-consciousness is the ground of the normative realm (Hegel 1991: §21), he argued that the Kantian account is formal and therefore it can only provide the identity of the will with itself and hence cannot provide the content of morality (Hegel 1995: 460–461). He also provided a historical and non-individualistic version of moral realism,¹⁹ which influenced Marx.

In the domain of the philosophy of social science, the anti-eliminativist (and additionally, the anti-naturalist) trend(s) took, in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the form of Hermeneutics. According to this view, the world of human beings is inherently meaningful and normative. Thus, the conceptual tools of the natural sciences cannot deal cognitively with it. There is an absolute gap between the natural (Naturwissenschaften) and the human (Geisteswissenschaften) sciences which is reflected in the different logical forms of intelligibility that they employ. The former only involves explanation (Erklären) of phenomena in terms of universal laws of nature (Bhaskar 1998: 19). The latter involves Verstehen (hermeneutic understanding from the “inside”)²⁰ (Macarthur 2010). Hermeneutic understanding is empathetic, which means that it presupposes ‘some kind of accurate simulation of another’s [subject] mental states and processes’ (Khalifa 2019: 283). This implies that the category of subject (or agent or human being) is indispensable for making the social world intelligible.

5 Marxist Options and Their Philosophical Costs

As we have already seen, the tension between RE_i and OE_i is the result of the dominant conception for scientific explanation in modernity (post-scientific revolution era). According to this conception, whatever is subject to cognitive appropriation by empirical science is value-free and whatever is not value-free (if there can be such a thing in nature) cannot be subject to cognitive appropriation by empirical science. However, this conceptual framework creates an antinomy for the Marxian thought:

Thesis: the Marxian social ontology (should) contain subjects (or agents or human beings).

Anti-thesis: the Marxian social ontology does (or should) not contain subjects (or agents or human beings).

¹⁸ Happiness theory is a version of naturalist-empiricist ethics.

¹⁹ For the details of the Hegelian account of normativity, see (Pippin 2008).

The thesis is compatible with OE_t , while the antithesis with RE_t . Dealing with the antinomy is not a foregone conclusion.

5.1 The Rejection of OE_t

Some Marxists conclude that the Marxian thought does not entail an objectivist conception about the normative content of ethics. They object to the ‘claim that Marx’s thought, and thus Marxism, has a moral component’ (Peffer 1990).

For instance, Hodges (1962, 1964) argues that, according to Marx, moral judgements should not count either as true or false.

‘Science of ethics resembles rather a system of social controls in which normative sanctions of right and wrong, including normative statements that are neither true nor false, function as part of a science of social engineering. Normative statements can increase the likelihood or unlikelihood of certain forms of behaviour, thereby leading to warranted prediction’ (Hodges 1964).

In short, Hodges suggests that Marxian metaethics is a version of noncognitivism. Skillen (1978), on the other hand, takes Marx to be an error-theorist (Mills 1994: 373–374). Error theory implies ‘that although most people in making moral judgements implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false’ (Mackie 1977). Finally, others (Fisk 1980; Lukes 1985) hold that Marx’s thought consists in a version of historical relativism. Ethical relativists, unlike non-cognitivists, believe that moral judgements can be true or false and, unlike error-theorists, that they are not all false. However, they take it that ‘moral judgments are true/false relative to class or the mode of production’ (Mills 1994: 374).

All of the above rejections of the genuineness of the normative realm, and hence the objectivity of morality, agree that ‘if a feeling of commitment to the moral point of view has the ultimate sources that Marx describes, it is bad evidence for the [universal or objective] validity of that commitment’ (Miller 1985: 44). Regardless of whether the moral judgments are considered as altogether false, not capable of being true (or false) or relative to a historical framework, this view rejects the universal validity of normative judgements. In this sense, it avoids the antinomy and allows the scientific understanding of morality. On the other hand, this view comes with some (interconnected) costs: (a) all evaluative judgements, and furthermore, every evaluative concept (e.g., exploitation) in the Marxian work, should be understood in a non-literal way; (b) the notion of historical progress is at stake. As we’ve already seen, this notion is an indispensable part of the Marxian work²⁰; (c) in relation to the previous point, the universal validity of every

²⁰ At this point, one may object that the notion of historical progress could be understood in a non-normative way. For instance, the Marxian conception of historical evolution has been compared to the Darwinian revolution. It is true that Marx (and Engels) showed admiration towards the Darwinian theory. However, it is doubtful that they saw a parallel between their own theory of history and the Darwinian theory of biological evolution. In a letter to Lavrov, Engels wrote: ‘Of Darwin’s doctrine, I accept the theory of evolution, but assume Darwin’s method of verification (STRUGGLE FOR LIFE, NATURAL SELECTION) to be merely a first, provisional, incomplete expression of a newly discovered fact [...] All that the Darwinian theory of the struggle for existence boils down to is an extrapolation from society to animate nature of Hobbes’ theory of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* and of the bourgeois-economic theory of competition together with the Malthusian theory of population’ (MECW 45: 106–108).

normative judgement—however undisputed—is also at stake. For instance, we cannot claim that the abolition of slavery is, strictly speaking, genuinely progressive.

5.2 The Rejection of Naturalism in the Philosophy of Social Science

Another option to avoid the above-mentioned antinomy is to reject (even a minimal version of) naturalism in the philosophy of social science. This implies supposing—in the way that Hermeneutics does—the existence of a methodological and epistemological gap between the disciplines which take as their subject matter the social world and the natural sciences. This is the Marxist Humanist view. This view is far from being without internal differences, but the unifying feature of this view is the rejection of naturalism in the philosophy of social science. For instance:

‘The fact that human beings are processual, that they develop within a functional context of systemic causes means that social organization and the channeling of individual development causes pathologies such as alienation and unfreedom. We need to grasp social facts in these terms, not as static entities of mere mechanisms. This is one reason that attempts to characterize Marx’s scientific and moral method in terms of contemporary philosophies of science become misleading and incorrect’ (Thompson 2015).

