

A Marxian Concept of Human Nature in Defense of Alienation: A
Revolutionary Exegesis of a Revolutionary Philosophy

by

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ABSTRACT

Two long-standing and erroneous claims have plagued Marxism for the past century. First, Marx held no static view of human-nature. Second, Marx's theory of alienation was the naïve view of a young Marx, which was jettisoned in his wiser adult years. Both views are demonstrable false. Moreover, the validity of his theory of human nature, and alienation, are contingent upon the acceptance of each other. One cannot fully comprehend his view of alienation without understanding his view of human nature, and vice versa.

Upon demonstrating Marx's theory of human nature, and defending it as a crucial bedrock for the theory of alienation, mainstream rejections of each will be considered, and critiqued. The constant misunderstanding of Marx's theory of human nature comes in his unique theory of essence. He is an essentialist, with a fluid conception of man's essence. One's historical essence is an ensemble of socio-historical reflections, dialectically interplaying off a historically transcending essentialism.

Dedications

To Kristen, my provider in all things essential and non-essential, without whom I would be totally lost.

And, to Ben, and his twenty years of patience, for me alone, regarding my stridency. I've no idea how either of you put up with me. Ben, I've tried to make Marx that much clearer for those who justifiable lack the time, or patience, to comprehend Marx's rational kernel, beneath his vitriolic shell, through years of reading.

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PREFACE

My interest in Marx's critique of capitalism was piqued during a Political Economy course when the professor's refutation of the Marxian theory of exploitation seemed wholly inadequate. Akin to a friar referring to tradition to justify his belief system, it was simply taken for granted that Marx must be wrong – since Marxists regimes were nightmares – without requiring further depth into the how and why of the errs of exploitation. But my interest was only piqued.

Later in my academic career I took a *Critical Theory* course. We were required to familiarize ourselves with Marx's theory of alienation. It occurred to me that if this theory was taken seriously, alienation under capitalism was insurmountable. If my memory is correct, in a short writing assignment, I stated approximately: until all modes of expression were available to all people, alienation was inescapable. This sentiment both horrified me, and electrified me. It was clear that something was deeply wrong with the entire mode of production around me, and most academics, news castors, journalists, politicians, etc., were skirting around some fundamental issues. Moreover, I was often informed by professors that despite Marx's contemporary critique of capitalism, we had transcended his criticisms. This seemed equally vexing to me as the conditions and descriptions of capitalism Marx seemed to be referring to were very much the present conditions of numerous third world countries. My Political Science background also led me to the awareness that the American life style is contingent upon third world labor. Even if we (American citizens) had transcended the critiques of capitalism (and I do not think we have), they had not.

Despite the controversial history of the author, I needed to read Marx myself. His writing is often cumbersome, erratic, and unabashedly polemical. Furthermore, he was steeped in German Idealism, which is notorious for its opaque writing style. Few would contend otherwise that Germany's philosophical master before Marx's time, Hegel, was most assuredly the worst author to grace the halls of philosophy, albeit he was also one of Philosophy's greatest geniuses. Marx followed in his footsteps. Therefore, I needed to read a few preliminary texts and introductions to begin a thorough study of Marx.

There was a trend in all introductory text, and guides to Marx, that seemed as vexing as my previous professor's presumptuous attitude toward the inferiority of exploitation. These texts were all pretty consistent in agreeing that there was no such thing as human nature to be found in the works of Marx. All concepts of man were historically contingent, and the socio-economic relations man found himself born into were entirely the determining factors of his essence. In other words, if Marx's concept was termed in the nature versus nurture debate, Marx assuredly took the side of nurture.

If this was the case, why did Marx espouse a theory of alienation, with predicates that state under capitalism man is alienated from himself, and from his species-being? If man's self is ultimately a product of socio-economic conditions, he cannot be alienated from it, since it is a culmination of the supposedly alienating factors giving rise to what and who he is.

These preliminary text and introductions were creating far more questions than they were ultimately answering.¹ Moreover, they left me quite confused as to why Marx would spend an entire lifetime rebelling, critiquing, scathing, and lambasting capitalism with every waking

¹ As I was to learn later, whereas Marx always sees contradictions as the building blocks of theory and praxis, these texts saw them as the ending point of good philosophy.

moment he had. I decided I was versed enough in Marxian lingo to dive into his most prominent works. After an entire year of reading I emerged both gratified and still alarmed. I was gratified that the previous questions that confused me were now answered. I was alarmed that the sentiments I had held in *Critical Theory* were even more correct than I had presumed.

This thesis was written to answer these questions for future readers, and hopefully reignite interest in Marx's theory of alienation. Additionally, to my surprise, the theories of man's essence and his lack of human nature were starkly different than my own reading. This dichotomy of views, in my opinion, is paramount to vindicating Marx's theory of alienation as being just as true today as it was in his time; and will continue to be true until capitalism is disposed of.

Sartre was correct to state: "I have often remarked on the fact that an "anti-Marxist" argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea. A so-called "going beyond" Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy which one believes he has gone beyond."

So long as capitalism remains the dominant mode of production we cannot transcend Marx's critiques. So long as we cannot transcend his critiques, we must ascertain them, if we have any hope whatsoever for a better tomorrow, where we cease to be alienated.

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will explore Marxian concepts of human nature, their relation to alienation, and popular refutations of both. I will argue that within Marx's work as a whole there is a consistent notion of human nature – backed by present day science - and alienation is a real phenomenon best understood upon Marx's concept of human nature. Marx's concept of human nature transcends history, but his explication of alienation is isolated to the capitalist mode of production.

In Part I, Chapter 1, I will establish Marx's concept of human nature via a long view of his work. The crux of Marx's claim to human nature is that humans have a drive to spontaneously and creatively produce products in a manner that is conducive to social and individual satisfaction. Human outlets of expression, decisions of products to make, and underlining motivators for creativity are historically contingent, but the overall drive is part of their species-being/human-essence. This concept of human nature is verifiable via a broad reading of Marx, but is rarely explicit except in several contentious – amongst Marxist scholars – writings (i.e., *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 & Notes on Mill*).

Marx established several predicates of human nature and rejected others (e.g., man is the rational species) long before the sciences had weighed in on these matters. Recent scientific and anthropological research though vindicates Marx's claims that what distinguishes homo-sapiens from other species is their creativity regarding their tool making capability. Our closest primate cousins are able to reproduce tools upon being taught, but lack the ingenuity and creativity to manifest them *a priori*. *A priori* instrument ingenuity is an aspect of human species-being.

Moreover, Marx's rejection that humans are the rational species has been affirmed by recent scientific research regarding seals and even some breeds of dogs.

Following this, in Chapter 2, I will indicate why this particular outlook of human nature is essential to Marx's theory of alienation. Despite many Marxist criticisms of alienation, Marx believed it to be an empirically verifiable fact of the human condition in capitalism. To vindicate this claim will require an elaboration of what alienation is – under capitalism – and its relation to the previously outlined historically transcending category of species-being. One of the core claims of alienation is that humans are alienated from their species-being, which is unintelligible without a concept of what that species-being is. Moreover, by grasping this cornerstone of alienation, the other cornerstones – alienated from product, from each other, from production – are broadly illuminated. A dialectical relationship exists betwixt all four cornerstones, with species-being serving a primary role.

In the process of alienation Marx deduces that misery, social, and spiritual (albeit with a material ontology) want will follow. Recent scientific research into the overall happiness and contentedness of nations again affirms Marx's predictions. The most capitalistic of countries (e.g., USA) when juxtaposed to the more socially democratic (e.g., the Scandinavian countries) reveals stark differences in overall happiness. Marx also believed that the most genuine forms of unfettered capitalism would lead to the starkest forms of wealth inequality. Similar data reveals that those countries with the largest gaps in wealth inequality - within a capitalist mode of production – suffer more misery than those with more wealth equality.

After laying down the previous foundations Chapter 3 will begin with a brief history of how issues of alienation and human nature became such contentious topics in Marxism. This

history will briefly highlight the Bolshevik revolution as the watershed moment for Marxist propaganda.² Then I will move on to a discussion of Marx's works being published in whole after a quasi-cold-war bifurcation of Marxism had been established, and how these works fit neither paradigm. The West used Marxism to represent all that was evil in the USSR and satellite countries, and the USSR and satellite countries used Marx, Marxism, and his notions of communism as moral justification for an unjustifiable authoritarian state. In the midst of such contentious times three criticisms of Marxian human nature and alienation arose from both sides of the cold war.

Part II of my thesis will deal with these major criticisms. The first critical perspective is the most well-known. Chapter 4 will go over the criticisms of Louis Althusser. Althusser published his philosophical collected works in *For Marx*. Althusser has two core criticisms against Marxism that incorporates a human nature and/or alienation. First, Althusser rejects Marxian concepts of a species-being as being prior to Marx's *epistemological-break*, and therefore not representing the wholly mature Marx. Second, Althusser's concept of Marx being a fine wine, i.e., he gets inherently better with age.

Althusser makes several mistakes in his analysis. The first is that the *epistemological-break* is not as stark as he claims. The second is that although Marx does make a formal break around the time Althusser indicates, he does not forego alienation or his concept of human nature. Although the categories are used less frequently, the predicates – and sometimes the categories - of the categories remain present all the way through Marx's work, including to the end of *Capital Volume III*. Whereas Althusser contends that the categories and predicates leave

² I use propaganda in the neutral sense as the deliberate spreading of ideas, and not the more contentious sense of spreading ideological manipulations.

once *The German Ideology* – which lays the foundations for historical and dialectical materialism – was consummated. This is ironic because in *The German Ideology* Marx states that alienation is an empirical fact. In the same work Marx is making a break from Hegelian concepts, ideas, philosophical praxis, etc. He views these modes of thought as inherently not empirical, but instead abstract ideologies. For alienation to be an empirical fact it must have grounding in reality, independent of ideology; that is, it cannot be just a philosophy.

The third criticism is that Louis Althusser offers no *a priori* reason or *a posteriori* reason as to why Marx gets better with age. Nor does he explain why one is inherently wrong to find truth and error in all ages of Marx's life. He simply takes for granted that fallibility dwindled away as Marx matured. There exist psychological and political reasons as to why Althusser may have presented this case, but vindicating them is bound to be spurious.

The next set of primary criticisms, to be discussed in chapter 5, regarding Marxian human nature, is a fastidious reading of Marx's 6th thesis on Feuerbach. Althusser also takes up this criticism, but he is by no means the first. The criticism was several decades old prior to Althusser's presentation. The Feuerbach theses were never intended for publication but have had a lasting impact on Marxist interpretation. Norman Geras, author of *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*, offers cogent criticisms against a reading of this thesis explicitly rejecting human nature, and his arguments will be summarized.³

³ . 6th thesis: Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1. To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human individual.
2. Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as “genus”, as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals.

The final popular criticism, discussed in Chapter 6, against a Marxist human nature, can be found in a statement Marx made in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that “ All history...is nothing but the development of human nature.” That is, in developing the tools and means of production, and developing new social relations, humans develop their human nature through historical praxis. There is no historically transcending essence, merely historically conditioned essence.

This criticism though is quite inconsistent with Marx's notion of alienation. For Marx humans are alienated from their species-being. This critical view accepts the fact that humans are *Homo-Faber*. Marx viewed capitalism as the most revolutionary force on the planet, especially within the means of production. If humans were only *Homo-Faber*, then capitalism would foster their species-being, not hinder it. It would serve as the greatest economic outlet for *Homo-Faber*. Given this inconsistency, and the notion of human nature outlined in section 1, it subsequently follows that this criticism, although the most popular, is not sound. As Marx would say, It contains a rational kernel – that man develops his human nature – within a mystical shell (i.e., there is no basis for man's initial human nature).

I conclude in Chapter 7 that alienation is still taking place. All criticisms against it are, as Sarte said: “a rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea.” Marx had a historical transcending notion of human nature that retained a dialectical relation to history. For Marx, claims regarding essence, existence, and being, must all share a dialectical relationship. The existentialist claims of existence preceding essence, and essence being determined by authenticity are ill conceived. Capitalist existence precedes any individual’s broad essence, but being in capitalism alienates one's narrowest and most fundamental essence, while simultaneously conditioning an

individual's essence towards society writ large.

Unfortunately Marx thought enough alienation would eventually lead to a proper revolt. I'll outline some notes, taken from readings I have done of Rousseau – who influenced Marx – as to how capital has adapted to a potentially hostile alienated work force via prescription drug sales. The US, being the most capitalist country on the planet, is presently consuming the most pharmaceutical drugs across all ages of the population, primarily served to keep mood in balance – with historical social conditions – and augment focus towards perfunctory task that alienate species-being.

The scholarship that informs this thesis has been mostly primary sources. Most of the works of Karl Marx, including his letters, along with Frederick Engels. Readings into pre-historical (i.e., state of nature) political theorist such as Locke, Paine, Hobbes, and Rousseau have been undertaken, along with more historically minded philosophers such as Hegel. Readings of Feuerbach were paramount to ascertaining Marx's break with Hegel and Feuerbach, and understanding the misconception that Feuerbach was the source of Marx's materialism. Both critical and complimentary notions of human nature and alienation have been read in the works of John Bellamy Foster, Louis Althusser, Allen Wood, Etienne Balibar, Erich Fromm, Norman Geras, Robert Tucker, Sydney Hook, George Novack, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Ernest Mandel. A minor reading of Gyorgy Lukacs and Herbert Marcuse also took place. These philosophers cover a wide spectrum of philosophical methods, ranging from pure dialectical, existential, dogmatic party loyalist, to analytic.

History regarding the spread of Marxism, the Bolshevik revolution, and later publishing of Marx's work was conducted by reading Robert Tucker, Ernest Mandel, Erich Fromm, Perry

Anderson, David Priestland, and *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Marx* (specifically essays by Terrel Carver and Paul Thomas).

Methodologically my work is analytical, sometimes dialectical (specifically Chapter 2) and Marxist. Marx's claims will be compared to empirical research. Ostensibly this is a betrayal of classic dialectical philosophy, but Marx was adamant that all real world claims should have the backing of empirical research. The logic of Marxism recognizes that categories of analytic and empirical scrutinization are not timeless, but historically conditioned. Their ontology is contingent upon a socio-material existence giving rise to their fleeting moments of conception. My research will not betray that framework Marx was working in.

By means of exploring Marxian human-nature, alienation, and criticisms of each, I hope to contribute to the scholarly dialogue regarding a denial of Marxian human nature, and a denial of alienation being a consistent theory in Marx's actual work. Cold war propaganda has led to visceral reactions and caricatures of Marxism as nothing but a militant and violent philosophy that implicitly seeks to dominate individuals. By refuting the criticisms in the various sections above, and offering keen insight into Marx's view of man, I hope this paper will serve as a small step in a positive direction towards a fuller understanding of Marx, and our alienated condition under capitalism. Until this mode of production is transcended, Marx and Marxism will retain cogent criticisms and illuminating insights regarding the social relations we find ourselves born into. Therefore, it is important that we understand Marx correctly, if we are ever to transcend to a new mode of production and a more egalitarian societal structure.

PART I

The checkout guy hates his job. Or at least he would if he allowed himself to feel in his body the slipping away of his own precious lifetime. Perhaps, though, it's more accurate to say "his own no-longer-precious lifetime," since if it were really precious he would not—could not—sell it so cheaply, nor even sell it for money at all. But he has been trained to never think of that, and especially to never feel it. If he thought of that—if he felt himself spending the majority of his life doing things he did not want to do—how would he then act? Who would he then be? What would he then do? ... How, too, would we all respond if we fully awoke to the effects of the drip, drip, drip of hour after hour, day after day, year after year sold to jobs we do not love (jobs that are probably destroying our landbase to boot), and how would we respond, too, if we paid attention to the effects of other incessant drippings such as airbrushed photo after airbrushed photo on something so intimate as what—not whom, *never* whom—we find attractive?

-Derrick Jensen⁴

⁴ Jensen, Derrick. *Engame Volume I*. New York: Seven Stories Press, 2006. 284.

CHAPTER ONE: MARXIAN HUMAN NATURE: OR SPECIES-BEING

Sure they liked it. Men always like to work together. There's a hunger in men to work together. Do you know ten men can lift nearly twelve times as big a load as one man can? It only takes a little spark to get them going. Most of the time they're suspicious, because every time someone gets 'em working in a group the profit of their work is taken away from them; but wait till they get working for themselves. Tonight the work concerned them, it was their job; and see how well they did it
-John Steinbeck⁵

I do not think it would be too presumptuous of me to assert the following truth: all of us, when asked as toddlers, children, pre-teens, teens, college students, even adults, what we want to be when we grow up, give frivolous answers. Sometimes we make something up on the spot. Other times we simply have no idea and cannot properly answer the question. And, occasionally, we may actually know what we want to be, and gradually what once was certain (I want to be a fireman) ceases to be (I now want to be a writer). Ultimately, the sad fate is, the majority of us end up not only not achieving our fleeting dream job, but labor in a manner that only serves to provide for our sustenance. It's telling that for much of our life, we truly lack the capacity to envision ourselves in one occupation until death do we all part, and yet we labor in that fashion anyway. Karl Marx's view of human-nature can shed necessary light on this proffered truism.

Noam Chomsky, in a debate with Michel Foucault, stated that creativity was a normal human act. In the field of linguistics he rhetorically asked: “is it possible to characterise [sic], in terms of the physical concepts presently available to us, the ability of the child to acquire complex systems of knowledge; and furthermore, critically, having acquired such systems of knowledge, to make use of this knowledge in the free and creative and remarkably varied ways

⁵ Steinbeck, John. In *Dubious Battle*. New York: Penguin, 2006. 49.

in which he does?"⁶ Marx asks an identical question but with an important distinction. He is not inquiring into language, but into the products man creates, from the arrow-head, to the poem, to the Hadron Collider.

In *Capital* Marx remarks that in bourgeoisie society, surplus value (i.e., exploitation) is just. Justice is only a product and reflection of the ruling classes ideology that supports its economic dominance. However, he also states in another paragraph that the capitalist steals value from the worker when deriving surplus value. Stealing is by no means a morally neutral word. Therefore, the famous analytic Marxist G.A. Cohen once declared, regarding Marx on justice, that Marx did believe capitalism was unjust, albeit he didn't know he believed it.⁷

Marx's expression of human nature could possibly be tantamount to his philosophy of justice; he may be unaware of it. Frankly, I think Marx did believe in a human nature, and I'm going to show what that human nature was, however, the caveat is worth offering that even if he doesn't know explicitly that he had a view of human nature, he implicitly had one, and *a fortiori*, contemporary science vindicates his claims. In establishing a Marxian human nature, Marx's theory of alienation can be defended and retained.

It is also worth noting that a Marxian concept of human nature has been nearly universally rejected by many Marx scholars, and Marxist, such as: Tom Bottomore, Robert D Cumming, Eugene Kamenka, Louis Althusser, Vernon Venable, Robert Tucker, Kate Soper, Colin Summer, and Sidney Hook; to name but a few!⁸

Throughout this thesis human nature will be denoted as that which is distinctly a property

⁶ Chomsky, Noam, and Michel Foucault. *Human Nature: Justice versus Power* Noam Chomsky debates with Michel Foucault. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Jan 2012. <<http://www.chomsky.info/debates/1971&x.htm>>.

⁷ Carver, Terrell. *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. 152.

⁸ Geras, Norman. *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*. London: Verso, 1983. 49-51.

of the human-species that distinguishes them from all other species. The distinguishing aspect is important. It's undoubted that humans are a rational species, a hungry species, a copulating species, etc., but these properties cannot distinguish us from the rest of life, even if they are a part of our nature. Fortunately Marx helps us find the distinguishing property of humans, thus revealing insights into their specifically human-nature.

The first problem with establishing Marx's concept of human nature is that he wrote quite a lot, and used terms that are rather interchangeable, or at least somewhat synonymous (e.g. species-being, essence, and human nature). Moreover, the predicates he used for each were often shifted around, as he dialectically shifted each categories prominence, and influence, in a broad socio-historical relationship, and personally philosophical development. For instance, in some early texts Marx refers to essence as what is essentially human, where as in later texts, ostensibly, essence is a social product (an ensemble), that isn't ahistorically *essential*.

The most prudent path to take then is to compile all Marx's explicit statements on human nature, man's essence, and species-being, into one list, and attempt to draw out a continuous theme.

From Youth to Death

In order of age, earliest to most recent, we begin with Marx's notes on James Mill, written in 1844. In these notes Marx is attempting to point out how money, as value, and as the predominant form of the measurements of value, is operating in an odious fashion to destroy real human value and real human relationships. "Species-activity and the species-spirit whose real, conscious and authentic existence consists in social activity and social enjoyment. Since the essence of man is the true community of man, men, by activating their own essence, produce,

create this human community, this social being which is no abstract, universal power standing over against the solitary individual, but is the essence of every individual, his own activity, his own life, his own spirit, his own wealth...To say therefore that man is estranged from himself is identical with the statement that the society of this estranged man is the caricature of a true community, of his true species-existence...the realization of his essence appears as the de-realization of his life.”⁹

Some translators translate essence of man as human nature. When this translation is made, and the Hegelian prose is left out, Marx is essentially saying that human nature is the ability to produce and flourish within a community that serves the community, and oneself, in a mutually gratifying way. The uniqueness of each individual’s productive and communal relationship simultaneously affirms the similarity of their human nature/essence. However, if one notices that man is estranged from himself, one notices that the community in which he is living is a caricature, or a *camera obscura* (a term Marx frequently used), of how man's essence is best expressed. Economics, and economist, produce and ensure this perverted *camera obscura*.¹⁰ When the *camera obscura* productive relation (e.g. capitalism) begins to take effect “our products are not united for each other by the bond of *human nature*.”¹¹ And “We are so estranged from our human essence that the direct language of man strikes us as an offense against the dignity of man, whereas the estranged language of objective values appears as the justified, self-confident and self-acknowledged dignity of man incarnate.”¹² Marx, without being explicitly normative, offers the way things would naturally be, if economist and capitalism had

⁹ Marx, Karl. *Early Writings*. London: Penguin, 1992. 265-66.

¹⁰ Chapter 2 will go into this at more length.

¹¹ Ibid 275.

¹² Ibid 276.

their perverted mirrors and mirages abolished (i.e., the full realization of man's human nature):

“Let us suppose that we had produced as human beings. In that event each of us would have doubly affirmed himself and his neighbor in his production. (1) In my production I would have objectified the specific character of my individuality and for that reason I would both have enjoyed the expression of my own individual life during my activity and also, in contemplating the object, I would experience an individual pleasure, I would experience my personality as an objective sensuously perceptible power beyond all shadow of doubt. (2) In your use or enjoyment of my product I would have the immediate satisfaction and knowledge in my labor I had gratified a human need, i.e. that I had objectified human nature and hence had procured an object corresponding to the needs of another human being. (3) I would have acted for you as the mediator between you and the species, thus I would be acknowledged by you as the complement of your own being, as an essential part of yourself...in my individual activity I would have directly confirmed and realized my authentic nature, my human communal nature. Our production would be as many mirrors from which our natures would shine forth. This relation would be mutual: what applies to me would also apply to you.¹³”

It's disingenuous to explain these quotes analytically. Marx was a dialectical thinker. To define something in an isolated way is too myopic, and fails to consider the synthetically harmonious relationship of material existence to man. Moreover, contradiction is just as important to understanding as is coherence.¹⁴ Human nature cannot be divorced from production, nor production from exchange, and therefore exchange cannot be divorced from human nature. However, if we are to put things succinctly, for Marx, human nature is: humans have a drive to

¹³ Ibid 277-78.

¹⁴ Hence all the references to mirror relations, and perversion of species activity, essence, nature, etc.

spontaneously and creatively produce products in a manner that is conducive to social and individual satisfaction. In producing a unique product, man affirms his uniqueness, and in distributing it, he gratifies someone else, and through that gratification, further gratifies himself. Simultaneously the same producer depends upon the same relationship, of unique production and exchange, from someone else, therefore what was unique to him, is in reality common to all.

These private notes on James Mill are only the first of many philosophical, and/or serious expositions, of Marx's view of man. The next can be found in the *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 (EP Manuscripts)*.

The *EP Manuscripts* are Marx's first serious endeavor into the Political Economy of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jean-Baptiste Say, etc., armed with a quiver of critical Feuerbachian arrows. The *camera obscura* of man's human nature, as discussed in the notes on Mill, is fully fledged out in Marx's chapter on *Estranged Labor*.¹⁵ Bringing out Marx's view of human-nature in this work is slightly more difficult than the notes on Mill. Marx is determined to reveal the dialectical contradictions in all categories of economic thought (e.g., value, wage, rent, etc.) and their relation to man's essence. Therefore, in establishing the negation of man's essence when confronted with bourgeoisie economics (i.e., alienation), an affirmative understanding of man's essence can only be elucidated from a careful negation of the negation made by the reader. That is, in understanding bourgeoisie economics negation of man, we can synthesize a view of what man's essence is, in his suffering his essences negation via bourgeoisie economic praxis.

In order to fully flesh out this picture though, it's simpler to begin with the affirmative

¹⁵ This is commonly referred to as the chapter on alienation. The philosophy of alienation will be discussed in detail in chapter 2, for now it's important that we focus solely on tethering out claims of species-being, essence, and human nature.

statements of human-nature, and proceed to the negated aspects in chapter 2. Marx states “man is a species being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species as his object (his own as well as those of other things), but – and this is only another way of expressing it – but also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being.”¹⁶ Marx goes on to compare the similarities between man and animal, but distinguishes that man's “species character” is productive life “in the character of its life-activity” as free and conscious. That is, free production – production without anything but nature's meditative material restraints – is what characterizes the activity of man from the other species. Whereas life-activity for the animals is identical to the animal essence, freeman makes life-activity “the object of his will and of his consciousness.” This distinguishing aspect makes man a species-being.¹⁷ Man sees his species as an object of which his free production will consciously and freely take into account, thus confirming his kinship as a species-being. The lexicon is different, and productive consciousness is added in as a universalizing aspect of man's essence, but nonetheless the theme is quite in line with his notes on Mill.

A contention could be raised that Marx is incorrect to consider production a species-being life-activity of man alone. He rejects this, carefully. For Marx animals only produce out of need, for themselves, and their immediate kin (i.e., birds produce nests, beavers dams). Whereas man produces “even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.” In one of the rarest moments of Marx's aesthetic side, he contends that unlike the animals, mans' production transcends mere bodily needs, but is an amicable confrontation

¹⁶ Marx, Karl. *Economics and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Mineola: Dover, 2007. 74.

¹⁷ Ibid 75. It is only under capitalism that what was free production, the confirmation of man's species-being - his life activity - that this activity becomes his means to life and no longer his own activity.

between material nature and man, whereby man can “also form things in accordance with the laws of beauty.” Marx is again harping on the point that whereas the life-activity of an animal is ingrained and perfunctory, man's life-activity when free is a confirmation of his species-being via its freedom to produce objects that transcend mere sustenance needs.¹⁸ Ultimately man's freely produced product is the objective confirmation of his essence, and its reception in society is *a fortiori* objective confirmation of all species-being.

Marx is making a radical break from his former philosophical mentor Ludwig Feuerbach. Feuerbach was the consummate critical Hegelian of his day, and when he published *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*, and *The Essence of Christianity*, Marx, Engels, and all the critical Hegelians “became at once Feuerbachians.”¹⁹ It was in this critical vein that Marx set out both to critique bourgeoisie Political Economy and simultaneously establish his own views. Feuerbach thought consciousness (awareness) of fellow man, and his capacities, in abstract consciousness, was the hallmark of human nature.²⁰ For Marx this consciousness of another fellow man, a species-being, is confirmed in the act of free production, and not in abstract thought. Production itself, for another, is in itself both an act of subjective abstract thought, and an objective confirmation of that very thought via its realization in praxis. For if this free production (as outlined above) is the hallmark essence of man, than Feuerbach's claims are nonsensical, since this hallmark of man cannot first be thought abstractly, but must be confirmed in praxis, and can only then be abstractly thought. Feuerbach has placed the horse (abstract thought of man's capacities) before the cart (objectification of species-being via free production).

¹⁸ Ibid 76.

¹⁹ Engels, Frederick. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. New York: International Publishers, 2010. 18.

²⁰ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. Mineola: Dover, 2008. 1-2.

The *EP Manuscripts* abruptly end, without the remaining pages intact. What Marx may or may not have written is a matter of speculation, and serious wonderment. Nonetheless, what he did write only consummates his previous views in notes on Mill.

In 1845, Marx and Engels met in Paris and drafted their first book together: *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*. The reason for writing the book was to criticize the Young Hegelians for their idealism, and utopian socialism. In so doing, they hoped to lay the groundwork for their future works that would flesh out their (mostly Marx's) theory of Historical Materialism. As Engels recalled later about the *The Holy Family*, they also wanted to develop “the science of real men and their historical development.”²¹

The fact that they believed they were laying out a science of real men is very important when considering Marx and Engels also explicitly refer to human-nature in this book. When their claim of human-nature is combined with Engels recollection, it necessarily implied that the two men believed they could develop a science of real men that included the notion of human-nature as a part of that science. Marx and Engel's explicitly used the notion of human-nature when referring to alienation under the capitalist mode of production: “The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognizes estrangement as *its own power* and has in it the *semblance* of a human existence. The class of the proletariat feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence. It is, to use an expression of Hegel, in its abasement the indignation at that abasement, an *indignation* to which it is necessarily driven by the contradiction between its human *nature* and its condition of

²¹ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The Holy Family, or Critique of Critical Criticism*. Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975. 8.

life, which is the outright, resolute and comprehensive negation of that nature.’’²²

They believe human-nature to be the antithesis of the estrangement and degradation that the laborer feels under the capitalist mode of production. Their human-nature is negated in the conditions of life that capitalism requires them to labor under. The significance of this passage is that Marx is taking his concept of human-nature from his notes on Mill, and merging it with his theory of alienation from the previous year.

Marx's next work that considers man's essence can be found in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, written in 1845. These were written on a single sheet of paper, never meant for publication. Presumably Marx had written them to work out his own ideas. Engels discovered them after his death and published them, believing they could augment his own work on Feuerbach, and to serve as a reminder to history where the germs of Marx's theory of Historical Materialism²³ began to culminate.²⁴

Critiquing Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* and his views of man, Marx scribbled: “Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled: 1. to abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract – isolated – human individual. 2. Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as “genus”, as an internal, dumb generality which naturally

²² Ibid 43.

²³ Historical Materialism will be discussed briefly in the chapter on alienation, and the chapter on Louis Althusser, although it's not necessary for a consummated understanding of Marx's view on human nature.

²⁴ Engels, Frederick. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. New York: International Publishers, 2010. 8.

unites the many individuals.’’²⁵

This note is *prima facie* a refutation of the previous views held by Marx regarding human-nature/essence. This is the case only *prima facie*, and not upon contemplation. Nonetheless that elaboration will be elucidated in chapter 5. For now the thesis is worth mentioning because it is a view of human-nature. And, it's worth noting that Marx did not intend these for publications, and is responding – privately – solely to Feuerbach's thesis. The negation of Feuerbach gives us a view into Marx's views on human-nature, and the negation of the negation (i.e., synthesis will be fleshed out later). Moreover, this thesis is a transcending point for Marx, whereby his old Idealism is being converted into a more realistic material outlook. The concept of essence is taking on a new meaning that should be distinguished from human-nature.

The next statement made by Marx regarding human-nature can be found in *The German Ideology*, written in 1845-1846. *The German Ideology* is interesting for three reasons: 1) it's Marx's first publicized assault on Hegelian thinking, German Idealism, and Feuerbach, 2) Marx establishes his method of Historical Materialism in this work, 3) The book did not receive a publisher, and was not printed until the 1930s. Dialectical arguments, and the negation of categories juxtaposed to other categories are no longer part of Marx's prose or practice. In the *Theses on Feuerbach* Marx concluded with “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.”²⁶ This is his first work that has a more realist vein to it, and no doubt served as a break from pure philosophy.²⁷ Marx makes one explicit statement regarding what is distinctly human, and not just animal. “Men can be distinguished from animals

²⁵ Ibid 82-84.

²⁶ Ibid 84.

²⁷ Unsurprisingly, when considered seriously and literally, Marx's next works retained a less philosophical edge to them, and his actual career became far more revolutionary.

by consciousness, by religion or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation [sic]. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life.”²⁸ This is very much in line with Marx's refutation of animal nature being productive as well. For Marx goes on to point out how the material world around man conditions what he can produce for subsistence. Whereas a spider can only produce a web, and a beaver a dam, a human can build a home in a cave, a tree, or grassland. It was Feuerbach who believed men could be distinguished by consciousness and religion. Most of *The German Ideology* is written with a sarcastic and flippant tone.²⁹ It's safe to say that the opening sentence of that passage is one of Marx's – many – casual dismissals of the preceding ideas of German Idealists. Moreover, as indicated in the *EP Manuscripts*, for man to begin to distinguish himself via abstract thought (consciousness for Feuerbach), and religion, first requires man's essence being objectified in production; which requires its own subjective abstract thought. Marx is only confirming his previous point against Feuerbach in realist language. As Marx points out later “the production of ideas [Religion for Feuerbach], on conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life.”³⁰ And this material activity is initially free and necessary production. Man, historically, is thus first and foremost a producer, and second (third, fourth, etc.,) an ideologue.

Also in *The German Ideology*, Marx publishes his first concept of what communism will

²⁸ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1970. 42.

²⁹ Whether or not this was a prudent idea I don't know, but it certainly makes for interesting reading.

³⁰ Ibid 47.

look like. Despite what the history of Marxism, Anti-Communists, and Communists regimes would lead us to believe, he wrote next to nothing – when juxtaposed to what he wrote overall – on what communism would look like. Marx again points out that the society we live in is a *camera obscura*, and like the *EP Manuscripts*, if we can negate that society we can weave out what is best for man, as a confirmation of his human nature. That at least is what communism will be. Marx states that “in communist society...nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.”³¹ Much like the notes on Mill, the inversion of the *camera obscura* we presently live in, is the free production of man, in a spontaneous and creative fashion that suits his will. This sentiment mirrors what Marx would later say in the notorious *The Communist Manifesto*: “In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.”³² The rest of *The German Ideology* consists of a development of Historical Materialism, and a long-winded critique of numerous Hegelian thinkers.

The Poverty of Philosophy, written in 1847, was a response by Karl Marx to the anarchist Pierre Joseph Proudhon's recently released book *The Philosophy of Poverty*. The book is predominantly a screed against Proudhon, but there is one line that deals with human nature: “M. Proudhon does not know that the whole of history is nothing but a continual transformation

³¹ Ibid 53

³² Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*. New York: Verso, 1998. 62.

of human nature.” Sometimes this is translated as “...continual development of human nature.”³³ Unfortunately such a small line, without any elucidation, has led many to believe that Marx was rejecting a steady state, ahistorical human nature. Chapter 6 will critique this view. For now, we should move on to *Capital Volume I*.

Capital Volume I, is Marx's magnum opus. He spent decades writing it, much to the chagrin of his publishers, and friends. The profundity within the text has historically made it worth the decades of research, labor, and wait. Bits of his philosophy dating all the way back to his youth can be found synthesized within, in one grand whole of an elaboration and insurmountable critique of Capitalism. In the opening of *Capital*, when Marx is discussing the difference, and dialectical synthesis, between a commodities use-values and exchange-values, a section comprising over 50 pages, he briefly asserts that “Labour, then as the creator of use-values, as useful labour, is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself.”³⁴

The ahistorical aspect of this claim is paramount. The entire work is written with the strong considerations to the fastidious capitalist aspect of labor, and how use-value and exchange-value are intertwined. Therefore, despite its apparent curtness, this is not a curt claim. For Marx what is a use-value is historical. For instance, a bow and arrow have no use-value to a taxi cab driver in New York City, and a taxi cab would have no use-value for the Bushmen. Moreover, the common and universal exchange-value used under capitalism – currency – is an entirely recent phenomenon, with historical necessity. What remains unhistorical though is man's

³³ Marx, Karl. *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995. 100.

³⁴ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 133.

creative labor.

Marx's chapter on The Labor Process rings home earlier statements he made regarding the uniqueness of man's labor – especially compared to other animals – and universal aspects of species-being (i.e., essence, or human-nature). In the labor process man “sets in motion the natural forces which belong to his body...in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs...he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature.” Marx then wants us to understand the labor process ahistorically: “[let us] presuppose labor in a form which it is an exclusively human characteristic. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. 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. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. 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. And this subordination is no mere momentary act. Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be.”³⁵ An important addition to man's nature needs to be noted here. Marx had discussed and gradually (over many years) elaborated the fact of man's free and

³⁵ Ibid 283-284.

conscious productive capacity to his view of human nature. It is in *Capital* that he affirms it and synthesizes it with his entire view of human-nature. Marx gives shape to what he previously only alluded to.

David Harvey, Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at CUNY, and author of numerous books on Marx, and *Capitalism* points out “ In his earlier works Marx made much of the idea of a distinctly human “species being”...This idea takes a backseat in the formulations of *Capital*, but it does occasional exercise a shadowy influence.”³⁶ He goes on to cite the same passages I've cited.

As Harvey points out, this is very much a return to previous views, with the same hints of idealism that can be found in the *EP Manuscripts*, and notes on Mill. Marx is not being a rigid materialist determinist, but instead is pointing out a dialectical relationship between the material world, ideas, and their fruition (or lack thereof). Within the labor process the material world informs us to a degree of what we can make, i.e., the ancient Aztec laborer cannot fathom an igloo in abstract thought, nor can the Eskimo fathom an adobe, but the actual moment of fathoming is the creative element that distinguishes man from animal. Whether or not he succeeds to put the ideal into material reality is a process of praxis. When Sartre set out to defend Existentialism, and elaborate on what it was, he both touched on a point Marx made a century earlier, and failed to see what Marx saw.

Sartre claimed that existence preceded essence. The rational following from this state of

³⁶ Harvey, David. *A Companion to Marx's Capital*. Brooklyn: Verso, 2010. 112. Harvey has admitted to reading *Capital* every year, for decades, and has been teaching a graduate level course on the book for several decades as well.

affairs was that man's essence was yet to be determined when he came into existence. He offered the analogy of a pen-knife. For the artisan the knife is first conceived in the mind, and then in reality. So the essence is first, the existence is second. Humans are the antithesis of this relationship.³⁷

Marx states something deeper. First off, the pen-knife cannot come into existence until metallurgy has been undergone, and various other instruments of labor have been created, augmented, and transformed. Thus, Cro-Magnon man cannot fathom the pen-knife just as he cannot fathom the automobile. Material existence first must inform us of our possibilities. Next, the process of creation is an act of human ingenuity. The creation of the pen-knife does not serve to vindicate Sartre's claim that for man existence precedes essence, but that the ability to undergo the creation of any widget is exactly the essence of man. Whereas the pen-knife is historical, the creative aspect of labor is consistently ahistorical. That essence of man (i.e., his species-being) is consistently interacting with and mediating within the various modes of existence man finds himself born into.

Marx makes one more reference to human-nature, explicitly, in a chapter on labor funding and the transformation of surplus value into capital. The comment is made in a footnote, in an assault on Jeremy Bentham. The footnote is unabashedly biting and insulting to Bentham.³⁸ “The principle of utility was no discovery of Bentham. He simply reproduced in his dull way what Helvétius and other Frenchmen had said with spirit in the 18th century. To know what is useful for a dog, one must study dog-nature. This nature itself is not to be deduced from the principle of utility. Applying this to man, he that would criticize all human acts, movements,

³⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism is a Humanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007. 20-21.

³⁸ Throughout many sections in *Capital* Marx makes it a point to tar and feather utilitarians.

relations, etc., by the principle of utility, must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch.”³⁹

Akin to his assault on the Hegelians and German Idealists in *The German Ideology*, Marx is at pains to reiterate his central criticism of philosophers. They continue to represent man's relation to philosophical categories of thought in present historical moments, and not ahistorically. Utility under capitalism is an odious way of sorting out what is useful to humans, when it fails to consider that capitalism itself is a *camera obscura* of human nature. No matter how utilitarian we make capitalism, man's nature is not in conformity with the capital labor process. Marx posits that the Utilitarians never take the time to deal with “human nature in general,” which would alert them to the odious nature of Capitalistic Utilitarianism; but since Marx has already done so, he can see through the mirage Utilitarian philosophy put before him.

The last comment made regarding human nature (in my opinion) requires a rather poetic reading of one of Marx's letter. In 1874, in a letter to an American labor leader, and friend, Marx was writing while overcoming an illness. He notes that “I am being assured that after I return [from hospital] I shall be fully able to work, and being *unable* [his emphasis] to work is indeed a death sentence for any man who is not an animal.”⁴⁰ Marx of course cannot literally mean this, as he never held a real job in his life, but was financially maintained by Engels. His work was revolution and research, in no particular order. Moreover, countless people survive just fine without working; Marx was well aware most capitalists did very little if any actual work, but merely garnered copious amounts of interest in return for sound investments. He was consistently metaphorical and poetic in his letters, and reading this letter, alongside his others,

³⁹ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 758.

⁴⁰ Padover, Sault. *The Letters of Karl Marx*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979. 298.

gives the reader the impression of a spiritual death. Marx was ill throughout his whole life, and the more he sat in hospitals or retreats, the more his writing became morose and languid. As he stated in his younger years creative work was the life-activity of man, which defined his species-being. Maybe he could be kept alive – by medicine – without working, but if he wasn't engaged in his life-activity, he was essentially dead. Any other reading of this intimate letter is too irrational for someone of Marx's cunning.

Considering all of Marx's views on labor, species-being, species-character, human essence, and human-nature together, we come across some very consistent themes of what is unique and distinguishable about man from the other animals, that are independent of his verbiage. Some of these terms were utilized in his more idealistic work, and others in his more realist work, but the common theme remains consistent. Man can produce. Man can produce with ingenuity. Man will produce for subsistence and free expression. Man's free and conscious production serves to gratify himself, and his fellow man, and in so doing confirms what is singularly human. Thus, this is Marx's view of human-nature, when human-nature is considered to be what is unique to the homo-sapient. As I stated earlier regarding G.A. Cohen's critique of Marx on justice, Marx may or may not have known he held this view, but he most certainly did; and since *Capital* was his last and most consummated work, it's quite probable he did.

Contemporary Science

Marx was a voracious reader of scientific literature, covering aspects of evolution, chemistry, agriculture, all the way to geology. However, most 19th century science is quickly antiquated or at least ameliorated to the point of antiquity. Darwin's theory of evolution,

remarkable as it is, has been tinkered to a staggering degree, as has Mendelian genetics. Thus, it is quite remarkable that Marx's views on human-nature have stood the test of time.

Marx and Engels highly regarded, and kept abreast, of the major scientific breakthroughs of their day, specifically Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species*, and *The Descent of Man*, and Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society*. Marx remarked to Engels in 1860: "I have read...Darwin's book on Natural Selection. Although it is developed in the crude English way, this is the book that contains the natural-history foundation for our viewpoint."⁴¹ He was referring to their theory of Historical Materialism. Previously Marx and Engel's had considered themselves triumphant in ridding philosophy – specifically the plague of German Idealism – from its Hegelian Teleological schemata. Upon reading Darwin, Engels was delighted to report to Marx: "Darwin...is absolutely splendid. There was one aspect of teleology that had yet to be demolished, and that has now been done. Never before has so grandiose an attempt been made to demonstrate historical evolution in Nature, and certainly never to such good effect."⁴²

Engels had gone over Marx's notebooks on Lewis Henry Morgan, and was intimately familiar with Marx's view on societal development and human-nature. In *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*, an uncompleted essay written by Engels, he scientifically and anthropologically pieced together an insight that, while obscure in his time, is paramount to anthropology today. "Hundreds of thousands of years certainly elapsed before human society arose out of troop of tree climbing monkeys. Yet it did finally appear. And what do we find once more as the characteristic difference between the troupe of monkeys and human

⁴¹ Ibid 139.

⁴² Engels, Frederick. "Engels To Marx In London." Web. 4 Feb. 2012.
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/letters/59_12_11.htm>.

society? Labour."⁴³ He goes on to point that this labor is complex tool making. But let us return to the claims made by Marx explicitly.

The first claim worth noting was Marx's rejection of rationality as the basis of human-nature. As stated earlier, the way Marx refers to rationality as the basis of human-nature in *The German Ideology*, is undoubtedly in a dismissive and sarcastic tone. In Marx's time, and many centuries leading up to it, numerous philosophers and theologians claimed that rationality was distinctively human. Some (very few) radical Spanish priests during the conquistador colonization of South America frequently claimed that the Indians too had rational souls, like all man, thus deserved not to be treated like animals. Many of the Classical Liberal thinkers thought rationality was one of the defining traits of man, even in the state of nature, and through his rationality his rights could be universalized. Most of the enlightenment was considered a philosophical and political testament to the reason and rationality of man. Post enlightenment thinkers like Hegel and Feuerbach also held reason highly. Hegel believed all mind/geist was coming to know itself, and reach an absolute end, through the processes of reason. Feuerbach championed this call after Hegel and claimed reason and passion were distinctly human properties. Marx, characteristically, rejected this as the starting point of human uniqueness, and science has confirmed this point. Recent research into Sea Lions has confirmed their ability at abstract reasoning, under time constraints, in relation to numbers, shapes, and words. When certain sounds are played in correspondence to numbers and letters in a perfunctory pattern, the Sea Lion easily memorizes which sound goes with which number/letter. But, if the letters and numbers are jumbled and the same sound is played, the Sea Lion is cunning enough to guess a

⁴³ Engels, Frederick. "The Part played by Labour in the Transition from ape to Man." . N.p., n.d. Web. 4 Feb 2012. <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm>>.

number/letter, respectively, in relation to the sound played.⁴⁴

Additionally, breeds of dogs have shown a similar ability at abstract reasoning. For instance, one dog, whose owner is a psychologist, was taught to memorize the names of over a thousand stuffed animals. When asked to fetch the turtle, rabbit, Popeye, etc., the dog was capable of picking the correct animal out of the pile. More interestingly though, when a new stuffed toy was introduced, by a third party – in this instance a stuffed Charles Darwin being introduced by the famous astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson – and asked to go find “Charles Darwin,” the dog, after serious pacing and deliberation, picked the newly added stuffed animal. The same test was repeated later with new stuffed animals, and the same consistent results were found. Thus, dogs have the ability to abstractly reason, albeit we rarely give them a chance to demonstrate this feat.⁴⁵

Marx's critical human-nature claims though are not the only ones to receive vindication. His positive claim on what defines man in all history, his ingenious and reciprocal productivity, has received confirmation too. Apes are our natural cousins, sharing approximately 98.6% of DNA structure. Some two-three million years ago a particular hominid, *Australopithecus Africanus*, broke up from the ape family and began to evolve into what we now know today as *homo-sapiens*.

A culmination of ape research, in the past decade, has led to several conclusions that retain Marx's view of human-nature. Apes have been witnessed using stones, sharp sticks, etc., to garner the means to their individual subsistence. Furthermore, once one ape does something

⁴⁴ *Nova: Smart Marine Mammals*. PBS, 2009. Film. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/smart-marine-mammals.html>>.

⁴⁵ *Nova: How Smart are Animals?*. PBS, 2011. Film. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/how-smart-are-animals.html>>.

creative, like bash a nut with a stone, other apes will mimic this behavior. Despite numerous researches to prove otherwise, apes cannot communicate in a social fashion how and why instrumental labor can be used. An ape may copy another ape's stone bashing technique, but the first ape lacks the unique ability to teach the other ape how to use a stone, and more importantly, will not construct a tool for the other ape to use. As Marx would have put this in his youth, the ape is not a species-being, for his activity does not objectify what is uniquely his species, in the product he creates for his fellow ape. Moreover, the phenomenon of 'triangulation' is the ability of one person to indicate and instruct another person, some laborious process in regards to an object. This is called triangular because two humans occupy an equally important emphasis in communication as does the object. Apes cannot triangulate between each other and external objects, that is, they cannot recognize each other as species-beings, and they can only imitate another ape already in productive progress. Michael Tomasello, developmental psychologist and co-director of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, summarizes this fact "At the moment we have no evidence that apes have shared goals based on shared commitments. They do things together, they coordinate their actions together, but they don't have a shared commitment to a shared goal."⁴⁶ More to Marx's point, there is no gratification in labor for apes in the process of mutual exchange. For Marx, objectifying species-being in the labor process is an inherently shared process, with goals (the material generation of the product idea), for others (reciprocation), and oneself (gratification). Our closest cousins, the only species with a shot of sharing what is uniquely human (i.e., human-nature) come so close, but qualitatively far.

⁴⁶ *Nova: Ape Genius*. PBS, 2011. Film. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/nature/ape-genius.html>>.

CHAPTER TWO: MARX'S THEORY OF ALIENATION

The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
made by human hands.
They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but cannot see.
They have ears, but cannot hear,
nor is there breath in their mouths.
Those who make them will be like them,
and so will all who trust in them.
-Psalm 135

If my truism is accepted from chapter 1 – that few, if any of us, have any idea what we want to do in life – what is the result for the majority who must end up doing something inhuman? First and foremost we must provide for our basic sustenance, and however we go about doing this, may or may not be appealing. Nonetheless it will remain necessary. If we have a social-security apparatus in place, we may be able to pass our final decade(s) in relaxation, but the majority of our life-activity must be inhuman, without fulfillment, and therefore *strange*.

This corollary truism though, like the first, can be made more dynamic. Also, like the first, Karl Marx can elucidate the dynamism we are missing. Marx's theory of alienation is treated with seriousness and dismissal by Marxists and philosophers. However, as indicated in chapter 1, his notion of human-nature is nearly universally considered not to exist at all. I contest that one cannot treat Marx's theory of alienation with dismissal under capitalism; moreover, one cannot seriously treat it seriously, without also factoring in his notion of human-nature. The two are necessarily intertwined. Therefore by understanding Marx's concept of human-nature, one can fully understand his theory of alienation.

What It Is

Notions and descriptions that sound akin to alienation can be found dating back to the time of the bible. The quote above in Psalm 135 is but one example. In German philosophy,

around the time of idealism, the term alienation - sometimes translated as estrangement - was frequently used. The word itself denotes the idea that some symbiotic relationship has been severed; two (or more) pieces that belong together have lost their binding force. A fracture has occurred.

There's another aspect to alienation though besides a severing of a natural bond, that is, an external force. An alien power, or presence, denotes the phenomena of something foreign, perhaps nebulous or not well understood, as acting, impacting, and controlling. A tribesman might believe the landing of a meteor to be an alien power that has impacted his way of life. Or, all the physicist who often wrote God into their equations to act as a variable for that alien force they could not properly account for, but knew had serious potency. Both examples though were alien forces that man has come to grapple with, and apprehend, via cunning and struggle. This is not the view-point of our German Idealist.

Marx's theory of alienation blossomed out of two preceding theories of alienation. The first was by George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the second was by Ludwig Feuerbach. Marx was an autodidact student of both philosophers.

Hegel's views on alienation – in regards to labor and property – are similar, but ultimately incongruous with Marx's notion. Hegel believed, like Marx, that a product was first conceived in the mind. Then, the laborer would create the product, imbuing his unique mark of being into the product, and ultimately he'd alienate himself by having to forego the product. Or, as Hegel would word it, in his rather obscure 19th century German Idealistic rhetoric: “The reason I can alienate my property is that it is mine only insofar as I put my will into it,” thus “alienation proper is an expression of my will, of my will no longer to regard the thing as mine.” The product that one

makes contains characteristics that are ultimately the producers “personality as such, my universal freedom of will, my ethical life, my religion.”⁴⁷ Hegel is erring in seeing artisan and feudal products, made with true blood and sweat, as the historical role of all laborious activity. Ultimately it's necessary under the historical mode of production that Hegel is analyzing for labor to be “restricted.” He means restricted in the sense that the ideal expression in the laborers mind, *must* be utilized by another. “By alienating the whole of [his] time, as crystallized in [his] work, and everything [he] produced, [he'd] be making into another's property the substance of [his] being, [his] universal activity and actuality, [his] personality.” In the end, “the whole range” of the laborers activities must be “alienated to his master.”⁴⁸ The only way for one to not be an alienated producer is for one to restrict all items to oneself, and not hand them over to a “master.” For Hegel, one either produces for oneself, or a master, there is no in-between. And, since one cannot produce all the means of subsistence for oneself, one must be perennially alienated. Labor is alienation, because labor must occasionally end in exchange, and exchange is to forego ones being, to be utilized and manipulated by another.

Although Hegel's theory of alienation is presented in toto, there are actually two reasons being presented here for the necessity of alienation. The first is that mankind's needs cannot be met by individual labor, or even immediate labor. Therefore, toilsome, sweaty, bloody labor was necessary, for a portion of sustenance, and the rest is for exchange. That is, man cannot meet his own needs, it is always an impossibility. The second reason is the more readily apparent reason. Since Hegel is viewing feudal labor as historic labor, products as embodied emblems of man's essence, and exchange as a loss of oneself, one must consistently alienate oneself to garner

⁴⁷ Hegel, G.W.F. *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. 77-78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 78-79.

sustenance. Thus for Hegel, alienation is not a severing of a prior bond that once existed in harmony. Life is always alienating, the bond is fleeting and momentary, the severing is constant and perennial.

Feuerbach took a different approach to alienation, one which had nothing to do with labor or economic relations. Feuerbach thought alienation derived from religion; not religion from alienation. "Religion is the disuniting of man from himself; he sets God before him as the antithesis of himself. God is not what man is—man is not what God is."⁴⁹ The predicates of God, such as infinite, perfect, omniscient, necessitate that man view himself as finite, imperfect, and ignorant. Feuerbach believes man has made a mistake in assigning all these predicates to a deity. In fact "in religion man contemplates his own latent nature," this dichotomy of God to man is in fact man alienating his own essence.

Feuerbach believes man has alienated himself, and his essence, by abstracting what is uniquely human, into another nonexistent being. His proof for the nonexistence of God is that all the predicates of God are in fact the predicates of man. There is nothing unique or ingenious about God, he's merely man refined; and as such man is remiss. If God was entirely unique, man would not be at a spiritual loss, nor considered imperfect, only different, and thus also unique. Since man has never, and will never, assign unprecedented predicates to God, the necessary conclusion is that God is merely the content of man abstracted by degree into something which does not exist. Feuerbach is setting up the ultimate challenge to prove the existence of God, a challenge that is impossible to surmount. Just as one cannot paint, or even imagine a color that does not exist, one cannot describe or wrestle with an attribute or predicate that does exist. Thus,

⁴⁹ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. Mineola: Dover, 2008. 29.

all our descriptions of God are mundane, and therefore God is nothing but an object of mundane thought, not an object of otherworldly existence.⁵⁰ Ultimately then, “man is the God of Christianity,” perceived at his highest mundane perfection.⁵¹

This poses a serious alienating problem. Religion is supposed to be an outlet of solace, and the expression of the highest good. If God were a unique being, starkly different than man, than man could never find solace in him; just as man cannot find solace in an emotion he can never experience. Goodness for that, which is uniquely different, cannot be goodness for man; solace for that which is uniquely different, cannot be solace for man.⁵² What is goodness to a unique being that lacks any material, social, historical, essential, familiar, relation to man? It certainly isn't man's goodness.

Since our predicates of God are not unique, it necessarily follows that God's concepts of goodness, and our attempts at solace, remain mundane and human. Therefore what is goodness in God and for God is goodness for and of man. These are the only predicates and descriptions man is capable of abstracting from himself. However, by abstracting man's goodness into ultimate perfection, without room for err, an alienation of pure inadequacy follows. We are thus inadequate, feeble, inferior, and always struggling for the impossible goal of perfection.⁵³ We cannot live up to our impossible standards of God – and since God is just ourselves alienated – we cannot live up to our own impossible standards of ourselves. A feedback loop of imperfection necessarily follows.

⁵⁰ Ibid 31.

⁵¹ Ibid 286.

⁵² Ibid 39.

⁵³ Ibid 40.

Unsurprisingly Feuerbach was an atheist. Although he was taking Christianity to task, his atheism was universal, he did not take Christianity to task merely to posit another God, or the superiority of another religion. The alienating effects of the Christian God, with enough searching, could be found in any of man's religions, or any of man's relationships to any notion of God.

For alienation to cease, Feuerbach believed critical philosophy had to flourish. Moreover, as theology had been slowly negating into philosophy, so philosophy – with its theological baggage – must negate into anthropology.⁵⁴ Essentially a new science of man had to flourish, and people had to stop believing in a deity. As both processes fleshed out, religion, and thus alienation, would cease to plague men.

Marx's initial reaction to Feuerbach was bordering on envious. He mailed him letters confessing his “love” and “respect” for him, and commenting that despite his “limited scope,” his philosophy had “more weight than all the present day German literature put together.”⁵⁵ When Engels wrote a short book on Feuerbach, recalling Marx and his experience with Feuerbach, he was explicit in his praise. When *The Essence of Christianity* was published, “the spell” of Hegel's “system was exploded and cast aside,” a “liberating effect” was experienced. Marx received the works “enthusiastically.”⁵⁶ Nonetheless, as “Feuerbach had himself thrust aside Hegel,” he too was to be pushed aside by Marx and Engels.⁵⁷

Although Hegel precedes Feuerbach, both in influences upon Marx, and in developing a

⁵⁴ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1966. 5 & 70.

⁵⁵ Padover, Sault. *The Letters of Karl Marx*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979. 34-35.

⁵⁶ Engels, Frederick. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. New York: International Publishers, 2010. 18.

⁵⁷ Ibid 19.

theory of alienation, I'll first present Marx's criticism of Feuerbach. Two reasons warrant this inverse order. First, after Marx criticized Feuerbach, Feuerbachian philosophy ceased to have a continuous impact upon Marx, especially after Marx developed Historical Materialism, and even more so when he went on to study Political Economy. Hegel's philosophy retained a lifelong influence on Marx. For instance in *Capital* Marx "openly avowed" himself the "pupil" of Hegel still.⁵⁸ Second, the critique of Feuerbach necessarily leads into the critique of Hegel. Marx considers Feuerbach to have no socio-economic foundation in his criticism of theism. Feuerbach does not consider the socio-economic relations around him, whereas Hegel and Marx do, though Hegel needs correcting.

Marx was an unabashed atheist, so there was no theistic bias in his criticisms of Feuerbach's religious alienation. The two were operating with equal disbelief. Unfortunately Marx's atheism is notorious for a simplistic and narrow reading of his comment, that religion is "the opium of the masses."⁵⁹ Ironically it seems Marx is notorious for a lot of simplistic readings of his text. Initially Marx agreed with Feuerbach, stating that "The basis of irreligious criticism is: Man makes religion, religion does not make man."⁶⁰ Marx goes on to state though that "man is not an abstract individual," living in a vacuum, but is in fact "the world of man," which includes the state, and all social relations. For Marx it is not man in a vacuum that produces religion – as it is for Feuerbach – but the implications of the state, and society at a given historical moment, that produce an inversion of man in a deity. The given moment of the state, and societies make up, are an inversion of what is naturally man. Marx goes on to elaborate

⁵⁸ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 107-108.

⁵⁹ Hitchens, Christopher. *The Portable Atheist*. Da Capo Press, 2007. 64.

⁶⁰ *ibid*

specifically where Feuerbach has his philosophy inverted: “*Religious* distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people. To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand their *real* happiness. The demand to give up illusions about the existing state of affairs is the *demand to give up a state of affairs which needs illusions*. The criticism of religion is therefore *in embryo the criticism of the vale of tears*, the *halo* of which is religion.”⁶¹

It is clear from this criticism that Marx is not referring to religious people in an invective fashion as the equivalent of opium addicts. Opium was known for its use as a pain reliever. Religion is thus the reliever of pain, both physical – from the toiling aspects of society – to psychological, from the perverted values of a historical epoch at a given moment. As Marx points out, we cannot just arm chair our way into atheism and expect positive results; as Feuerbach wants. If we want people to cease being pious, they need living conditions that make piety superfluous. You cannot win the conflict against religion through thought alone, nor would the results necessarily be admirable.⁶² If we could remove the Islamic sentiments from the Palestinians, this would in no way change their miserable living conditions. And their miserable living conditions, give Islam credence and authenticity as a possible outlet for escaping their conditions. There's some empirical evidence that gives credence to this claim, which will be discussed below.

Marx is explicitly rejecting Feuerbach's claim that religion is the cause of alienation.

⁶¹ Ibid 65.

⁶² There's great irony here in that I'm quoting Marx from Hitchen's book, a former Marxist. His violent and jingoistic rhetoric against Islam, and his desire to fight theism through public debates, shows he either entirely misread this work by Marx, or simply came to reject it.

Moreover, he is seeing religion as a sentiment having its derivation in an impoverished society. This leads Marx to find the source of alienation in the source of what makes religion a source of solace: man's present society. Moreover, in so doing he is grappling with Hegel's claim of labor as necessary alienation, at all times.

At the same time that Marx was grappling with, and ultimately rejecting Feuerbach's philosophy, he was also realizing the need to study political economy. Events were taking place in the German State, where workers were being dispossessed of their land to make room for business interests.⁶³ Thus it was clear to Marx that the state was not the communal organ of governing society *en masse*, but in practice “the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”⁶⁴ He had to figure out what were the motivating interest of the bourgeoisie, and the state, and this required a venture into Political Economy, a venture he essentially undertook until his death decades later.

When Marx first began reading the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and other mainstream economist of his day, he drafted a manuscript presently published as *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Much of the text is comprised of reversing the theories of Smith and Ricardo to be told from the point of view of the proletariat, i.e., the class that owns no means of production, and sells its labor power for a wage, to the capitalist class (bourgeoisie). Marx is not rejecting the theories of his predecessors⁶⁵, he's pointing out their social-positional bias, and justification, of a system that is not perennial, but historical. The most popular chapter of the book is the chapter on estranged labor (or alienated labor). This is the most philosophical

⁶³ Mandel, Ernest, and George Novack. *The Marxist Theory of Alienation*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974. 13-14.

⁶⁴ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*. New York: Verso, 1998. 37.

⁶⁵ Yet!

chapter. All the other chapters where Marx goes toe-to-toe on economics were superseded by his publication of *Capital* several decades later. Ultimately in this chapter Marx is taking the categories of bourgeoisie economic thought (e.g. wage, profit, value, wealth, etc.) and dialectically negating them against the species-being of man, or as I am arguing, man's human-nature. This means Marx is not seeing man in a vacuum, like Feuerbach, but he's also not seeing man as merely a social product without historically transcendent qualities. If man was only the latter, then there would be nothing stable to negate political economy against - in such a divisive fashion - since political economy would be the synthesis of man in his historical moment.

The *EP Manuscripts* consistently point out that the bourgeois political economist begin with the fact of private property, and extrapolate economic 'laws' from them; they never take the time to explain where private property (a historical social relation) came from, and given its obvious temporal nature, thus cannot be equated to timeless natural laws. Marx's theory of alienation begins with seeing the worker as a commodity in this social ensemble. A commodity is an item on the market, which serves some use, and is readily abundant. In capitalism the labor class is one such commodity. Labor is mostly readily abundant, and it serves the value of generating profit and working the privately owned machines of the capitalist class. Marx thus informs us that in revealing his theory of alienation, and labors historically specific alienated being, he is giving us “actual economic fact[s].”⁶⁶

As Marx points out, in his first inroads into his theory of alienation, if economist view the laborer as a commodity, who must be paid/bought, then as the worker produces evermore commodities, in relation to his own value (what he is paid) he becomes ever more less valuable.

⁶⁶ Marx, Karl. *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Mineola: Dover, 2007. 69.

If the worker is a “thing” like any other commodity is a “thing,” the value of the labor commodity decreases in direct proportion to the increase in other commodity “things.” Somewhere along the line, this process leads to an “alien power” with primacy over the individual worker.⁶⁷ The more the laborer produces, the less items of his production (and his classes production) can he possess. Marx agrees with Hegel that at this historical moment the worker is being robbed of his objective self, as identified in the commodity of his creation.

Political Economy, Marx is convinced, by never looking at itself from the point of view of labor, hides the process of alienation. Labor is dichotomous. On one side – bourgeois - it produces unprecedented luxury, on the other – laborer – privation, deformity, idiocy, and a cog like existence.⁶⁸

These are the results of the historic moment of production; but there is alienation to be found in the actual “*act of production.*” Marx summarizes that “The product is after all but the summary of the activity of production. If then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation.”⁶⁹ The activity of alienation is laid out as the second primary aspect of alienation; of which there are four total.

This second factor of alienated activity is that the act of production, or producing, is not under his control. In capitalism it is under the control of the capitalist. The worker does not, as Marx points out, get to exercise his “essential being/intrinsic nature” in work, but take orders from the alien force of the market, and his capitalist exploiter. In so doing, Marx writes – in one of his most humanistic passages: “he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ Ibid 71.

⁶⁹ Ibid 72.

content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home.” The evidence Marx posits for proof of this first aspect of the theory of alienation is that man avoids work “like the plague” once he leaves work. If spontaneous work is the consummate fulfillment of man's intrinsic nature, he ought to revel in it; but by being denied his essential being, he recoils from more labor in horror. Since what is essentially human is now negated, man therefore only feels free and active in his “animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating...what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.” This ultimately leads to “self-estrangement.”⁷⁰

The third aspect of alienation is that man is alienated from his species being. “In practice and in theory he adopts the species (his own as well as those of other things) as his object, but – and this is only another way of expressing it – also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being.” In capitalism man no longer produces for the fellow species, this form of producing is foreign to him. His only reasons for producing now are to satisfy his individual means of subsistence. All labor now works for itself as an individual and not as a class or a species, both in abstract political economy and in the real world. “Free, conscious activity,” as man's characteristic form of labor is non-existent, labor is now coerced, and so rote and perfunctory it ceases to be “conscious activity.” When market forces begin to dictate, and control the direction of man’s product to other capitalist, foreign markets, warehouses, merchants, etc., man's species-being is lost. Man is now

⁷⁰ Ibid 72-73.

What makes eating, drinking, etc animal activity is that they are “ultimate ends” in activity.

a market-being.⁷¹

The fourth aspect of alienation is a direct corollary of the previous two. If man is alienated from his species being, he is subsequently alienated from his fellow species, i.e., other men. Marx points out, if his propositions are accepted: “that man's species nature is estranged [alienated] from” himself, then it necessarily follows that he is estranged from other men, as all men share the same “essential nature.”⁷² And that essential nature is to produce as a species-being. You cannot have an economic social order that orders so many people, without alienating most people.

Marx concludes that since there is no deity, and this economic order is not inherent in nature, as a natural law, the alien force, i.e., man's product, is “man himself.” Marx's ontology is essentially social-being, this is the primary driver in man's existence, and no matter how convoluted and complex society gets, and the ultimate driving force is man himself, albeit sometimes man is not aware of his own power. These powers get lost in social relations. In order for the majority of men to tolerate such “torment,” their work must be bringing “joy” and “delight” to *someone*, not something.⁷³

Unlike Hegel, Marx is seeing alienated labor in a historical moment predicated upon specific social and material conditions. Alienated labor is not insurmountable, nor is it necessary, and consistent. Marx believes the solution to alienation resides within the abolition of private property. Hegel believes man always lost a part of himself in the act of foregoing his product which is an objective container of part of man's self. Marx believes the act of forgoing ones

⁷¹ Ibid 75-76.

⁷² Ibid 77.

⁷³ Ibid 79.

product for his fellow man, of his own free and conscious volition is an objective measurement of the consummation of man's fulfilled life activity. If man is a species-being, man can, and has reveled in such forms of production. Marx retained this adamant view that man was not always alienated into his late years. Thus he states in the *Grundrisse*: “What requires explanation is not *unity* of living and active human beings with the natural, inorganic conditions of their exchange of matter with nature, and therefore their appropriation of nature; nor, of course, is this the result of an historical process. What we must explain is the *separation* between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active being, a separation which is posited in its complete form only in the relationship between wage labour and capital.”⁷⁴ It is the disunity of man from his natural way of life, which is fully consummated under the capitalist mode of production, which leads to the glaring reality of alienation, an alienation so opaque for man, that Hegel could not see a way out.

Human Nature's Essential Role

The EP Manuscripts read in a very dialectical fashion. Marx is constructing a dialectical argument. Ultimately he is stating that man is alienated from the product of his labor, the act of production, his fellow man, and thus himself. All four moments in the productive process lead to the cornucopia of his single theory of alienation. There is a unity (alienated theory) in four moments of contradiction (praxis). And the whole qualitative experience of alienation cannot be consummated, without four quantitative moments of alienating activity. Dialectical thinking is a process by which one considers quantitative relations, to lead to a qualitative change. Thus it takes four contradictions to lead to the consummation of alienation. But what are these

⁷⁴ Foster, John Bellamy. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. 1.

contradictions, or negations, to be weighed against?

Marx's theory of alienation is nonsense if one believes he holds no view of human nature. Moreover, human nature can serve as the backbone, or core criterion, by which to clash his moments of negation against. This view-point is true for several reasons.

Primarily, to posit that man is alienated from himself, as Marx does several times, is to posit that there is an ahistorical self to man. If man's essence is nothing but the totality of his social relations, then man cannot possibly be alienated from himself, as there's no essence to alienate himself from, but that which is his historical self. To put this more clearly, if Marx is not an essentialist, and believes there is nothing at root essential in the human being, then the necessary conclusion by most Marxist is that Marx believes man to be absolutely a product of his social environment. There is no dialectical relationship between (human) nature and nurture, and the forms each of these take in a fluid existence. Individual man is always a mirror of the entire social ensemble he finds himself in.⁷⁵ Thus instead of being alienated from himself, as Marx states, he can only be puttering along, and perhaps even flourishing. There is no static state of man on which to weigh the claim that he is alienated from himself; and yet Marx makes this very claim with polemical force.

The second reason human-nature is required to justify Marx's theory of alienation comes in his reflection that man is alienated from his fellow man. If man loses the life activity of species being, Marx explicitly concludes he is alienated from all fellow man, because this activity is in conformity with all mankind's essential nature. This means that if man were to

⁷⁵ This is a pretty inconsistent viewpoint if we remember back to chapter 1, where Marx is constantly quoted as referring to capitalism as a camera obscura. This inconsistent viewpoint was again expressed in the past year by Paul D'Amato, editor of the International Socialist Review: <http://socialistworker.org/2011/11/04/marx-and-human-nature>

again produce in a species-being fashion, then it would be in harmony with his essential nature. Which leads to the next necessary conclusion that whether man is living under utopian communism (or even primitive communism), or alienated capitalism, his essential nature remains rigid. What is fluid is how it gets expressed.

Finally there comes the third reason, which is commingled with two aspects of alienation. Man is alienated from the product, and the activity of production. Of course, by being alienated from the activity of production, this means man is producing products of alienation. If Marx does not believe this has to be the case, he must believe there is an alternative. Moreover, he also believes this alienated activity is leading to an animal like existence, where what is human is lost, and all that is left is fulfillment in animal sentiments. At issue here, then, is what is a human expression, as *distinct*, from animal expression, and how is it related to production and products?

To have a view of some characteristic of what humans do, that differentiates them from all other species, is to have a view of what is human nature. As we've seen in the previous chapter, Marx does believe that ways of producing that are free, and conscious, with species-being in mind, are distinctly human properties. What Marx is doing in pointing out the alienation of man via his product, and his product activity, is showing that something that is fundamentally human is being denied – free and conscious labor, with species-being in mind – and this leads to an animal existence. He believes only the other animals produce in a fashion whose sole aim is means of subsistence. Ultimately the claim that man is alienated from his product, his production process, his fellow man, and himself, is to imply that now what is estranged, has been, or could be, harmoniously united. In order for us to achieve unity for man, in his social-being, we must have a positive view of man that transcends the alienated historical moment we find him in. This

is a view of his human nature.

Contemporary Science

Marx alludes to the fact that alienation is an empirical fact, both in his youth and in his later years. In *The German Ideology* we find Marx stating that “In history up to present it is certainly an empirical fact that separate individuals have, with the broadening of their activity into world-historical activity, become more and more enslaved under a power alien to them.” And, “this alienation (to use a term which will be comprehensible to philosophers) can...only be abolished” when it “become[s] an intolerable power.”⁷⁶ In the *Grundrisse* Marx states that under capitalism the worker “surrenders its creative power, like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage...he necessarily impoverishes himself...because the creative power of his labor establishes itself as the power of capital, as an alien power confronting him...the economist have expressed this more or less empirically.”⁷⁷

Alienation is a hard thing to test causally. Anything dialectical is. We cannot find a study that takes four unique moments, and is able to qualify them into alienation. Dialectics is frequently about quantitative and qualitative changes, not cause and effect.

