

MARX AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

THE argument of this paper is that the essential difference between the philosophy of history of the young Marx and of the mature Marx is one of method and, hence, of the logical status of his conclusions.

The young Marx argues the case for his view of history on the basis of an analysis, derived from a Hegelian model, of the structure of the world. The method of argument is metaphysical, and, hence, its consequences, if valid, would be necessary.

The mature Marx argues the case on the basis of an analysis, conceived as an analogy of Darwin's model of evolution of the factual course of history. The method of argument is empirical, and, hence, its consequences, if valid, cannot be 'necessary', although it might be claimed they have a scientific certainty, or at least a high degree of probability.

The need to distinguish at all between these two phases of Marx's thought has been a much-debated question in recent years. It arose as a result of the publication of the writings of the young Marx, especially the so-called 'philosophic-economic manuscripts' written by Marx at the age of 26 in 1844 and printed for the first time in Germany in 1932, that is, in historical conditions which resulted in their not receiving close attention until recently. The discussion of these works by Communist, Existentialist, Socialist and Catholic scholars has led to no agreement, neither as to their importance, nor as to their significance, although it has been vast in extent.

One group of scholars, which includes among others perhaps the best known French Marxist scholar, Lefevre, (*Pour connaitre la Pensee de Karl Marx*, 1956, p. 59), a Socialist leader J.P. Mayer (Introduction to the *Oeuvres Philosophiques*, ed. Costes, Vol. IV, p. xiv-xv), a Catholic economist, Andre Piettre (*Marx et le Marxisme*, 1957, p. 11), maintain that these 'philosophic-economic manuscripts' constitute 'a revelation', an 'overturning' of accepted ideas about Marx; they are 'fundamental' to the understanding of Marxist thought: the manuscripts show that Marx's achievement is NOT a 'model' for the interpretation of history as ultimately determined by economic factors and a 'theory' for bringing about social revolution based on this model, but a philosophy of history based

on a metaphysical picture of the human condition. And this 'humanism' which has been discovered in the hitherto unstudied works of the young Marx, according to another Marxist scholar, Henri Arvon, has 'for our contemporaries a fascination and attraction far greater than that of the historical and economic parts of his doctrine' (*Le Marxisme*, ed. Colin, 1955, p. 67).

This trend to interpret Marx not as an exponent of a theory of economic determinism – (namely that the inner contradictions of capitalism must inevitably lead to its collapse) – but as the proponent of a philosophy of man (in the light of which a society can be brought about, which would allow maximum human development) was already foreshadowed in the polemical works of Lukacz, and Gramsci, in the 1930's, against the then dominant stalinist interpretation. Lukacz and Gramsci were the first to emphasise the importance of Marx's early writings and of his Hegelian heritage. For these early writings are closely related to Hegel. In fact the study of Marx's relationship to Hegel, and the suspicion that this relationship differed between the earlier and the later, Marxist writings raised the question of the coherence between the earlier and the later writings (especially *Capital*) of Marx.

The problem was closely studied by Louis Althusser who has reached original conclusions. Althusser holds there was a radical break in Marx's thought (about 1846-47) and although Marx went on using the same terms in the later as in his earlier works, he changed their significance by adopting a different conceptual framework. Most of the interpreters of Marx as a 'humanist' – for instance Calvez (*La pensee de Karl Marx*, p. 319-326) Bigo (*Marxisme et Humanisme*, p. 498-499) and Rubel (*Karl Marx*, p. 365-367) maintained that there was a unity of thought throughout the whole of Marx's lifework, and that Marx's later work was a direct development and application of the earlier works, especially the *Manuscripts* of 1844. It is certain that Marx's thinking was not static, but constantly developing, as is true of most thinkers, who rarely present us with a ready-made, complete system of thought from the start. The question about Marx is whether there was a definite shift from a humanist frame of reference to a different one, rather than consistent development.