The common feature of contemporary philosophies of science is of course naturalism and this is exactly what is rejected by M. J. Thompson on the ground that human beings are processual. The justification for the rejection of naturalism is not the point here. Different humanist approaches may provide different philosophical grounds. The point is that all share the rejection of naturalism in the philosophy of social science by presupposing a logical gap or cleavage (Bhaskar 1998: 1) between the scientific understanding of the world of human beings and the scientific understanding of (the rest of) the natural world.

This view avoids the antinomy too. Furthermore, it is compatible with OE_t . However, it doesn’t come without philosophical worries or costs. The one thing that the Humanists need to answer is the origin of this gap in a way that shows respect to Marxian materialism. The fact that social sciences employ different logical form(s) of explanation than physics, for example, does not justify the presumed logical gap between the scientific understanding of the world of human beings and the scientific understanding of the natural world. There are a lot of contemporary accounts of scientific explanation (e.g., Mitchell 2009; Kaiser and Plenge 2014; Scholz 2014) which, while they acknowledge a plurality in logical forms of scientific explanation, do not suppose that those differences coincide with a clear-cut division between the world of human beings and the (rest of the) natural world. Moreover, they detect interesting affinities between explanations in history and biology. The other thing that this view must overcome is Marx’s naturalist conception about his own scientific perspective. A few words from the Preface of *Capital* are more than convincing about what we can retrospectively call his ‘naturalism’ in the philosophy of social science:

‘And even when a society has got upon the right track for the discovery of the *natural laws* of its movement—and it is the ultimate aim of this work, to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society—it can neither clear by bold leaps, nor remove by legal enactments, the obstacles offered by the successive phases of its normal development. But it can shorten and lessen the birth-pangs. To prevent possible misunderstanding, a word. I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense *couleur de rose*. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the *personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests*. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a *process of natural history*, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them’ (MECW 35: 10, emphasis added)

6 The Marxian Alternative

It seems, at this point, that the coherence of Marxian thought requires some kind of philosophical sacrifice. We have to sacrifice either the objectivity of ethics or the idea that historical materialism is a science proper, so to speak. Or, we can conclude that Marx was just incoherent (Acton 1955; Kamenka 1969; Boyd 1988) for he held both RE_t and OE_t .²¹ In what follows, I will argue that we don’t need to sacrifice either RE_t or OE_t and that, in addition, Marx was not incoherent. I suggest that (some of) the *Theses on Feuerbach*, if they are reconstructed properly, can create the appropriate logical space between scientific naturalism and supernaturalism or idealism. Creating this logical space requires the rejection of three interconnected philosophical presuppositions of scientific naturalism: (a) metaphysical empiricism, (b) God’s point of view and (c) methodological individualism. The rejection in question leads to a liberal naturalist conception, according to which there is no longer tension between RE_t and OE_t .

6.1 Naturalism Does Not Entail Metaphysical Empiricism

In the first thesis on Feuerbach, Marx detects and rejects the philosophical assumption that materialism—or naturalism²²—necessarily entails (metaphysical) empiricism:

‘1. The chief defect of all previous materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that things [*Gegenstand*], reality, sensuousness are conceived only in the form of the *object, or of contemplation* [or intuition (*Anschauung*)], but not as *sen-*

²¹ Of course, this conclusion absolves no one from dealing with this putative incoherence.

²² For the purposes of the attempted reconstruction of the Marxian perspective I shall use the terms ‘materialism’ and ‘naturalism’ as interchangeable. They are not interchangeable per se, but they are, I think, for the purposes of my line of argument.

suos human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active* side was set forth abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective* activity. In *Das Wesen des Christenthums*, he therefore regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance. Hence he does not grasp the significance of “revolutionary”, of “practical-critical”, activity’ (MECW 5: 3).

Marx explicitly recognizes as the chief defect of all previous variations of naturalism that took for granted empiricism. In other words, the ‘previous’ naturalists took for granted the idea that reality (or nature) is equated with the subject matter of the empirical knowledge (‘are conceived only in the form of the object, or of contemplation (*Anschauung*)’). This philosophical stance excludes by definition human subjectivity from reality (‘but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively’). Thus, subjectivity was left in the philosophical jurisdiction of idealism. However, the latter cannot but treat the former abstractly.²³ Furthermore, Marx charges Feuerbach with nominalism (‘wants sensuous objects, really distinct from conceptual objects’). The result is that the Feuerbachian perspective takes the distinctively human feature (*differentia specifica* i.e., rationality)²⁴ as being exhausted in the theoretical attitude, i.e., knowledge. Human action, on the contrary, is stripped of its normative (rational) content. By taking for granted empiricism and *a fortiori* nominalism, Feuerbachian naturalism leads to an eliminativist perspective on ethics.

The same philosophical diagnosis about the Feuerbachian identification of naturalism and empiricism is repeated in the fifth thesis:

‘5. Feuerbach, not satisfied with abstract thinking, wants [sensuous] contemplation [or intuition (*Anschauung*)]; but he does not conceive sensuousness as practical, human-sensuous activity’ (MECW 5: 4).

Marx suggests that naturalism, *qua* naturalism, does not entail an eliminativist perspective on normativity. What leads to the programmatic elimination of the

²³ It is possible that Marx repeats here the accusation of ‘empty formalism’ against the idealist conceptions of human agency. This accusation is directed against the Kantian account, and it is possible that Marx took the latter as the paradigmatic form of the idealist accounts of subjectivity.

