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### Marx's contribution to the knowledge of man\*

Some preliminary remarks seem to be in order. Marx's contribution to the knowledge of man or, in a narrower sense, to psychology, is a topic which has found relatively little attention. Quite unlike Aristotle or Spinoza, whose works on ethics are treatises on psychology, Marx is supposed not to have been much concerned with the individual man, his drives, and his character, but only with the laws of society and its evolution.

This disregard of Marx's contribution to psychology is caused by a number of factors. One, that Marx never put his psychological views in any systematic form, but that they are distributed all over his work and have to be pulled together to display their systematic nature. Second, the vulgar misinterpretation of Marx as having been concerned only with economic phenomena, or the misinterpreted concept of materialism, according to which Marx assumed that man is by nature driven primarily by 'he wish for economic gain, obscured Marx's real picture of man and his contribution to psychology. Third, Marx's dynamic psychology came too early to find sufficient attention. It was not until Freud that a systematic depth psychology was developed, and Freud's psycho-analysis became the most important dynamic psychological system. Its popularity, to some extent due to its mechanistic materialism, obscured recognition of the core of the humanist depth psychology which is to be found

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in Marx. On the other hand, the ever more important role of a mechanistically oriented experimental psychology, tended to block the understanding of Marx's psychological concepts.

How could it have been otherwise? Modern academic and experimental psychology is to a large extent a science dealing with alienated man, studied by alienated investigators, with alienated and alienating methods. Marx's psychology, being based on the full awareness of the fact of alienation, was able to transcend this type of psychological approach because it did not take the alienated man for the natural man, for man as such. As a result, however, his psychology was in fact a closed book to those who believe in reflexology and conditioning as the last word in the knowledge of man. Perhaps today there is a better chance for an understanding of Marx's contribution to psychology than ever before, partly because essential findings of Freud's are no longer held to be so inseparably connected with the mechanistic parts of his theory (for instance, the libido theory), and partly because the renaissance of humanist thinking is creating a better basis for the understanding of Marx's humanist psychology.

I am sure it is not necessary to apologize for the fact that given the length of this paper I cannot try more than to give a brief resume of what I consider to be the core of Marx's contribution to psychology. Furthermore, it goes without saying that many elements of his psychological thinking are to be found in thinkers who preceded him, of whom Spinoza, Goethe, Hegel, and especially Feuerbach, are only some of the outstanding figures in a sequence of thinkers, East and West.

Marx, speaking of psychology as "a natural science of man" (identical with "a human natural science"), starts out with a concept of human nature which runs through his whole work until the last pages of the *Capital*, where in the third volume he speaks of working conditions "most adequate to their human nature and most worthy of it". While in the *Economic and philosophical manuscripts* of 1844 Marx speaks of the "essence of man" or the "species life" of man, he qualifies already in the *German ideology* the use of "essence" by stating that this essence is "no abstraction", and in the *Capital* he replaces the concept of "essence" with that of "human nature in general", to be distinguished from "human nature as modified in each historical period". This is, indeed, an important refinement of the concept of human nature, but in no way its abandonment.

Does Marx give us a definition of the "essence of human nature", of "man's nature in general"? Indeed he does. In the *Philosophical manuscripts*, Marx defines the species character of human beings as "free, conscious activity", in contrast to the nature of the animal which "does not distinguish the activity from itself [...] and is *its* activity". While in his later writings, having dropped the concept "species character" he cannot repeat the same formulation, the emphasis remains the same, that of activity as the characteristic of the not crippled, the not

fragmented nature of man. In the *Capital* Marx defines man as a "social animal", criticizing Aristotle's definition of man as a "political animal" as being "quite as characteristic of ancient classical society as Franklin's definition of man as a 'tool-making animal' is characteristic of Yankeedom". Marx's psychology, as well as his philosophy, is one of human activity, and I quite agree with the view that the most fitting way to describe Marx's definition of man is that of a being of "praxis", a point to which I shall return later.