THE EARLY MARX

In order to present what I have to say about the philosophy of history of the early Marx as clearly and succinctly as possible, this section

will be divided into two stages:

- (1) an outline of the Hegelian Model and an attempt at showing that it is a transformation of the Biblical Model as a result of the Cartesian dualist concept of man;
- (2) an outline of the Marxist Model and an attempt at showing it is a transformation of the Hegelian model as a result of a return to a unitary concept of man.

(1) THE HEGELIAN MODEL

Marx has said about Hegel that his essential achievement was to 'see history as a process in which man is alienated from himself and his work and then finally comes to his own once more'.

It has often been noted that this vision of history looks very much like a non-theological version of the Biblical vision of History.

(a) 'Alienation'

By man being 'alienated' from himself and his work, Hegel means something very similar to what the Bible means by the 'fallen' state of man. He means that man is conscious of a double division: *First*: a division within himself, because he does not obey the moral law he makes for himself, and as a result he has a troubled conscience; the moral law is seen as external to himself. *Secondly*: a division between himself as an individual and society, because he does not live up to the standards established by society. Now society, like the moral law, is created by man, but man comes to see it, again like the moral law, as something external to him, opposed to him as an individual.

This process of seeing things which are of man's own making as external to him, this process by which man ceases to recognise his own products as his own, Hegel called 'objectification'.

(b) 'Coming into one's own'

Hegel, like the Bible, held up the hope of a liberation from this alienated condition, not in the form of a Redeemer, but arising out of the very opposition at the heart of human existence which he was stressing. The typical example of this which he gives is the famous dialectic of master-and-slave. Between the master and the slave there is opposition; the slave's will is made subservient to the master, but the master becomes in turn dependent on the slave's work. They are, in fact, inter-

dependent and this is generative of a sort of equality between them. Thus the very inequality established by the division between Master-and slave generates its opposite – an equality of a more basic kind. This is the form in which redemption comes to alienated man in the Hegelian picture of history.

Why did Hegel feel the need for this re-statement of the Biblical vision of history and how do the two statements differ?

- (i) The point of it is, very clearly, the elimination of the Biblical concept of a Personal God who transcends the total process of history. For Hegel, the absolute cause of the whole process of change (which is all we know through experience of what there is) is no longer judged to be, as by traditional philosophy, a cause which transcends the total process of change; it is identified with this very process.

Traditional religion is judged by Hegel to be an expression of the alienation of man: an example of the objectivisation-process. Instead of considering God as immanent in the history of mankind, instead of identifying Him with the process of self-consciousness in humanity itself, men objectivise God as a separate person, other than themselves; likewise, the redemption process is 'objectivised' in the person of a redeemer.

- (ii) The root of this Hegelian doctrine is, in my opinion, his anthropology – that is – his view that the essence of man is purely spiritual, and not embodied spirit. It is the prejudice that matter does not belong to the essence of man, which is constituted solely by his self-consciousness, and hence that 'objectivisation' is a symptom of man falling below his nature. Hegel had to restate the Biblical interpretation of history in different terms, because for him the essence of man is consciousness.

Hence: the tragedy and future triumph had to be restated as taking place wholly in the realm of thought. The concept of the *Fall* is turned into the concept of *Alienation* – in other words, it consists in considering ideas which are purely subjective as objects – because the essence of man is purely spiritual and all human creations, like the moral law and social ethics, belong purely to the ideal realm but are turned into 'objects' with an independent existence, external to man. The concept of the *Redemption* is turned into that of '*Coming-into-one's own*' – be-

cause it is made to consist of this process by which man comes again to recover his pure self-consciousness, to know himself not in terms of his distinctness, separation and opposition to other things, but in himself; in other words mankind will know itself as God, as the Man-God 'objectivised' by traditional religion in Christ.

