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NOTES

MARX'S CONCEPTION OF MAN

Marxism gladly takes for itself the name of humanism. This humanism even furnishes a justification of atheism, as if the full exaltation of man must imply the negation of God. The affirmation of the young Marx, "Man is man's god," is in the provocative style of a great polemicist, but, more profoundly, it is a sign of the problematic which controls Marx's conception of man.¹ The assertion is, above all, ethical. "Man's god" is man's end, that is, the good which completes him and gives him full reality.

This good consists, apparently, in the act in which man takes for himself the objects which satisfy him, rather than in the objects themselves. Thus the concept of *praxis* is fundamental. *Praxis*, the transformation of natural or social matter, is the self-affirmation of man; it is the act in which man enjoys himself as man, in his full autonomy; for man is obliged only to himself for what he is.

Praxis can be either authentic or nonauthentic. Man asserts himself in *praxis*, but he can also destroy himself radically in it. Such is the meaning of "alienated labor," a concept which is one of the keys to the manuscripts of 1844. Labor, and therefore man himself, are radically perverted and corrupted, made strangers to their own nature, exiles from themselves, when an individualist form of property dominates the instruments of production. In this sense, *praxis* is dependent, in its very nature and for the integrity of this nature, on social circumstances. This is why circumstances themselves constitute the field of application and the object of *praxis*. Man is *causa sui* by the mediation of circumstances, on which he depends, but of which he can be master. In short, he is formed by social and exterior forces. Later, Marx abandoned the term "alienation," too charged with philosophical reminiscences. The idea remained. His judgments are oriented by this idea which is never spelled out in his theory. The idea remained — a criterion of the authentic and of the nonauthentic, all the more powerful because unformulated. Even when he did battle against the notion of human nature or against the notion of moral norms, Marx was inspired by this implicit norm of the truly human.

I anticipate. It is only little by little that Marx became conscious of the main lines of his anthropology. He began by being a Young Hegelian. The Hegelianism which Hegel's disciples knew presented itself as a historical monism. The real was history, and history nothing but the self-development of the Spirit. An all-consuming metaphysical approach absorbed the idea of progress which had come from the eighteenth century. The dissolving force of the dialectic assured the triumphant march of Spirit (*Geist*) with which history was identified.

1. Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie, Einleitung*, in ANNALES FRANCO-ALLEMANDES (1866). Cf. MARX-ENGELS HISTORISCH-KRITISCHE GESAMTAUSGABE (hereafter abbreviated MEGA), Division I, Vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 607-21 (Frankfurt, 1927). The formula takes its inspiration from FEUERBACH, DAS WESEN DES CHRISTENTUMS.

These conceptions of Spirit and history controlled the Hegelians' view of human nature. On the one hand, man tended to be defined by the Spirit, to the point that the Young Hegelians tended to treat with disdain the material contingencies of history. On the other hand, since Spirit was history, consideration of the individual ran the risk of being eclipsed by collective reality, especially the reality of the State. Man appeared as a collective, political being, his supreme realization the modern State, treated as equivalent to the kingdom of liberty. True, the logic of these ideas was tempered for many of the Young Hegelians by the individualistic aspirations born in the liberal battle in which they were engaged.

The exaggeratedly speculative aspect of Hegelianism provoked reactions such as the historical school of law of Gustav Hugo, which contrasted "the positive" to "the rational" and opposed "history" to "reason." Against this emphasis on existence and on history, Marx invoked Hegelian rationalism. In an article in 1842 he scornfully and violently attacked Hugo's abandonment of reason in favor of an irrational history and asserted the primacy of the rational in reality.² Soon Marx himself was to break with Hegelianism, but the breach was never total. His philosophy continued to rest on the Hegelian postulate that reason and history are identical.

With his sense of the concrete and his increasing consciousness of social and political problems, Marx had become increasingly dismayed by the orgy of abstractions of the Young Hegelians. Beginning in 1843 he undertook a critical examination of Hegel's philosophy of law. For "reality" Hegel substituted "unreal" entities or "hypostases." His philosophy of law developed in an a priori way which did violence to reality. In his critique Marx first depended on Feuerbach. Then, thanks to the French socialists and Engels, whom he had met in Paris, he acquired a direct knowledge of the terrible condition of the industrial proletariat. From this experience came the powerful ethical inspiration which fills his work, which cannot be ignored in evaluating his humanism. As a concept, justice is banished from his system and turned to derision. As a demand, lived and living, justice is the devouring fire from which his protest breaks forth. Hegelian apriorism represents for Marx the spiritualistic process par excellence. It is, then, necessary to reject "Spirit" and, to the extent that it involves morality, to reject morality. But at the same time there is introduced into a theoretical work an ethical indignation which animates the whole undertaking. It seems to me that this contradiction between an extraordinarily clear and impatient conscience and the denial of the reality of conscience on the plane of philosophical reason gives to Marxism its explosive character and its seductive force. I speak, of course, of Marx himself, for contemporary Marxism has generally degenerated into a heavy and soulless scholasticism.

The German Ideology (written in 1845-1846, although published only in 1932) affirms in all their originality the doctrines of historical materialism. The reading of Stirner, had, it seems, been decisive; it had convinced Marx that, in spite

2. Marx, "Das philosophische Manifest der historischen Rechtsschule," *Rheinische Zeitung* (Cologne), reproduced in MEGA, Division I, Vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 252-53.

of his materialism, Feuerbach continued to move in the Hegelian orbit. Feuerbach had typically employed the concept of *Gattungswesen* (generic being), and Marx's manuscripts of 1844 had themselves used it to a large degree. Feuerbach is now criticized for conceiving of man as an abstract entity, a derivative of Spirit. Yet in the measure that the identity of reason and history remains a fundamental affirmation of Marx, the concept of *Gattungswesen* is maintained. It is the word, rather than the idea, which is rejected.

Against the speculative construction of Hegelianism and its a priori character, there is a reaction which is at the root of Marx's historical materialism. For Marx it is a matter of starting from "real man," and the real man is he who exercises the most elementary and ordinary activities of production and consumption. This starting point, of course, implies an epistemological viewpoint. It is through an examination of "real" history, and not by a deduction from concepts, that one can seize history. Yet, Hegelianism is not totally erased. History possesses a permanent and knowable structure; it is the coherent development of a form so that adequate knowledge of the past and of the present leads to knowledge of the future and what the future brings with it. Here, as in the writings of 1843, the problematic of the *Philosophy of Right* of Hegel has exercised its influence.

Praxis is now, however, at the center of Marx's analysis of man.³ *Praxis* is set out as man's characteristic activity. It consists in transforming the world in order to satisfy fundamental needs. In its essence it is social. It is not isolated individuals, but the group, which works. In distinction from animal action which is determined by instinct, human *praxis* is progressive. Reason is the source of progress; but it is a reason defined by its technical object, a reason whose progressive function consists in the ceaseless invention of new instruments, according to the demands of the transforming *praxis* in which it is incorporated. Marxist man is entirely *homo faber*, and his reason creates instruments in the service of the needs which are the motives of *praxis*. Man is, then, committed to a process of constant transformation. But in transforming nature, he transforms himself, for he is entirely determined by labor and by the product of his labor. Once the first needs of man have been satisfied, the very evolution of labor and its products engenders new needs which demand satisfaction.

But we have not yet reached the decisive factor, and Marxism is not yet reducible to a purely technological concept of man. I have said that *praxis* is entirely social. To each kind of instrument of production there corresponds a structure of the human group or of the social organization of labor. In the most primitive societies, where man lives on what he gathers, everyone, man or woman, young or old, engages in all the productive activities, which are limited in number and are relatively undifferentiated. But an irreversible process, tied to technical progress itself, leads humanity to an ever increasing division of labor. This division of labor, a necessary phenomenon of the development of technique, constitutes at the same time a kind of original catastrophe. Such is the ambi-

3. The major text on *praxis* is *Theses on Feuerbach*, an appendix to *THE GERMAN IDEOLOGY*.

guity of Marxist history: it brings both the good and the evil under the heading of necessary elements. The division of labor is a step forward for reason, and yet Marx speaks with nostalgia of the primitive community and its absolute equality. At the same time, on the horizon of this explanation, may be glimpsed the outline of the Hegelian concept of dialectical unity, which goes from an undifferentiated state to differentiation only to regain itself in reconciliation. Thus, of necessity, inexorable change only succeeds in stifling ethical egalitarianism.

With this division of labor, indeed, a rupture occurs in the community itself. It divides into antagonistic groups. The weak are crushed and yoked by the strong. Thus Engels will say that the first great historical defeat was that of woman. Henceforth, the fundamental law of society is that of master and slave, or the law of the class struggle.

The reasoning of Marx implies a selection among a whole series of options. The first, doubtless inspired by the Hegelian concept of dialectic, consists in identifying every differentiation with antagonism. The second, which recalls the eighteenth century, supposes that the major motive of human action is self-interest. In the primitive community, still undifferentiated, there is a common interest, i.e., the interest of everyone converges unconsciously toward the single common good. With the breakup of society into classes, the individuals cease to be moved by the interest of the whole. Their interests are particular. They are the interests of classes; they are egoistic interests, violently opposed to each other.

