

YOUNG MARX, ALIENATION AND COMMUNISM, AND A NOTE ON ARISTOTLE

Musa DUMAN*

ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore young Marx's theses on man, alienation and communism from a critical point of view. I argue that Marx's thought fits well within the tradition of modern subject metaphysics which culminates in Hegel's philosophy. Marx's attempt at interpreting human essence in terms of labor and production belong directly to this context of subject metaphysics. I also take issue with the social-political implications of this understanding of man. Then I have recourse to Aristotle's political thought, his reflections on polis, as a comparative case. Both thinkers recognize man's communal nature but interpret it in entirely different ways.

Key words: Marx, Aristotle, alienation, communism, labor, production, human essence, polis, subject metaphysics, theoria.

(Genç Marx, Yabancılaşma ve Komünizm, ve Aristoteles Üzerine Bir Not)

ÖZ

Bu makalede genç Marx'ın insan, yabancılaşma ve komünizm üzerine tezlerini eleştirel bir şekilde ele alıyorum. Marx'ın düşüncesinin Hegel felsefesinde zirveye varan modern özne metafiziği geleneğine çok iyi oturduğunu savunuyorum. Marx'ın insanın özünü emek ve üretim çerçevesinde yorumlama girişimi doğrudan bu özne metafiziğinin bağlamına aittir. Ayrıca bu insan anlayışının toplumsal-politik imalarını da tartışıyorum. Sonrasında bir mukayese fırsatı olarak Aristoteles'in siyaset düşüncesine, polis hakkındaki fikirlerine yöneliyorum. Her iki düşünür de insanın asli toplumsal/komünal doğasını kabul etmekte, ancak bunu oldukça farklı biçimlerde yorumlamaktadırlar.

Anahtar sözcükler: Marx, Aristoteles, yabancılaşma, komünizm, emek, üretim, insanın özü, polis, özne metafiziği, theoria.

* Mardin Üniversitesi Felsefe Bölümü öğretim üyesi

I- Introduction

Young Marx's thoughts about the essential unity of man and community, that is, his communist vision of society, seems to have proved decisive for his later intellectual development. "Communism is the riddle of the history solved and it knows itself to be this solution"¹ he says in the *Manuscripts (Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844)*. Communism of young Marx² may be stated roughly in this way: a truly human life, a life in which man's self-realization is possible is essentially a communal life free of antagonisms of all sorts. But such communal essence of man, the social individual, is something largely suppressed: history is the record of such progressive suppression, a suppression that keeps our essence, its true and ultimate potentials, from realization in social life. In terms of its effects on concrete individuals, Marx designates such phenomenon as "alienation" (*Entfremdung*, and sometimes *Entäusserung*). The growing social organization on the basis of relations of production, specialization and private property went hand in hand with, and indeed presupposed, the growth of inequality and injustice among groups of society. The resulting forms of exploitation and domination relations between advantageous and disadvantageous groups of society give us the concrete structure underlying the reality of each society and the hidden but focal antagonism (class struggle) that fueled the history of these societies. Marx's overall position implies that there is a direct correlation between the degree of human alienation and the degree of institutionalization and domination of the private property in a given society. The supreme expression of this is the capitalist social organization which is based on the systematical exploitation of labor and on systematical inequalities. Capitalism is the darkest hour of the night which is, yet, historically necessary for the revolutionary dawning of the establishment of the community centred on and organized around the human subject and the communal realization of her powers. This future community freed of private property is man's natural habitat where man's communal and individual essence become one and the same thing.

As is well-known, Marx thinks that (1) man has a communal essence, but that (2) man's existence is separated from this essence due to the very structure of history (which is ultimately related to historical determinism of man's economic organization based on private property). The former has a long history from Plato to Rousseau and Hegel, but the latter (the idea of human alienation due to the economic structure) especially with a distinctly material/economic emphasis, is something new. The idea of alienation that we find in Hegel has an idealist content, whereas it is not adequately materialistic in the case of Feuerbach. Marx's version, by contrast, grows out of a materialist interpretation of human experience and history. Marx combined these two ideas in a quite original way and built thereby a comprehensive social philosophy, which is a dialectical-teleological reconstruction of history. Marx sees an

¹ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton, ed. Lucio Colletti (London: Penguin Books, 1975), p. 348. Henceforth abbreviated as *EW* with page numbers. *EW*, if solely given, stands for *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. When I refer to another writing in *EW*, I state it together with *EW*.

² By young Marx I mean the early period of Marx's thought, the period roughly up to 1850.

antagonistic dynamic to historical development where the source of *kinesis* is “antagonism” (a concept, whose origins go back to Heraclitus, Kant, Hegel). On the other hand, this movement is a movement towards a *telos* being its eventual resolution in the culminating communist stage of human history (emancipation). The *telos*, in other words, is the historically decisive (and qualified) institution of community (*Gemeinschaft* or *Gemeinwesen*) in its concrete reality, as different from the “crude communism” of the earliest stage of human history, which is not “the positive community”.³ Hence we see how the idea of human alienation and the ideal (or utopia) of communism are intimately intertwined in Marx’s early thought. In this article, I examine this relationship between the idea of alienation and of community as conceived by young Marx and subject their implications to a critical inquiry carried out from an ontological point of view. And finally I contrast this social conception with Aristotle’s insights about man and *polis*. The most relevant, in this context, is Marx’s assumptions concerning human essence, that is, concerning the way in which we, humans, essentially *are*.

Echoing Hegel, Marx believes that man is fundamentally a communal being in the sense that man’s human unity and fullness consists in his achieving communal participation and in his being a recognized member of the organic structure of a community. Thus we not only belong to but also deeply need taking part in the organic unity of a community. This is, in fact, more than saying that man is a social animal for here the point is not about the minimum level of being human, but the actualization of its highest potentials. But one should rightly doubt whether Marx understands correctly the true nature of community and man’s communality, because his assumptions about human essence are mostly problematic. Also problematic is his starting point, namely the idea of human alienation. Now, let us discuss these theses.⁴

II- The Idea of Community and Human Essence

Since Tönnies’ influential work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, it became a commonplace to speak of community and society as having some serious fundamental differences. Tönnies understands society as a mechanical, impersonal framework in which we have a complex web of socio-economic relations as determined on the basis of some formal rules and practices. Formality thus comes before and determines the face-to-face relations of humans. Community, on the contrary, rests on familiarity and organic, personal, informal human-to-human relations. In a community, not formality but the human claims of face to face relations in their immediacy prevail. It seems that the dichotomy between community and society is already found, though implicitly, in early Marx’ writings, the former being natural and the latter, by contrast, alienated expression of man’s communal ties with his/ her fellow human beings. Man’s communality is the most essential fact about it, alienated capitalist society representing only an extreme level of degeneration and

³ *EW*, p. 347.

⁴ In this article my discussion basically focuses on Marx’s position as found in *The Manuscripts*, *The German Ideology* (part I), *Theses on Feuerbach* and *On the Jewish Question*.

distantiation from this. Nevertheless all sorts of capitalist social organizations themselves can subsist, in various practical ways and forms, only by way of faking community, only with communal semblances. For Young Marx, exploitative economic relations are subtly reflected in political and judicial structure, and thereby more and more, in our more concrete human-to-human relations.⁵ The point is that structured economic/ material injustices and inequalities undermine the original unity among people, the organic communal bonds that keep them together. Human relations are thus defined on the basis and in terms of a covert exploitative power structure the more subtle and complicated outward expression of which is what we have come to call “society.” Even so, the quasi-atomic existence of individuals in the modern industrial world becomes possible because we are essentially communal beings, despite the fact that such modern existence is a deeply alienated form of our communal essence.

It is important that so far as the issue of community, or communal life, is concerned, we are speaking of the communal essence of human nature, that is, ultimately about the way we are humans. Marx believes that true form of being human, a truly human way of life, will/ can appear only in the communal life of communism. This is because man can fully actualize his potentials only in community, as a community of equal and free human beings, where their labor (i.e., their human powers as a whole) is no longer a means appropriated and exploited by capital owners, but belongs to workers themselves and its exercise is valuable in and for itself. In such a community alone man’s creative intellectual and spiritual faculties can flourish and find authentic avenues for profound self-expression. Further there is the assumption that once humans are provided equal share from economic wealth, there will be no need whatsoever for pursuing competition with other humans. Then the possibility of true humanity, i.e., of non-alienated humanity presupposes a classless social reality to be found by communism in the future.