(2) THE MARXIST MODEL

Feuerbach had already made his famous statement – in opposition to Hegel's view of man's essence as being purely self-consciousness – that 'man also eats'. Following him, the young Marx, having said that the essential achievement of Hegel was to have seen history as the process of man's alienation and his coming back to himself, went on to point out that his essential mistake was precisely that Hegel described these processes as taking place purely in the ideal realm, in the field of man's consciousness, and not in the real world, in the field of man's total existence, as an eating as well as a thinking animal. Marx wrote:

'The human essence, man, is for Hegel simply self-consciousness. All the alienation of essential humanity is therefore nothing but the alienation of self-consciousness. But the truth is that the alienation of self-consciousness is nothing but an expression, reflected in the form of knowledge and thought, of the real alienation of man's true being'. What is the Marxist concept of alienation?

Marx connects the condition of alienation with work. (See note). Work should ideally achieve three objects:

- (i) *the transformation of matter*: objects which have no value become transformed by work into something which serves a useful human purpose and hence acquire value;
- (ii) *the development of man himself*: through his work he develops his abilities and expresses his personality in his products;
- (iii) *the forging of society*: due to the division of labour which, through specialisation, creates the interdependence of men and hence constitutes the basis of society.

But, in fact, this nature of work is not being fulfilled.

- (i) matter is being transformed, but the conditions of the organisation of work after industrialisation are such that the second and third purposes are being frustrated.

- (ii) Man is reduced by repetitive work to the execution of tasks which make no demands on his mind or the exercise of his power of decision; hence his specific abilities are not developed, but stunted.
- (iii) The organisation of work under capitalism is such as to generate opposition between the worker and the capitalist. Hence instead of forging solidarity, it generates a conflict of interests, and becomes a potentially disruptive rather than unifying force in society.

This frustration of the nature of work is what basically constitutes the 'alienation' of man. It is not just something which happens in the realm of thought; it happens in real life. It is not just a phenomenon of consciousness; it affects man's entire life in all its aspects. 'Alienation' is not something which occurs on the 'ideal' plane, but at all levels of the real: it affects the whole human being.

Since we have here a contrast between what nature requires and the actual organisation of work, violence is bound to erupt out of the contrast. The actual organisation of work is not in accordance with the natural order. On the contrary, it is a violation of it, a frustration of it, which is bound to produce a reaction. The bent branch will shoot back – violently – to the position which its inbuilt dynamism makes it seek. This will be the process of 'man's-coming-into-his-own', but it will not occur as Hegel thought merely by the growth of man's consciousness; it will occur through an actual transformation of the conditions of real life, in particular of the organisation of work; in other words, through the advent of the communist society, which is precisely this re-organisation of human relationships in such a way that work will not only operate a transformation of matter such that it acquires value for man, but also the development of man's own powers and of human solidarity.

It will be seen that what Marx has rejected of Hegel is essentially the dualist concept of man as made up of two radically different components – matter and mind – of which mind is what constitutes the human essence; hence that mind is the sphere in which the drama of 'alienation' and 'coming-into-one's-own' is played out. For Marx, man is a totality, a single substance and the drama occupies the entire sphere of his existence. Marx is thus repudiating the Cartesian dualism of which Hegelianism is the final development and returning to the unitary concept to which both the Aristotelean philosophic tradition and the Bible subscribe. This is an important reason for regarding Marx as one of the founding fathers of contemporary philosophy which is characterised by the rejection of the Cartesian dualism.

However, Marx does not reject with the doctrine that man's essence is consciousness the other Hegelian doctrine that the meaning of history is not to be sought in a transcendent cause but in its immanent dialectic. He goes on holding that just as 'alienation' is to be analysed in terms of the contrast which can be seen between what man's nature demands and actual social organisation, the determining factor of which is the organisation of work relationships, likewise man's 'coming-into-his-own' is to be analysed in terms of the corresponding social re-organisation around its crucial point work. Hence, the religious interpretation of history contained in the Bible is still rejected as a manifestation of man's 'alienation'.