One understands why, in the eyes of Marx, the process of the division of labor finds its end in the phenomenon of the appropriation of the instruments of production. A master exists from the day when the instruments of production are appropriated in an egoistic and exclusive manner and the slaves are left to manipulate them. The slave is the alienated being, frustrated in the roots of his being, since his labor and its fruits are no longer his own but for another; for man is his labor. One can even say that man no longer exists: there are only masters and slaves engaged in a battle to the death. A radical pessimism marks this vision of history, past and present.

Yet this pessimism galvanizes the will to reverse the course of history in an equally radical manner, and it is accompanied by a romantic exaltation of violence. The struggle is presented as the principal motive of historical progress. The interests of the masters make them conservative, maintainers of the status quo from which they profit. In opposition, those who are exploited are led to find in the new instruments of production the arms of liberation. Here, in fact, a "law" comes to the rescue with a messianic hope which polarizes Marxist history. By their very nature the instruments of production irresistibly invoke a social and economic structure corresponding to them. The process can be checked; but it cannot be prevented. It is thus that the bourgeoisie, the class appropriate to the beginning of the industrial era, has supplanted the feudal class which ruled in a predominantly agricultural time. In a vast fresco Marx retraces the different phases of history. Turning out the masters, the slaves of history become masters in their turn; the exploited become the exploiters; and so on up to our day, when the present exploiters will be driven from power by a

new class. The development of these alternate waves is a replica of the succession of empires as Hegel had painted it. The purpose of the fresco is to serve as background for the episodes of modern history.

Yet, while being treated as a prolongation of the past, the modern situation is regarded as qualitatively new. According to the scansion of a dramatic movement which has been increasingly and ceaselessly amplified, the antagonism of the classes has increased and been exacerbated in the measure that history has advanced. Formerly, society was composed of a plurality of classes. Today contradiction appears in an extremely pure form. The contrast takes shape with logical symmetry. Two classes are face to face. They are contradictory to each other. They are the capitalist class and the industrial proletariat. Modern industry, by reason of the technical structure of its large enterprises, necessarily requires collectivist institutions and at the same time provides the means to realize them. Private property becomes an anachronism in the industrial age and constitutes a handicap to progress. The objective conditions are then set so that the proletarian class may turn out its exploiters and take in its hands the reins of power. A monotonous return to the alternations of violence? Not at all, but a decisive qualitative leap. Up to now revolutions were always to the advantage of minorities, which took the place of other privileged minorities. This time, the revolution will be of the masses, of the immense majority. The proletariat represents and recapitulates the whole of humanity, and that is why its victories will be the victory, and even the birth, of man. We are then at the threshold of socialism and communism, which constitute the true humanism because they bring about the creation of man. Man appears here as the product of his own history. After centuries of humiliation he takes his own destiny in his hands, and to speak accurately, it is only this taking in hand of destiny which constitutes his true history. This thesis is taken up lyrically in the *Manifesto* of 1848, and, on this foundation, *Capital* undertakes to demonstrate that the structure of capitalism is founded on exploitation. There is nothing, then, good to be drawn from capitalism, whose contradictions proclaim its imminent disappearance and at the same time the victory of socialism.

Considered in the perspective of *The German Ideology*, Marxism seems to be a form of historicism. Man is essentially labor and the product of his labor; he is, therefore, implicated in a process which is one of constant transformation. We can no longer, it seems, speak of human nature in any rigorous sense, inasmuch as labor, viewed historically, implies the division of man into classes. What exists, at a particular moment in time, is a slave, a serf, a proletarian, a soldier, a noble, a merchant, a capitalist. A complete relativism is the result; the unity of human nature is dissolved. Only a nominalist view of history has validity. The image of man becomes an image of a succession of heterogeneous beings, each of whom differs essentially from the predecessor who has prepared his arrival. Human nature is essentially determined by variable historic coordinates. Time, as succession and as the factor of the many, is at the root of an irreducible metaphysical pluralism.

Yet, this result which seems to follow from Marx's historicism is compensated for, and even neutralized, by the affirmation that history is reason. Essence,

as an intelligible structure, appeared emptied and destroyed. It is now surreptitiously reintroduced, but under a heading which is programmatic, or if you like, messianic and eschatological. The flow of time with the dispersion which it implies is crossed by a design which is rational, homogeneous, and permanent. It is still true that one can no longer speak of human nature in the sense of an intelligible unity which deploys its possibilities by bringing them to realization in various ways in time; but the time of history is considered as a time in which there is an increase of the homogeneous sort which a living organism experiences, a progressive realization of an idea or a plan. This ordered increase is reason.

