Examination Answers,
History of Recent Philosophy

[26 May–5 July 1952]
[Boston, Mass.]

After finishing his first year at Boston University, King remained in Boston for a six-week summer session. In these answers for Richard M. Millard's course on the history of recent philosophy, King comments on an internal contradiction in Karl Marx's thought. Marx, he writes, "starts with a high Kantian motivation which emphasizes the worth of the human personality as a means rather than an end" and concludes with a "rigid determinism" that eliminates freedom. This course work, one of King's few academic encounters with Marx, may have helped him prepare for a sermon he gave later in the summer at Ebenezer entitled "The Challenge of Communism to Christianity." In his answers King also describes the philosophical ramifications of Charles Darwin's research, the topic of his term paper for the course. Several words are missing because of torn pages in the manuscript. Millard gave the answers 94 points out of 100, an A.

1. Richard Marion Millard (1918–1992) received his A.B. in 1941 from DePauw University and his M.A. in 1942 and Ph.D. in 1950 from Boston University. He taught at Boston from 1949 to 1967, serving as chairman of the philosophy department, acting dean of the Graduate School, and dean of the College of Liberal Arts. He left Boston University for a career in public policy and postsecondary education, including a term as president of the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation from 1981 to 1987. His publications include Personality and the Good: Psychological and Ethical Perspectives, co-authored with Peter A. Bertocci (1963).

2. This sermon has not been located by the King Papers Project, but King published a version of it as "How Should a Christian View Communism?" in Strength to Love (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 93–100. For a reaction to King's Ebenezer sermon, see Melvin H. Watson to King, 14 August 1952, pp. 156–157 in this volume.

1. Herbert Spencer was a thoroughgoing agnostic when it came to knowledge of ultimate reality. For him all knowledge is finite. Only that which can be related and compared is knowable. The “Unknowable” being the totality cannot be known because there is nothing else with which it can be related or compared. Spencer made it clear that although we cant know the “Unknowable,” we cant doubt its existence, for every judgment presuppose [its] existence. He use two [word missing] of evidence to establish [word missing] reality the “Unknowable” [F]irst there is the dialectical proof. It asserts that we must assume the existence of the unconditioned before we can talk about the conditioned. To say that something is knowable is to assume the existence of something unknowable. Second, there is the proof from experience. Experience itself affirms that there is something outside causing our sensation. Although the “Unknowable” cannot be known, its existence is the most familiar aspect of experience.

It is interesting to note that Spencer’s agnosticism was derived indirectly from Kant through the Scottish thinker Hamilton and Mansel. Both of these men had taken the Kantian agnosticism and [word missing] to a justification of theology and [word missing] revelation. All knowledge is phenomen[al] and therefore metaphysical thinking is absurd and even impossible when it come to knowing ultimate reality. But if such a view denies the possibility of reason to meet ultimate question, it affirms the validity of revelation. As Hamilton affirmed, the limitation of philosophy is the justification of theology.

Spencer's agnosticism differed from that of Mansel and Hamilton in the sense that it was not strictly theology. In other words he secularized the agnostic thinking of these two men.  

2. The internal contradiction in Marx thinking is found in the fact that he starts with a high Kantian motivation which emphasizes the worth of the human personality as a means rather than an end, and ends up with a thoroughgoing materialistic view which make mind only a by-product or an effect of matter (epiphenomenalism). Moreover, he ends up with a rigid determinism which destroys this validity of his initial Kantian motivation.

The source of this contradiction in Marx’ thought is found in the fact that he attempted to synthesis his Kantian motivation with a Hegelian methodology. At the same time he “turns Hegel upside down” by emphasizing the primacy of matter rather than spirit. So he was led to Dialectically materialist. He became a thoroughgoing economic determinist. History is moving inevitably toward the classless society. Nothing can stop its consumation. Such a view destroys freedom, while the high Kantian motivation affirms it.

4. King refers to William Hamilton (1788–1856) and Henry Longueville Mansel (1820–1871), who were mentioned by Millard in a lecture on Herbert Spencer. See King, Class notes, History of Recent Philosophy, 26 May–5 July 1952, MLKP-MBU: Box 114.