Marx's first step of employing the concept of human nature in one form or another throughout his whole work would have little meaning without the second and most important step which characterizes his psychological theory. I refer to his concept of man's nature as a dynamic, energetic one. He sees man as being driven by passions, or drives, although man is largely unaware of these driving forces. Marx's is a *dynamic psychology*. This constitutes on the one hand its affinity to Spinoza's psychology, and its anticipation of Freud's, and on the other, its contradiction to any kind of mechanistic, behavioristic psychology. As I shall try to show later in more detail, Marx's dynamic psychology is based on the primacy of man's *relatedness* to the world, to man, and to nature, in contrast to Freud's, which is based on the model of an isolated *homme machine*.

His most general and yet very fruitful concept of drives consists in the differentiation between "constant" or "fixed" drives, and "relative" drives. The constant drives "exist under all circumstances and [...] can be changed by social conditions only as far as form and direction are concerned", the relative drives "owe their origin only to a certain type of social organization". Marx assumed sex and hunger to fall under the category of "fixed drives", while avarice, for instance, would be an example of a relative drive. This distinction is closely related to the distinction between human nature in general and its specific manifestations. At this point I only want to say briefly how extraordinarily fruitful this division between fixed and relative drives is, and that in fact, this concept alone constitutes a most important contribution to the present-day discussion of drives and instincts. Marx clarifies the distinction still further by saying that "relative appetites" (another word for drives) "are not an integral part of human nature" but "owe their origin to certain social structures and certain conditions of production and communication". Here Marx already linked the relative appetites with social structure and conditions of production, and communication, and thus laid the foundation for a dynamic psychology which understands most human appetites, and that means a large part of human motivation as being determined by the process of production. The concept of "social character" in the dynamic sense in which I have formulated it, is based on this notion of Marx.

Not less important than Marx's distinction between constant and relative drives is his discussion of the animal versus the human quality

of constant drives. And it is precisely at this point that we find the decisive difference between Marx's dynamic psychology and that of Freud. Considering those drives which are "constant" and assumed to be of the same quality in man and animals, by psychoanalysts as well as by academic psychologists, Marx states that "eating, drinking, and procreating are, of course, also genuine human functions. But abstractly considered, apart from the environment of other human activities and turned into final and sole ends they are animal functions". For Freudian psychoanalysis, based on the model of the isolated *homme machine*, whose drives are fed by inner chemical processes, with the goal of reduction of tension to an optimal threshold, the satisfaction of hunger, thirst, and sexual desire are, indeed, ends in themselves.

We are now prepared for one of Marx's most fundamental statements concerning the nature of drives. "*Passion is man's faculties striving to attain their object*" (Die Leidenschaft, die Passion, ist die nach seinem Gegenstande energisch strebende Wesenskraft des Menschen). In this statement passion is considered as a concept of relation, or relatedness. It is not as in Freud's concept of instinct or drive an inner, chemically produced striving which needs an object as a means for its satisfaction, but man's faculties themselves, his *Wesenskraft*, are endowed with the dynamic quality of having to strive for an object they can relate to and unite themselves with. *The dynamism of human nature is primarily rooted in this need of man to express his faculties toward the world, rather than in his need to use the world as a means for the satisfaction of his physiological necessities.* What Marx is saying is that because I have eyes I have the need to see; because I have ears I have the need to hear; because I have a brain I have the need to think; and because I have a heart I have the need to feel. In short, because I am man, I am in need of man and of the world. In passing it might be useful to note, considering the present-day popularity of the so-called psychoanalytic ego-psychology, that when Marx speaks here of faculties and their expression, he is precisely not speaking of the ego, but of passion, of "natural powers and faculties which exist in man as tendencies and abilities, as drives"; of the energy invested in the need of each faculty to be expressed.