In this reintroduction of essence, one may no longer, it is true, speak of ontological structures thrown into temporal existence in order to be successively realized. It is time itself, as history, which constitutes a structure or essence. If all the individual humans in the course of time are considered, it might still be said that their diversity prevents consideration of a single common and identical essence. Yet these individuals are not completely separated from reason, inasmuch as reason is considered to be the totality of individuals in evolution. This totality is the imposition of a kind of logical form on the becoming of history; in relation to the totality, individuals, or even particular groups, become epiphenomenal. In themselves, events, episodes, individuals in history can only be the object of a nominalist consideration. They are brought into the sphere of reason only when, thanks to dialectic, they appear as moments of the totality. Through them, in effect, is deployed the inexorable, structured increase of history which is reason. Events and individuals are not reason; they are the place where reason appears, and this distinction between reason and its place of deployment is significant.

Marxist historicism admits, with Hegel, that the real is rational. This admission is not an affirmation that the historical real is itself intelligible in the measure that it is being; it is only to profess the radical immanence of reason in becoming. In the becoming the logical process is deployed, and this process is the self-building of reason. Suddenly, Becoming is not only justified, but even deified. In this perspective, man, product of History, is its *raison d'être*, or, we might say, its formal cause, inasmuch as he is the very structure of this *raison d'être*. The plan which is realized in history is social man. The climax is an identification of man, history, and reason.

This identification results in a humanism, and yet there is something paradoxical in it. While proclaiming that man is the center and end of history, it takes refuge in generalities or turns to a utopia, when there is a question of making its content definite. Why is there this turning to generalities and utopias? It is because abstract generalities are possible as long as reason must realize itself only through a concrete reality which is not itself considered to be intelligible. At the same time it may be understood how this kind of reason *in fieri*, this convergence of history toward man, could easily serve as a kind of disguise for ethical inspiration. Marxist historicism may thus be considered as the mythical formulation of a humanism which is, above all, ethical.

Relativism and the mythical identification of history with reason involve each other in the historicist conception of Marxism. It is significant that the two Marx-

ist thinkers who have most insisted on historicism have each emphasized one of these two aspects. Anthony Gramsci, influenced by Croce, has tried to bring out the dialectical structure of history.⁴ At the same time, he has been impressed by the perspective of an end for history which Marx had inherited from the Hegelian system. In Gramsci, man appears in his very structure as the ceaselessly modified resultant of a polygon of technical and economic forces which are themselves in a state of constant transformation. In particular, in reaction to the materialism of Bukharin, Gramsci has attempted to substitute for the science of nature the science of man and of history, since these sciences are more conformable to the dialectical notion of reason, more conformable to that becoming which is inscribed in reason itself.

George Lukács has a point of departure even closer to the vision of Hegel.⁵ He is especially careful to set out the systematic character of reason in the sense in which German idealism understood the notion of system — system as the coherent, rational totality flowing from an a priori principle. History or reason is essentially totality. But what is the generative principle, or more exactly, what is the self-generating principle, of this totality? In other words, what is the principle which is a substitute for the synthetic judgment a priori or Spirit? The new principle is the class of totality, or the Proletariat. The Proletariat of Lukács is no longer, then, a simple sociological notion, derived from experience, but this notion transferred to the rank of an a priori metaphysical category. By making this transfer Lukács believes that he has completely liberated the principle of “modern” philosophy, the principle of immanence. But what he has not observed is that, if Spirit held a residue of transcendence, then the Proletariat, as an artificially privileged category, is only a mythical name for the same transcendence. The same aporia may be noted in Gramsci: the privileged subject of the dialectical *praxis* is, for him, the Proletariat.

In this fashion Marxism, in accordance with the program of modern philosophy, undertakes to exorcise the vestiges of transcendence. Its theory of ideology is composed with the same intent. It supposes that all the activities of man — cultural, moral, esthetic, juridical — are determined, on the human level, by the social structure and the class relationship. No transcendental value, and consequently no free value, has any longer a place. The utopian picture of the “kingdom of liberty” is, perhaps, compensation for this absence of gratuitousness, but it is a compensation which remains utopian.