²⁴ I take for granted that human essence or nature is conceptually tied to the notion of rationality as the *differentia specifica* of human beings, viz. what makes them rational animals. Marx does not explicitly make this conceptual tie. However, there is plenty of textual evidence which indicates this conceptual relation. For reasons of brevity, I will choose the famous passage from *Capital*: ‘We presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. [...] But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality [...] He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also *realizes a purpose* of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will’ (MECW 35: 188, emphasis added). The idea of the realization of a purpose of one’s own which also gives law to one’s *modus operandi* is very close, if not identical, to the idea of rationality in German Idealism. Of course, this idea, in the Marxian (naturalist) framework, is necessarily modified. But this is a topic for another paper.

normative realm is empiricism. ‘Marx maintains that all hitherto existing materialism failed, as it conceived of material reality merely as an object of intuition, not as human activity. That is, existing materialism is flawed by being empiricist’ (Rödl 2007: 14). Empiricist naturalism is necessarily eliminativist because it equates the realm of nature (or reality) with the subject matter of the empirical scientific understanding.²⁵ As we saw in Sect. 4, in the post-scientific revolution era final causes are not part of the logical arsenal of the empirical sciences and hence their subject matter is deprived of normativity. Therefore, equating nature with the subject matter of the empirical sciences leads necessarily to the exclusion of the normative content from nature.

One clarification is required at this point. Empiricism here should not be conflated with the epistemological view regarding the origins, methods, and boundaries of knowledge. Epistemological empiricism claims that all knowledge springs from experience and is defined in contrast to rationalism. The empiricism which Marx identifies as the flaw of old materialism is a metaphysical or ontological doctrine, as it implies what exists in general. According to metaphysical empiricism, only that which can be the subject matter of empirical knowledge exists. Under this view, only things that can be known empirically are considered part of the world’s furniture.²⁶ Given that the world is equated with nature (naturalism), the latter is also equated with the subject matter of empirical knowledge (metaphysical empiricism). Naturalism or materialism, in Marx’s terms, along with metaphysical empiricism, leads to eliminative scientism,²⁷ i.e., the doctrine that human subjectivity as the locus of normative relations is not real.

The rejection of the identification of naturalism with empiricism entails the rejection of the idea that nature and the subject matter of the empirical sciences are co-extensive notions. This, in turn, means that empirical-scientific understanding is not the only genuine way of making things intelligible in nature. There is also a kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason. The contradistinction between the two ways of making things intelligible is described by Wilfrid (Sellars 1997: §36) in the following passage:

²⁵ John McDowell (1996: 77) makes the same philosophical diagnosis 150 years latter. According to McDowell, bald (that is, eliminativist) naturalism equates the realm of nature with the realm of (natural) law, viz. the subject matter of the natural sciences.

²⁶ The critique of metaphysical empiricism is not my main focus here. I simply aim to emphasize that Marx identified this metaphysical doctrine as a flaw of old materialism. However, a brief critical observation on this perspective would be that it succumbs to what Roy Bashkar calls ‘epistemic fallacy’: ‘the view that statements about being can be reduced to or analysed in terms of statements about knowledge; i.e. that ontological questions can always be transposed into epistemological terms’ (Bhaskar 2008: 26).

²⁷ Note that someone could embrace the eliminative aspiration of scientism without being an epistemological empiricist. One could hold a non-empiricist theory of how empirical knowledge is acquired, yet still equate nature with the subject matter of empirical knowledge; in other words, they could be metaphysical empiricists. For instance, Althusser follows Gaston Bachelard in a historicist version of neo-Kantianism (see Bachelard 2003: 2005). In this sense, he is an opponent of epistemological empiricism. However, his anti-humanism is a version of scientism and hence of metaphysical empiricism. I owe this elucidation to the critical comments of an anonymous referee.

‘[...] in characterizing an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says (emphasis in the original).’²⁸

Placing things in the logical space of reasons does not entail the appeal to any queer faculty like mental intuition. In this sense, it does not violate naturalism. It only rejects the equation of the latter with empiricism. As I have already said, the principal thought of German Idealism²⁹ is the idea that freedom, reason, and self-consciousness are one. In Sebastian Rödl’s (2007: 56) words, ‘In the acting subject, reasoning toward and explaining the action are one act of the mind’.³⁰ This is also an idea that we can find in contemporary analytic philosophy starting with Anscombe’s (2000) famous notion of ‘knowledge without observation’.³¹

I suggest that the first and fifth theses on Feuerbach show exactly that Marx too is an adherent of this idea. The point of these theses is that identifying naturalism with metaphysical empiricism makes the former ‘blind’ to normative facts. Naturalism is not eliminativist per se, it becomes so when it is—implicitly—taken to be inherently empiricist. The further consequence of this identification is that only the theoretical attitude is recognized as distinctively human, i.e., as rational. In short, rational animals (i.e., human beings) are distinguished from other animals exclusively on the grounds of their capacity to know; not on the grounds of their capacity to act (‘practice is conceived and defined only in its dirty-Jewish form of appearance’). This brings us to Marx’s second point of criticism against scientific naturalism.

6.2 God’s Point of View is Untenable

The viewpoint of an external observer is an indispensable precondition of the eliminativist perspective. In the third thesis Marx points out:

‘3. The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that the educator must himself be educated. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change can be conceived and

²⁸ The same goes for the episodes of intentional action insofar as they are considered as such, that is, as episodes of intentional actions and therefore expressions of human rationality. The point is to distinguish between two kinds of making things intelligible. The particular domain of application of the different kinds of intelligibility (i.e., knowledge, action, etc.) is not relevant here.

²⁹ This tradition, and especially the Hegelian philosophy, influenced Marx’s thought in multiple ways.

³⁰ The same goes for the knowing subject. In the knowing subject, reasoning toward and explaining the belief are one act of the mind.

³¹ John McDowell (2010) and Christine Korsgaard (2009: 120), despite the significant differences between their accounts, are two more examples of contemporary analytic philosophers who exploit the idea that the autonomy of the normative realm (i.e., the autonomy of reason) is grounded in the capacity for self-consciousness.

rationally understood only as *revolutionary practice*' (MECW 5: 4, emphasis in the original).

Many scholars, such as E.P. Thompson (see Sect. 2), take this thesis primarily as an indication that Marx acknowledges the existence of some creatures (human beings) that are characterized by a strange or idiosyncratic causal efficacy. And this is the ground for suggesting that Marx adopts an anti-naturalist philosophy of social science. But I don't think that this is the point here.