Marx once remarked that “all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.”⁷⁸ Many Marxists have taken Marx’s epistemological method – dialectical materialism – to be his science. These Marxists do not use the term science in the sense of academic science departments, or pure empirical processes, but as their own unique method of collecting data, and interpreting information. Any large body of

⁷⁶ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1970. 55-56.

⁷⁷ Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse*. New York: Penguin, 1993. 307.

⁷⁸ Marx, Karl. "Marxists.Org." . N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Feb 2012. <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1894-c3/ch48.htm>>.

knowledge under their own specific criteria is science. The Hungarian Marxist György Lukács for instance was convinced that Marx's method was a science that grappled with essence, and actually disqualified empirical sciences from having access to anything other than appearance.⁷⁹ If these Marxist are correct, then an empirical study not only cannot prove alienation, but it is an impoverishing attempt of the true genius of Marx to even try to do so.

The social psychologist, socialist, psychoanalyst, and overall erudite of the Frankfurt School, Erich Fromm, wrote a lengthy work on the gradual insanity of civilization – *The Sane Society* - with a heavy emphasis on Marx's theory of alienation. Fromm, from his psychological background, was convinced that if the spontaneous and creative nature of humanity was denied to a large majority of individuals, the opposite expression would forth: destruction. "To create presupposes activity and care. It presupposes love for that which one creates. How then does man solve the problem of transcending himself, if he is not capable of creating...[the] answer to this need for [creative] transcendence: if I cannot create life, I can destroy it. To destroy life makes me also transcend it." Again, "Creation and destruction, love and hate, are not two instincts which exist independently. They are both answers to the same need for transcendence, and the will to destroy must rise when the will to create cannot be satisfied."⁸⁰

At the risk of doing a disservice to Marx, and Marxism, I want to offer one study that is roughly on par with Fromm's conception of alienated man. The Happy Planet index takes into considerations four factors: per capita satisfaction with life, life expectancy, and environmental footprint, and averages these together to determine if a country is helping to create a happy

⁷⁹ Lukacs, Georg. "History & Class Consciousness." . N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Feb 2012.
<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/orthodox.htm>>.

⁸⁰ Fromm, Erich. *The Sane Society*. New York: Owl Books, 1990. 36-38.

planet. Unsurprisingly the most capitalistic industrial countries are tarnishing the environment at unsustainable rates. Without individual creativity, only capitalist growth, there is wanton planetary destruction. Moreover, the more free-market (less state backed welfare programs and consumer reform) the country, the less happy the individuals.⁸¹

This type of study in no way proves Marx's claim. However, it does give us insight into some facts: as capitalism is more unfettered, people are less happy, and ecological life around them is destroyed. This way of being is in direct contradiction with the way of being of man for the past 150,000 years on earth. This unity of man to his environment that Marx referred to in the *Grundrisse*, is lost, or as he stated, the break is fully consummated in capitalism. If we know we aren't happy, and we know we are ruining our means to life in the process of reproducing our own misery, why do we keep doing it? Maybe no study can prove that alienation is the reason, but it's indubitable that Marx's theory of alienation has something to tell us.

⁸¹ . "The Happy Planet Index." *The (un)Happy Planet Index: An index of human well-being and environmental impact* . N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Feb 2012. <<http://www.happyplanetindex.org/public-data/files/happy-planet-index-first-global.pdf>>.

CHAPTER THREE: BRIEF HISTORY OF 'MARXISM'

"It is one of the peculiar ironies of history that there are no limits to the misunderstanding and distortion of theories, even in an age when there is unlimited access to the sources; there is no more drastic example of this phenomenon than what has happened to the theory of Karl Marx in the last few decades. There is continuous reference to Marx and to Marxism in the press, in the speeches of politicians, in books and articles written by respectable social scientists and philosophers; yet with few exceptions, it seems that the politicians and newspapermen have never as much as glanced at a line written by Marx, and that the social scientists are satisfied with a minimal knowledge of Marx. Apparently they feel safe in acting as experts in this field, since nobody with power and status in the social-research empire challenges their ignorant statements.

- Erich Fromm⁸²

Karl Marx wrote the majority of his work between the years 1842-1880. This ought to be the foundation of Marxism, however it is not. Moreover, when Marx heard that a French political party was referring to themselves as Marxist, his response was "All I know is that I am not a Marxist."⁸³ Thus what is known as Marxism, and what Marx actually wrote, is divergent, and Marx's sympathies towards Marxist parties is dubious.

Throughout this thesis I have been consistently working with the writings of Marx alone,

⁸² Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1969. VII.

⁸³ Engels, Frederick. "Engels to C. Schmidt In Berlin." . N.p., n.d. Web. 20 Feb 2012.
<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_08_05.htm>.

except in a few clarifying cases. I have been presenting Marx's work in chronological order too. However, Marxism as a philosophical, political, and economic branch of study, rapidly took off in the 20th century, and to a strong degree has led to the misconception of Marx's view of man discussed in chapter 1. It has also led to a denial of his theory of alienation discussed in chapter 2. Before proceeding to critique the errors of this form of Marxism, I think it is important to explain why they came about in the first place.

The Bolsheviks' Come to Town

The 1917 Bolshevik revolution was a watershed event for promulgating Marxism across the globe. The irony of this event though is that the Bolshevik's only had access to a limited scope of Marx's works.⁸⁴ Their primary philosophical works were *Capital Volume I*, and *The Communist Manifesto*, along with Frederick Engel's *Anti-Duhring*, which purportedly claimed to present Marx's views on various philosophical issues, but has recently come under serious questioning.⁸⁵ Marx wrote in *Capital* that one day he hoped to get around to writing out his own inverted version of Hegel's Logic. He never did. Engel's attempted to do so in the *Anti-Duhring*, but Engel's, although brilliant, frequently lacks the genius of Marx. The success of the Bolshevik revolution, along with the maelstrom of Marxist propoganda that flowed from it, created a fastidious scope and breadth to what constituted Marxist philosophy.

The Bolsheviks openly identified as Marxist and revolutionaries, and believed that by ascertaining Marx's work, they could fully utilize it to foment revolution. Other Russian parties also identified with Marx's work, but not to the strident degree of the Bolsheviks. Prior to the 1917 revolution, several Marx scholars, such as Mehring, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Trotsky, Stalin,

⁸⁴ Tucker, Robert. *The Marxian Revolutionary Idea*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1969. 146-152.

⁸⁵ Carver, Terrell. *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*. New York: Cambridge Press, 1991. 1-23.

and Bukharin, were generating Marxist propaganda.⁸⁶ Within this limited printed scope of Marx's work, most of these revolutionaries were not philosophers or economists. They were strictly revolutionaries who believed they had found the key to revolution.

These Marxist theorists drew on these limited works and extrapolated conclusions particular to backward Tsarist Russia. This created a whole genre of Marxism known today as Western Marxism. Few of these Marxists had actually read the serious predecessors of Marx, such as Hegel or Feuerbach, let alone common philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. As the most renowned Marxist of his era (Lenin) put it: "It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first Chapter, without having thoroughly studied and understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*. Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!"⁸⁷ Lenin had seriously committed himself to studying Hegel, for approximately an entire year. Unlike another Western Marxist though – Lukács – Lenin read Marx first, and then attempted to read Marxism into his reading of Hegel. Lenin wrote in the preface of his Hegel notes: "I am in general trying to read Hegel materialistically."⁸⁸

Lenin took his duty as a Marxist further than most. He believed that he could work out a dialectical logic, on par with Hegel's, by fully comprehending *Capital*. "If Marx did not leave behind him a 'Logic' ..., he did leave the logic of *Capital*... In *Capital*, Marx applied to a single science logic, dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism (three words are not needed: it is one and the same thing) which has taken everything valuable in Hegel and developed it

⁸⁶ Anderson, Perry. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso, 1979. 7-8.

⁸⁷ Lukács, . *The Ontology of Social Being 2*. Marx. London: Merlin Press, 1978. 22.

⁸⁸ Slaughter, Cliff. "Lenin on Dialectics." *Marxists.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb 2012. <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/en/cliff.htm>>.

further.”⁸⁹

During WWI and the Russian Revolution, Marxism in Germany was taking on a more left-wing form. Rosa Luxemburg is regarded as one of the many founders of left-wing Marxism.⁹⁰ Left-wing Marxism is, unlike Marxist-Leninism, represented by Luxemburg, who supported free-speech at all times, and found the concept of a vanguard insufficient to achieving a proper revolution. By the end of WWI though, the Bolsheviks had achieved revolution, and the left-wing Marxists, including Luxemburg, were either assassinated or persecuted and imprisoned by the state. Thus Lenin’s model of Marxism was seen as the correct reading, or at least the most prudent reading. Despite the effectiveness of Leninism, it certainly did not adhere to some basic principles found in *The Communist Manifesto*: “The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties,” and “They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mold the proletarian movement.”⁹¹

Lukács also joined in on the development of Marxism. His famous work *History and Class Consciousness* was an attempt to develop dialectical materialism, and a revolutionary class consciousness. He too believed, like Lenin, that in reading *Capital*, and a few other works by Marx, the theory of dialectical materialism could be fully comprehended. Lukács book led to what is now known as Western Marxism, and Orthodox Marxism. The orthodox aspect comes from the “scientific conviction” that Dialectical Materialism is the best method for comprehending the world, whether or not all of Marx’s theses were proved correct.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid 23

⁹⁰ Chomsky, Noam. "Activism, Anarchism, and Power." *Chomsky.Info*. N.p., n.d. Web. 26 Feb 2012. <<http://www.chomsky.info/interviews/20020322.htm>>.

⁹¹ Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*. New York: Verso, 1998. 50.

⁹² Lukács, Georg. *History and Class Consciousness*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986. 1.

Lukács was frequently disappointed with the use of Marx's economics as a bourgeois scientific economics. Marx was not just creating his own empirically justifiable economic structure, as other Marxist believed (like Hilferding, and Bukharin), but was giving us core insight into the totality of social-being.

The works of Lukács, and the success of the Bolshevik's, which sprouted Western Marxism, were taken up by readers and theorist across Europe. Between WWI and WWII philosophers, and radicals, such as Gramsci, Korsch, Walter Benjamin, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Adorno, and Lefebvre, began to augment Marxism within the framework of their historical condition, psychoanalysis, and the Leninist and Lukács models of dialectics.⁹³ Outside of Gramsci, and a few other Marxist, this led to a strong shift away from the praxis of Marx⁹⁴ and previous Marxist. As Marx harangued his philosophical predecessors, as not having changed the world, but only thought about it, so too did the interwar philosophers merely think about the world, without changing it.

Late Publications

Some of Marx's earlier works began to be published in the 1930s, in small quantities, in only a few countries. Only a few individuals were able to get their hands on these texts, and of those few, fewer were able to re-calibrate Marxism in its entirety. Henri Lefebvre was one of the few who tried to revolutionize Dialectical Materialism, in his book by the same name, to counter

⁹³ Anderson, Perry. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso, 1979. 7-8.

⁹⁴ Marx's praxis, was basically during times of crises and revolutionary outrage, be a revolutionary. During times of apathy and economic boom periods, learn and theorize. Thus writing *Capital* took him over a decade because he was being a revolutionary in praxis, and writing sparingly.

act the deterministic model of Stalin's reading.⁹⁵

Lefebvre writes in the preface to his book, that the sciences – physics, biology, etc. – were replacing and transforming the understanding of dialectics. He believed communist parties, and Stalin(ist), were doing this because they had “a deep mistrust...with regard to Marx's early writings.” They “feared” that their interpretations of Marxism would be recognized as misunderstanding Marx if “these newly published works were read.” As politicians in power they “forestalled” abundant access to the early works.⁹⁶ The Hegelian roots of Marx were recognized as contemptible. Dialectical Materialism was seen as forming after Marx's youth, and not during, nor as an entire process of aging. Stalin's books, and official party works became “fetishized.” Marxism was basically an outlet for proper economics. Under this perverted form of Marxism “institutional Marxism refuses to listen to talk of *alienation*.” The new Marxist saw it as a “staging-post” for Marx, which was “superseded” by his discovery of Dialectical Materialism.⁹⁷ Lefebvre speculates that this “dogmatism” in Marxism, is “obviously for political reasons which are both short-term and short-sighted.” Presumably because the theory of alienation, if fully grasped, can expose the alienation of Soviet society, and Stalinist reign.⁹⁸ Lefebvre was hopeful that with the downfall of Stalin, Marxism, with a fresh reading of early works, could be reignited.

Lukács, in his new 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness* writes about the impact the early works had on him. “In the process of reading the Marx manuscript all the idealist prejudices of *History and Class Consciousness* were swept to one side. It is undoubtedly

⁹⁵ Ibid 50-51.

⁹⁶ Lefebvre, Henri. *Dialectical Materialism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota , 2009. 1-2.

⁹⁷ Ibid 4

⁹⁸ Ibid 5

true that I could have found ideas similar to those which now had such an overwhelming effect on me in the works of Marx that I had read previously. But the fact is that this did not happen, evidently because I read Marx in the light of my own Hegelian interpretation. Hence only a completely new text could have such a shock effect.” Marx’s take on objectivity in the *EP Manuscripts* “completely shattered the theoretical foundations of what had been the particular achievement of *History and Class Consciousness*. The book became wholly alien to me.”⁹⁹ Thus, the creator of Orthodox Marxism renounced his magnum opus upon the reading of an unpublished manuscript. Clearly these new writings did not bode well for Stalinist Marxism.

Overall the theories of ‘Marxism’ blossomed out of the works of individuals who had only read some of Marx’s work (specifically his latter works). Whether or not their interpretation of Dialectical Materialism is truly equivalent to Marx’s cannot be known with certainty, however it is rather dubious that they would achieve equivalency without having read Marx’s wrestling with Hegelian thinkers. And those that tried to re-read Marx, with all his works included, were often already invested in Orthodox Marxism and/or Western Marxism. Individuals like Lefebvre were simply kept out of the mainstream until the fall of Stalin.

This expansion of Marxism during the interwar years led to problems of comprehension. The people who became the main proponents of Marxism were academic proponents writing for fellow academics. The arguments generated out of the publications of earlier writings were abstruse and not meant to adhere to mass reading. As Perry Anderson notes: “The extreme difficulty of language characteristic of much Western Marxism in the twentieth century was never controlled by the tension of a direct or active relationship to a proletarian audience. On the

⁹⁹ Lukacs, Georg. "Marxists.Org." *Preface to the New Edition, 1967*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb 2012. <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/lukacs67.htm>>.

contrary, its very surplus above the necessary minimum quotient of verbal complexity was the sign of its divorce from any popular practice.”¹⁰⁰

Many Marxists entirely disparaged the works of the young Marx as irrelevant or entirely superseded. Louis Althusser is the most remarkable example of someone who tried his damnest to refute all young writings of Marx as wholly inadequate. Althusser's reading of Marx is enigmatic. His reading is both a revolutionary reading – due to his cunning and acumen - but also one that serves to guard against revolutionary readings. He is specifically guarding against revolutionary readings that wander outside the paradigm of Marxism that had served so successfully in Marxists political regimes.¹⁰¹

Also, for many Marxists and philosophers these new publications offered a new insight into Marx. Some philosophers and scholars viewed these works as consummating a history of Marx's gradual learning curve. And, some saw this as a chance to provide radical reinterpretation of Marx that could be divorced from the paradigm established since the Bolshevik revolution. Regardless, it was hard to start afresh a reading of Marx when the cold war had essentially turned an individual's philosophy into a factional standoff of Liberal Democracy versus Marxist-Leninism. Both sides had already perverted the words of Marx to facilitate certain sentiments in their populations.

Cold War Paradigm

Although many of the early works were published in the 1930s, these publications were in Russian and German. It was not until the 60s and 70s that the publications were made in English. A cold war paradigm had long since emerged by then. Erich Fromm welcomed the

¹⁰⁰ Anderson, Perry. *Considerations on Western Marxism*. London: Verso, 1979. 54.

¹⁰¹ The following chapter will be entirely devoted to Althusser's critiques.

publications as a chance to shatter this paradigm.

“The world is torn today between two rival ideologies – that of “Marxism” and that of “Capitalism.” While in the United States “social” is a word on the Devil’s tongue and not one that recommends itself, the opposite is true in the rest of the world.” The propaganda by the USSR and China was so great, that developing countries in Asia and Africa were attracted to this fastidious version of socialism under the ideologies of “justice, equality and universality,” albeit the “Soviet Union is a system of conservative state capitalism and not the realization of Marxian Socialism.” This leads to the great irony that “American public opinion and official policy...support the Russian-Chinese claim be heralding that their system is Marxist,” and perpetuate the myth that Marx’s socialism is to be found in the Soviet and Chinese totalitarian states.¹⁰²

The linguist and libertarian-socialist Noam Chomsky reflected similar sentiments: “When the world’s two great propaganda systems agree on some doctrine, it requires some intellectual effort to escape its shackles. One such doctrine is that the society created by Lenin and Trotsky and molded further by Stalin and his successors has some relation to socialism in some meaningful or historically accurate sense of this concept. In fact, if there is a relation, it is the relation of contradiction.”¹⁰³ He is referring to the fact that the two main propaganda systems – the US and the USSR – are at a crossroads of defining socialism, which was supposed to be workers ownership of the means of production, not state, nor private ownership.

These terms like Marxism, Socialism, Communism, etc. were used as justification by

¹⁰² Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1969. VII.

¹⁰³ Chomsky, Noam. "Chomsky.Info." *The Soviet Union Versus Socialism*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 Feb 2012. <<http://www.chomsky.info/articles/1986----.htm>>.

Liberal Democracies and Soviet Satellites, to wage war against each other, and indoctrinate fairy-tales into their populations. Marx, and all things flowing from him, was the epitome of evil to western eyes. Where as in the Soviet Union, and Communist countries, Marx was used as the pinnacle of liberation, and all steps, no matter how brutal, were marching toward his promised land. Perversion knew no bounds. Fromm's comment that introduces this chapter brings home the languid irony of the Cold War Paradigm regarding Marxism.

Part II

“A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being right, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom. But the tumult soon subsides. Time makes more converts than reason.”

— Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

CHAPTER FOUR: ALTHUSSER

"The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame."

– Oscar Wilde

"All censorships exist to prevent anyone from challenging current conceptions and existing institutions. All progress is initiated by challenging current conceptions, and executed by supplanting existing institutions. Consequently, the first condition of progress is the removal of censorship."

– George Bernard Shaw

The two previous theories espoused above – that of Marx's human nature and its paramount significance to his theory of alienation – are antithetical to mainstream Marxism. Marxism proper, is the fastidious reading of a limited scope of Marx's work, as outlined in chapter 3.

Without the full scope of Marx's work at hand, three forgivable errs can occur: 1) The error in failing to flesh out properly his evolving theory of human-nature. 2) The error to come to grips with his theory of alienation; as it is neither as explicit nor as primary in his later works.¹⁰⁴ 3) And finally, the error to fail to connect the two theories together as essentially intertwined and mutually inclusive.

Despite these understandable errors, one philosopher in particular became renowned for his explicit rejection of Marx's earlier works having any serious bearing, or even fruitful insight, on the already established theories of Marxism. Therefore his rejection of a Marxian human

¹⁰⁴ Although the fact Lukacs nearly reproduced it in his essays on reification, independently of reading Marx's earlier works, confirms that it is still present.

nature, a theory of alienation (even independent of human nature), and any interconnection of all three, is not an excusable oversight, due to limited resources, but an actual contention that catapulted him to fame in the 1960s.

In the 1960s Louis Althusser, a communist party member, and professor at École Normale Supérieure published several journal articles specifically assaulting the new theories and readings of Marx that were arising from the publication of his earlier works. Some of these new readings branched into a new form of Marxism known as Marxist Humanism. Raya Dunayevskaya, Trotsky's former secretary, was one of the key founders of Marxist Humanism, putting heavy emphasis on Marx's earlier works. Other Marxists, and/or humanist followed suit, such as Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, Henri Lefebvre, Che Guevara etc.

Some of the Marxist Humanists contended that Marx's theory of alienation, and/or his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, were the pinnacle of his work, of which all subsequent works were merely elaborations on. For instance, Erich Fromm states: "Marx's Philosophy...has found its most articulate expression in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*."¹⁰⁵

Thus, Althusser came to be known as the anti-humanist Marxist. There was no middle ground between these philosophers, nor an evolving understanding of Marx's thought, merely a dichotomy of sides, where teams and defenders took positions.

The Marxist economist Ernest Mandel articulates a position I fully share: "All...of these opinions are wrong. There was an important evolution, not an identical repetition, in Marx's thought from decade to decade. Any person who thinks, and continues to think and live, will not

¹⁰⁵ Fromm, Erich. *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co, 1969. V.

say exactly the same thing when he is sixty as when he was twenty-five.”¹⁰⁶ Alienation, and Marx’s vast philosophical work, took on new scope and insights, from reification, to commodity fetish, to his labor theory of value, to name but a few changes. Much of these cannot be found directly in the *EP Manuscripts*. I must digress.

Due to popularity, influence, and sheer philosophical cunning, Althusser’s anti-humanist critiques, and rejections of Marx’s earlier theories, are the most well-known and cogent. Unlike those who made the excusable mistakes outlined above, he gained notoriety for having read all Marx’s earlier works, rejecting them, and drawing conclusions still in line with Marxism proper. Thus my personal theories, outlined in chapters 1 and 2, are at an obvious contentious point with Althusser’s rejections, and their validity must stand over and against his critiques, independent of the historical context of the humanist and anti-humanist divide.¹⁰⁷ Whereas the previous proponents of Marxism proper can be dismissed for the excusable errs already discussed, Althusser cannot.

In 1965, Althusser’s work *Pour Marx* (English translation: *For Marx*), was published. *For Marx* is a collection of several journal articles written throughout the 60s. Viewed in their collective entirety, one can understand the full breadth of Althusser’s assault on a humanistic view of Marxism, and his rejection, that he believes Marx shares, of the theory of alienation.

Althusser’s attack on humanism is not just the generally understood historical concept of humanism, but of an ahistorical human identification datum(s). He believes the “tendency” to “look for theoretical justification” in “Marx’s early work,” to reinterpret Marx in a manner that

¹⁰⁶ Mandel, Ernest, and George Novack. *The Marxist Theory of Alienation*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974. 18.

¹⁰⁷ I make no claim to being for or against Marxist Humanist philosophy in general, primarily due to ignorance. While I think Mandel’s criticism is legitimate, this does not de-facto result in anyone having to take Marxism wholesale as a worthy philosophy, nor does it mandate which side of a humanist divide one must take either.

remains true to “old philosophical themes of freedom, man, the human person, and alienation” is a reactionary and outmoded reading.¹⁰⁸ This outmoded thinking is “a possible historical symptom of a double inability and a double danger. An inability to think the specificity of Marxist theory, and, correlatively, a revisionist danger of confusing it with pre-Marxist ideological interpretations.”¹⁰⁹

There are two primary criticisms Althusser has lobbed at his Marxist rivals. The first is his recognition (dubious) of Marx’s epistemological break; a term Althusser has become famous for, and associated with. The second is his view of what it is to be wholly Marx.

The Epistemological Break

Althusser believes that Marx undergoes a break in his philosophical method.¹¹⁰ Roughly a year after drafting the *EP Manuscripts*, Marx and Engels published *The German Ideology*. There are two new methods that Althusser sees in this work. The first is Historical Materialism, the second is Dialectical Materialism. Prior to this Althusser believes Marx was merely dabbling in Hegelian Ideological philosophy, and realized its futility after drafting the *EP Manuscripts*.

Althusser finds it convenient to break up the works of Marx into stages of his life. The early stage and Marx’s early works cover 1840-1844. The epistemological break occurs in 1845 with the drafting of *The German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach*. From 1845 to 1857 Marx changed his area of study, from philosophy to political economy and revolutionary activities, within the framework of his new epistemology. This is known as the transitional era. Marx published several works during this new venture, like *The Communist Manifesto* and

¹⁰⁸ Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. New York: Verso, 2005. 10.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid* 12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid* 32-39.

Wages Price and Profit. Finally, from 1857-1883, Marx drafted what Althusser calls his mature works.¹¹¹

As Althusser states: “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.” First, “the formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts.” Second, “a radical critique of the theoretical pretensions of every philosophical humanism.” And third, “the definition of humanism as an ideology.”¹¹² One of the primary reasons Althusser gives for supporting this claim is Marx’s VI Thesis on Feuerbach. This particular issue warrants a whole chapter of its own, and thus will not be discussed here; however when it is discussed it is worth remembering that Althusser – among others - is one of the many proponents of the view that the sixth thesis proves Marx held no essentialist view of man.

Althusser’s contention is that Marx’s epistemological break necessitates that Marx must jettison all past categories of thought that occurred prior to the break. These categories were ideological categories, not material ones arising within the framework of his new methods, and his new methods reject ideological categories with no material basis. The categories that must be jettisoned – according to Althusser – are human essence/nature, and alienation. Any attempt to define human nature before the break was a nonsensical abstraction that failed to consider the socio-material components of any given era. Whereas the Historical Material method puts primacy on the socio-material relations, and views ideologies as arising from them.

There are several errors in Althusser’s judgment. Thus, there are several ways of refuting

¹¹¹ Ibid 34-35.

¹¹² Ibid 227.

his judgments, and the order in which it is done requires no specific chronology. However, it is diligent enough to admit where Althusser is correct. Althusser is correct that Marx's analysis and methods underwent change to a degree. Marx's lexicon and many categories of thought changed. The more Hegelian sentence structure, and argumentation is less apparent in the transitional periods (although it returns whole sale in his later works), and new categories of thought are conceived and elucidated.¹¹³ It is also true that Marx heavily shifts his ontology to one of material conditions.¹¹⁴ A shift in ontology though is not a shift in epistemology, but this will be elaborated later.

According to Althusser, the Young Marx's theory of alienation was more Hegelian-Feuerbachian, and to some degree he is correct. Marx believed that his theory of alienation and the alienated experience of the worker gave rise to private property (an entirely ideological concept). "Private property thus results by analysis from the concept of alienated labour- i.e., of alienated man, of estranged labor, of estranged life, of estranged man."¹¹⁵ Notice here that Marx believes the philosophical analysis results in private property. This is quite Hegelian, to view, primarily, the contentious nature of abstract ideas as a force that leads to results in reality. Discussing earlier societies, like Ancient Greece, Hegel remarks: "while they [philosophers] so thought, the principal ordinances of life began to be seriously affected by their conclusions. Thought deprived existing institutions of their force. Constitutions fell a victim to thought: religion was assailed by thought...thought, in short, made itself a power in the real world, and

¹¹³ The labor theory of value, labor power, value, reification, etc.

¹¹⁴ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1970. 37.

¹¹⁵ Marx, Karl. *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Mineola: Dover, 2007. 80.

exercised enormous influence.”¹¹⁶

Nonetheless, in *The German Ideology* Marx makes the necessary corrections within his method (epistemological) breaking work for retaining the theory of alienation. Instead of seeing alienation as giving rise to private property, Marx makes the necessary inversion within his Historical Material framework. Thus, it is the division of labor that gives rise to alienation and private property. “The division of labor offers us the first example of how, as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man’s own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, . . . enslaves him.”¹¹⁷ Thus Marx retains his theory of alienation, within his epistemological break, and Althusser neglects this correction at his own peril.

However, I can offer Althusser a fig leaf and, for the sake of argument, concede his argument and overlook Marx’s inclusion of alienation at the point of break. Perhaps the inclusion was a mistake, and Althusser wages that it is not until 1858 that Marx is wholly the mature Marx. Nonetheless Althusser remains incorrect.

Around 1858 Marx finished what is now published as the *Grundrisse*. These were his draft notebooks that he worked on preceding his publications of several volumes on capitalism. Essentially the *Grundrisse* was Marx’s personal blue-print of how he understood Capitalism, and was also the basis for translating his blue-print into a book for society at large. In it Marx explicitly states: “The economist have expressed this more or less empirically...*real* labor comes to confront the worker as an *alien power*; capital, inversely, realizes itself through the

¹¹⁶ Hegel. *Hegel's Logic*. New York: Oxford Press, 1975. 28.

¹¹⁷ Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. New York: International Publishers, 1970. 53.

appropriation of alien labor.”¹¹⁸ In fact there are over 30 references to alienation, alienated labor, alien forces, and alienated capital appropriation. To cite them all would be cumbersome and superfluous, but the predicates of Marx’s earlier theory can still be found. The *Grundrisse* was published before Althusser raised his contentions. However, again, we can offer a fig leaf, and say maybe he missed out on reading it for some obscure reason, or maybe post *Grundrisse* Marx changed his mind on alienation.¹¹⁹

In 1867, when Marx published *Capital*, he was at the height of his maturity, and offered the world his magnum opus. Marx refers to alienation numerous times, and even when he does not refer to the subject of alienation, the predicates are frequent throughout the work. Quoting all such instances would take up several pages, and is frankly a superfluous task. But, to offer one example, when writing on capitals accumulation Marx says: “Before he enters the [perfunctory work] process, his own labor has already been alienated from him, appropriated by the capitalist... it becomes a product alien to him...capital [is] an alien power that dominates and exploits him”¹²⁰ In general, this particular citation reveals that most of the predicates are retained. The aspect of misery is left out, but Marx picks it up again in several chapters, specifically when he says: “It follows therefore that in proportion as capital accumulates, the lot of the labourer, be his payment high or low, must grow worse. The law, finally, that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It establishes an accumulation of misery, corresponding with

¹¹⁸ Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse*. London: Penguin, 1993. 307.

¹¹⁹ He obviously did not change his mind on human nature, as demonstrated in chapter 1.

¹²⁰ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 716.

accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, *i.e.*, on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.”¹²¹ Despite the claims of bourgeois economists, believing that Marx is claiming that actual poverty will increase, he is not, as Ernest Mandel shows in his brilliant introduction to *Capital*. He is referring back to the misery of the *EP Manuscripts*, whereby when the worker is a commodity, thus having (being) an exchange-value, the more values he creates, the less he is worth in comparison to the world of commodity values.

Lastly we have *Capital Volume III*, which Marx left a rough draft version behind upon his death, and Engels subsequently published it. This is the last major work written by Marx, and in it he says: “Capital shows itself more and more to be a social power, with the capitalist as its functionary...an alienated social power which has gained an autonomous position and confronts society as a thing.”¹²² Moreover, a bourgeois social revolution around the means of production will ultimately result in the “alienation” of the laborer from the production process (Marx, 1991, p. 725).

Thus, Althusser is simply wrong to claim that the epistemological break brings with it a loss of alienation. Marx retains it into his mature years, and he accommodates it into his theory of history. Alienation thus takes on a peculiar form under the capitalist mode of production, and is not some grand ideological concept, coming to know itself in absolute spirit, in nebulous Hegelian terms, but a dialectical relationship betwixt the laborer and the mode of production he finds himself born into. Althusser is wrong on two counts then: 1) Marx does in fact retain the

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 799.

¹²² Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume III*. England: Penguin, 1991. 373.

theory, and the fact he overlooked this in his personal readings is vexing, and 2) The theory according to Marx squares with the epistemological break.

There is one more contention I wish to raise, and that is of the epistemological break in general. My reading of Marx contends that Marx shifted ontologies and not epistemologies. In the transforming years as Althusser calls them (those between the *EP Manuscripts* and *Capital*), Marx is no doubt presenting his arguments in a non-Hegelian, non-dialectical framework. One obvious example is the *The Communist Manifesto*. Also, *Wages Price and Profit*, was deliberately written for a working class audience, and is one of the clearest and most didactic of Marx's works. However, as Marx admits in the preface to *Capital*, he returned to Hegel's *Logic* to deal with capitalism, and rightly admits to being a pupil of the master: "The mystifying side of Hegelian dialectic I criticized nearly thirty years ago, at a time when it was still the fashion. But just as I was working at the first volume of "Das Kapital," it was the good pleasure of...cultured Germany, to treat Hegel...as a dead dog. I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker, and even here and there, in the chapter on the theory of value, coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him...With him it [the dialectic] is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."¹²³ Moreover, the *Grundrisse*, his private notebooks, are dialectical through and through.¹²⁴

Marx is right, as I will show in a bit, that he does retain the dialectic in his analysis. Moreover, his retention is one whereby the dialectic serves as an epistemological tool. That is, it

¹²³ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 102-103.

¹²⁴ It is interesting to note that Marx's private notes are wholly dialectical, and his elaborations on them are less so.

is Marx's tool for getting at the essence of matters, which resides beneath¹²⁵ appearances. When juxtaposed to his earlier writings, his epistemology is the same; it is only his ontology which changes. Thus, what really occurred between the early and old Marx is an ontological break, and not an epistemological one.

Althusser believes that Historical Materialism is a new science, which has its own system of concepts, and these concepts produce "true knowledge."¹²⁶ Thus, Althusser believes that "when Marx broke with the problematic of humanism in order to establish the problematic of Historical Materialism, he broke with an ideology in order to found a science."¹²⁷ But Historical Materialism has never been about generating a new epistemology. Historical Materialism is an ontological claim about what exist, what is "real" as Marx would put it. And it is not just an ontology of material history but also of social being.¹²⁸ In what is widely considered Marx's most explicit and clearest expression of Historical Materialism – as the one found in *The Germany Ideology*, as Althusser acknowledges, is Marx's first working draft of the theory – Marx elaborates his new view in the preface of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. "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

¹²⁵ For lack of a better word.

¹²⁶ Ferretter, Luke. *Louis Althusser*. New York: Routledge, 2006. 37.

¹²⁷ Ibid 38.

¹²⁸ As Lukacs argued in his later life, after reading the early works of Marx, Marx had an ontology of social beings in a material relationship with one another, and the world around them.

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.”¹²⁹ Marx believes that the totality of man’s social-economic existence constitutes the real foundations of man’s existence in general, which man is always in the process of changing through social production. This is an ontology of social beings in the world, and it is an ontology that works in any mode of production (i.e., feudalism, slave society, etc). The static element is the social productivity, and social relationship, of man,¹³⁰ and the dialectical relationship is the constantly changing ensemble of man’s total relations with material nature. Whereas Althusser contends that Marx’s Historical Materialism gives us whole new concepts, of which he mentions Marx’s economic concepts, as the new foundation of a science. This is a misreading though, as the new concepts are appropriate to capitalism only, whereas Historical Materialism is claiming to be a theory of all history. Thus, it is an ontological position, where the categories appropriate to capitalism (exchange value, capital, proletarian, even alienation, etc.) are fleeting, and the underlining ontology is stable.

Viewing Historical Materialism as an ontology allows us to better recognize that the dialectic remains Marx’s epistemological tool, and he utilizes it in *Capital* in the same way as he utilizes it his youthful years. The perfect example of a dialectical analysis to be found in *Capital* is Marx’s analysis of the commodity. Marx’s analysis of the commodity occupies approximately fifty pages, but I can simplify it for the sake of space. To go through the entire dialectical dance of the commodity, while informative and enlightening, is outside the scope of this thesis.

¹²⁹ Marx, Karl. "A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy: Preface." *Marxists.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 Mar 2012. <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1859/critique-pol-economy/preface.htm>>.

This was written in the mature years too.

¹³⁰ Which fits in nicely with Marx’s view of human nature elaborated in *Capital*, and discussed in chapter 1.

Marx says that the commodity is the most readily apparent feature of capitalism, but its appearance masks the real essence of capitalism. He feels we need to get at this essence to unfold the whole ensemble of capitalism's essence, and he does so dialectically. Thus it is not Historical Materialism that is the epistemological tool, but the dialectic. Historical Materialism can only tell us how we got here, ontologically, which he saves for the final chapter of *Capital*.

The commodity has two obvious features, an exchange value, and a use value. A use value simply means the commodity can be used for something, e.g., a car can be used for transportation, and a book for learning. An exchange value means the commodity can be exchanged for something, for instance money, or another commodity, or labor power. If a commodity has no use value, it will have no exchange value, since no one will want it. But something can have a use value, without having an exchange value (like oxygen for breathing). At first appearance the exchange value of a commodity is not perplexing, but at an essence level it is quite vexing. As Marx points out, what is the common element that allows for all commodities to be exchangeable? "This common something cannot be either a geometrical, a chemical, or any other natural property of commodities. Such properties claim our attention only in so far as they affect the utility of those commodities, make them use values. But the exchange of commodities is evidently an act characterised by a total abstraction from use value. Then one use value is just as good as another, provided only it be present in sufficient quantity... use values, commodities are, above all, of different qualities, but as exchange values they are merely different quantities, and consequently do not contain an atom of use value."¹³¹ Marx believes we must get at the essence of what warrants exchange value, thus exchange value has an essence,

¹³¹ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 127.

but exchange value is not material. In order to do so we must get at what value is in essence, not as an exchange, but as the initial moment a commodity receives value, which all commodities must have, in order for them to become exchangeable.

If these commodities share no similar properties, such as volume, weight, atomic structure, chemical composition, etc, Marx concludes that only one thing is universally shared by all of them: labor. But concrete labor is not enough to get at the essence of value.¹³² What is shared by all forms of labor is labor in the abstract. And labor in the abstract is quantifiable by the socially necessary labor time required to produce a particular commodity, that is the average time of labor expended to produce the commodity. It is socially necessary labor time that ultimately is congealed into a commodity as value, and then can be exchanged – thus also measured/quantified – with other commodities.

This analysis harps on all the primary elements of a dialectical reading, and it not nearly as materialistic as vulgar Marxist, and layman readers of Marx, believed his materialism to be. A commodity contains a unity of opposites: exchange, and use. The exchange value contains a contradiction in that what is being exchanged cannot be defined at a surface level, and what appears as its value – the transaction that takes place – is really a reflection of a deeper value. This deeper value, which is abstract labor, requires a high degree (quantifiable) of qualitatively different types of labor, to generate socially necessary labor time (and a commodity market). Once socially necessary labor time is congealed into a commodity, and the commodity becomes exchangeable, we have a quantifiable measurement that is an objective measurement, of a non-

¹³² Concrete labor is the difference in actual labor processes. i.e., the difference between sewing shirts, accounting incomes, and scrubbing toilets.

material thing. Value has no material substance, but has an objective measurement.¹³³

This type of dialectical analysis of a social phenomenon is entirely in line with Marx's earlier works. As discussed in chapter 1, Marx frequently saw non-alienated labor as a performance whereby man objectified his species-being and essence into his product. This too was a form of immaterial objectification through the act of labor, which could only be unmasked through a dialectical analysis of man's essence, his product, and his social relationship. While it is true that Marx's youthful analysis is more ideological – as exemplified in his believing alienated labor gives rise to property relations, and not property relations to alienated labor – it's clear that Marx's dialectic of youth is retained at the height of his maturity. The only shift is ontological. Thus there is no epistemological break, only an ontological one. Althusser, then, broadly fails to defend his view of Marxism, and Marxism proper, from the unearthing of these other text.

Fine Wine

There is one other aspect of Althusser's Marxism, which he contends requires that we abandon all Marx's early works and categories of thought.

Althusser believes that with age, Marx becomes greater; much like a fine wine.¹³⁴ Althusser – probably correctly – believes that Marxian scholars read Marx's work backwards to forward as offering some connecting thread throughout. Or, at least, references back to his early works, looking for connections in the latter works. Althusser believes that this attitude fails to recognize a break in Marx. All of his personal readings reveal a lack of a connecting thread, but

¹³³ One hat for two coats, or one car for \$20,000.

¹³⁴ The fine wine analogy is a little misleading in that Althusser is proposing a qualitative break, and not a qualitative gradual improvement, nonetheless the argument should still stand without over scrutinizing the analogy.

instead, a definitive break, as already discussed above.

Thus, Althusser's epistemological break requires that one stage of Marx is correct and all previous/latter ones outdated and incorrect. "we must admit that *Capital* (and 'mature Marxism' in general) is *either an expression of the Young Marx's philosophy, or its betrayal.*" He continues: "This is the *location* of the discussion: the Young Marx. Really *at stake* in it: Marxism. The *terms of the discussion*: whether the Young Marx was already and wholly Marx." Then he offers us, supposedly, an uncompromising choice: "it seems that Marxists have a choice between two parrying dispositions within the ideal order of the tactical combinatory...if they want to rescue Marx from the perils of his youth with which his opponents threaten them, they can *either agree that the young Marx is not Marx; or that the young Marx is Marx.*"¹³⁵

If we already accept the epistemological break as only an ontological one, and recognize that Marx does retain and develop the very categories Althusser is attacking Marxist Humanist for idolizing (alienation and some form of human essence), then we can walk away from his dichotomy without feeling rebuffed. However, I disbelieve that his dichotomy is necessary or even a cogent argument, even upon accepting the epistemological break.

The real problem is that Althusser never even considers that his epistemological break could be an error. Given the "location" of the discussion, he believes his "terms" are the necessary conclusion. But it does not follow, in any *a priori* or *a posteriori* sense, that because we are discussing the Young Marx, and the veracity of his individual theses, we are compromised into rejecting whole sale thesis and stages of his life. Althusser is right to say Marxism is at stake, as discussed in chapter 3, Marxism developed out of a narrow set of books; however, the

¹³⁵ Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. New York: Verso, 2005. 52-53.

aspect of being at stake does not require that Marxism is under threat, unless one is militantly dogmatic. The part that is at stake could be the narrowness of Marxism to account for human-essence, and theories of worker alienation, that the earlier writings can offer a broadening and widening of Marxism's scope. Thus the stake could be one of ameliorating the theory, and not one of threatening it whole sale.

Moreover, these discussion terms remain obscure in that to speak of something as "Wholly Marx" is to set up some deified version of a mortal man. No human, in an extended life, ever has a final consummating moment. And no one reflecting on that individual's life has any *a priori* or *a posteriori* obligation to view an individual's work as reaching consummation in a given moment. Cherry-picking is okay too, so long as we are not dealing with a religion.

Finally, Althusser is categorically rejecting the possibility of seeing a gradual evolution of Marx's concepts and views, as Ernest Mandel referred to them in the quote above. Thus, Althusser's terms are contentions, only if you accept them in the first place, but there is no reason to do so. What is at first the "tactical combinatory" arena for getting at the essence of Marxism, ends up being the false guidelines for a chance at ameliorating Marxism proper, or developing and working with individual theses (regardless of their historical moment in a mortal man's life) in a way that can better a personal philosophical project.

He is correct, and has every right, to argue against Marxist Humanists like Erich Fromm who contest that the *EP Manuscripts* are the pinnacle explication of Marx's work, but his dichotomy does not in and of itself debar the Marxist Humanist project of any of its veracity, in fleshing out a new theory and a new understanding. Ironically Marx would have been on board with such a project when he –as already stated earlier- remarked to some Parisian Marxist that he

himself was not a Marxist. His theories were never intended to wage war with one another.

When reading *Capital* we no longer have to be confused about those odd references to ahistorical man, nor alienation, that Marxists once fought about, when his earlier works demonstrate, in a broader and richer context, what Marx meant. By raising such a false bifurcation, Althusser was threatening the improvement and amelioration of a theory, which desperately needed amelioration after being so greatly perverted by Stalin(ism), and the cold war dichotomy.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE XI THESIS

^{VI} thesis: Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations. Feuerbach, who does not enter upon a criticism of this real essence, is consequently compelled:

1.To abstract from the historical process and to fix the religious sentiment as something by itself and to presuppose an abstract - isolated - human individual.

2.Essence, therefore, can be comprehended only as "genus", as an internal, dumb generality which naturally unites the many individuals.

-Karl Marx

The VI Thesis of Karl Marx has been used for decades to argue against the idea of any kind of essentialism, or human-nature, belonging to homo-sapien man. All sides of Marxism have utilized this claim, from the anti-humanist branch best argued by Althusser, to the Humanist Marxists such as Erich Fromm. It is quite peculiar that this thesis has been the trump card for many Marxist as a firm denial of human nature when the thesis was scribbled on a sheet paper that Marx never showed anyone, and until Engels fortuitously stumbled across it (after Marx died), no one was aware of it existing. As with many of Marx's blue prints and drafts, the thesis is written unclearly, and for Marx's purposes, not ours, at developing theory.¹³⁶ There is no indication that he took all XI theses, nor thesis VI, whole sale into his developmental thought.

¹³⁶ Engels, Frederick. Ludwig Feuerbach: And the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy. New York: International Publishers, 2010. 8, 82.

Nonetheless, thesis VI is utilized as evidence for many

In refuting this claim, as a denial of human nature, I find I have *almost* nothing new to add to the conversation. Norman Geras, a Marxist (former?)¹³⁷, and Professor Emeritus of Government at the University of Manchester, wrote a book titled *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*. The legend is that Marx held no view of human nature. Geras points to approximately a dozen authors who use the VI Thesis to justify a denial of human nature, across all kinds of political and philosophical spectrums.¹³⁸ Geras ironically does not propose a positive view of human nature, he only demonstrates with great analytic cunning¹³⁹ that thesis VI does not deny a view of human nature.¹⁴⁰ Then he goes on to cite a few passages where Marx is indicating a human nature, without piecing them together into a fit theory. In defense of my own thesis then, I find I ought to rearticulate his claims in a summarized fashion. Afterwards, I will try to offer something new to the conversation¹⁴¹, while recognizing that the admittance and/or denial of my something is entirely superfluous, given the cogency of Geras' book.

How it is Frequently Read

Simply put, the VI Thesis is read as rejecting all claims to a human-essence, and a human-nature, that transcends history. Instead, as man develops the means of production, so he develops his essence, in a fashion that is qualitatively different in different modes of production. Although the thesis is several lines running, it is the second line that critics claim vindicates this

¹³⁷ He still claims himself to be a Marxist, albeit he's taken a stark turn away from the left-wing side of politics, in defending Tony Blair, and the war on terror. My personal reservations and understandings of Marxism don't square with idolizing statesmen, especially those involved in imperial ventures, or nebulous wars over nebulous ideological concepts (terror).

¹³⁸ Geras, Norman. *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*. London: Verso, 1983. 49-51.

¹³⁹ Ironically he is one of the few analytical readers of Marx that does not impoverish Marx's dialectical thought.

¹⁴⁰ As I have tried to do in Chapter 1,

¹⁴¹ In the following chapter, when dealing with another criticism, I will offer a broader critique of what I believe Marx means by essence, which can retroactively be read into this chapter.

position: “But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.” Social relations change, as man develops the means of production and instruments of labor. Man’s essence is not inherent in each individual. It cannot be abstractly figured out either. Ergo, there is no static essence. Ergo, there is no human nature.

Geras believes this reading to be incorrect, and that he can “discredit its status as evidence” against a Marxian human nature. Moreover, the task is in general superfluous, if a broader reading of Marx’s stance on human nature is conducted; as I have shown in chapter 1. Geras points out that ever since Althusser’s rise to fame, there is consistently “no room” in “historical materialism” for human nature, amongst his acolytes.¹⁴²

Another Reading

Geras, and myself, find it foolish to settle the issue of Marx’s thought on human nature by an intense scrutiny of a few sentences, in a thesis never intended for outside reading. “In general, a sentence can yield only so much of a person’s thought and no more.” One cannot definitively settle the issue over the sentence contained in the VI Thesis, albeit rejecters of Marxian human nature often try to. Nonetheless, given the long standing fastidious reading of this thesis, Geras feels obligated to scrutinize to an equal degree of cunning as his best opponents.¹⁴³

Geras offers a reading that pits himself in a corner. He purposely (miss)reads the thesis as discussing human nature and not essence, for the sake of his opponents, and he refuses to look at

¹⁴² Geras, Norman. *Marx and Human Nature: Refutation of a Legend*. London: Verso, 1983. 19-20.

¹⁴³ *Ibid* 36-37.

any other writings by Marx.¹⁴⁴

The easiest re-reading of this thesis, for Geras, would be for the reader to “notice...that in the final sentence Marx takes Feuerbach to task for conceiving of man’s ‘nature’ [essence] *only* as species...Marx does not say that is *not* these things.” Thus, “the sentence permits the interpretation that, for Marx, Feuerbach is mistaken not because he views man in terms of... ‘species’ ... characteristics but because he views him exclusively in those terms. He is wrong for a one-sidedness...not wrong *tout court*.”¹⁴⁵

Geras moves on to the second sentence in the thesis, where Marx states that man’s nature “is no abstraction inherent in each single individual.” This could be read as categorically rejecting human nature, but it can also not be read that way, and since we are dealing with the sentence alone – and not other works – there is no necessity in reading it the former way. Marx could be arguing, implicitly that “A is no B; it is C,” where C is a view of nature in a broader perspective conforming to the entire social ensemble. Or put another way, to say “A is no B,” can be another way of saying “A is no *mere* B.” Or, “A is *more* than B.”¹⁴⁶

Geras offers an example to clarify what he means. He could say “Language is no individual possession; it is a social and collective phenomenon.” And in saying this he is not “supposing, absurdly, that it is not individuals who know and speak, to that extent ‘possess,’ a language.” Thus the initial appearance of denial, in sentence two, and in his example, is to qualify something greater with a crucial distinction.¹⁴⁷ Thus, Marx’s intent, could be, in identifying human nature with larger social relations, to point out that it is something more than

¹⁴⁴ Ibid 30.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid 31. Italics Geras.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid 32-33. Italics Geras.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid 33.

can be characterized in any single individual. Marx, in the Hegelian tradition of being able to report back from a particular, to a totality, cannot leave anything (in this case human nature) isolated, without transcending it into a systemizing whole. This is not to deny the inherent or possessing aspect of each individual, in regards to a human nature, but it is to qualify human nature differently than an individual datum or phenomenon.

Admitting that this is not the best way to hedge a bet, Geras elaborates that given what he has just said, it is possible now to read these statements as saying that “there are general human characteristics inherent in each individual, irrespective of the ensemble of social relations,” and that is practically a truism. To deny is it absurd. And because Marx was no fool, there’s no way he could deny it. But, he still may have scribbled a thesis conveying something that absurd.¹⁴⁸ Nonetheless, many bright people – Althusser included – have taken this thesis to mean this absolutely absurd conclusion, thus it is not a definitive enough rebuttal to say smart people don’t draw absurd conclusions.

The third sentence of Marx’s thesis is essentially saying “In its reality man’s ‘nature’ is the ensemble of social relations.” Marx is indicating an “identity where none seems possible¹⁴⁹: between a totality of relations on the one hand, and the make-up of entities that are related by and within it on the other.” Nonetheless, within this identity, human nature, of some kind, is being identified as a part, or as a whole.¹⁵⁰ But if it is a whole, this leaves the reader guessing, as Marx has numerous predicates and subjects contained within the “ensemble of social relations,” that can also be viewed in a particular and totalizing way.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid 35.

¹⁴⁹ Hegel would disagree with this impossibility.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid 35-36.

In weaving together some kind of coherent view between the antagonism of the particular, and the total, Geras presents over a half a dozen different ways of reading this thesis, none of which discount human nature whatsoever. To review each of them would be superfluous. All we need, for the sake of rejecting Marx's supposed rejection of human nature, has already been outlined. Thus, with no more obligations to contain ourselves to this isolated writing of Marx's work, we can move on to his other writings – as already outlined – and dismiss this fastidious reading of the VI Thesis.

What about Thesis III?

Before moving on to the next chapter, I want to put forward a criticism from the actual thesis, that points out the erroneous reading of the VI Thesis, that human nature rejecters have offered. Like Geras, I am doing this on their own terms, that is, isolating myself to the theses only.

Thesis III says: “The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. Hence this doctrine is bound to 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 rationally understood only as revolutionary practice.”¹⁵¹

The first thing worth pointing out is that Marx is here rejecting the old idea that man's essence is entirely his environment. Now this does not mean, in today's colloquial debate, he is siding with nature over nurture, but it does mean he is not siding wholesale with nurture.

¹⁵¹ Engels, Frederick. *Ludwig Feuerbach: And the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*. New York: International Publishers, 2010. 83.

Moreover, man cannot be entirely defined as that ensemble of social relations, since it is men who do the changing, and not the changing that makes men.

Marx's rejection of the nurture aspect of the materialist debate is that circumstances are changing. Marx always views affairs in as broad a scope as possible, with as much historical knowledge as possible. Political circumstances from despotism, democracy, republicanism, feudalism, slave society, etc, are constantly in flux, as are institutions, and social relations around them. Yet we cannot entirely account for the change in social relations, institutions, and political circumstances, by the change in material nature alone. Marx is not taking a rigid determinist view. Instead, there is a role for people to play in the changing of circumstances, that transcends any given circumstance, or historical moment. *A fortiori* in order to warrant a moment as historically paramount, it is man that must shape it. As Marx says in another work, written a decade later "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly... transmitted from the past."¹⁵²

Thus, whether or not this role is determined by human nature, or not, there is something about man that transcends, and makes, particular moments of history. This is something that is not reducible to nurture, nor socio-economic relations. Also, it is something that is constantly popping up in history. Marx believes part of it is revolutionary praxis,¹⁵³ and man's ability to educate the educator. Men have a constant ability to "change" circumstances, and social relations.

We have the ability to change things, the ability to conduct praxis, and the ability to

¹⁵² Marx, Karl. *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York: International Publishers, 1991. 15.

¹⁵³ And, as outlined in chapter 1, man's praxis is part of his human nature.

educate, as distinctly human characteristics that supersede nurture, and history. Moreover, we have the ability to educate, in a revolutionary – that is ingenious – way, as a factor in the process of nurture, that is constantly transcending deterministic nurture. Perhaps this is a form of compatibilism.¹⁵⁴ The degree to which education, praxis, and change can be shaped is, as Engels would say: “in the last instance,” determined by the degree of economic development.

Given a broader reading of Marx, the ingenuity in education, praxis, and manipulating of the environment (change), are entirely within the framework of the theory of human nature already identified. Moreover, even if we scrap the broad view, Marx is clearly denoting characteristics of man that are both constant, and transcendental to history. Thus, when we factor in the essence of man in Thesis VI, we must remember to carry into it the characteristics from Thesis III. In so doing, when confronted with sentence three of Thesis VI – the definitive thesis for those who deny human nature – “In its reality [human essence] is the ensemble of the social relations. We must remember that that ensemble was created by man, will be changed by man, and will be done so through several characteristics that are distinctly human. There is now a constant contradiction, or antagonism, as dialectical thinkers enjoy uncovering, between the essence of man in his historical moment, and the potential essence of man in that same moment.

The given moment, of any period in history, that is not revolutionary, can portray man’s essence as a social product, between the particular that is man, and his relation to the totalizing society. But, in that same moment, there is an undercurrent of potential, found outside the given mode of production, which can radically change how we see man, and how society operates. We cannot know beforehand the direction or success of any given revolutionary moment, but we can

¹⁵⁴ And to explore this potential is outside the scope of this thesis. Although, the Marxist Alex Callinicos has done so in his book *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory*.

always know beforehand that the potential is there. Thus, in any period we have two ways of seeing man, one as he is in the social ensemble, and two, as he always, at all times, potentially is. While the former view is static for long periods, the latter view is also static, for all periods, at all times.

To give man such a constant characteristic is to certainly assign some element of essence to him, or an aspect of nature that is not entirely dependent upon nurture, albeit its expression will be. Thus, to see man as only the product of social relations is to not read the theses in their entirety, and to miss the uniqueness, and compatibilism, Marx sees at all times. This does not definitively prove that Marx held a view of human nature, but this criticism, along with the insight of Geras, proves he also is not definitively rejecting one either. To be sure one way or the other we must explore more of his work, and the moment we do so, those who contest a Marxian human nature, rapidly lose their standing.

CHAPTER SIX: HOMO FABER AND THE GENESIS OF HUMAN NATURE

Man is a tool making animal.
-Benjamin Franklin¹⁵⁵

There is one last predominant view of Marxian human nature, which needs to be dethroned. The dethroning ceremony though is not going to be held with the intention of exile, but merely, placing the view within a more coherent framework. In the process of dethroning this view, I will also be proposing a new way of viewing essence and essentialism, within a specifically Marxian framework. That is, the reader can view essence and essentialism however they like in Plato, Aristotle, or a more contemporary philosophy, but just as Hegel gave his readers a new way of seeing God –whether or not they accept it is another question- Marx offers a new way to look at essentialism and its corresponding essence.

This last predominant view is to view man as *Homo Faber*; tool-making man. The unique characteristic of humanity, amongst the rest of the animal kingdom, is that man makes tools, utilizes tools, and makes newer tools. Sometimes these tools are qualitatively different, by the merging of two old tools. For instance, merging the sharp stone, with the bush rattling stick, creates the arrow. Or, throwing the carrying bucket, on top the wheel creates a wheelbarrow. But

¹⁵⁵ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 286.

this constant production is not an element of our human nature, or some essentialist aspect of man, because we do not all engage in the activity. Moreover, as some amongst us generate newer and greater tools, man's essence is redefined.

Thus, for proponents of this view, there is no essential similarity between the college student who stays up late into the night playing an online video game, or working his turn tables, compared to the Bayaka tribesman who climbs a staggering tree to collect some honey, from a beehive swarming with the Queen's finest military defenders. Both men are adapting themselves to the material world around them, and their essence is just that, the expression of that adaptation. This view is regarded by Marxists as a view Marx actually held, and I disagree, but the disagreement is not wholesale. I fully accept, from a Marxian framework, that the essence of each man is different, and the adaptation to the environment is paramount in grappling with man's essence in each particular region, and historical moment. But, I do not think Marx is denying an essentialist framework either.

Marx was known to walk, well maybe tackle, these middle lines between predominant modes of thought. He did not always seek the middle ground, in the sense of reconciling views, but instead constantly sought the middle as an end product of revolutionizing two views. In a more dialectical framework, he found contradictions, and negated the negation. For example, the dialectic of the German Idealist was impotent and 18th and 19th century materialism was too deterministic and lacking any *a priori* confirmability. So we end up with a revolutionary fusion of both: dialectical materialism. Or, for Hegel, there is no individual man, but only Geist/spirit, coming to know itself in history, as an all-encompassing spirit reflected in the minds of individual men. And, for the state of nature theorist, there is man in his natural state, reaching a

social contract, to begin to take hold of his own life, and determine his future, independent of history. Marx negates both, without abandoning either, in his theory of revolutionary praxis, and his theory of Historical Materialism. In this same manner, I believe Marx – perhaps implicitly – does the same for essentialism, and essence.

Re-Rereading Poverty of Philosophy

The Poverty of Philosophy, written in 1847, was a response by Karl Marx to the anarchist Pierre Joseph Proudhoun's recently released book *The Philosophy of Poverty*. The book is predominantly a screed against Proudhoun's economic and socialist views. Marx had negative and positive views of Proudhoun. In one of his letters he recalls that they were once friends, and debated and discussed philosophy and theory "lasting all night." Marx regrets having "infected him" with "Hegelianism," which Proudhoun could not properly study due to his lack of German. Marx initially admired the work of Proudhoun, considering it to be filled with "muscular style," that was its chief merit. And like Feuerbach, although inferior – intellectually - to the person he criticized – Hegel – his criticisms remained cogent and devastating. Proudhoun set out to assault Political Economy from the French socialist point of view, but Marx found his criticisms erroneous. When Marx wrote *The Poverty of Philosophy*, he acknowledges, to the correspondent of the letter, that their friendship was ruined.¹⁵⁶

In this entire seven pager letter, Marx never mentioned the criticism of human nature he lobbed at Proudhoun, although he does not fail to mention dozens of other ones. Nonetheless, there is a line in *The Poverty of Philosophy* that deals with human nature: "M. Proudhoun does not know that the whole of history is nothing but a continual transformation of human nature."

¹⁵⁶ Padover, Sault. *The Letters of Karl Marx*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979. 191-197. Marx's criticisms of Proudhoun carried all the way into *Capital*.

Sometimes this is translated as “...continual development of human nature.”¹⁵⁷

This theme is frequently translated, along with the third sentence of the VI Thesis,¹⁵⁸ to mean that Marx holds no rigid view of human nature. Both claims are said to be saying the same thing.

John Bellamy Foster, editor of *The Monthly Review* (a Marxist/socialist economic journal), and professor of Sociology at the University of Oregon, says that: “Rejecting all essentialism (apart from the practical, transformative nature of humanity itself, as *Homo Faber*),” Marx gave us his VI Thesis, which says “In other words, human beings did not consist of some fixed *human nature* residing in each individual, but rather, as he was to argue later, all history was nothing but the development (that is, self-development) of human nature through social intercourse.”¹⁵⁹

This is a very contradictory presentation, which *prima facie* seems to rebuke itself. In one instance there is no essentialism, but in another, there is a constantly transformative capability via a constant - *Homo Faber* – to be found in humans. Moreover, there is no essence of the individual, when he refers to the VI Thesis,¹⁶⁰ yet self-development (individual), is the essence of a given man; which is contrary to a social essence embodying an economic mode of production.

In an article for the Socialist Worker, Paul D’Amato, editor of the International Socialist Review, and author of *The Meaning of Marxism*, titles an article “Marx vs. the Myth of Human Nature.” The same argument is made. “Human beings have changed very little genetically over the last 30,000 years. Yet their social forms of organization--the way that they organize

¹⁵⁷Marx, Karl. *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1995. 100.

¹⁵⁸ In its reality [human essence/nature] is the ensemble of the social relations.

¹⁵⁹ Foster, John Bellamy. *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. 113.

¹⁶⁰ Omitted for the sake of avoiding repetition, but referred to between each quote.

themselves to procure food, shelter, clothing and other necessities--have changed tremendously. It is this that accounts for the changing nature of humans from one society to the next... In other words, in changing their environment, human beings change themselves."¹⁶¹ This is not just D'Amato's view, but also, according to him, Marx's as well.

The simplest critique would be to point out Marx's conspicuous claims of human nature in his mature work *Capital*. I believe another way of reading Marx is more sufficient. I also believe, given Marx's theory of alienation, this particular reading by Foster and D'Amato makes little sense.

Inconsistency in Revolutionary Capitalism

The first glaring inconsistency, before contending with essence and essentialism, can be found in Marx's theory of capitalism. It is no secret that Marx thought, and was right to think, that capitalist must constantly have their means of production revolutionized. "The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionizing of production...distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones."¹⁶² And Marx held on to this view throughout *Capital* too, devoting roughly 150 pages to how this process takes place.¹⁶³

Now if Marx's theory throughout his life was that capitalism is the most revolutionary mode of production (in that the bourgeoisie dethrones kings, separates church and state, and do

¹⁶¹ D'Amato, Paul. "Marx vs. the Myth of Human Nature." *The Socialist Worker*. N.p., 04 11 2011. Web. 16 Mar 2012. <<http://socialistworker.org/2011/11/04/marx-and-human-nature>>.

¹⁶² Marx, Karl. *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition*. New York: Verso, 1998. 38-39.

¹⁶³ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume I*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 492-643.

whatever is best for the market), and requires constant revolutionizing of the means of production, then Foster's criteria for what it is that makes someone human is being met to perfection. If the only thing that makes man different, is this *Homo Faber* characteristic, than capitalism is utopia. What room is there left for misery, alienation, and communist revolution? If our essence is a reflection of the means of production, we cannot be alienated from ourselves (as already discussed in chapter 2). And if our only unique ingredient as humans is the ability to perpetuate change in material circumstances through the changing of tools, we cannot ask for better circumstances. There is nothing better imaginable in conformity with what is *essential* to man. Thus we are left with the problem of why Marx fought so hard against the most revolutionary and harmonious mode of production generated by man.

Essentialism and Essence

These confused readings, constant contradictions, and mental gymnastics, can all be avoided if Marx is read as being a rigid essentialist, who sees a fluctuating essence to man. At first glance this a contradictory view too, but as outlined above, Marx is consistently taking contradictions, and developing new understandings within the framework of the old contradiction.

What is essential to man is already outlined in the first chapter, and when this essential aspect of man is not met, he is alienated. Man is in fact *Homo Faber*, but the way in which man is *essentially* expressing (life activity) the fullest, freest, and most conscious expression of his human-nature, is to be *Homo Faber* in a way that confirms species-being. Fortunately, one other Marxist, Alex Callinicos, Director of the Centre for European Studies at King's College London, affirms this view, in a more lucid expression: "Under capitalist society, the worker is compelled

to sell his strength and his skill to the capitalist. As a result he controls neither the products of his labour, nor his labour itself. What should be his life-activity, through which he affirms his humanity, or ‘species-being’, becomes a mere means to an end,” and becomes alienated from his “human nature.”¹⁶⁴

If this expression of human nature, shared by Callinicos, is what we qualify as essentially human, then what are we to make of the claim that Marx sees essence as always changing? And, this claim cannot be refuted, as it crops up too many times in all areas of his analysis, from exchange values, money, human expression, what is man in a mode of production, the actual mode of production, etc.

It is clear then, that for Marx, essence and essentialism are distinct. Essentialism though must fundamentally play a role in how we are to view man’s essence at a given time. And, as discussed in the opening section of this chapter - and confirmed by Foster and D’Amato - essence is also to be expressed by man’s adaptation to his material circumstances, which are regionally unique, and historically changing. Thus, we must blend the rigidness of essentialism, as it is expressed via adaptation, and against¹⁶⁵ the material framework man finds himself in. In so doing, these constant phrases of man “developing” and “transforming” his “human nature” and/or “human essence,” reach a synthesis. Man’s essentialism is developed, transformed, and most importantly *expressed* differently, not because it itself is different, but because circumstances, social relations, material factors, etc., are different.

Thus, the missing link between a constant Marxian human nature, and this contrary view

¹⁶⁴ Callinicos, Alex. *The Revolutionary Ideas of Karl Marx*. London: Bookmarks, 1984. 70.

It’s extremely fortuitous that I found this quote, and an actual fellow sympathizer in exact agreement with me, the day I sat down to tidy up this chapter, March, 16, 2012, for presentation.

¹⁶⁵ This could read: “over and against” in revolutionary circumstances.

held by the previously mentioned authors, is *expression*. An analogy, which is bound to offend aesthetic philosophers, can be found in the symphony. The symphony is comprised of numerous elements, constantly changing. The instruments change (both type, and brand), the musicians change, the acoustics in a given arena or auditorium change, etc. It has often been stated that no two people ever play Beethoven the same, and no one has ever performed a symphony by him, as well as him.¹⁶⁶ What are constant though in this ever changing area of study are the musical notes. In the same symphony, or even one of an entirely different composition, the musical notes are the constant, the *essential* ingredient of any given performance. When the usual variables change – instruments, performers, etc. - as they inevitably will, the *expression* of the *essential* component is nuanced, and *transformed*, giving the listener the distinct *essence* of a Beethoven symphony or a Mozart symphony, as performed by this or that quartet, or conductor. Thus, we can always recognize the essential elements of *Ode to Joy*, but can be repulsed or mesmerized, by the performer.

Also, to take a historical example, Che Guevara, who Sartre referred to as the most authentic man he met, was in essential conformity with his human nature, and his species-being (his guerilla comrades). His authenticity was this very expression of what was essential. However, it is the expression of his essentialism, against a tropical island region, around a third world development, within a social framework of a military unit, which gave him the essence of a guerilla, a threat to Western values, a poor father, and a revolutionary. The consummated essence of Che is not that he was a guerilla, or that he was authentic, it is all these, and more, constantly changing, as he changed (in Bolivia for instance), and his circumstances changed.

¹⁶⁶ Grabsky , Phil, dir. *In Search of Beethoven*. Seventh Art Productions , 2010. DVD.

What never changed though was his authentic expression of his essentialism, to make his life-activity a confirmation of species-being, in so consummated a manner, he even had Sartre admiring him. This is why we find such jarring aphorisms from Che, to be essentially true. For instance “At the risk of sounding ridiculous, the revolutionary is motivated by love,” and “the political is personal, and the personal is political.”¹⁶⁷

Marx too, offers a similar portrait of someone who was not alienated, but constantly expressed the essentialism he saw at root in man. Of course, what Marx produced was intellectual work, and never work that generated any substantial profit. He did not conform, he rebelled, plotted, worked and abstracted, in the hopes his fellow man could join him without worrying about their own subsistence either. And so, in his final volume of *Capital*, *Capital III*, we have the full articulation of what past Marxists have failed to see, but what Che and Marx lived and died trying to achieving: “In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions

¹⁶⁷ Gerassi, John. *Talking With Sartre*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. 41, 56-58.

most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ Marx, Karl. *Capital Volume III*. New York: Penguin, 1990. 959.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have explored Marxian concepts of human nature, the theory of alienation, their interconnection, and refutations to both theories. My intention was to demonstrate that throughout Marx's life he held on to both theories, and both theories fit snugly together, albeit each of them received editing over the years. Marx's theory of human nature is consistent throughout history, although his theory of alienation cannot be.

In order to properly develop a Marxian theory of human nature, I presented Marx's works in chronological order, where any references to essence or human nature cropped up. This revealed a consistent theme from Marx's notes on Mill, all the way to *Capital III*. Man has a human nature, and Marx frequently referred to it. Man has a spontaneous and creative drive, his life activity, whereby he produces products, with others in mind (species-being), in a manner that objectifies his own uniqueness (both in what he produces and how he produces), and the uniqueness of man's relationship to other men; a relationship that other animals do not share, according to recent primate research. Moreover, man is the only species that enjoys creative and fruitful production over and above the means of subsistence. That is, man creates for the pleasure and enjoyment of the entire process, and not always for nourishment and reproduction.

As man produces more and more, there are two tendencies at work. One, which is fully realized in the stark division of labor, is an ever growing denial of the full flourishing of one's nature. This is when alienation arises. And, Marx was careful to implement alienation into this theory of the division of labor after initially generating it as an ideological theory. The other tendency at work is the overabundance of new gizmos and gadgets, that offer man newer and richer ways to express his nature. This is the ideal communist society Marx was fighting for, as

expressed in passages from *The German Ideology* and *Notes on the Gotha Program*.

Unfortunately capitalism has denied man the ability to interact with the world of ever growing gizmos and gadgets, because man remains a commodity, amongst staggeringly more commodities, for sale, as an exchange value, and not as a human being.

The humanity in this view of man, and Marx's theories of man, was lost to us for decades after the success of the Bolshevik revolution, and the subsequent explosion of Marxism-Leninism. Marxism was no longer wholly Marx, but was intertwined with the works and theories of Lenin in a stranglehold so firm, Marxists – like myself – are still struggling to unravel the rational kernel, from the bloody shell of history; history told by the victims, winners, and enemy combatants of Marxist-Leninist regimes.

Although Marxism as a philosophy also exploded during the period of Marxism-Leninism as a revolutionary praxis, the philosophy itself was tainted with the revolution, and the lack of Marx's complete works. Thus, when the early works were finally published, they had to contend with over half a century of Marxism proper.

Numerous attempts were made to quell the echo of these new works. Althusser rose to fame in his attempts, revolutionizing Marxism in a manner that ironically held it steady. He offered us the view of what was "Wholly Marx," and the Epistemological Break. Dozens of other Marxist and scholars asked those with a view of human nature to read, and re-read, and keep reading the VI Thesis. Debates over essence and essentialism also flourished.

Each of these claims, when analyzed with the patience outside a cold war revolutionary framework, can be gleamed for their triumphs and faults, without being partisan to anyone but Marx. There are simply too many positive references to human nature in Marx's work, and to

many references to what is distinctly man, and not animal, to jettison the idea that Marx held a view of human nature. Moreover, the constant debate over essence and essentialism, in Marxism, can be resolved through the dialectical analysis of the *expression* of essentialism – as constant – in a fluctuating framework.

Ideally, by fully coming to grips with a Marxian human nature, the theory of alienation will subsequently follow for readers. The theory of alienation alone, as it is usually presented, simply lacks a solid foundation without a theory of human nature. When man has been viewed as purely *Homo Faber*, alienation has ceased to make sense, as there is no self to be alienated from, and capitalism serves as the greatest outlet of constant *Homo Faber* activity. The moment we expand upon *Homo Faber* as the isolating characteristic of man, is the moment alienation becomes more and more subsequent and necessary.

Although this thesis has been predominantly an argument in favor of a Marxian human nature, the motivation for writing it, and arguing for human nature to starkly, is to retain and rescue the theory of alienation from any detractors, or capitalist apologists.

The means of production may have been tinkered, new layers to the hierarchy of capital and labor may have been added, and outlets for capital may have expanded (e.g., assets and credit markets), since Marx's writing. But fundamentally, the social relations around the means of production, and the private ownership of the majority of the means of production, by the few, over the many, has been constant. Despite the year *Capital* was written, the criticisms remain potent. The worker is still exploited, and this is fundamental to the accumulation and reproduction of capital and capitalism. In the constant accumulation and expansion, all workers, and their offspring (potential workers) will remain variables of value, and not of humanity. They

cease to be species-being, and become investment opportunities. Thus, they will be treated and exploited as things (reified), and not humans, and the indefinite consequence will be prolonged alienation. If this detrimental essence of capitalism – underneath the appearances of freedom of the market, of consumption, of explosions of wealth and superfluous outlets to be active and happy in via consumption - cannot be understood, and fully grasped, it is not because Marx was wrong, but because our alienation is perhaps insurmountable deep.

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