There are numerous statements by Marx which are variations of the theme of passion as a category of relatedness of man to himself, to others and to nature, and of the realization of his essential powers. Space permits me to quote only a few. Marx makes very clear what he means by "human faculties" which relate to the world in a passionate way: "his *human* relations to the world — seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, observing, feeling, desiring, acting, loving — in short, all the organs of his individuality are the [...] active expression (*Betätigung*) of human reality". Precisely because the object is an expression of human reality, it, itself, becomes human, or as Marx put it, "in practice I can only relate myself in a human way to a thing when the thing is related in a human way to man". (In pass-

ing I should like to call attention to the basic similarity of this concept of Marx with concepts to be found in Goethe, Zen Buddhism, and Christian mysticism.)

Man's "drives", then, are an expression of a fundamental and specifically human need, the need to be related to man and nature, and of confirming himself in this relatedness. The aim is to "accomplish the union of man with nature, the realized naturalism of man and the realized humanism of nature". The need for self-realization in man is the root of the specifically human dynamism. The wealthy man is at the same time one who needs "a complex of human manifestations of life, and whose own self-realization exists as an inner necessity, a need".

Marx saw also clearly the connection between man's relatedness to himself and his relatedness to others. His position in this respect is essentially the same as that of Goethe who said: "Man knows himself only as much as he knows the world. He knows the world only within himself, and he is aware of himself within the world. Each new object truly recognized opens up a new organ within ourselves". From this concept of dynamic relatedness follows that for Marx "the wealthy man is at the same time one who *needs* a complex of human manifestations of life, and whose own self-realization exists as an inner necessity, a *need*". Hence "poverty is a passive bond which leads man to experience a need for the greatest wealth, the *other person*".

Is this related man who energetically strives for expression of his faculties, the worker, or the bourgeois of the 19th century? If the answer is no — and it *is* "no" — what relevance has Marx's model of human nature for the understanding of man? Is it a man of the golden age of the past, or is it the man of the Messianic vision for the future? The answer is complicated, and leads us directly into one of the most profound and most modern concepts of Marx's psychological system. In contrast to the concept of mental illness which can be defined in relative terms as an illness different and graver than the illness of the average man or, from a different standpoint, as an illness which does not prevent man from producing and procreating, Marx visualized the pathology of normalcy, the crippledness of the — statistically — normal man, the loss to himself, the loss of his human substance, the loss of being what he ought to be because of what he could be. Thus Marx speaks of the possibility that man may "become lost" in the object provided the object has not become a human object, that is to say, that his relationship to the object is not that of active relatedness, often called "appropriation". He speaks of man's becoming "mentally and physically dehumanized", or of the "crippled" worker, the "mere fragment of a man" versus the "fully developed individual". If man, so goes Marx's reasoning, does not relate himself *actively* to others and to nature, then he loses himself, his drives lose their human qualities, and assume animal qualities, and so, we might continue, since he is no animal, he is a sick, fragmented, crippled human being. This is pre-

cisely the revolutionary and the therapeutic element in Marx's dynamic psychology. Man is potentially not only capable, but in need of relating himself to the world, and in order to be human and to be cured, he needs to restore this potential of a healthy, and not a pathological form of human functioning.

Marx's concept of the crippled versus the fully developed man forms the basis for a new and original concept of neurosis. I am referring to an important statement in the *German ideology* : " It is nonsense to believe [...] one could satisfy one passion separated from all others without satisfying *oneself*, the whole living individual. If this passion assumes an abstract, separate character, if it confronts him as an alien power, that is [...] as the one-sided satisfaction of a single passion — this by no means pertains to consciousness or good will [...] but to *being*; not to thought, but to life. It is caused by the empirical development and manifestation of life of the individual [...] if the circumstances under which this individual lives permit him only the one-sided development of one quality at the expense of all others [...] the result is that this individual achieves only a one-sided, crippled, development ". Marx speaks here of alienated passions, of passions which are satisfied as ends in themselves, without satisfying the whole human being, that is to say, which are separated from all other passions and hence oppose the individual as an alien power. In an instinctivistic psychology like Freud's where normalcy and health are the result of the satisfaction, precisely, of one instinct, namely the sexual instinct, such a consideration would have no place. In a humanistic concept of passions, in which the energy is generated by the active striving of all faculties to attain their objects, Marx's statement points to the nature of neurosis or mental illness. It can be defined as absolute dominance, and hence alienation of one passion.