It will be seen that the structure of the argument is still 'metaphysical'. Essentially it runs as follows: Because human nature is such, it requires such-and-such conditions for its fulfilment. Actual conditions are not what is required: they are bound to be changed, because human nature cannot be frustrated indefinitely, and there is bound to come about a situation in which it can be fulfilled. The future foreseen can, on the basis of this kind of argument built on the nature of things, be predicted as inevitable. This appears to have been the nature of Marx's argument before 1848.

THE MATURE MARX

In his later works, Marx changes the method of his argument. He no longer builds it on a thesis about what man's nature is and the contrast between the conditions required for its fulfilment and the conditions existing in capitalist society as the spring which will inevitably produce revolutionary change. Marx now abandons the model of metaphysical argument he had borrowed from Hegel and takes up the model of scientific argument which is used, for instance, to establish the theory of evolution.

In the preface which Engels wrote to the English edition of the Communist Manifesto in 1888, he acknowledged that the central proposition had come from Marx, and he further asserted that 'this proposition ... in my opinion is destined to do for history what Darwin's theory has done for biology'.

The central proposition of the Manifesto has in fact, a close connexion with the theory of evolution: it is the theory of the sense of history.

The evolution of the animal species out of the vegetal world grown out of inanimate matter, once it has taken place, makes us discern a direction in the process which leads from inanimate matter to man. Likewise, the history of the world, as yet unfinished but already quite long, makes us see a direction in the process which appears, in fact, to be the gradual but increasing separation of man from nature through the growth of his scientific knowledge which makes it possible for him to master, rather than conform to, the laws of the natural world, and the similarly increasing separation of man from man through the multiplication of class-divisions and conflict, both of which processes interact on each other. This appears, to Marx, to be the direction which the study of the past as it has taken place shows.

Here, however, it is extremely important to hold a distinction very clearly in mind: to assert that the study of history after it has taken place reveals that events have taken mankind in a certain direction is not the same as to assert that there is a purpose behind the process, that the direction actually followed is the execution of an intention immanent in the process and due to a transcendent mind. The second assertion only follows if God exists (as the Bible holds) or if History were itself God (as Hegel holds). But Marx does not uphold either of these views. Hence he cannot pass immediately from the first assertion that the study of the past shows that events have taken mankind in a certain direction to the second assertion that this direction is inbuilt in the process itself.

The Marxist idea of the sense of history is more subtle and more complex. One has to distinguish two factors. First: there are a number of elements which interact according to the laws of chance; secondly, there are human purposes which intervene and modify the play of these laws of chance. These laws are those of the calculus of probabilities which, as the word implies, means that even without human intervention, it is not *pure* chance which produces results. For instance: our planet earth is the realisation of one of the many possibilities opened up by the breaking-up of a galaxy, and there is every chance if such breaking-ups are sufficiently frequent for similar planets to come about. Likewise, given the constitution of our planet, the appearance of life becomes one of the probable results of the combination of the material elements in it, and successively the appearance of animal and then human life are probable results. Marx is not very impressed by the apparent harmony of

these results; for first we know hardly anything about the possibilities which were not in fact verified, and, secondly, each realisation in fact restricts the range of possibilities for the future. Thus, on the one hand, the direction taken by events only appears *after* they have taken place; but on the other hand, the probability is that once a direction has been taken, it will be followed, because the range of other possibilities has been restricted by the first step taken. This is what happens in nature.

Now, according to Marx, the same happens in the development of society. It is because of this that Marx feels authorised to predict the quasi-inevitability of the advent of socialism. Neither slow-downs nor regressions are excluded; but it is deemed most unlikely that a movement, set in a certain direction for thousands of years, will stop short of a sudden without warning. Besides, it is also evident that in human history, human purposes will intervene in the process, and again the likelihood is that these will re-inforce the natural movement of social evolution. Once men understand that the advent of socialism, already inbuilt in the direction taken by events so far, is to their great advantage, they will add their revolutionary force to the evolutionary trend. The chances of the realisation of socialism will be multiplied and the range of other possibilities considerably restricted.