The crucial part of this thesis is the second sentence: 'This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society'. The point is that the 'materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing', in other words, all previous (eliminative) naturalism, presupposes a division of society between those who observe (the superior part) and those who are observed. Only from the viewpoint of such division are human beings passive products of the circumstances and the (received) education. However, this is an external viewpoint, a standpoint which is often called God's point of view or, in Thomas Nagel's (1986) terms 'view from nowhere'.

Presupposing God's point of view, a transcendent standpoint external to the observed society, that is, an epistemically privileged standpoint, is an indispensable presupposition of eliminativist naturalism.³² The standpoint is external in the following sense: it is not affected by the very act of scientifically understanding society. In this sense, it can assume the elimination of normative content through the gradual explanatory reduction of the latter to the domain of empirical-scientific understanding.

Let me clarify this last point with a very brief example. Think of someone (let's say V) who does not have sex because she thinks that premarital intercourse is morally wrong. Suppose now that someone else (let's say S), a social or behavioral scientist, studies her behavior and concludes that V's beliefs concerning premarital intercourse are the result of a set of causal (psychological and/or sociological factors). This is an ordinary act of explanatory reduction: a normative attitude (against premarital intercourse) is explanatorily reduced to the factors that cause this very attitude. The eliminative naturalist believes that this act of explanatory reduction can be performed for every phenomenon (provisionally) understood in normative terms. Hence, she believes that the normative content is eliminable. Each and every act of making a phenomenon intelligible in normative terms can be gradually (explanatorily) reduced to an act of making the same phenomenon intelligible in terms of empirical-scientific understanding. To reiterate, the programmatic claim is that every aspect of V's thinking and behavior can be explained in terms of empirical scientific understanding. At this point, let's think of a slightly different scenario. Let's suppose that it is not S but V herself who realizes—with the aid of sociological or psychological knowledge—that it was a set of causal factors which determined her attitude against premarital intercourse. In this case, the normative content concerning premarital intercourse is not eliminated. It is just modified in light of the

³² For a more detailed argument in favor of this conclusion, see Dimitrakos (2020).

new evidence about what brought about her previous moral convictions on premarital intercourse.

The philosophical image which allows (and furthermore demands) the elimination of normative content presupposes an external, or God's point of view, which is not affected by any act of explanatory reduction of a normative fact³³ to the network of explanations of empirical scientific understanding. I think that this is the point of Marx's remark about the division of the society into two parts where one of them is superior. The superior part allegedly embraces God's standpoint concerning society, the standpoint of an external observer. Moreover, the point of the same thesis is that a standpoint like that is untenable, and it should not be presupposed especially by a philosophical perspective which takes itself as naturalistic.

6.3 The Rejection of Individualism

The empiricist viewpoint of external observers brings us to the third presupposition of eliminative naturalism: Methodological individualism. Marx detects the inherently individualistic perspective of the old materialism in the ninth and the tenth theses:

'9. The highest point reached by contemplative materialism, that is, materialism which does not comprehend sensuousness as practical activity, is the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society.

'10. The standpoint of the old materialism is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or social humanity' (MECW 5: 5).

In the ninth and the tenth theses, Marx argues that empiricist naturalism ('contemplative materialism') entails methodological individualism ('the contemplation of single individuals and of civil society'). In other words, empiricist naturalism cannot but conceive society as a sum total of individuals. In this view, individuals—as observable—are methodologically or epistemologically primary while social relations are secondary. The latter are made intelligible only as derivatives of the intrinsic features of the former. In this sense, individuals are conceived independently of their social relations. On the contrary, social relations are conceived as derivatives of the private goals of individuals.³⁴

This view, in turn, entails an ahistorical conception of human nature:

6. Feuerbach resolves the essence of religion into the essence of *man*. But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In reality it is the ensemble of social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is hence obliged:

³³ A fact made intelligible in normative terms.

³⁴ This individualistic perspective is later—in *Grundrisse*—eloquently called 'Robinsonads' by Marx (MECW 28: 188).

1. To abstract from the historical process and to define the religious sentiment [*Gemüt*] by itself, and to presuppose an abstract—*isolated*—human individual.
2. Essence, therefore, can be regarded only as “species”, as an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals *in a natural way*.
7. Feuerbach, consequently, does not see that the “religious sentiment” is itself a social product, and that the abstract individual which he analyzes belongs to a particular form of society (MECW 5: 4–5, emphasis in the original).

Both the sixth and the seventh theses stress that Feuerbach’s contemplative materialism is incapable of realizing that the essence of man—that is, what is distinctively human (i.e., rationality)—‘is no abstraction inherent in each single individual’. Marx objects that the essence of human being is equated with ‘the ensemble of the social relations’ and therefore individuals are shaped by the social context of each historical era. This is a clear expression of holism.

In short, Marx rejects the idea that the *differentia specifica* of human being is something that can be determined through abstraction, that is, through the cognitive process of forming concepts by identifying common features among a group of observable individuals. It is not a property like two-footedness, for example. Furthermore, he rejects the idea that the *differentia specifica* is a transhistorical feature that is found in the ‘isolated’ human individual. On the contrary, he takes it that what is distinctively human (i.e., rationality) is transformed according to the historical transformations of the social framework. In this sense, the ‘abstract individuals’ are a ‘social product’ (methodological holism) and not vice versa. This view, which is clearly influenced by Hegelian historicism,³⁵ creates the logical spaces for adopting a notion of progress in human history. History is not the succession of (ethically) incommensurable social frameworks but the domain of the ongoing expansion of human rationality.

In concluding, I want to make clear that the rejection of individualism occurs on two distinct levels. The first level is concerned with the acquisition of empirical knowledge about societies and is associated with Marx’s later work (*Grundrisse* and *Capital*), which also dismisses methodological individualism (‘Robinsonads’). This entails that the empirical understanding of society as a whole can only be achieved by observing its parts, i.e., the individuals. In Marx’s methodological holism, conversely, comprehending the behavior of individuals presupposes knowledge of the function of society as a whole. The second level concerns the essence of man or what is unique to human beings, namely rationality. Rejecting individualism on this level implies that rationality is not a capacity inherent in the isolated individual human being, as in the case of the Kantian transcendental subject, for instance. Rationality is a notion that presupposes social relations and institutions, which are expressions of those relations, and therefore, its content has a historical dimension. In short, the first level belongs the philosophy of social sciences and the second to

³⁵ And by his conception of rationality which emphasizes its recognitive status and its institutional character (Pippin 2008: 13).

metaethics. The rejection of individualism on both levels,³⁶ along with the rejection of metaphysical empiricism, creates the necessary logical ground for establishing a collectivist and historicized conception of human being (i.e. of rationality).

7 Marx as Liberal Naturalist and the Dissolution of the Controversy

It is quite unequivocal that Marx's aspiration was to find a middle ground between old or vulgar materialism and idealism. This aspiration is, of course, very common to its followers.³⁷ I suggest that Marx made a serious attempt to flesh out the intermediate position between 'all previous materialism' and idealism in the fragmentary text of the *Theses on Feuerbach*. What creates the logical space for the intermediate position is the rejection of three presuppositions of previous materialism: empiricism, the possibility of God's point of view, and individualism. The three theses combined and taken as inherent to naturalism commit the latter to its eliminative (or scientific) version.³⁸

7.1 Sorts of Naturalism

Scientific naturalists claim that metaphysical naturalism (Risjord 2014: 9), viz. the view that the human mind is part of the natural world, necessarily entails epistemological or methodological naturalism, viz. the view that empirical-scientific understanding is the only legitimate way of making things in the natural world intelligible. Briefly put, they take for granted metaphysical empiricism. Furthermore, they suggest that metaphysical naturalism entails meta-philosophical naturalism (Risjord 2016: 2), viz. the view that philosophy is continuous with the empirical sciences.

³⁶ The distinction between these two levels of individualism and also the connection with metaphysical empiricism is crucial because one can reject methodological individualism in the philosophy of social sciences without necessarily adopting a collectivist and historicized conception of rationality as the *differentia specifica* of human beings. This conception presupposes the rejection of individualism at both levels, as well as the rejection of metaphysical empiricism. For example, Althusser rejects methodological individualism in the philosophy of social sciences. However, since he does not reject scientism (i.e., metaphysical empiricism), he also expells the notion of human being from the Marxist theory. He cannot arrive at a collectivist and historicized conception of rationality as the one that I described. What blocks this possibility, in his case, is not individualism but metaphysical empiricism and its eliminative implications with regard to normative relations (i.e., rationality).

³⁷ As Bhaskar (1998: 71–72, emphasis in original) stresses 'Marxists have long recognized two errors: idealism, dislocation of a superstructure from the base (or the totality); and *reductionism* (or economism), reduction of a superstructure to a mechanical effect or epiphenomenon of the base (or to an expression of the totality). Reductionism is another name for vulgar materialism which leaves no room for human subjectivity or agency.

³⁸ The combination of the three theses is a sufficient condition for adopting the eliminative version of naturalism, but not necessary. As we saw in the case of Althusser, this version can be achieved without adopting methodological individualism. Therefore, metaphysical empiricism and God's point of view form the necessary condition for eliminative naturalism. Historically, the combination of all three aforementioned theses is a characteristic feature of naturalists who are also epistemological empiricists (e.g. J.S. Mill).

By shedding light on the philosophical presuppositions of the scientific version of naturalism (or old materialism in his terminology), Marx shows that naturalism *qua* naturalism does not entail the eliminability of normative content. The reason is that not all versions of naturalism take the empirical-scientific understanding as the only legitimate way of making things in the natural world intelligible. Only the versions which take for granted metaphysical empiricism do that. Moreover, by rejecting the presuppositions in question he adopts a perspective that nowadays is called ‘liberal naturalism’. The principal idea of liberal naturalism is that ‘[t]here is no implication that concepts of the natural are restricted to concepts that subserve the mode of intelligibility [that belong to the empirical-scientific understanding]’ (McDowell 2009: 262). Placing actions or beliefs in the logical space of reasons is a genuine, which means, explanatorily ineliminable, way of making things intelligible.

7.2 Dissolving the Controversy: Two Modes of Intelligibility

Marx’s liberal naturalism can lead to the dissolution of the humanist controversy. We don’t need to choose between RE_t and OE_t . The controversy is articulated on the grounds of a common premise that both humanists and anti-humanists share: the Marxian perspective on human society and its history is exhausted to a single logical mode of intelligibility. Given this premise, humanists reject naturalism in the philosophy of social sciences and they preserve the concept of subject in their social ontology. This is the only way to preserve OE_t . On the other hand, anti-humanists retain naturalism in the philosophy of social science and therefore RE_t . Hence, they get rid of the concept of subject from their social ontology. Given the shared premise, though, they have to abandon OE_t . Liberal naturalism aims exactly at the rejection of the common premise. The Marxian perspective is not restricted to a single logical mode of making things in the social world intelligible. On the contrary, it can include both a kind of intelligibility which belongs to empirical-scientific understanding and another which is proper to reason.

If this is the case, we can argue that anti-humanists are right when they say that Marx managed to inaugurate a novel science of human history when he got rid of the concept of man. But he got rid of the concept of man only as far as concerns the mode of intelligibility which belongs to empirical-scientific understanding. This does not mean that he abandoned the notion of man (human being, subject, agent, etc.) altogether. The concept of human being is part of the kind of intelligibility which is proper to reason. By rejecting the shared premise, as the result of the rejection of the philosophical presuppositions of scientific naturalism, we can reconcile the scientific understanding of human history and the possibility of the explanatory reduction of morality with the objectivity of ethics and the notion of genuine progress of history. Of course, this reconciliation requires additional philosophical work. It needs a positive account which explains how the two modes of intelligibility are related. However, the precondition for the reconciliation in question is liberal naturalism, that is, the philosophical conviction that we can employ two rather than one mode of intelligibility in the process of understanding the social world and its history.

7.3 An Alternative Strategy

As I have already stressed, Marxists face a distinctive philosophical challenge in reconciling REt and OEt. However, most of them, if not all, believe that “[t]hrough he is often accused of determinism, it seems that for Marx both structure and agency matter” (Dave Elder-Vass 2010: 3), with ‘structure’ denoting a set of causal relations grasped through empirical knowledge, and ‘agency’ referring to human subjectivity. The humanist controversy reveals two diametrically opposed strategies for resolving the tension between REt and OEt. However, these are not the only strategies for addressing the antinomy in the Marxist thought (see Sect. 5 above).

Another alternative is to resolve the conflict between eliminative naturalism and anti-naturalism exclusively in the domain of the philosophy of social science. Roy Bhaskar follows this strategy. He argues that “human sciences can be sciences in exactly the same sense, though not in exactly the same way, as the natural ones” (Bhaskar 1998: 174). He considers reasons to be “analogous to the causal structures of nature” and recognizes the possibility of empirical knowledge of them (Bhaskar 1998: 91). In his view, reasons cannot be reduced to other kinds of causal relations, thus rendering agency ineliminable. On the other hand, reasons can be empirically known as any other aspect of empirical reality. Therefore, he finds a middle way between hermeneutics (anti-naturalism) and positivism (naturalism) within the domain of the philosophy of social sciences.

It is not my intention to assess Bhaskar’s account here. I mention it as a characteristic example of a specific kind of philosophical strategy to resolve the tension between REt and OEt. My intention is to elucidate my account by showing how it diverges from Bhaskar’s. If my reconstruction of the Marxian theses on Feuerbach is coherent, the tension is resolved without seeking a middle way between positivism and hermeneutics in the domain of the philosophy of social sciences. Even if we take for granted the crudest positivist view³⁹ of the social sciences, this cannot threaten the autonomy of ethics. Given that we acknowledge two genuine kinds of intelligibility, one corresponding to the empirical-scientific understanding and one that is proper to reason, we can defend naturalism in the philosophy of social sciences and the autonomy of the normative realm in metaethics or in philosophy of mind, at the same time. Bhaskar aims to find a solution within the domain of the philosophy of social sciences, which is why he presents reasons as ordinary causal structures that can be known empirically. Perhaps this is not irrelevant to his view that Marxists have a special claim ‘to be able to grasp social life as a totality, to display it, in Labriola’s words, as ‘a connection and complexus’” (Bhaskar 1998: 47). In my view, Marxists or other social theorists do not have to form one single theory about everything in the social world. Making things in human societies intelligible requires both empirical theories and placing actions and beliefs in the space of reasons. Presenting reasons as the subject matter of empirical knowledge is against the

³⁹ I am not implying that we should adopt a positivist view. Bhaskar (1998) presents convincing arguments against it, as Elder-Vass (2010) and many non-Marxist accounts in contemporary philosophy of social sciences do. I’m presenting this hypothetical case to clarify my point.

first and the fifth theses on Feuerbach, as I have reconstructed them here, i.e., as a rejection of metaphysical empiricism.

7.4 Social Sciences as Constitutive of Our Freedom

Given the rejection of God's point of view, the empirical knowledge provided by social sciences cannot threaten our moral autonomy. Acts of explanatory reduction, like the one in our example (Sect. 6.2), do not lead to the programmatic elimination of the space of reasons and hence of the normative relations. Let's return to V's case. Acquiring sociological or psychological knowledge can reveal that her belief about premarital intercourse is not actually justified. It was only seemingly justified that premarital intercourse is morally wrong, and this belief was the effect of various sociological and psychological causes. But the possibility of empirical knowledge of those causes does not restrict her freedom nor excuse her from the reflective scrutiny of what actually constitutes a reason for acting or believing with respect to sexual behavior. On the contrary, the empirical knowledge that she acquired about herself made her freer, as it has enriched her space of reasons in an important sense: If the act of explanatory reduction is correct, her re-organized space of reasons contains a few more justificatory relations that prevent her from making a mistake about what is morally right or wrong about sexual behavior. During reflective scrutiny about what is a reason for acting in a particular way, taking into consideration the sociological or psychological knowledge about her condition, can prevent her from uncritically believing that her action (e.g., abstaining from premarital intercourse) is justified. Thus, embracing the cognitive content of the act of reduction enriches the space of reason because it leads to what we may call the *restriction of the possibility of normative error*.⁴⁰

In short, if we reject God's point of view along with metaphysical empiricism—as I claimed Marx does—then social sciences cease to appear threatening for our freedom and consequently for our moral autonomy. They are, in fact, constitutive of our freedom since they can assist us in taking control of our lives by identifying the cases when we do not have control of it. This idea is expressed, but without proper philosophical foundation, in Friedrich Engels' following words:

Freedom does not consist in any dreamt-of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws, and in the possibility this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and to those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves [...] Freedom therefore consists in the control over ourselves and over external nature, a control founded on

⁴⁰ Of course, V may never have at her disposal the result of this inquiry. But this is just a contingent issue. My point is that human beings can, in principle, be aware of the acts of reduction of a normative explanation to a set of empirical-scientific explanations. For further elaboration on this specific matter, see my XXX.blind review. 2020; forthcoming.

knowledge of natural necessity; it is therefore necessarily a product of historical development (MECW 25: 105–106)

I suggest that the reconstruction of the Marxian theses on Feuerbach can provide the elaboration and proper philosophical foundation for this idea.

8 Conclusions

In what preceded, I attempted to reconstruct a Marxian response on the question of whether social sciences constitute a philosophical threat to the autonomy of ethics. In order to do that, I examined the humanist controversy which, I take it, springs from the same philosophical anxiety, that between the scientific comprehension of human actions and beliefs and the objectivity or autonomy of the normative realm. The anxiety is the result of the major metaphysical gap between reason and nature. I argued that the Marxian work provides valuable philosophical insights to create the logical space which dissolves the philosophical anxiety in question. In particular, the logical space is created if we reject metaphysical empiricism, the possibility of God's point of view, and individualism as inherent presuppositions of naturalism. This leads to the option of a liberal naturalist framework which acknowledges the genuineness of the kind of intelligibility that is proper to reason. In this framework, the possibility of proper scientific understanding of the social world does not entail the eliminability of the normative realm. In this sense, the Marxian response to whether the social sciences constitute a threat to the autonomy of ethics is, in principle, negative.

One final remark is needed here. I said that the Marxian response is negative in principle. The reason is that it is far from being completed. While Marx's rejection of the three presuppositions of scientific naturalism is a precondition for constructing the liberal naturalist framework, there are open philosophical questions concerning the relation between the two distinct kinds of intelligibility which are acknowledged as genuine. Some of the questions which demand a reply are the following: (1) What version of ethical realism is compatible with a naturalist approach in the philosophy of social science? (2) Conversely, what version of naturalism in the philosophy of social science is compatible with the autonomy of the normative realm? (3) What version of historicism is compatible with ethical realism? The replies to these questions are neither self-evident nor easy, and they may lead to different and competitive accounts. Furthermore, there is a relation of, let me say, underdetermination between the general liberal naturalist framework and the more concrete ethical accounts. In other words, more than one version of ethical realism can be compatible with the Marxian rejection of eliminative naturalism. For instance, it seems to me that a neo-Aristotelian view that appeals to human nature (Sayer 2011), a Hegelian view that appeals to the notion of practical crisis (Pippin 2008), or even a Deweyan pragmatic view (Gregoratto et al. 2022) can all be compatible with the Marxian liberal naturalism. Despite the necessarily incomplete character of the (reconstructed) Marxian response that I presented here, I claim that it can offer valuable insights into the contemporary discussion concerning the varieties of naturalism.

Acknowledgements The research project is implemented in the framework of H.F.R.I call “Basic research Financing (Horizontal support of all Sciences)” under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan “Greece 2.0” funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU (H.F.R.I. Project Number: 16362).

Funding Open access funding provided by HEAL-Link Greece.

Declarations

Conflict of interest I have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article’s Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article’s Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

References

- Acton, H.B. 1955. *The Illusion of the Epoch: Marxism-Leninism as a Philosophical Creed*. London: Cohen & West.
- Althusser, Louis. 1976. *Essays in Self-Criticism*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press.
- Althusser, Louis. 2003. *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings, 1966-67*. London/New York: Verso.
- Althusser, Louis. 2005. *For Marx*. London/New York: Verso.
- Anscombe, G.E.M. 2000. *Intention*, 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press.
- Aristotle. 1933. *Metaphysics*, vol. 1. London: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library.
- Aristotle. 1960. *Posterior Analytics*. London: Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 2003. *Le Nouvel Esprit Scientifique*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 2004. *La Formation de l’esprit Scientifique: Contribution à Une Psychanalyse de La Connaissance*. Bibliothèque Des Textes Philosophiques. Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin (1er ed. 1934).
- Bachelard, Gaston. 2005. *La Philosophie Du Non : Essai d’une Philosophie Du Nouvel Esprit Scientifique*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Bhaskar, Roy. 1998. *The Possibility of Naturalism: A Philosophical Critique of the Contemporary Human Sciences*. London: Routledge.
- Bhaskar, Roy. 2008. *A Realist Theory of Science*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203090732>.
- Boyd, Richard. 1988. How to Be a Moral Realist. In *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. G. Sayre-McCord, 181–228. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Burt, Edwin Arthur. 2003. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*. Mineola/New York: Dover Publications.
- Caro, Mario de, and David Macarthur. 2010. Introduction: Science, Naturalism, and the Problem of Normativity. In *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Mario de Caro and David Macarthur, 1–19. New York: Columbia University Press. https://scholar.google.com.sg/citations?view_op=view_citation&hl=th&user=pqJVDt8AAAAJ&citation_for_view=pqJVDt8AAAAJ:TQgYirikUcIc.
- Cohen, G.A. 1981. Freedom, Justice and Capitalism. *New Left Review* 126: 3–16.
- Descartes, René. 2008. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dimitrakos, T. 2020. Integrating First and Second Nature: Rethinking John McDowell’s Liberal Naturalism. *Philosophical Inquiries*. <https://doi.org/10.4454/philing.v8i1.216>.