In this context, several points draw attention: (1) Marx moves with a dynamic understanding of human nature or essence, the full actuality of which will come about only in the communist future: man creates himself through productive activity, labor. (2) We also see that the idea of alienation is the starting point for Marx: alienation is a pervasive, a universal fact about the human world (at least, up to the communist stage set up by revolution). (3) The source of alienation lies principally in the very structure of social organization based on the institution of private property. This refers to an exclusive emphasis upon the material/ economic factors as responsible for human alienation. In this sense, human emancipation (communism, the actuality of community), too, can be understood only in reference to a comprehensive mastery over and regulation of material/ economic factors in view of the equal benefit of all people. (4) For Marx, as indicated, man has a communal essence. (5) Productive activity, labor, defines man’s relation to the world (social and natural). If man’s relation to the world is everything about him/her, then labour is the most essential thing about being human, about the way we *are* humans. We have chosen these five basic

⁵ See Karl Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: International Publishers, 1970), pp. 79-81. Henceforth, abbreviated as *GI* with page numbers.

(but by no means exhaustive) propositions from Young Marx in order to pave the way for our critical analysis.

First, let us discuss in more detail the way in which Marx understands man's communal essence.

But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, state, society.⁶

The human essence is no abstraction inhering in each single individual. In its actuality it is the ensemble of the social relations.⁷ (6th thesis on Feuerbach)

The great achievement of Feuerbach is: ... to have founded *genuine materialism* and *positive science* by making the social relationship of "man to man" the basic principle of his theory.⁸

The society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations in which individuals stand.⁹

Consciousness is from the very beginning a social product and remain so as long as men exist at all.¹⁰

Mode of production... is a determinate activity of individuals, a determinate way of expressing their life, a determinate *mode* of life for them. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are coincides with *what* they produce and *how* they produce. What individuals are, therefore, depend on the material conditions of their production.¹¹

The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.¹²

We first of all see that in these and many other remarks Marx comes closer to the view that human essence is something exhausted in social/communal relations: social relations are ultimate datum of human reality, such that there can be nothing either transcending or coming before them. Accordingly, man is absorbed in a social world. How should we understand this? Is there a place in this social universe for human individuality? Marx's account, I think, implies that this is possible only with the revolution, never before. We will remain immature subjects, captivated by the deterministic laws of history up

⁶ EW, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction", p. 244.

⁷ EW, "Theses on Feuerbach", p. 423.

⁸ EW, p. 381.

⁹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 265.

¹⁰ *GI*, p. 51.

¹¹ *GI*, p. 42.

¹² EW, "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy", p. 425.

100 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

until communism. We might surmise that with the communist revolution such determinism will totally end and a new lawfulness based on human freedom will emerge. Men will come to be, for the first time, the true masters of their own life and the whole history. Also in this stage we will begin to act and live according to our real nature, enjoy an unbroken unity with our species, with our communal world. All this means that we will freely enjoy our subjective powers of production, objectify them through nature into a world of objects, the human communal world, as “free from the strains of physical need.”¹³

Marx conceives of man as a *Gattungswesen* (a term borrowed from Feuerbach’s *The Essence of Christianity*), a species-being, i.e., having an essence defined in reference to his membership in and attachment to a species. Conceiving of man’s communality in terms of a species life easily suggests the naturalization of being human. Is it that we belong to a species life just as an animal belonging to a herd? Does Marx’s utopia of communism involve the claim that ultimate realization of being human involve a thorough naturalization? The answer is yes. With the ultimate communist stage the human history will culminate in a complete naturalization and man will be restored to his essentially natural being.¹⁴ With the abolishment of private property traditional morality and ethics as simply “the religion of private property”¹⁵ will be deprived of its whole basis. This entirely new moral code of communist social life will rest on a naturalistic culture.¹⁶

Marx’s concept of species-life (*Gattungswesen*) as a naturalized social universe is key to his communism. Man (as a *Gattungswesen*) belongs to a life of species, in which he can truly satisfy the basic natural/ material needs of his life centering on productive activity (labor). Labor has a double dimension here: its truth lies not only in serving such a life but also in its being the area of realization and application of man’s powers. For Kain, *Gattungswesen* in Marx’s thought takes the place of Kant’s ethical God.¹⁷ Needs are, in the final analysis, natural-material needs, concrete needs, because man, when purged off all sorts of ideological demistifications accumulated over centuries, appears ultimately to be a natural reality, an entity conditioned by material-physical factors, needs and necessities, while other sorts of needs (e.g., spiritual needs, needs that we are told to be human needs *par excellence*) belong to and spring from nothing but the egoism of the private sphere. Thus one can discern in Marx an attempt at naturalizing the human life to its underlying animal ground, thus releasing the

¹³ *EW*, p. 323.

¹⁴ *EW*, p. 389. Here Marx notes: “Man is directly a natural being. As a natural being, and as a living natural being, he is on the one hand equipped with natural powers, with vital powers, he is an active natural being; these powers exist in him as dispositions and capacities, as drives. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being, he is a suffering, conditioned, and limited being, like animals and plants.”

¹⁵ *Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. A. Jolin and J. O’Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 108.

¹⁶ See, *EW*, “private property and communism”, pp. 345-358.

¹⁷ Philip J. Kain “Aristotle, Kant and the Ethics of Young Marx”, in *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity*, ed. George E. McCarthy (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland: 1992), p. 236.

human animal from the chains of ideological mystifications, of moral dogmas, and of metaphysical illusions.¹⁸

Ontologically conceived, this human animal is, simultaneously and equally, at the very heart of its being, a social or communal animal, categorically reducible to the whole sphere of its social relations which like atoms constitute its reality. Anything that does not fit this communal picture must be counted as a degeneration, a deviation, on man's part, from the essential. So much so that, as Margolis points out, the supposition of "rights of man" degrades the conception of man as a *Gattungswesen*.¹⁹ On the other hand, Marx in the *Manuscripts* clearly argues that labor is the definitive instance of self-realization, and as such the basis of man's relation to his *Gattungswesen* and to himself as a *Gattungswesen*. Then man's species life is basically a collective life of labour that can find its uninhibited (or "natural") expression in communism alone. It is also the naturalization of Hegel's *Geist*. The alienated labor that characterizes all non-communist stages of human history, especially the market-based division of labor found in the capitalist world refers to an alienation to the species being.²⁰

In this sense, the actualization of the potentials of thus conceived *Gattungswesen* (the species life, communal life, or society) rests on abolishing private life which can be understood as the sphere of egoism risen to "a world historical power".²¹ In "On the Jewish Question", he writes as follows:

Therefore not one of the so-called rights of man goes beyond egoistic man, man as a member of civil society, namely an individual withdrawn into himself, his private interest and his private desires and separated from the community. In the rights of man it is not man who appears as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself, society, appears as a framework extraneous to the individuals, as a limitation of their original independence.²²

Indeed, Marx conceives of individual autonomy simply as an expression of egoism operating to the detriment of the interests of man's communal essence. Much like Hegel, he believes in rational autonomy or freedom, but insists that it is real only in organic/communist society. This means that it must be understood in opposition to any liberalist notions and to the notion of individual as an end in itself.

In close inspection, this suggests that (1) man *is not* truly his essence at all apart from an all-engulfing organic association with community, i.e without living his *Gattungswesen* and (2) man *is not* at all without being a member of a social world. The following quotation from the *Manuscripts* might give us an idea on how Marx construes these two premises: "The great achievement of Feuerbach is... to have founded *genuine materialism* and *positive science* by making the social relationship of "man to man" the basic principle of his theory."

¹⁸ As he claims "this communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism." *EW*, p. 348.

¹⁹ Joseph Margolis, "Praxis and Meaning: Marx's Species Being and Aristotle's Political Animal", in *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity*, p. 331.

²⁰ *EW*, pp. 327-29.

²¹ *EW*, p. 345.

²² *EW*, "On the Jewish Question", p. 230.

102 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

Here we should read carefully what Marx is saying: he understands “the social relationship of “man to man” as the basic principle” in the context of founding *genuine materialism* and *positive science*. It is the ultimate datum, the irreducible atom, for thinking about human and social reality.

Man, before society or community, *is not*. But does this necessarily involve the aforementioned (scientist, naturalist) reduction of all that is human to the social relations conceived in a scientific (atomistic and mechanistic) manner? Is not man’s sociality essentially different from that of the animal? Is man’s social existence reducible to a species-life, to *Gattungswesen*? Let us ask a simple question: what is the difference between a herd and a community? Perhaps one basic difference is that the former does not allow any place for individuality in its compact and enclosed universe. What differentiates a community from a herd must be what differentiates a man from an animal: roughly speaking, reason. But can “reason” at a more fundamental level be conceived apart from human individuality or autonomy? Rather, we should, with Kant, see that it presupposes human autonomy and individuality at the very heart of its operation. Perhaps we can even say that community or society to subsist as such stands always in need of something vital coming from human individuality, of an individual contribution. Then we have good reasons to think of the relation between man and community not as unilateral where the social determines man but as bilateral where there is a substantial place for interaction between the two.

By contrast, in the 6th thesis on Feuerbach, we recall, Marx is saying that “The human essence is... in its actuality... the ensemble of social relationships.” We might see that he refuses to treat human beings as single and concrete individuals, but as *relata*. But if we take human beings not as entities ontologically basic, but as simply *relata* of social processes, how can we speak of the future community as composed of free individuals and indeed of full subjects, masters of their own powers? If a human being is an ensemble of social *relata*, he is derivative, i.e. outcome of certain web of relations, and thus not essential, not individual in the real sense. Further, this way of taking things does not allow us to perceive human beings either as agents of these relations, or as subjects bearing certain properties and relations. One recalls Aristotle, who in the *Categories* provides us with the classical (and still the most brilliant) account of the indefensibility of such a position.

To be sure, Marx does not see any problem here; he simply wants to emphasize man’s constitutive social and historical situatedness. Marx’s conception of a future communist revolution as the indispensable foundation of the possibility of the complete realization of true (i.e. positive) human community²³ implies that neither human individuality nor human freedom nor true human sociality can be said to exist yet, in its true (non-alienated) form. Indeed, it appears that Marx interprets freedom as the end-result of economic development. Implicit is the assumption that we cannot afford an independent use of reason; we are trapped not only in the determinism of economic forces, but also in the ideologies (philosophy, religion etc.) which reproduce ever and again false consciousness. Before we can enter the promised land of freedom, everything is a semblance and none of our concepts do apply truly. Revolution, it seems, miraculously enough bring real content to our concepts as well.

²³ *Marx’s Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, p. 48.

As a matter of fact, Marx's naive view of revolution, an excessive and unrealistic historical mission he attaches to it, prevents him from looking more closely at the present human being and his ways of being (which Marx, no doubt, finds characterized by alienation). Ironically, Marx's point of departure, his standard against which he measures the human phenomena (including the concrete historical man or reality) appears to be the free, inalienated man inhabiting in the communal society of the ideal future in which, he believes, history necessarily will culminate. This calls to mind Heideggerian phenomenology which, too, rests on a historical sense of human life, but which refuses to read human phenomena from the perspective of the teleology of a dialectical progress. In direct opposition to the spirit of Marx's thought, Heidegger would say that being human in all its ways involves transcendence and thinking as our highest dimension refers to such transcendence at work. Being human is characterized by transcending anything encountered in the social or natural space. We live in a social world but not in a way that we are a playingthing in it, or captivated in it. We live in a natural world but our way of responding to what appears to us is not reducible to anything natural. We move in a space of transcendence which is at the same time a space of freedom. And precisely because of such ability of transcendence things can be revealed to us as meaningful. Meaning is thus a transcendent occurrence with which only man is endowed. This implies that freedom is our essence; we need not seek it in some remote future, nor can we establish it from without in some historical time. Rather it is given to us as our nearest or, let us say, "intrinsic" possibility. And it is what makes us in history. We are either free or not human at all. There is not an in-between.

By contrast, for Marx, as indicated above, freedom is developing historically from without, as correlative with the development of man's subjective powers through an encounter with natural and social world. This is by and large Hegel. Another and perhaps more accurate reading of Marx suggests that before the communist revolution, when alienation deeply prevails in everything, we cannot speak of freedom at all. With the revolution which establishes the positive community determinism of the laws of history is replaced by a new lawfulness based not on non-human factors but on human freedom. If this second reading is correct, which is presumably the case, then we will also be in difficulty to account for social change and dynamism. I think what we might call "social determinism" is an integral element of both early and later Marx's thought. And, as frequently indicated in Marx literature, this is not easily compatible with any possibility of liberation whatsoever.

As noted by many critics, it would be quite correct to argue that Marx's position involves "social determinism" (which even we need to further qualify as "economic-material determinism", or what is called, in *The German Ideology*, "historical materialism" a term which Engels later exploits a great deal). Therefore human individuality (and creativity) as a factor in society and history is, in Marxian terms, something we should reject: all change in a given society is essentially external to human beings who only undergo them, and in no way entailing the creativity of an internal response or enterprise. Furthermore, ultimately, all that we might think as internal is, in the final analysis, reducible to something external.

104 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

Habermas, in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, argues that one basic problem in Marx's thought deals with the fact that Marx fails to see human beings as having a capacity of self-reflexivity, because he approaches to history on the basis of the determinism of supposed economic laws.²⁴ In other words, Habermas (following the tradition of German Idealism) is maintaining that consciousness is not entirely reducible to the mechanic of labor if we are to do justice to humans as relatively conscious and autonomous agents. This, in fact, amounts to saying that Marx could not attain the true notion of individuality and, by extension, of freedom, which presupposes a capacity of reflection humans in all history have on their own experience, on their situations, on their own world and life. However, I see the main difficulty in Marx in his taking all human thinking, awareness and understanding (including man's practical existence) to be exhausted in an object-oriented relation to things. For Marx "A non-objective being is a non-being."²⁵ Marx could not accept that human thinking and awareness, indeed being human in all its ways and forms, involve transcendence, i.e. transcending a world of things and objects in such a way that such a world becomes open to us in the first place. Even self-reflexivity itself is possible on the ground that thinking and meaning must transcend things before encountering them.

Another difficulty arising in this context is related to Marx's ascribing an active essence to human mind or subjectivity (his appropriation of modern philosophy and German idealism, especially Fichte).²⁶ Briefly here the basic problem is something like this; on the one hand, Marx in line with German idealist philosophers wants to conceptualize human being in terms of an active subjectivity. For instance, he criticizes Feuerbach for the latter's treating human being as merely passive.²⁷ Indeed, Marx moves with a model of extreme subjectivity in relation to the practical world. He, on the other hand, views thinking as exhausted by man's social interactions, as a product of social and economic determinism. One has difficulty in seeing any freedom attached to thinking in Marx's sense. Not only that his "subject" without freedom is not easy to make sense, but also that he fails to appreciate aspects or potentials of thinking not reducible to the simplistic subject-object model. Marx's thought thus is thoroughly alien to an idea of thinking associated with transcendence.

III- Marx's Subject as a Subject of Power

At another level, it is indeed strange that Marx can conceive of man both as determined by subjectivity and as having a communal essence. We already indicated that Marx's "subject" is a social-practical entity dependent on the mechanic of social forces, i.e., a subject without freedom. Let us briefly examine the notion of subjecthood in Marx's analysis. We will also consider the question;

²⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), pp. 48-50.

²⁵ *EW*, p. 390.

²⁶ See "Theses on Feuerbach" and also the *Manuscripts*, third manuscript. For a good defense of this view, see Tom Rockmore, *Fichte, Marx and the German Philosophical Tradition* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).

²⁷ See "Theses on Feuerbach" and *The German Ideology*, pp. 60-64.

how or to what extent is Marx's subject suited to the harmonious life of the future communism.

The concept of a subject is the function of a radical distinction between thinking and the world, and of situating thinking over against the world exclusively as a capacity to represent beings with the ultimate function of producing the knowledge of beings.²⁸ Marx understands the totality of beings as objectively present for man's subjective or productive activity, for the interaction of individuals and, above all, for the exercise of the powers of individuals.

On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being, he is a suffering, conditioned, and limited being, like animals and plants. That is to say, the objects of man's drives exist outside him, as objects independent of him. But these objects are objects of his need, objects which are indispensable and essential to the exercise and confirmation of his essential powers.²⁹

To be *sensible*, i.e., to be actual, is to be an object of sense, to be a sensible object, hence to have sensible objects outside itself, to have objects of its sensibility. To be sensible is to be *passive*.³⁰

But, to be sure, Marx refuses a notion of subject (1) imprisoned in the realm of thoughts, (2) having an ideal/ spiritual essence (3) separated from the material world of practice (4) producing knowledge by mere thinking, or through theorization.³¹

Marx's subject is embedded in economic practice. Knowledge for this subject grows out of economic practice (production) and is a function of practice, of interaction with the physical and social world, of producing tools and commodities. This consciousness which is essentially an economic one is socially-materially determined, forming and reforming itself in the process of a confrontation with objects, and ultimately a subject, a maker of history, history in turn needing to be thoroughly humanized and naturalized. Ontologically, it is man's needs that make him step outside himself, that leads him to relationship and interaction with other individuals: his relation to other individuals is essentially and originally determined by material needs and interests. This idea of practical subjectivity (or "actor theory of subjectivity"³² as Rockmore calls it) can be compared with Heidegger's claim (in *Being and Time*) that in the practical world of everyday life we are first and foremost (*zuerst und zumeist*) not subjects at all. In this world our way of being is not determined by consciousness. Rather we are pre-reflective agents. Marx, too, rejects the primacy of consciousness, but retains the idea of subjectivity. Here the question is whether we can remove the primacy of consciousness from being a subject.

²⁸ When Marx says "thought and being are *distinct*, but at the same time they are in unity with one another" (*EW*, p. 351), he defends such unity between thought and being simply in virtue of naturalizing the former as the function of man who is, at bottom, "a physical subject".

²⁹ *EW*, pp. 389-90.

³⁰ *EW*, p. 390.

³¹ See, for instance, "Theses on Feuerbach".

³² Tom Rockmore, "Marxian Subjectivity, Idealism and Greek Philosophy" in *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity*, p. 372.

106 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

Presumably we cannot, because the notion of subject arose in the modern mind (Descartes) through an emphasis on self-mastery and self-transparency which involves an appeal to consciousness as self-consciousness (German Idealism).³³

Nonetheless, Marx's subject is a "larval" subject developing itself through history, one which will at last, via revolution, burst forth into the stage of history as a perfectly free agent. As indicated above there is a tension in Marx's thought. On the one hand, we see Marx assimilate the subjectivism of German idealism: consciousness has an active and practical essence, over things, objects, that is, over nature whose conquest and subjugation to man's rational will constitutes the ultimate goal in history. On the other hand, Marx departs from the determinism and supremacy of the non-human factors, factors external to consciousness such as economy and material conditions of human life. Marx wants to place concrete and real human being, his practical and historical existence at the basis of his epistemological starting point and thereby at the basis of his analysis of human history. In fact, in order for this subject to be real Marx must recognize some degree of freedom to it, which in turn requires that Marx recognize a limited deterministic power to the non-human factors. It is not entirely clear whether Marx would like to do this, because this would amount to saying that human freedom, in a crucial sense, is behind all historical movement as a struggle for and through freedom (*à la* Hegel). This would imply that capitalism represents a much higher degree of freedom than all the previous ones. But for Marx alienation and unfreedom are almost identical and capitalism is incomparably the most alienated social organization history has ever seen. In addition, even early Marx sees a scientific necessity in history, the necessity of historical and social factors. This makes it more likely that Marx moves with a sort of social determinism.³⁴

Obviously, despite this social determinism, he takes human being essentially as a subject, the subject of practice ("physical subject"³⁵), that is, as ultimately practical agent equipped with powers to be exercised over against sensuous objects. We should, I argue, see that this aggressive picture of subject driven to promote more and more his mastery and power over his sphere of objects does not seem to be compatible with the requirements of communal harmony. Marx's subject, like all conceptions of subject, is inescapably a creature of power. If the notion of subject arises out of conceptualizing our relationship with the world in terms of power, then one can rightly ask whether this fits the priority of We demanded by community.

³³ Marx, too, in many places in the *Manuscripts* takes consciousness as central to subjectivity, however making it thoroughly practical and social (in the sense of "species life") in character. For instance, he states: "Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life", *EW*, p. 328. For similar remarks, see *EW*, pp. 328-29. Habermas sees it very well that Marx "retains the framework of the philosophy of reflection" even if he "deludes himself about the nature of reflection when he reduces it to labor", *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 43.

³⁴ However, this (pseudo)scientific determinism is clearer in his mature thought. He emphatically writes at the end of *Capital*, vol.3: "The realm of freedom only begins, in fact, where that labor which is determined by need and external purposes, ceases; it is therefore, by its very nature, outside the very sphere of material production proper."

³⁵ *EW*, p. 325.

As can be seen, Marx's coming to the interpretation of human essence through an epistemological analysis, through an analysis of the nature of labor and mind creates a serious difficulty in the foundations of his entire thought. The concrete man is his labor as the concretization of all his mental powers: to speak of man's mental powers apart from labor is to speak abstractly. First of all, this implies that Marx still thinks man in terms of subjectivity, in terms of mental powers striving to develop mastery over an external world (natural and social) as a sphere of objects. History, in a special sense, "is the history of the development of the forces of the individuals themselves".³⁶ If the idea of subject, in some way or another, implies individuality in the sense of self-sufficiency, i.e., self-containedness, self-sovereignty, self-ownership (ownership of powers and faculties), self-transparency, fundamentalness of self-consciousness, and thus atomicness, then social determinism becomes questionable.³⁷ Hence, it is strange that in Marx an absorbing version of communality comes together with the monadic essence of the primacy of the subjective.

We can speak of an intimate continuity between labor and human essence where labor represents the instance and process of manifestation (or with Marx's words, "externalization") of one's human powers, that is, one's essence. But Marx thinks that the original unity between labor and human essence is progressively being lost in a class-based society such that today productive activity entirely lacks meaning and satisfaction for human beings. It is a process which is not only thoroughly meaningless and spiritless, but also oppressive and destructive. Since man's essence is understood as the totality of powers to be actualized in and through labor, the externalization of labor comes to be of utmost significance. In the capitalist production process, the externalizations of labor (commodities) turn into something alien, because it is usurped systematically by the capitalist, which, Marx argues, leaves the worker unable to find confirmation of his subjective powers as well as social recognition in the objectifications of these powers. That recognition is constitutive of rationality and that it is socially established (self-recognition and social recognition as inseparable) is surely a typical Hegelian theme. Lack of recognition is closely associated with alienation. Marx, thus, differs from Hegel in understanding recognition purely in economic terms. His essence now stands against and outside himself as an alien and indeed hostile force impoverishing his own being. Alienation is the fact that worker's labor is seized from himself against himself by the capitalist.³⁸ Worker is reduced to the level of a commodity.³⁹ Consequently "the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It belongs to another, it is a loss of his self".⁴⁰

Thus one essential dimension of human societies in history, as the *Manuscripts* claims, is alienated, dehumanized labor. Although Marx, in the *Manuscripts*, puts forward four different aspects of human alienation, the

³⁶ *GI*, p. 86.

³⁷ These Leibniz had already seen. Descartes, too, by making methodical individualism the cornerstone of his rationalism followed consistently the implications of his ontology for which man essentially was a spiritual substance, a subjectivity.

³⁸ See *EW*, "alienated labor", in the *Manuscripts*, pp. 322-34.

³⁹ *EW*, p. 322.

⁴⁰ *EW*, p. 327.

108 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

principal matter, it seems, is that man gets distanced and alienated to his own powers and to its products, but stands always in need of expressing and actualizing them, i.e., “in need of a totality of life-expressions”⁴¹ which is, at bottom, nothing but a communal satisfaction and is suffused with communal significance. Further when he qualifies alienation, he seems to speak about a historical power independent of individuals; “an inhuman power rules over everything”⁴².

The picture is something like this: man’s powers stand in need of uninhibited flourishing and creative expression which becomes possible through productive activity and as products, works, commodities (which are basically “objectified labor”⁴³). And in a classless society to be founded by revolution man’s powers and their objectifications do not become any more merely a means in the hands of private property but an end in itself; man will be the owner of his own powers and will freely enjoy their objectifications. It is so clearly observable that in Marx’s thought, too, a dream of plenitude, or of fullness of being, for human beings plays a decisive role, which is an important part of philosophical agenda in the Western tradition ever since Plato’s *Symposium*. Hence each human being as subject will gain his fully realized subjective powers through a relation to a world of natural and social objects in the form of technological interaction, mastery and transformation. Technological because a practical relation to things in the key of production is what characterizes technology. This technological relation to things, now unhindered (or unsurped) and enriched in terms of its abilities or of its cognitive content (modern technology), is in turn projected as the basis of communal recognition for each subject. In short, the whole communal life revolves and is organized around the expression and actualization of the powers of individuals. The result is a community of self-powered individuals. Here man is approached basically as an entity owning and using powers, an entity in need of objectifying his powers as products. Human essence is implicitly understood as a totality of powers at the disposal of the subject who seeks their full actualization, i.e objectification. Man is an entity needing power gratification. Freedom, in turn, becomes immediate as man’s immediate and complete possession of his productive powers, his own labor within an organic social body, community, for “real freedom...”, he writes in the *Grundrisse*, “is precisely labor”⁴⁴.

Such emphasis on humans’ supposed need to actualize and enjoy their own powers is central to the argument. Yet what is completely lacking in this discourse of power, in this power-based determination of man is a real attempt for a clarification of the ontological meaning of power itself and of its relation to human essence. It ends up actually as a glorification of self-empowering as an ultimate end for human subjects, much akin, in spirit, to that of the Nietzschean will to power (which also appeals to man’s naturalization). In fact, this Marx-Nietzsche connection is not accidental. As discussed above, the thesis that man is a species-being means that man needs to be restored to the naturalist, i.e., to the purely human, ground of his reality, thus encouraging us to assume a naturalized,

⁴¹ *EW*, p. 356.

⁴² *EW*, p. 336.

⁴³ *EW*, p. 331.

⁴⁴ *Grundrisse*, p. 611.

a realistic relation to the way we exist as living beings. Accordingly, Marx's naturalism is at the same time his humanism and history exactly starts as a distantiating from these naturalistic origins (from this "state of nature", Rousseau). Then the ultimate stage of history, the communist stage, as Marx envisages it, consists in the confirmation of man's biological truth, man's complete naturalization, and perhaps in this sense, represents the overthrowal of history itself. But, nonetheless, Marx is careful in distinguishing man from other living beings in that man possesses consciousness in its relation to the world, a social-practical consciousness that is ultimately at the disposal of man's productive powers (labor). Sublimation of productive activity in Marx (at least, in its non-alienated form) actually corresponds to a deification of man, which might be in turn the real meaning of his humanism.⁴⁵

As suggested, Marx considers labor as the most distinctive thing that makes us human, that determines the very character of being human, because man's "actor subjectivity" concretizes in labor. Through labor, history as the realm of man and culture, expands over against nature. We should still ask: why is labor the most essential thing about being human? Above all, why don't we have such an idea about cats, for example, but about humans? What is it that makes us think that labor is the uniquely essential dimension of being human? What is labor at all? I would answer: nothing other than the interpretation of "thinking" as the employment of intelligence to conquer and humanize the realm of objects. Since labor without an object is unthinkable, it becomes an interpretation of subject-object model as our basic relation to the world in a new way, namely as a dynamic and interactional relationship, and the essence of subject, the human being, as labourer.⁴⁶ Hence Marx can write: "All objects become for him the objectification of himself".⁴⁷

In this context, one can argue that with Marx, once human essence is defined in terms of the primacy of labor, Cartesian subjectivism reaches an extreme expression in which the drive to conquer nature (all entities including human beings themselves!) becomes definitive. Accordingly, we can see quite clearly, for instance in the *Manuscripts*, that Marx interprets the essence of labor as *Vergegenständlichung*, that is, as objectification. Accordingly, Marx's thought, thus conceived, leaves no room for non-objective forms of thinking. Therefore, I believe that the oft-discussed Marxian idea that communism will bring about an ultimate reconciliation with nature⁴⁸ is empty, because nature in Marx's thought, as discussed above, remains in the final analysis a sphere of objects to be subjugated by man's subjective powers and this in order to enhance man's subjective powers and their richer expression through the means provided by nature. Nature becomes a domain of means for man's subjective self-expression or, said differently, for the objectification of his subjective powers.

⁴⁵ This issue invites a discussion of his relation to Hegel and especially to Feuerbach.

⁴⁶ As Habermas puts it: "The nature that surrounds us constitutes itself as *objective* nature for us only in being mediated by the subjective nature of man through processes of social labor. That is why labor, or work, is not only a fundamental category of human existence but also an epistemological category." *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ *EW*, pp. 352-53.

⁴⁸ *EW*, p. 348, 349-50.

110 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

In fact, it is imperative that we gain a relationship to nature outside the grip of power entailed by the project of subjecthood, i.e., by the determination of human essence as subject. One fundamental way, I propose, is to approach nature as a metaphorical realm of meaning, as a realm of signs and artworks, windows and pointers striking us with the occurrence that beings *are*. Thus experienced nature is never reducible to the bare physical and material components of beings, just like a work of art which has a reality not reducible to the chemical or physical totality of the painting, that is, a reality which consists essentially in the painting's opening a realm of meaning to us, perhaps different in each case. And one cannot say that such a meaning dimension is opened to us when we consciously analyze and inspect the painting, that is, when we make the painting an object to our reflection just as a natural scientist makes sun into an object of study. Rather such meaning dimension, though it demands our attention to the painting, just happens to us. Such a relation to nature which is, above all, struck by the fact that things *are* corresponds to thinking as an activity of transcendence. "Metaphora" (μεταφορά, literally, "carrying beyond or after"), does only exist for a thinking which enacts its ground as transcendence, which stands beyond.

If labor, as Marx argues, is the most essential fact about being human, hence the human nature itself, one cannot see it as instrumental to certain ends; this would be instrumentalization of human essence which is exactly what alienation itself means. Some commentators (relying on some points in young Marx's text, especially *The German Ideology*) suggest that Marx understands the productive activity (labor) in the ultimate communist stage as basically an activity of artistic creation worthy to be performed for its own sake.⁴⁹ They construe Marx's communist subject of labor as an artistic subject because it sounds somewhat hollow to make mere labor an end in and for itself. Presumably, they think that if the communist labor is identified with artistic activity, such banality might be overcome. But art is not separable from man's constitutive engagement with meaning. Meaning can happen in man and only in man, because only man can transcend the world of entities surrounding him/her. Artistic act is an act of transcendence in which meaning is disclosed and embodied. A bee is not an artist regardless of how much excellence its products can exhibit, for a bee as a bee is not capable of meaning. Genuine art is done essentially in the service of truth and embodies in itself a quest for meaning. This implies that meaning is fundamentally non-objective, thus not reducible to the objectifying activity of labor. Art is far more than labor.

What is the ontological meaning of labor as conceived by Marx? Marx's analysis presupposes that man's all engagement with meaning happens in the key of labor; things get their meaning from out of man's productive (labor-based) relation with them. Man's labor, as a whole, and nothing else, imposes meaning on (otherwise, or in-themselves, meaningless) things. Entities *are* there as

⁴⁹ For a good discussion of this position, see Uri Zilberscheid, "The Abolition of Labour in Marx's Teachings". <http://libcom.org/library/abolition-labour-marxs-teachings-uri-zilberscheid> Marx's thesis that communism will abolish forced labor and his scattered remarks on the importance of art for man's self-realization have led many Marxist theoreticians (mainly those associated with the Frankfurt School) to the idea that communist productive activity will be essentially an artistic activity.

created/ produced by labor, as commodities, potential or actual, and make sense, appear to us basically in such a framework.

So, alienation must be fundamentally an alienation of labor; alienated man refers to alienated labor, to the alienation of man's human capacities which are, at bottom, labor-related. Alienated labor means that labor has become a commodity in the market sold and bought at the best price possible. This calls to mind the Kantian emphasis on respect for human beings as the basis of morality. Private property ends up destroying the respectability of human beings by instrumentalizing labor.

On the other hand, Marx's several determinations concerning human essence (indicated above) might imply a sort of circularity in his understanding of human essence. Human essence is not a static essence, but a dynamic, historical structure: man makes himself through his labor.⁵⁰ And taken in the framework of the communist society of the future, the real or authentic human essence is something to come, i.e. a futural phenomenon, and not to be found in history, today or past, where we only find corrupted and alienated man,⁵¹ "a mentally and physically dehumanized being".⁵² Then how can we understand human alienation and how do we know that there is such an alienation (1) if we do not really, at present, know the true human nature which will emerge perfectly only in the communist future and (2) if it is not a static essence but developing through history? In other words, how can we use such a term as human nature if we do not know "concretely" the human nature at all? Likewise, without the legitimate use of such a concept, how can we speak of human alienation, which, as a valuative connotation, requires an anchoring reference to the true human nature from which humanity is found at a distance?⁵³

The interpretation of human essence in terms of subjecthood inevitably means taking man as a power unit (regardless of whether you are a liberalist or a socialist, whether you understand man as an isolated atomic individual or an actor subject of knowledge, of productive activity) which leaves no room for community. Nothing can limit a subject who is always a subject of power, from expanding his power. So far as humans remain subjects, understand themselves as a power unit, thus in terms of the possession of power and its objective expression, social life can never be freed from tension and antagonism, from power struggle. Thinking, on the other hand, only enters into the arena of meaning by stepping back from it as the arena of power, because it experiences that the highest emergency of meaning and truth evades all will to power. Indeed, thinking as the activity of transcendence arises from the profound powerlessness of human essence and as the appropriation of this essence. This thinking, as Heidegger argues, lets things *be*. Thinking turns into a play of

⁵⁰ *EW*, p. 357.

⁵¹ *EW*, "On the Jewish Question", p. 226.

⁵² *EW*, p. 336.

⁵³ However, some commentators argue against such a historicist reading of Marx's conception of man and for a view that Marx recognizes a universal human nature across all history and cultures. See, for instance, Norman Geras, *Marx and Human Nature. Refutation of a Legend* (London, 1983); and W. Peter Archibald, *Marx and the Missing Link: 'Human Nature'* (London, 1989). Let us note that the historicist reading is the dominant one.

112 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

subjectivity when it loses this essence. This suggests a thinking degenerated into subject-object model (representation, ratiocination, intellection, in short “calculation”) is itself the highest alienation for man. Subjectivistically determined relation to the world is then the principal foundation of power-based society, including above all capitalism.

Precisely in this connection, two important points also must be taken into consideration with respect to the possibility of community in Marx. It appears that Marx puts an almost exclusive emphasis (1) on political action and (2) on material/ economic factors for the emergence and establishment of communist way of life. We can put the question more concisely in this way: is it really possible to build the objective or authentic conditions of “community” by simply overthrowing the exploitation and inequality (say, private property) in society, and ensuring the just distribution of wealth through central planning and organization? Marx would say “yes”; he maintains that revolution is totally necessary, because the proleterian class can only in a revolution clean up all the muck of ages and become “fitted to found society anew”.⁵⁴

This means that proleterian revolution has the principal objective: “founding society anew”. Leaving aside many difficulties inherent in such a position we should only pay attention to the unrealistic assumptions about the potentials of political action and its revolutionary radicalism. For Marx, revolutionary political action can and must design, from the top, communal reality and communist understanding as the highest realization of human history.

For the production on a mass scale of this communist consciousness, and for the success of the cause itself, the alteration of men on a mass scale is, necessary, an alteration which can only take place in a practical movement, a revolution; this revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew.⁵⁵

Hence it becomes clear that such social engineering which needs to be radically implemented by the revolutionary political action aims at creating “a mass scale of communist consciousness”. And it seems that revolution itself is enough for this since revolution is capable of transforming the very character of people. One rightly wonders how the mere destruction of the past can create positive conditions (including a certain type of humanity fitting for the needs of revolution and for the communist way of life) for the reconstruction of communist social reality. In this connection, we should see that Marx’s point of view involves an overly politicized approach to human life and its problems. This again brings us to the Cartesian element in Marx’s approach to matters related to us humans and our social existence. This Cartesian element manifests itself quite naturally in the form of revolutionary political practice with the delusion that it operates on the basis of ultimate truths. Man must impose forms upon, thus transform the social and natural world in order to ensure ultimately the eradication of certain concrete conditions of unequal and exploitative social relations. Accordingly, the truth is already there and clear, at our hands,

⁵⁴ *GI*, p. 96.

⁵⁵ *GI*, p. 96.

indisputable, so the only thing remaining to do is to see and undertake it with a concrete action with the objective to impose it upon the world. Is not this a striking transfiguration (or continuity) of a tyrannic subject imposing itself on nature to conquer and govern its resources with the tools of mathematical certainty? On the one hand, we see that Marx understands the basic matters of our human and social life in an overly politicized framework. On the other hand, the absolutism and dogmatism inherent in Marx's approach leaves virtually no room for authentic political action as a common, dialogical and corporate enterprise, that is, for the potentials of authentic, open-ended discussion between groups as a way of handling socio-political problems. This is because, truth is a finished product and thinking is fully completed in the historical production of this truth by the actor subjectivity of the proletariat. So there is nothing to dispute, nothing to question or to disagree, and in fact there is no need for essential thinking at all. Philosophy has no place in the future communist society. For Marx, as Brudney notes, "under communism, the goals of philosophy would be realized literally in practice".⁵⁶

Another problem in Marx's thought, is, what I call, the materialist assumption about the real problems of men. Indeed, Marx thinks that human alienation is, at bottom, an economic issue (and at bottom due to private property). As if the whole matter about humans was about how we should share the material wealth in society. If this is solved in the manner of abolishing private property (distributive justice), then essential problems we face as human beings will be fundamentally resolved. Because we will have enough time and possibility to use our powers as a whole for their own sake, for their self-realization and not for physical need to sustain materially our lives. Revolution, so the theory goes, not only destroys the pathological economic order and thereby saves its pathological (de-humanized) agents, namely all humans, from its exploitation, but also, as integral to this, it actively embarks on building a perfectly communal life composed of equal human beings.

IV- Aristotle's *Polis*: A Comparative Case

Notice that how great is the difference between Marx and Aristotle's social thought. Aristotle believes that the highest and thus the defining dimension of being human is the activity called *theoria*, namely "contemplative thinking", a thinking drawn into the wonder of things (things in the sense of *phainomena*), into the way things come to happen or emerge (*physis*). Therefore it can alone serve as a basis upon which such communal life can rise and flourish. *Theoria* aims at bringing what is essential into the area of lingual disclosure (*logos*) with an adequacy. *Theoria* (contemplative activity) is the highest, and therefore the defining, possibility of *logos*. It appears as the highest instance of human excellence, the happiest, most complete and most independent activity, thus, the final cause of being human (*NE*, X, 7). *Theoria* therefore can never be reduced to productive activity (*poiesis*) of any sort, which Aristotle considers to be inferior to *theoria*, because *theoria* unlike *poiesis* is autotelic,

⁵⁶ Daniel Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), p. 217.

114 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

thus produces (changes, plays, manipulates etc.) nothing. Instead it arises “ἀπὸ τοῦ θαυμάζειν ... εἰ οὕτως ἔχει” (“from the wonder that things are as they are”, *Metaph.* 983a13-14) and lets things as they are. Moreover, Aristotle’s text seems to suggest that *poiesis* becomes most creative as inspired from *theoria*, by far the superior form of *episteme* (*Metaph.* 981b12-24), which is thus rightfully authoritative over all others (*Metaph.* 982a15-20, 982b5-6).⁵⁷

Then we speak of a community, which is institutionalized on the basis and for the sake of functioning to cultivate the highest, the noblest, the definitive possibility in being human, the life of *theoria*. Aristotle has ultimately in mind, it seems, a community of people devoted to and based on contemplative excellence, on the deepest care for meaning and truth, on the service of truth. In this sense, all sorts of human activities, doings and makings, become meaningful only when they serve for and be helpful for man’s defining need (contemplation) as the exercise of the most explicit form of man’s truth-relatedness, hence the importance of leisure in *Politics*. The deepest reaction of an animal comes for the sake of survival, while we humans show our deepest interest when meaning or truth is at stake. *Theoria* is nothing but the culmination of such uniquely human experience, i.e., the experience of meaning. If we are justified to conceive of human being as a meaning-related and truth-related being, then his basic need, contrary to Marx, cannot be taken as material and physical needs of life. There is something at issue with man which is much more than mere survival such that it is neither satisfied when survival is guaranteed nor discardable while we struggle for the means of life. That is our truth-relatedness.

Consequently, this requires efforts towards actualizing the contemplative principle (ἀρχή) which determines man’s being. Because community (as *polis*) as the most natural and primordial human sociality can only arise out of and consist in the most essential and internal dimension of being human. Thinking in the sense of *theoria* can transform our understanding of and approach to things. Indeed, all authentic transformations are possible only in the realm of thinking and as possibilities of thinking. Then philosophy, most naturally, can play a crucial function towards this end. At least, it seems that this is the special mission which Ancient Greeks, and in particular, Aristotle, had attached to *philosophia*. Marx, on the contrary, sees philosophy “as another form and mode of existence of the alienation of human nature”.⁵⁸ It is certain that the communist stage is something to be accomplished not by thought, but by action in the sense of revolutionary force: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.”⁵⁹ (11th thesis). However, Aristotle would say that *theoria* is the highest possible area of action for man, thus it is the consummation of man’s practical existence because its end does not lie in something else but in its own exercise (*Metaph.* I 2, 982b24–28).

Aristotle’s idea of *polis* as a community formed by thinking or “philosophical” (in the authentic sense of *philosophon*) people should give us a clue. *Polis* which is usually translated as “city-state” is neither city nor state in the sense in which we understand these terms today, even though it has some secondary elements sharing with both city and state. A *polis*, I argue, is a

⁵⁷ See *Metaphysics* A.

⁵⁸ *EW*, p. 381.

⁵⁹ *EW*, “Theses on Feuerbach”, 11th thesis, p. 423.

communal organization, in short a community, with a firm institutional structure based on a constitution, *politea* as a set of shared (but unwritten) rules of the community in which Greek life ideals are embodied. Crucial here is Aristotle's conviction that it must have a limited population (*Pol.* 1326b5-1327a10). It is in this context that we may come to understand Aristotle's words:

From this it becomes clear that polis is natural and that man is naturally a communal being (*zoon politikon*) and a man who is by nature and not by fortune un-communal is either below or above humanity. (*Pol.* 1253a1-5)

Why? Because: only man possesses logos (“λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζῴων”) (*Pol.* 1253a 10-11), because:

For, compared with all other living beings, it is the distinction of man that he alone possesses perception of good and bad, right and wrong and so on and it is gathering and sharing [*koinonia*] for these things which is what makes family and community [*polis*]. (τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς ἄλλα ζῶα τοῖς ἄνθρωποις ἴδιον, τὸ μόνον ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθησιν ἔχειν, ἢ δὲ τούτων κοινονία ποιεῖ οἰκίαν καὶ πόλιν.) (*Pol.* 1253a 16-19)

When Aristotle says that “*polis* is a natural entity”, he simply expresses, in another way, his deeply seated belief that “man is naturally a *zoon politikon*”, i.e., man has a communal essence. Hence *politikon* here cannot be understood as “political”. Even it is imperfectly rendered as “social” because life in the *polis*, as opposed to the abstract and formal character of society evident in modern cities and states, is based on shared communal values, goals and relations, on an organic unity of communality.

Aristotle, in some places, explicitly identifies *polis* with *koinonia* (*Pol.* 1261a18, 1275b20). Though *koinonia*, which primarily conveys such senses as “partnership”, “intercourse”, “participation”, “sharing” or “gathering” is not the perfect equivalent of community, it gives some of the salient features of community. It is better to say that *polis* is the whole institutional framework of *koinonia* or the most complete *koinonia* that allows space for all sorts of *koinonia*. And this Aristotle seems to indicate in the opening lines of *Politics*:

Because every polis is a partnership (*koinonia*) and every partnership is founded for the purpose of some good (since everyone does everything with a view to some good) it becomes clear that while every partnership aims at some good, the partnership that is the most supreme of all and includes all the others does so most of all, and aims at the most supreme of all goods; and this is the partnership called polis, the communal organization (... αὕτη δ' ἐστὶν ἡ καλουμένη πόλις καὶ ἡ κοινονία ἢ πολιτική). (*Pol.* 1252 a1-7)

What is this supreme good that *polis* does all the time and most, and aims at and that *politike episteme* studies (*NE*, 1094b1)? It cannot be other than serving for the highest good of its citizens, which is a flourishing life, a life of self-realization. This underlies “the noble life” (ζῆν καλῶς), which “is above all the end (τέλος) for all people both in common and individually (καὶ κοινῇ πασι καὶ χωρὶς)” (*Pol.* 1278 b22-24). Then the ultimate end of a *polis* consists in its serving for the true happiness and excellence of its citizens (*Pol.* 1332a 25-40)

116 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

which is described in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book X) as culminating in a life of *theoria*.

But there is a further twist here. Aristotle thinks that man is a communal being (*zoon politikon*) more than other living beings, and indeed *par excellence* (*Pol.* 1253a 7-9). This is because each member in the community (*polis*) has a capability for independence (*autarkeia*, *Pol.*1275b 20-21) and thus equality. Aristotle sees that a human community, unlike others, becomes more perfect to a degree it can accommodate individuality (i.e. independent thinking and attitude of its equal members, independence and equality thus being inseparable) in itself, rather than merely demanding obedience. For a *polis* is “a communal enterprise of free persons” (πόλις κοινονία τῶν ἐλευθέρων ἐστὶν) (*Pol.*1279a22) and its *politeia* must rest on this fact (*Pol.*1279a 17-21). Arguably, *bios theoretikos* becomes both the basis and *telos* of *bios politikos* by virtue of independence intrinsic to it and gained through it (*NE*, 1097b 6), for *autarkeia* is “the end and the best” (*Pol.* 1253a2). Thus independent people as citizens constitute *polis* around the ideals of contemplative excellence which give rise to a friendship (or love, care, respect etc, which Greeks have experienced as *philia*) as the deepest and most authentic relationship ever possible among human beings (see *NE* 1169b3-1170b19), since in this highest form of friendship practical interests of all sorts (including power relations) become completely irrelevant (*NE* 1169b24-28). Not surprisingly, *philia* is at the core of the birth of philosophy as *philosophia*, more freely understandable as “devotion to truth”. This is the sense beautifully expressed in Allan Bloom’s words:

The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers, of all men to the extent they desire to know. But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends.⁶⁰

But is not there a vicious circle here? Does *bios theoretikos* establish *bios politikos* (*polis*, genuine human community) or the other way around? *Bios theoretikos* as the *telos* of *polis* is its ultimate foundation, is the only true ground that can sustain an authentic culture of human community. But nonetheless the relationship becomes reciprocal and symbiotic: *polis* is organized to serve for the demands of the supreme human good, human self-realization possible as *bios theoretikos* which in turn keeps alive man’s communal essence and helps *polis* be a cohesive (but not absorbing) unity.

As opposed to Marx who thinks that human self-realization is free laboring activity, free objectification of one’s powers (i.e free from all sorts of physical need), Aristotle holds that man’s excellence (*arete*) and self-realization (*energeia*) consists in *theoria*. Thus members of Aristotle’s *polis* are those who are qualified and willing for a life of *theoria*, since this life alone is devoted to truth and meaning in the pure sense which surpasses categorically the sensuous-practical aspects of human life characterizing both animals and ordinary people alike.

For Aristotle, there is a categorical difference between thinking (its supreme possibility being *theoria*, which is cultivated through philosophy, hence essential need for philosophy for both self-realization of human being and of

⁶⁰ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon&Schuster, 1987), p. 381.

polis) and sensuous-practical activity. While the former deals with the universal principles of being and contemplates the whole, instead of reflecting on this or that being, the latter (both *aisthesis* and *phronesis*) is entitative, i.e. determined by its relation to objects. In order to contemplate the whole of being, being as such, attention must be kept away from focusing on the particulars, or stated differently, on objectifying world. Thinking (*noesis*) or the lingual disclosure of things (*logos*) becomes *theoria* as an end in itself when it takes things not *kath'ekaston* (as this or that specific being), but *kath'olou* (in terms of their being, i.e. of the fact that they *are*). Clearly, *theoria* is related to being as such and is in this sense a non-objective sort of thinking. This only means that it becomes the self-explication of being as such. Human *psukhe* is in turn the ground of this self-revelation and is to be enformed (rather than forming anything) by it.

Accordingly, we see that Aristotle, in *De Anima*, characterizes man's capacity for thought (*logos*) as going beyond any relation to particular beings, whereas animal which completely belongs to the area of *aisthesis* is sunk into a closed world of sensuous satisfaction. But *logos* as transcendence pervades, in turn, subtly into all sorts of human doings giving them their distinctively human quality. A human way of seeing, as opposed to the animal's, is determined by the role of *logos*. *Logos* is, however, first an ability of speech, which man has as a *zoon politikon*, as a communal being. *Logos* is an activity of lingual disclosure, of bringing things into intelligibility, into a world of meaning communally established. Also *logos* as transcendence underlies man's freedom denied to the animal that is absorbed into an exclusively sensuous and thus captivated relation to things. This freedom is in its essence truth-related; it is a freedom endowed by and for a relation to truth. Freedom of *logos*, by virtue of its being man's very transcendence, is transformative both for individual and community; it is the pre-condition of history.

Now, it is precisely for the purpose of creating such a *polis* that Aristotle thinks it necessary to exclude certain groups of people from *polis* who are alien to its *telos*, to its spirit. Therefore, Aristotle does not admit into his *polis* those who are only doing manual jobs, commerce, crafts, farming and the like. He seems to believe that they are already determined by certain narrow practical interests, by a mindset which makes them unsuited to the demands of contemplative life. For the integrity of *polis*, Aristotle seems to believe, one cannot include people with all sorts of social motivations. In addition, Aristotle is keen to realize that such people who are driven only by material interests are prone to degenerate basically contemplative ideals of *polis*. Even though Aristotle rushes into extremes with this stricture, his intention is clear. The defining function of *polis*, as a social space inductive and conducive to the agency of *arete* in its supreme sense, requires that it must, as a principle, admit man only as man, and not under any other more emphasized status.

The fact that Aristotle conceives a unity and continuity between ethics and politics (his politics is just a continuation and culmination of his ethics, *NE* 1181b12-23) implies that the actuality of the human good, primarily contemplative excellence, can and must be realized ultimately on a communal basis. Hence the ultimate goals of Aristotle's *polis* should be understood with reference to a contemplative enlightenment for all citizens and the political

118 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

structure based on individuals with such philosophical consciousness and excellence. Aristotle's *polis* is the general communal framework determined by the demands, needs, aims, ideals and prospects of contemplative excellence as the highest expression of *zooi makarios*, *eu zen*, or *eudaimonia* (*Pol.* 1252 b 29-30). In this light, we may read Aristotle's claim:

For even if the end is the same for a single man and for a polis, that of the polis seems at all events something greater and more complete whether to attain or to preserve; though it is worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is nobler and more divine to attain it for a nation or for polis (*NE*, 1094b7-10).

It follows that the principal end or task of a *polis*, its *raison d'être*, does not consist in approaching its citizen (*polites*) with a dogmatic agenda (ideology, worldview, religion etc.), but in serving for the flourishing of the highest and the best in them, namely their thinking/ contemplative capacity, and thereby helping them become philosophically capable and responsible members of the universe.

As Heidegger argues, we are far away from the authentic possibilities of thinking because we live in an age in which technological (calculative) relationship to the world predominates everything. Thus alienation we face is an alienation, at the core, to and from the essential sense of thinking, to its area of happening alone we most intimately belong. We, humans, today are mostly related to thinking as a scientific, technical, ratiocinative, practical, calculative activity. Consequently, we are rather alien to a sort of thinking which goes beyond the present and thereby does neither give the knowledge of things nor utility nor mastery. Marx's thesis that productive activity is man's most definitive aspect is the paramount expression of this. Such an approach to thinking as a way to develop cognitive mastery over the object, as a way of dealing with the present is alien to the mystery and question of being which above all puts our very being into question; the question "who am I?" becomes purely futile and it seems in the paradisiacal age of communism I need no longer to ask such sort of abstract questions.⁶¹

⁶¹ For instance, Gerald A. Cohen is right when he says that Marx's "conception of human good and nature overlooks the need for self definition", *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 175. For a larger discussion, see pp. 137-154.

REFERENCES

- ARISTOTLE. *Metaphysics*, ed. D. Ross, 2 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
 --- *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1998)
 --- *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. D. Ross (rev. by L. Brown) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
 --- *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959).
 --- *De Anima*, trans. R. D. Hicks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907)
- BRUDNEY, Daniel. *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy* (Massachusetts: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998)
- COHEN, Gerald A. *History, Labour, and Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- GOULD, Carol C. *Marx's Social Ontology* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1978).
- HABERMAS, Jürgen. *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
- HEIDEGGER, Martin. *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985)
 --- *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. McNeill and N.
- WALKER (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).
 --- *What is Called Thinking?* trans. F. D. Wieck and G. Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).
 --- "The Question Concerning Technology" in *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008).
- KAIN, Philip J. "Aristotle, Kant and the Ethics of Young Marx", in *MA*.
- LEOPOLD, David. *The Young Karl Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- MARGOLIS, J. "Praxis and Meaning: Marx's Species Being and Aristotle's Political Animal", in *MA*.
- MARX, K. *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton, ed. L. Colletti (London: Penguin, 1975).
 --- *The German Ideology*, ed. C. J. Arthur (London: International Publishers, 1970)
 --- *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1973)
 --- *Marx's Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. A. Jolin and J. O'Malley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
- MILLER, F. "Aristotle's Political Theory", *The Stanford Enc. of Philosophy* (Spring 2011 Ed.), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/aristotle-politics/>.
- MCCARTHY, George E. (ed.) *Marx and Aristotle: Nineteenth Century German Social Theory and Classical Antiquity* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1992). Abbr. as *MA*.
- ROCKMORE, Tom. *Fichte, Marx and the German Philosophical Tradition* (Carbondale, III.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980).
 --- "Marxian Subjectivity, Idealism and Greek Philosophy" in *MA*.
 --- *Marx After Marxism* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2002).

120 *Young Marx, Alienation and Communism, and a Note on Aristotle*

ROSEN, Stanley. "Karl Marx", Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Version 1.0, (London and New York, 1998).

SHIELDS, Christopher. *Aristotle* (London: Routledge, 2007).

TÖNNIES, Ferdinand. *Community and Society*, trans. R. Heberle (New Jersey: Transaction Pub., 1988).

WOLFF, Jonathan. *Why Read Marx Today?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

WOOD, Allen W. *Karl Marx*, 2nd. ed. (London: Routledge, 2004).

ZILBERSCHIED, Uri. "The Abolition of Labour in Marx's Teachings".

<http://libcom.org/library/abolition-labour-marxs-teachings-uri-zilberscheid>