The key concept of the human, that is to say, not alienated or pathological drive, is *activity* or, as Marx originally said, self-activity. What does Marx mean by " activity "? Obviously he does not have in mind " activity " as it is used in contemporary language, as doing something, being busy, etc. It is also different from the activity of animals which construct " only in accordance with the standards and needs of the species to which they belong, while man knows how to produce in accordance with the appropriate standard to the object. Thus man constructs also in accordance with the laws of beauty ". Marx's concept of activity is close to that of Spinoza, a creative and spontaneous act, possible only under the condition of freedom. So he speaks, for instance, of the " spontaneous activity of human fantasy, of the human brain and heart ". This concept of activity becomes particularly clear when Marx speaks, in very concrete terms of human passions, particularly that of love. " Let us assume, he writes, *man* to be *man*, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust, etc. If you wish to enjoy art you must be an artistically cultivated person ; if you wish to influence other people you must be a

person who really has a stimulating and encouraging effect upon others. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a *specific expression*, corresponding to the object of your will, of your *real individual life*. If you love without evoking love in return, *i.e.*, if you are not able, by the *manifestation* of yourself as a loving person, to make yourself a *beloved person*, then your love is impotent and a misfortune. ”

Marx expresses this active quality of love most clearly in what he writes in *Die Heilige Familie* : “ Mr. Edgar transforms love into a goddess and into a cruel goddess by transforming the loving man or the love of man into the man of love, thus making ‘ love ’ a being separated from man. By this simple process, the transformation of predicate into subject ” man is transformed into no-man. Indeed, love is a human activity, not passivity (*to be* in love, rather than *to fall* in love) and “ it is love which teaches man to truly believe in the world of objects outside of him. ”

Marx’s concept of truly human needs, that is, the need of the other, the need to express and to pour one’s faculties into their adequate objects, can be understood fully if one pays attention to Marx’s concepts of synthetic, inhuman and enslaving needs. Modern psychology is little concerned with the critical analysis of needs ; it accepts the laws of industrial production (maximal production, maximal consumption and minimal human friction) by assuming that the very fact that a person desires something is proof that he has a legitimate need for the desired thing. Freudian psychoanalysis, focusing only on sexual needs, or later on destructive needs, in addition to the needs for survival, had no reason to concern itself with them. Marx, on the other hand, because of the dialectic nature of his psychology, pointed to the ambiguous character of needs very clearly and, in fact, used this point as his most severe attack against the science of psychology. “ What is to be thought of a science ” so he says in the *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*, “ which [...] does not feel its own inadequacy, even though this great wealth of human activity means nothing to it except, perhaps, what can be expressed in the single phrase — ‘ need ’, ‘ common need ’ ” ? Those “ needs ” which are not *human* needs are characterized by Marx very succinctly : “ Every man speculates upon creating a *new* need in another, in order to force him to new sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence, and to entice him to a new kind of pleasure [...] Everyone tries to establish over others an *alien* power in order to find there the satisfaction of his own egoistic need. With the mass of objects, therefore, there also increases the realm of alien entities to which man is subjected. Every new product is a new potentiality of mutual deceit and robbery. Man becomes increasingly ‘ poor ’ as man [...] This shows subjectively, partly in the fact that the expansion of production and of needs becomes an *ingenious* and always calculating subservience to inhuman, depraved, unnatural and *imaginary* appetites ”.

“ As a result, [...] the production of too many useful things results

in too many *useless* people. Both sides forget that prodigality and thrift, luxury and abstinence, wealth and poverty, are equivalent."