- Dimitrakos, T. (forthcoming), Historicizing Second Nature: The Consequences for the Is/Ought Gap, in M. Trajkovski and E. McWilliams (eds), *Normativity and Normativity of Art, Belgrade*: University of Belgrade.
- Elder-Vass, Dave. 2010. *The Causal Power of Social Structures: Emergence, Structure and Agency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Engels, F., and K.H. Marx. 1887. Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Collected Works, vol. 25. Frederick Engels: Anti-Dühring, Dialectics of Nature. International Publishers. <https://books.google.gr/books?id=QE44xQEACAAJ>.
- Fisk, Milton. 1980. *Ethics and Society: A Marxist Interpretation of Value*. Eweb:31398. New York: New York University Press.
- Gregoratto, Federica, Heikki Ikäheimo, Emmanuel Renault, Arvi Särkelä, and Italo Testa. 2022. Critical Naturalism: A Manifesto. *Krisis | Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 42(1): 108–124. <https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.42.1.38637>.
- Hare, R.M. 1977. *Freedom and Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1991. *Hegel: Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Ed. Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. 1995. *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3. Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Hempel, Carl G. 1965. The Function of General Laws in History. In *Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, 231–244. New York: Free Press.
- Hempel, Carl G., and Paul Oppenheim. 1948. Studies in the Logic of Explanation. *Philosophy of Science* 15(2): 135–175. <https://doi.org/10.1086/286983>.
- Hobbes, Thomas. 1998. *Leviathan*. Ed. J.C.A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hodges, Donald Clark. 1962. Historical Materialism in Ethics. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23(1): 1.
- Hodges, Donald Clark. 1964. Marxist Ethics and Ethical Theory. *Socialist Register* 1(1): 227–241.
- Hume, David. 2007. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton, vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Kaiser, Marie I., and Daniel Plenge. 2014. Introduction: Points of Contact Between Biology and History. In *Explanation in the Special Science: The Case of Biology and History*, ed. Marie I. Kaiser, Oliver Scholz, Daniel Plenge, and Andreas Hüttemann. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Kamenka, Eugene. 1969. *Marxism and Ethics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-00592-5>.
- Kant, Immanuel. 1997. *Immanuel Kant: Critique of Practical Reason*. Ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. 2017. *The Metaphysics of Morals*. Ed. Lara Lara Denis, Denis, Agnes Scott College, and Decatur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Khalifa, Kareem. 2019. Is Verstehen Scientific Understanding? *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 49(4): 282–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0048393119847104>.
- Kitcher, Philip. 1992. The Naturalists Return. *The Philosophical Review* 101(1): 53–114. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185044>.
- Korsgaard, Christine. 1996. *The Sources of Normativity. Dialogue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (CUP).
- Korsgaard, Christine M. 2009. *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Leiter, B. 2006. Introduction. In *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. B. Leiter, 1–24. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Lukács, Georg. 1971. *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Lukes, Steven. 1985. *Marxism and Morality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Macarthur, David. 2010. Taking the Human Sciences Seriously. In *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Mario de Caro and David Macarthur, 123–141. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Machamer, Peter, Lindley Darden, and Carl F. Craver. 2000. Thinking About Mechanisms. *Philosophy of Science* 67(1): 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1086/392759>.
- MacIntyre, A.C. 1959. Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought.' *The Philosophical Review* 68(4): 451. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2182491>.
- Mackie, J.L. 1977. *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*. Harmondsworth/New York: Penguin. <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999469007602121>.
- Mantzavinos, Chrysostomos. 2016. *Explanatory Pluralism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Marx, Karl. 1996. *Collected Works: Marx and Engels: Karl Marx Capital: Volume 1*, vol. 35. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1975. *Collected Works, Marx and Engels: 1843–1844 I*, vol. 3. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1976. *Collected Works: Marx and Engels: 1845–1847*, vol. 5. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1986. *Collected Works 1857–61*, vol. 28. New York: International Publishers. <https://www.amazon.com/Karl-Marx-Frederick-Engels-Collected/dp/071780528X>.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1988. *Collected Works: Marx and Engels: 1857–61*, vol. 29. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 1991. *Marx & Engels Collected Works Volume 45: Letters 1874–79*. New York: International Publishers.
- Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. 2014. *The Communist Manifesto*. Ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Samuel Moore. Penguin Classics.
- McDowell, John H. 1996. *Mind and World: With a New Introduction*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
- McDowell, John. 2009. Naturalism in the Philosophy of Mind. In *The Engaged Intellect: Philosophical Essays*, 257–278. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://philpapers.org/rec/MCDTEI>.
- McDowell, John. 2010. Autonomy and Its Burdens. *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 17(1): 4–15. <https://doi.org/10.5840/harvardreview20101711>.
- Miller, Richard W. 1985. *Analyzing Marx*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691219745>.
- Mills, Charles W. 1994. Marxism, ‘Ideology’, and Moral Objectivism¹. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 24(3): 373–393. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.1994.10717375>.
- Mitchell, Sandra. 2009. Complexity and Explanation in the Social Sciences. In *Philosophy of the Social Sciences: Philosophical Theory and Scientific Practice*, ed. Chrysostomos Mantzavinos, 130–143. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitchell, Sandra D. 2012. *Unsimple Truths: Science, Complexity, and Policy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nagel, Thomas. 1986. *The View From Nowhere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2220404>.
- Paller, Bonnie Tamarin. 1986. Naturalized Philosophy of Science, History of Science, and the Internal/External Debate. *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 1986(1): 258–268. <https://doi.org/10.1086/psaprocbienmeetp.1986.1.193126>.
- Peffer, Rodney G. 1990. *Marxism, Morality, and Social Justice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400860890>.
- Pippin, Robert B. 2008. *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plato. 1997. *Plato: Complete Works*. Ed. J.M. Cooper and D.N. Hutchinson. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett.
- Quine, W.V. 1961. Two Dogmas of Empiricism. In *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd ed., 20–46. Harper.
- Quine, Willard Van Orman. 1969. Epistemology Naturalized. In *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, 69–90. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Risjord, Mark. 2014. *Philosophy of Social Science*. New York/London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203802540>.
- Risjord, Mark. 2016. Introduction. In *Normativity and Naturalism in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 8th ed., ed. Mark Risjord. New York/London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315676722>.
- Rödl, Sebastian. 2007. *Self-Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Rorty, Richard. 2010. Naturalism and Quietism. In *Naturalism and Normativity*, ed. Mario de Caro and David Macarthur, 55–68. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Salmon, Wesley C. 1984. *Scientific Explanation and the Causal Structure of the World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Sayer, Andrew. 2011. *Why Things Matter to People: Social Science, Values and Ethical Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Schol, Oliver R. 2014. Philosophy of History: Metaphysics and Epistemology | International Network for Theory of History. In *Explanation in the Special Sciences*, ed. Marie I. Kaiser, Oliver R. Schol, Daniel Plenge, and Andreas Hüttemann, Dordrecht: Springer, 245–253.

- Sellars, Wilfrid. 1997. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Edited by With an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press.
- Skillen, Anthony. 1978. *Ruling Illusions: Philosophy and the Social Order*. Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press.
- Smith, Benedict. 2016. Naturalism, Experience, and Hume's 'Science of Human Nature'. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 24(3): 310–323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2016.1176389>.
- Thomas, Peter D. 2009. *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill Nv.
- Thompson, E.P. 1957. Socialist Humanism: An Epistle to the Philistines. *New Reasoner* 1: 105–143.
- Thompson, Michael J. 2015. Philosophical Foundations for a Marxian Ethics. In *Constructing Marxist Ethics*, 233–265. BRILL.
- Turner, Stephen. 2010. *Explaining the Normative*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 2001. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Wood, Allen. 2004. *Karl Marx*, 2nd ed. New York/London: Routledge.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.