5. Millard gave the answer 9 points and wrote: “However—did identify Unknowable as religious object. This asserted & even supports religion.”
We may conclude then that Marx' attempt to combine the Hegelian methodology with his Kantian motivation caused the flagrant contradiction in his thinking.6

3. Metz statement that Darwin was no Darwinian is essentially true in the sense that Darwin never set out to establish any metaphysical or philosophical conclusions.7 He wrote as a biologist and not as a metaphysician. The one exception of a deviation from his biological interest was his attempt to delve into ethical theory. But certainly Darwin never set forth many of the philosophical theories that later became attached to his system. A case in point is Herbert Spencer. After Darwin published his Origin of the Species Herbert Spencer welcomed it and proceeded to apply its underlying theories to the whole of society. We find Haeckel attempting to define everything in terms of the Darwinian theory of evolution along with the law of substance.8 Many other examples could be cited. But these are adequate enough to show that many philosophical tenents developed from Darwin's system that he never realized. So Metz is essentially right: "Darwin was no Darwinian.

There are mainly four reasons why Darwin's evolutionary hypothesis raised such a furor.

(1) It seem to contradict the traditional view of the immutability of species.

(2) It contradicted those who accepted a literal account of the Bible.

(3) It seemed to take teleology from the universe. A first cause was also cast aside.

(4) It seemed to lessen man's status.

So we can see the Darwin's theory raised a deal of furor because it upset certain habits of mind. Of course most of the above accusation did not necessarily follow from the Darwinian hypothesis.9

4. There can be no gainsaying of the fact that Herbart's answer to the Kantian problem of the Ding an sich was the very antithesis of Hegel's answer.10 Hegel solved the problem in terms of idealism, affirming that Reason was the thing in itself (the rational is the real and the real is the rational). Herbart, on the other hand, solved the problem in terms of realism. He was systematically opposed to Hegel's method, principles and conclusions. Things are not thoughts as the idealist Hegel would

6. Millard gave this answer 8.5 points and commented: "[word illegible] ideas (& ideals) have been used as instruments of exploitation too. Ideas are only reflections of economic material processes."


8. King refers to Ernst Heinrich Haeckel (1834–1919), who was mentioned by Millard in his lecture on Charles Darwin.

9. Millard gave this answer 10 points.

10. King refers to Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776–1841).
affirm. Things are independent of the mind that knows them. He agrees with Kant that all knowledge must begin with experience. But he sees that when we look at experience we find it filled with contradiction. Therefore he would also affirm with Kant that experience is phenomenal. But we can get at the real by absolving the contradictions of our general ideas. In doing this we must use the method of relation. From this method Herbart comes to the conclusion the the real is unchangeable, immovable, nonspacial and nontemporal. We can immediately see how this again contradicts Hegel who saw the real as process itself. Herbart goes further by saying that there are a number of independent "reals" (rele) which are absolute. Again this pluralistic view is absolutely opposed to Hegel monistic emphasis. Herbart, as we can see, is the very antithesis of Hegel in every respect. For him the real is unchanging and nontemporal. For Hegel the real is changing process.

AHDS. MLKP-MBU: Box 115.

11. Millard commented: "[plurality?] of reals."
12. Millard gave this answer 10 points.

To Charles E. Batten

29 July 1952
Atlanta, Ga.

Through a cooperative relationship with Boston University, King took two philosophy courses at Harvard University during the 1952–1953 school year. In his reply to King’s request for a Crozer transcript, Batten wrote, “On your way north, why don’t you stop here for a chat so that we can hear about what you are doing. Your friends here at school join me in all good wishes.”

Dean Charles E. Batten,
Crozer Theological Seminary
Chester, Pa.

Dear Dean Batten:

I would like to have a transcript of my academic work at Crozer, sent to Harvard University, as soon as possible. It should be addressed to the Dean of Special Students, 11 Weld Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge 38, Mass. If there is any charge for this, please forward the bill to me.

1. Charles E. Batten to King, 31 July 1952, CRO-NRCR.