With this distinction between genuine and imaginary human needs, Marx's psychology touches upon one of the most important distinctions to be made in the theory of needs and drives. Neither is an isolated and hypothesized sexual instinct "normal" unless it is part of the totality of man's manifestation of his life; nor is an artificially produced (through advertising) need and desire normal, natural, healthy or human, because it is a subjectively felt desire. The question how to distinguish between human and inhuman, real and imaginary, furthering and poisonous needs is, indeed, a fundamental psychological problem which neither psychology nor Freudian psychoanalysis could even begin to investigate, because they made no such distinctions. And how could they make such distinctions when their model of man is the alienated man, when the fact that modern industry creates and satisfies more and more needs is taken as a sign of progress, and when the contemporary concept of freedom, to a large extent, reflects the freedom of the customer to choose between various and virtually identical brands of the same commodity within the reach of his pocket-book — a freedom of the consumer quite different from the freedom of the entrepreneur in the 19th century? Only a dialectical and revolutionary psychology which sees man and his potentiality beyond the appearance of a crippled man can arrive at this important distinction between two kinds of needs, the study of which may be initiated by those psychologists who do not mistake the appearance for the essence. It should be noted in passing that Marx, once making this difference, must come to the result that poverty and wealth, abstinence and luxury, are not contradictions but are equivalent, resting on the frustration of *human* needs.

So far we have dealt with Marx's concepts of drives and needs in a general way. Is there anything more specific concerning drives to be found in his psychology? Indeed there is, even though by no means anything as systematic or as complete as we would expect in a work that deals primarily with psychology.

It has already been mentioned that for Marx the concept of love is crucial in describing man's relationship to the outside world. It is crucial also for the process of thinking; one of the main criticisms against "Herr Edgar" in *Die Heilige Familie* is precisely that he tries to get rid of the passion of love in order to find total peace of knowing (*Ruhe des Erkennens*). In this context Marx equates love with all "that which is life, all that is immediate, all sensuous experience, all real experience, of which one never knows beforehand whence and whither (*von der man nie vorher weiss woher und wohin*)". As far as human relations are concerned, Marx believes that "the immediate, natural and necessary relation of human being to human being is the *relation of man to woman* [...] The relation of man to woman is the *most natural* relation of human being to human being".

It is very interesting to compare this concept of Marx with the concept of sexuality in Freud. For Freud, sexuality (and in his later work, destructiveness) is a central passion of man. As I have indicated before, this passion is conceived of as the use of woman by man in order to satisfy his chemically produced sexual hunger. Had Marx known Freud's theory he would have criticized it as a typical bourgeois theory of use and exploitation. In the center of Marx's concept of human relations we find not sexuality, but Eros, of which sexuality can be one expression. By Eros is meant here the specifically male-female attraction which is a fundamental attraction in all living substance. Freud, in his work up to 1920, could not have had such a concept because for him libido was masculine, and woman was only a sexually crippled man. Only in the basic revision of his theory after 1920 did Freud speak of Eros, but without giving up his original mechanistic libido theory.

Another basic category in Marx's psychology is that of life as against death. Life and death not in a biological-physiological sense, but in a psychological one. (In many ways this concept touches upon Freud's life and death instinct, but without its alleged biological substratum or more directly, upon what I have called biophilia and necrophilia — love of life and love of death.) Perhaps the most decisive question in Marx's psychology is whether a man, class or society are motivated by the affinity to life or to death. His enmity against capitalism, as his love for socialism, as far as the emotional background is concerned, are rooted in this dichotomy. Among the various places where Marx mentioned this distinction, I quote here only the one best known, that in the *Communist Manifesto* : " In bourgeois society living labor is but a means to increase accumulated labor. In Communist society, accumulated labor is but a means to widen, to enrich, to promote the existence of the laborer. In bourgeois society, therefore, the past dominates the present ; in Communist society, the present dominates the past ". Or, as he put it elsewhere, the rule of capital is " the domination of living men by dead matter ". Eros and love of life are the two central strivings of the unalienated man. They are given in human nature, and manifest themselves under social circumstances which give man the possibility to be what he could be. Among the passions which are produced in, and which govern man in capitalist society, Marx counts in the most general way any kind of greed which is a substitute for the lack of love and aliveness, and more specifically acquisitiveness, avarice and self-indulgence. His analysis of the ascetic, hoarding character of the bourgeois of the 19th century and of the self-indulgent character of those who could afford the luxurious life, is a milestone in the development of a dynamic characterology applied to various classes. Since Marx's whole psychological thinking is dynamic, and not behavioristic-descriptive, those character traits and character concepts have to be understood in the dynamic sense. They are the relatively constant passions and appetites determined by certain economic and social conditions. Marx is related here to the great social-psychological

opus of Balzac, who considered the study of character to be the study of those “*forces by which man is motivated*”. The work of Balzac is in many ways the elaboration of Marx’s psychological principles. It must be added in passing, that if one reads Marx’s letters to Engels, especially in their unabridged German original, one finds a depth-psychological view of individuals which, while not having the artistic qualities of Balzac’s descriptions, would belong among the best psychoanalytic sketches of character in terms of a dialectic humanist psychoanalysis.

To finish this brief resume of Marx’s psychology of drives I want to mention that rage is also among the passions he mentions, but what is especially interesting is his concept that rage can be turned against oneself, an idea which later on played a very essential part in Freud’s psychoanalysis. Marx wrote “shame is a kind of rage which is turned against oneself, and if a whole nation were really ashamed, it would be as were it the lion which crouches before it leaps”.

Marx’s contribution to humanistic depth psychology could not be fully understood without knowing his attitude toward consciousness and his concept of the function of becoming aware.

His attitude toward consciousness has found its classic expression in the well known statement in the *German ideology*: “it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness”, and later, in the Preface to the *Contribution to the critique on political economy*: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines consciousness”. What he calls in the first statement “life” he calls in the second statement “social existence”. Continuing the tradition of which Spinoza was one of the early outstanding exponents, and which found its culmination in Freud, over fifty years later, Marx attacks the prevalent opinion that consciousness is the ultimate datum and the quality of all psychic life. Marx saw, and in this respect more deeply than Freud, that consciousness is the product of the particular practice of life which characterizes a given society or class. It is “from the very beginning a social product” and like language, it arises “from the need, the necessity for intercourse with other men. While man thinks he is determined and motivated by his own ideas, he is in reality motivated by forces behind his back and of which he is not aware”. While Marx already used the term “repression” (*Verdrängung*) in relation to the repression of “ordinary natural desires”, in the *German ideology*, Rosa Luxemburg quite explicitly, and following Marx’s thought, spoke of the dichotomy between the “conscious” and the “unconscious”. In an interpretative version of Marx’s statement about consciousness being determined by social existence, she writes: “The unconscious comes before the conscious. The logic of the historic process comes before the subjective logic of the human beings who participate in the historic process”. In a class society man’s consciousness is necessarily false consciousness, ideology, which gives

the appearance of the rationality of his actions when due to the contradictions of any class society the true motivations are not rational.

Marx's concept of consciousness and ideology led to one of the most essential parts of Marx's theory of revolution. In a letter of September, 1843, he speaks of consciousness as "a thing which the world must appropriate, although it does not want to do so [...] our motto must be then : reform of consciousness not by dogmas but by the analysis of the mythical consciousness unclear to itself, be it religious or political". The destruction of illusions and the analysis of consciousness, that is to say, awareness of the reality of which man is not conscious, are the conditions for social change. Marx has expressed it in many splendid formulations, like this one : one must force "the frozen circumstances to dance by singing to them their own melody". Or : "The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions". Man should become "a disappointed man who has come to his senses in order that he may move around himself and thus around his real sun". Awareness of reality as a key to change is for Marx one of the conditions of social progress and revolution, as it is for Freud the condition for the therapy for mental illness. Marx, not being interested in problems of individual therapy did not speak about awareness as a condition for individual change, but considering his whole psychological system, as I have tried to outline it here, it is by no means a tour de force to make this connection.

I believe that when Marx's central concern, that with man, has been fully recognized, his contribution to psychology will find the recognition which so far has been denied it.

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*Erich Fromm is Professor of Psycho-analysis at the University of Mexico, Mexico City. He is the author of numerous widely read books on man and society among them : The sane society (1955), Sigmund Freud's mission (1958), Marx's concept of man (1961), The heart of man (1964).*