Just as Marxism transmuted the empirical notion of the proletariat into a metaphysical category, so Marxism has also transformed its most basic concept: the concept of *praxis*, which first appears in the theses on Feuerbach in the appendix to *The German Ideology*.⁶ Considered in its philosophical purity, the concept of *praxis* is a formulation of the intellect in an idealistic fashion. It is a conclusion of post-Kantian philosophy. Spirit is a priori; essentially active, it

4. For further development of this point, the reader may be interested in consulting my *Le néo-marxisme d' Antonio Gramsci*, in *DU ROMANTISME AU MARXISME* 207-226 (1961).

5. See Lukács' youthful work (later officially repudiated), *GESCHICHTE UND KLASSENBEWUSSTSEIN: STUDIEN ÜBER MARXISTISCHE DIALEKTIK* (1923).

6. Cf. my *La philosophie de la praxis*, in *DU ROMANTISME AU MARXISME* 169-206 (1961).

posits its own object: these are the foundations of the idealist position whose consequences Fichte and Hegel developed. This development was to affirm that the object is not really distinct from the subject; that the subject posits its object means that the subject posits itself. Then, by virtue of the postulate of immanence which is at the heart of this development, "to posit" and "to posit self" came to be understood in the strong sense of a "creation" or a "self-creation" and to meet literally the formula of Spinoza, *causa sui*. At the same time — and on this point Fichte is perhaps more radical than Hegel — it was understood that the contemplative and speculative form of thought presupposes a real object and, therefore, a transcendence of being in relation to thought. This understanding led to the assertion of the essentially practical nature of the mind. It is the combination of these characteristics of the practical mind which characterizes the *praxis* of Marxism, and it is these qualities which make Marxism a radically atheistic philosophy.

But the originality of Marxism, which is also the cause of its congenital ambiguities, arises from this: at the same time that it fulfills the tradition of idealism, it intends to break with it. What Marx retains from idealism is the demand of immanence and the idea of man *causa sui*. But he has revolted at the a priori character of its reasoning. The only reality which he wants to recognize is concrete, "material," empirical reality. Hence a latent conflict lies at the interior of Marxism between the a priori and the a posteriori; there is an incessant passing back and forth between a concept taken in its scientific, experimental sense, and the same concept taken in a speculative sense. Thus, at the heart of Marxism, the concept of *praxis* has a fundamental ambiguity as it relates to the concept of labor and the concept of the class war. Hence arises an illusion which often proves deceptive: the philosophical notions of Marxism give the impression of emerging from social and economic experience, while the economic or social concepts have a significance and a dynamism which go substantially beyond their obvious meanings. In reality, however, this illusion is based on a weakness: the absence of any distinction between the philosophic and the scientific. In sum, Marxism results in a melange of science and philosophy which bears the imprint of the age of Auguste Comte.

It is by an analysis of *praxis*, as affirmation of immanence, that the opposition of Marxism to religion may be understood. In the self-affirmation of *praxis*, man owes what he is only to himself; he depends on no one, on nothing transcendent. He is his own creator, he is the provider of his own good, so that the cause and the mode of acquiring this good are essential components of this good itself. Consequently, Marx takes away the notion of creation and, so doing, any ontological dependence on a transcendent God. This way of putting the problem has, indeed, been conditioned by the Lutheran theology of man as a sinner situated in opposition to God.⁷ In this earlier theology what is given to one is taken from the other: to affirm God is to annihilate man, and vice versa. In this perspective, Marxist humanism could be considered as the prolongation of a movement of protest and the revenge of degraded man, a movement prepared

7. I have analyzed this problematic in my *L'ATHÉISME DU JEUNE MARX ET SES ORIGINES HÉGÉLIENNES* (1959).

in the eighteenth century and already vigorously formulated in Kant's *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* and in Hegel.

It is also the postulate of immanence, yoked to the postulate of materialism, which accounts for the incapacity of Marxism to develop a significant political ethic. The political order, by nature ideological, is not subordinate to any higher norm. Marx had, indeed, felt that the Hegelian State, which was conceived as an entity above society, had a purely logical existence as a being of reason. But he stopped with a denial of its necessity. As the State continued to exist, he was reduced to the disastrously impoverished concept of the State as an instrument of domination in the hands of the governing class. The political order became a simple reflection of class struggle; its law was, then, violence. What is the criterion permitting a judgment on the use of violence? There is no other criterion than the interests of the proletariat, that is, of the Party, which is the "conscience" of the proletariat. Here, again, it appears that the Marxist concept of the proletariat is a myth which testifies in its way to the irrepressible demands of transcendence.

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(Translated by the Staff of the FORUM)