Hence, the sense of history which appears only when it has been already a long time underway implies neither the determinism of the pagan conception of Fate nor the omnipotence of a divinely-established plan, but the play of the laws of probability in which both are in a certain way reflected.

On the other hand, I hold that another criticism of Marxism retains all its validity. This is the Marxist postulation of an *end* of history – i.e. its assumption that the communist society represents the *absolute* fulfilment of society, the term of human progress. Such a postulation is, on the basis of the interpretation of history, an illegitimate anthropocentrism. There is nothing, outside revelation, against the hypothesis that man represents an earthly impasse in the process of evolution and that elsewhere the process will produce infinitely superior results.

A Note on Alienation

The concept of *alienation* figures much more prominently in the earlier than in the later writings (although Pierre Naville has probably exaggerated in his emphasis on the absence of philosophical premises

in *Capital*) and still more prominently in the expositions of Marx's thought provided by his 'humanist' interpreters. The prominence given to this concept has provoked protests, such as that expressed by J.M. Domenach in his article: 'Pour en finir avec l'alienation' (in *Esprit*, Dec. 1965). Nonetheless it is central to the 1844 philosophico-economic manuscripts; it is not by any means a crystal-clear concept and the efforts made to elucidate it have not produced identical results; it is, also, the essential connecting link in the relationship between Marx and Hegel, the study of which led Althusser to assert his thesis that the humanist reading of the later works in the light of the earlier cannot be justified, because it fails to note that the terminological continuity masks a radical break in the thought due to precisely the adoption of a new attitude towards Hegel.

It is therefore, worth devoting some attention to this concept. There is considerable disagreement as to whence Marx borrowed it. There are three possible sources:

1. According to Lukacz, it has a purely *economic-juridical* pedigree. It is already found in this sense in the writings of the English economists and in both 'natural law' and 'social contract' theorists. It signifies a transfer of property. Hence the 'alienation' of the worker in capitalist society would mean simply that the product of the workers was being 'expropriated' by the capitalist. But if this was all there was to it, would not the concept of 'exploitation' have been adequate?

2. The term is also used in *psycho-pathological* contexts. It indicates a degradation of consciousness. This interpretation has been propounded by Gabel in *Esprit* (Oct. 1951) and by Igor Ćarusó. Here the concept of 'alienation' is associated with and taken to imply necessarily self-deception, 'the willing mystification of oneself', 'false consciousness', a passive acceptance of *Standverlust*. It is asserted that as long as there is no consent to the conditions in which one finds oneself, no acceptance of the situation, there can be no real alienation. Capitalist society only 'alienates' the worker when the worker accepts its so-called 'laws' as *natural* laws. If the working-class does not make this identification, its condition will be a motive for rebellion, and not of enslavement. The willing consent is, however, not all: it will only amount to alienation when it leads to the illusion that, in fact, the condition of servitude is a sharing of power.

3. According to Hyppolite, Wahl, Cornu, etc. it has a religious-meta-

physical origin. In fact, it is related to biblical concept of man's fall and the subsequent condition of man. This concept is 'desacralized' or 'secularized' by Marx (following Hegel, Feuerbach and Moses Hess), but it retains its 'prophetic', 'messianic', 'apocalyptic' and 'mystical' overtones, particularly in the descriptions of the end of 'alienation' in the communist society, which does not appear in the early writings as the inevitable end-product of the inbuilt dialectic of human history, but as the manifestation of man's true nature to man himself and as a stepping-stone to further progress. There is no doubt that Marx's early writings retain a tone close to Feuerbach's religiosity and idealism; and it is precisely Althusser's thesis that in the earlier works, Marx's attitude to Hegel is close to that of Feuerbach, while in the later it is different.

PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT

