

***IS MARX THE ANSWER TO PIKETTY?***

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“AN IMPORTANT BOOK” – HANS ACHTERHUIS

# BECOMING MARX

How the Young Karl Marx  
Became a Marxist

MARCEL H. VAN HERPEN

**By Marcel H. Van Herpen**

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## WHY YOU SHOULD BUY THIS BOOK:

### “AN IMPORTANT BOOK”

- **HANS ACHTERHUIS**, Dutch philosopher and official ‘Thinker of the Fatherland’ (2011 - 2013) on the Dutch edition of this book.

In recent years the philosophy of Karl Marx has met with a new interest. The problems of the modern capitalist market economy have showed that Marx - far from being a ‘dead dog’ to be buried in the dustbin of history - has still a lot to tell to our contemporary world. This book proposes a critical assessment of his thinking. The young Karl Marx was a typical representative of German Romanticism, who, under the influence of his father, began to be interested in theories of **human alienation**. In this book we follow in detail his intellectual development. We are introduced in the theories of Schiller, Rousseau, Hegel, and Feuerbach, that shaped his thinking and see how, from the

beginning, Marx's objectives are deeply ethical. He wants to end man's alienation and change the egoistic 'bourgeois' of civil society into an ethical citizen.

Paradoxically, this ethical stance led him to criticize **human rights**, which, he thought, only defended the rights of the selfish bourgeois – a position, which is a central flaw of his theory. Young Marx's commitment to end human alienation brings him to search for a subject, capable of revolutionary change. He finds this subject in the proletariat and predicts an increasing **polarization between the haves and the have-nots**, leading to a revolution. Although this polarization theory seemed to be definitively refuted by the advent of the modern welfare state, it recently made a come-back with the debate around **Thomas Piketty's** book "Capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century", in which the author argued that **inequality in Western societies is increasing** and has reached levels similar to those existing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Marx, therefore, is far from dead. He is there to stay with us. Although Marx's solutions may not be appropriate for the contemporary world, his ideas on human alienation and his critique of economic inequality will remain an enduring source of inspiration.

This book describes and analyzes in a critical way, also accessible for non-philosophers:

- Rousseau's and Schiller's theories of alienation
- Hegel's metaphysical thinking
- Feuerbach's critique of Hegel
- The development of Marx's different theories of alienation
- Marx's ambivalent position vis-à-vis human rights
- The relation between politics and ethics in the young Marx
- Marx's theory of the proletariat
- Marx's polarization and immiseration theories: have they been refuted or not?
- Marx today: A critical assessment of Marx's theories and suppositions in the light of the debate inspired by Thomas Piketty's *Capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

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**Read the final chapter “Marx or Piketty? What Should Be Done against the Growing Inequality?”**

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(Title in the book: “Marx’s Critique of the Market: Was Marx Right after All?”).

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