

THE CONCEPT OF MAN IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF (EARLY) KARL MARX

In Africa, other developing countries, and even inside developed Europe and America, there exist very distorted ideas about Marx and his teachings. Some reasons for this are not hard to find. The developing nations have been the battle-field of propaganda between the West and the East, between the Right and the Left. In their bid to win the emerging nations to their side, the Western colonial powers launched serious propaganda aimed at discouraging the Third World from embracing Communism. It was portrayed as destructive of religion, freedom of speech, private property even to the extent of advocating community of wives and children. People were instructed to keep contact with Marxists very limited and to suspect any humanistic move they made as a device to get into the system of government and of the church in order to overthrow them. Marx was branded as being materialistic. "Marx is supposed to have believed that the paramount psychological motive in man is his wish for monetary gain and comfort and that this striving for maximum profit constitutes the main incentive in his personal life and in the life of the human race...Marx's criticism of religion was held to be identical with the denial of all spiritual values... that he had neither respect nor understanding for the spiritual needs of man, and that his "ideal" was the well-fed and well-clad but "soulless person."¹

Perhaps the Western powers in Africa were right in their propaganda against Communism. Perhaps in Russia, freedom of speech was curbed to some extent; that families broke up on account of the State's intervention in determining who did what job to maintain the Communist System; that children belonged first and foremost to the State and secondarily to their parents that the church was persecuted. These were alleged proofs of the demerits of Communism and the inhuman treatment inflicted on the people under communist regime.

Whatever the truth of these statements one point is clear as a result of a reasearch on (early) Marxism—namely, that the

man Marx and the Communism he preached were quite different from what they were said to be by the West. Eric Fromm defends Marx: "Suffice it to say at the outset that this popular picture of Marx's Materialism — his anti-spiritual tendency, his wish for uniformity and subordination — is utterly false. Marx's aim was that of a spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature. Marx's philosophy was, in secular, nontheistic language, a new and radical step forward in the tradition of prophetic Messianism; it was aimed at the full realisation of individualism, the very aim which has guided Western thinking from the Renaissance and the Reformation far into the nineteenth century."²

We shall trace the development of early Marx's concept of man from the background of the Hegelian philosophy and show how indeed early Marx concerned himself primarily with the realization of the individual man as a person.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL AND FEUERBACH AS REMOTE INFLUENCES ON MARX

(a) Influence by Hegel

The connection that Marx had in his early university training with the Hegelian philosophy, was very decisive in the future of Marx's philosophy of anthropology. Hegel had died in 1831. Marx entered the University of Berlin in 1836 where Hegel had taught till the time of his demise. Most of the Faculty of philosophy had become Hegelian at the time Marx began his philosophical studies. In fact, Gans, a Hegelian disciple had lectured Marx on the Philosophy of Right and Marx was credited to have been "very industrious" in the course. "Gans' interpretation of Hegel's theory of right was to have a profound influence on Marx's early philosophy. It was in his classroom that Marx's attention was first drawn to the revolutionary aspect of the Hegelian dialectic—that no historical state of affairs can ever be considered final. Rather than freezing juridical institutions dialectical philosophy must further their progress by its own dynamic character."³

Hegel had dealt with what ought to be the ideal. In the *Phenomenology of Mind*, he noted a separated identity between ego and nature, "I" and the "other" in all the four levels of perception. His whole philosophical effort was to reconcile the one-sided identity and to show the sameness of ego and nature. "The present standpoint of philosophy is that the idea is known in its necessity, the sides of its direction, nature and spirit, are each of them recognised as representing the totality of the idea—what exists as actual nature is an image of divine reason, the forms of self-conscious reason are also the forms of nature. The ultimate aim or business of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the notion with reality."⁴

Hegel's treatment of Lordship and Bondage which illustrates the Hegelian notion of human relationship had a far reaching influence on Marx's treatment of the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. According to Hegel the level of consciousness that operates in Lordship and Bondage is that by which one is conscious of oneself as the negation of the other by a process of objectification. The 'other' is regarded as a 'thing' which is useful (or not) according to whether it renders or does not render services. One never reaches the individual character or personality of the other. This gives rise to social and political control, injustices and wars.

The evils of the Master-Slave relationship can be overcome by the ethical disposition of the individuals concerned, namely the knowledge of identity of all their interests with the whole and their mutual knowledge of themselves in this identity. "The ethical substance is thus, in this determination actual concrete substance, Absolute spirit realized in the plurality of distinct consciousness definitely existing . . . It is Spirit which is for itself, since it maintains itself by being reflected in the minds of the component individuals".⁵

Whereas in the Lordship-Bondage situation, the "Other" is useful or useless, on the level of ethicality, I find my realisation in the 'other'. I realize that my being is contained in the other. The Master realizes that he is servant within their difference and that he is then a servant to the servant. This is love. "For love implies a distinguishing between two and yet these two are

as a matter of fact not distinguished from one another. Love, this sense of being outside of myself is the feeling and consciousness of this identity. My self-consciousness is not in myself but in another but this other in whom alone I find satisfaction and am at peace with myself".⁶ The ability to practise this mutuality is the highest act of the Spirit. This is the meaning of existence; this is social justice and peace; this is Absolute Unity.

(b) *Influence by Feuerbach*

Feuerbach criticised the universality and absoluteness of the Hegelian system. For Feuerbach the individual cannot be encompassed in the metaphysical concept. "But reason knows nothing of real and absolute incarnation of the genus in a determinate individuality .. whatever becomes real, becomes real as something indeterminate. An incarnation of the genus in its whole fullness in one individuality would be an absolute miracle, a violent cancellation all laws".⁷ Feuerbach introduces historical and sociological variables to Hegel's system. The Hegelian interpretation, says Feuerbach, makes communication and understanding between different cultures impossible.

As a materialist Feuerbach questions the metaphysical presuppositions of Hegel. "The idealist sees also in nature, life and reason, but only as his own life and his own reason. What he saw in nature, that he himself has imposed on nature".⁸ Rather Feuerbach appropriated the Hegelian system and inverted it to suit his own materialistic doctrine. Instead of Nature realizing itself in the Absolute Spirit, man becomes the highest realization of Nature. The idea of God or religion as the realization of ethicality was thrown overboard by Feuerbach. "The task of modern era was the realization and humanization of God—the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology".⁹ Feuerbach made concrete the idealistic love or charity of Hegel. From the development of techno-structure, he shows how the security once thought of as the prerogative of the divine can be given by organizations resultant from techno-structure. "We have shown that the substance and objective of religion is altogether human. We have shown that divine wisdom is human wisdom; that the secret theology is anthropology—the necessary turning of history is therefore the open confession that

the consciousness of God is nothing else than the consciousness of the species—Homo homini Deus est; .. this is the greatest practical principle The relations of child and parent, brother, friend, in general of man to man; in short all the moral relations are per se religion".¹⁰

BACKGROUND OF KARL MARX HUMANISM

Influenced by Feuerbach's interpretation of Hegelian ethicality and his material inversion of the Hegelian idealistic system, early Marx took a philosophical stand which improved greatly on Feuerbach's materialism while at the same time retaining the dialectic method of Hegel. Marx extricated himself from the philosophical idealism which characterized Hegel and acquainted himself with the historical situation of his time. He felt that speculative philosophy was also an alienation; he involved himself in practical investigations of how to cure the social evils of his day—the economic and social issues.

Abstract notions such as 'Absolute Spirit', 'eternal ideas', 'heaven' and 'after-life' were attacked by Marx because he was convinced that these notions had been used as a cover to practise injustice and other social evils by the wealthy class. Taking an opposite stand against Hegel, Marx taught that the individual man should be given to the State. 'In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is to say, we do not set out from what men imagine, conceive, nor from man as narrated, conceived, thought of or imagined in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out from real active men and on the basis of their real life process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life process.'¹¹ This is the basis for Karl Marx's philosophy being called naturalism or humanism as distinguished from both idealism and materialism.¹²

THE ASPECT OF MAN THAT CONCERNS MARX

There are many aspects from which man can be treated: the historical, the religious, political, economic, social, materialistic and so on. Marx studies man in relation to the economic

and social conditions under which he lives. He was primarily interested in historical materialism, which states that 'the way man produces determines his thinking and his desire' as distinct from psychological materialism which holds that the strongest motive in man is to gain money and to have more material comfort.¹³ For Marx men are the authors and actors of their history. How does man make his own history? How does he find himself? The answer is found in Marx's incorporation of Hegel's thought in the *phenomenology of Mind*: "The outstanding thing in Hegel's Phenomenology of mind and its final outcome—that is the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle—is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-genesis of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation, that he thus grasps the essence of labour and comprehends objective man—as the outcome of man's labour."¹⁴

Louis Dupre' expounds the above quotation from Marx by picking two elements of Hegel's thought which are basic for Marx:

i. Labour is conceived of as the activity through which man realizes his own essence. Labour is man's coming-to-be for himself."¹⁵

ii. This becoming oneself is realized within alienation; labour itself constitutes this alienation.

Marx criticizes the identification of labour itself with alienation. Marx feels that Hegel's erroneous concept of man is due to his idealistic philosophy by which man is essentially consciousness. Hegel implies that man does not express himself by external relation with the outside world.

On the contrary Marx holds that man is complete when he interacts with nature as part of the world. 'Man is directly a natural being. As a natural being and as a living natural being, he is on the one hand furnished with natural powers of life—he is an active natural being. These forces exist in him as tendencies and abilities—as impulses. On the other hand as a natural corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited creature like animals and plants.¹⁶ Since

labour is man's coming-to-be for himself i. e. since labour is man's proper channel of expressing his real life by contact with natural objects for the satisfaction of his needs, Marx regards labour as an essential property of man such that if it is taken away from man he would be in a state of bankruptcy and need.

HUMAN NEED AS THE ORIGIN OF LABOUR

Having shown the central position which labour holds in Marx's concept of man we will proceed to investigate why man has to labour and why labour is the means of self-expression. The reason is to be found in the concept of human need. Man has many needs, the acquisition of which means self-expression, self-realization and satisfaction. Man seeks clothing, sex, habitation, food, which are all realized by man's manipulation of nature.

Labour is this manipulation of nature carried on by man for the satisfaction of his basic needs. "We must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence, and therefore of all history, the premise mainly that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first 'historical' act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself."¹⁷

The labour imperative does not exempt anyone whether one's needs are many or few. Even men leading a most austere religious life by separating themselves as much as possible from 'worldly pleasures', have some needs no matter how insignificant and they must labour to fulfil these needs. "The founder of the Trappists, wanting nothing more than a walking stick had to go into the forest in order to cut one from a tree. In this simple feat, St. Bruno was performing an act of material production. Few men are satisfied with so little, of course, for generally as soon as needs are satisfied, new needs arise. The only way to satisfy this incessant, unremitting claim of nature is through labour, for need in becoming passion, stirs man to action".¹⁸

This is the central position that labour holds in Marx's philosophy of anthropology. Hence the relevance of Marx's

fundamental principle that the mode of production of the material life in general dominates the development of social, political and intellectual life. Man by his work determines the type of life he lives. It is interesting the extent Marx goes to identify the individual with his labour. Labour or the mode of production is a definite form of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. "As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are therefore coincides with their production, both with what they produce and with how they produce".¹⁹ This makes clear the difference between materialism and the humanism or naturalism of Marx.

MARX'S THEORY OF ALIENATION

From the thoughts expressed in the preceding paragraph, it is easy to see the relevance of the treatment and emphasis which Karl Marx gives to the theory of alienation. Martin Milligan gives a detailed explanation of the meaning of alienation.²⁰ The word is an English translation of the the German *entaussern* which has the following meanings: "to part with", "to renounce", "to cast off", "to sell" a right or property. "To alienate" best expresses the sense in which Marx usually uses the German term. For "alienate" is the only English word which combines in much the same way as does *entaussern*, the idea of "losing" something which nevertheless remains in existence over—against one. At the same time, the word *entaussern* has, more strongly than "alienated", the sense of "making external to oneself", or estrangement.

The idea of alienation is however not original to Marx. He incorporated it from the writings of Hegel and Feuerbach. For Hegel "a consciousness which projects its substance outside itself or in other words, exteriorizes itself is alienated. In a vain attempt to reach this myth which it has projected outside itself whether in the form of a god or any other, human consciousness becomes unhappy".²¹

Feuerbach whose brand of materialism influenced Marx, (although criticised by Marx as not understanding human activity itself as objective activity, in that human activity (labour) deals

with sensuous objects as distinguished from the objects of thought) presents a well-known example of alienation, in his *Essence of Christianity* "where a man is shown to embody each one of his main faculties — mind, will and heart — in a Superior Being. In positing his aspirations as fulfilled in the Deity, man deems himself to be by contrast weak and powerless. This conception of a Being which exists at a great distance in all the splendour of his isolation results in alienation for man. In an attempt to overcome this alienation, man loves God and through belief in the incarnation of his son, finds a means of sermon with the distant Deity. All this is in Fauerbach's opinion, not only deceitful but actually harmful. Man must confront the earth and make his happiness there, rather than live in the vain desire of a non-existent God. 'Homo homini Deus'—Man is God for himself."²²

Marx went a step further than his predecessors in his application of the idea of alienation. He is interested in man as a concrete human being who is essentially producing the means of his subsistence. The type of alienation that Marx was interested in is the alienation of man from his personal activity, his labour, not the speculative and idealistic alienation of consciousness. If Hegel called the state of consciousness, which has projected itself outside, unhappy, Marx implied that the state of the man, whose proper activity has been alienated, is worse off; "for to him alienation has been an enormous source of grief far surpassing that of the unhappy consciousness".²³ Marx says that man has been alienated in all spheres of his concrete earthly life activities. The type of man for whose interest Marx poses as the spokesman, is the working man, who suffers the grief and poverty issuing from religious, intellectual, political and economic alienation. This is the proletariat in contradistinction from the bourgeoisie which inflicts this pain on the proletariat. Man's inhumanity to man !

CAPITALISTIC SOCIETY : MAN'S ALIENATION FROM HIS LABOUR

We saw in the section on Human Need as the origin of Labour, that Marx identified the individual man socially with his labour. For him, labour was a definite form of expressing man's life. He made his stand more forceful by saying the following

about man : "what they are therefore, coincides with their production; both with what they produce and with how they produce".²⁴ In the industrialised capitalist society, labour or the expression of man's life, is taken from him. Man is alienated in a threefold way, namely from the product of his work, from the act of producing and from his own social nature. The worker in a capitalistic society is used as an instrument of production. Whereas his production should be the very expression of his being, it now becomes a thing alien to himself. He externalizes his labour in the object of production over which he has no control as to its disposal and enjoyment. "The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him independently as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him; it means the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien".²⁵

In the chapter on Wages of Labour,²⁶ Marx engaged himself in an imaginary dialogue with the political economist who would argue that the worker is compensated by a just wage. Marx contends that the idea of wage earning makes a slave of the worker who is thereby reduced to the status of a commercial object, a commodity which is paid for according to the quantity and quality of his production. In other words, according to whether his capitalist master gains more money out of his labour or not. His value as a human being is forgotten and unconsidered. As a man, "the worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity, the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of man".²⁷

Marx points out the following disadvantages of the worker in a capitalist society.

- i. The separation of Capital, ground rent and Labour is fatal to the worker. The lowest and the only necessary wage rate is that providing for the subsistence of the worker for the duration of his work and as much as is necessary for him to support a family.
- ii. The demand for men necessarily governs the production of

men, as of every other commodity. Should supply greatly exceed demand, a section of the workers sinks into beggary or starvation.... The worker has become a commodity, and it is a bit of luck for him if he can find buyer. And the demand on which the life of the worker depends, is on the whim of the rich capitalist.

iii Thus in the gravitation of market price to natural price, it is the worker who loses most of all and necessarily.

iv. The worker need not necessarily gain when the capitalist does, but he necessarily loses when the latter loses. Thus the worker does not gain if the capitalist keeps the market price above the natural price by virtue of some manufacturing or trading secret, or by virtue of monopoly or the favourable situation of his property.

Another respect in which the worker is at a disadvantage : The labour prices of the various kinds of workers show much wider differences than the profits in the various branches in which capital is applied. In labour all the natural, spiritual and social variety of individual activity is manifested and is variously regarded, whilst dead capital always shows the same face and is indifferent to real individual activity.²³

In the above points Marx spreads out clearly the dehumanization of man in a capitalistic society. He shows the cruel way in which man is laid off when the capitalist 'loses'; and by 'loss' we understand that the profit does not rise to expectation and not that capital is in any way affected. Thus man's value, like merchandise, is marked down to the value of his money. The demon, almighty money, destroys all authentic interpersonal rapport, christian love and compassion.

COMMUNISM : THE RE-VALUATION OF MAN

Equipped with his knowledge of French Proudhon's work *What is Property?* and its treatment of private property as theft; equipped with the scholarly incorporation of Proudhon's ideas into the German situation, by earlier German communists Hess and Lorenzo Stein, Marx became convinced that the one solution for the ills of capitalism is communism. He saw in communism, "the return of man himself as a 'social', i. e. really human being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth

or previous development. Communism as a fully developed naturalism is humanism and as a fully developed humanism is naturalism. It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species. It is the solution of the riddle of history and knows itself to be the solution".²⁰

The strongly emphasized notes in the above quotation are "self-realization", "humanism", "resolution of antagonism between man and man", "solution of the riddle of history". Marx, as we saw earlier on in this paper believed that man realises himself by bringing nature to his auspices by labour. He accused capitalism of usurping man's labour and making a commodity out of it thus reducing man to the status of a slave by alienating him from his labour which is his definite form of expressing his life and a definite mode of his life. This causes antagonism between the "capitalist" and the "worker".

Communism, by doing away with active private property i. e. private ownership of means of production, resolves this antagonism between man and man. In communism, wealth or poverty in a community is shared by all with pride and dignity; whereas in capitalism some class of human beings enjoy the goods of this life while others merely subsist and lead lives below the level of dignified human beings. Communism will put an end to the stupidity of personal pride which comes from the sense of having instead of from a sense of being.

To further appreciate the Marxian idea of communism as humanism, it is necessary to clarify his notion of private property. The so-called communist and socialist nations have distorted Marx's idea of communism and popularised the information that in communism the individual can claim nothing as his own. This is contrary to the meaning of private property in the early Marxian sense. Eric Fromm explains: "By private property, Marx never refers to the private property of things for use (such as a house, a table etc.). Marx refers to the property of the 'properties class', that is of the capitalist who, because he owns the means of production, can hire the pro-

ertyless individual to work for him under conditions the latter is forced to accept. "Private Property" in Marx's usage, then always refers to private property within capitalist class society and thus is a social and historical category; the form does not refer to things for use as for instance in a socialist society".³⁰ From this it can be concluded that Marx is not against private ownership of things as such, but private property which, in one form or other, interferes with the interest and development of man; private property which occasions the enslavement and dehumanization of the worker.

CONCLUSION

We have seen in a rather short way how the humanism of Marx forms the pivot of his early philosophical enterprise. Whether Karl Marx is branded a communist, an atheist, a revolutionary, anti-religious, the one appellation that is appropriate to him is humanist. All other names correctly or incorrectly apply to him in the light of his humanism. As Ricour points out: "The anti-humanistic rules of Christians is the basis of Marx's attack on religion."

Marx is interested in man as a concrete being, not as an ideal speculative consciousness of Hegel. Marx's man is not considered in terms of what he has but in terms of what he is, his being, as a being of possibilities, who is able to surpass, transcend the givens of nature. He attacked the capitalist society for implementing a system that makes man a slave to the givens of nature by alienating man from his labour. Capitalism, by paying man a subsistence wage buries man's possibilities of realizing himself in the greatest possible degree.

Perhaps with the new wave of emphasis on the humanism of Marx by contemporary Marxist philosophers, the world will soon be able to understand Marxism in its true perspective. And who knows what great contribution Marxism can make towards religion, peace and prosperity.

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NOTES

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