

MARX: THE ECONOMIC BASIS OF HUMAN NATURE

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MARX'S HISTORY.....

- Karl Marx was born in 1818 in the German Rhineland, of a Jewish family who became Christian
- He displayed his intellectual ability early, and in 1836 he entered the University of Berlin as a student in the Faculty of Law.
- His early writing has a vigorous philosophical and poetic style, expressing the passionate intensity of his thought.

HOW MARX GOT THE IDEA.....

- Marx came to see the driving force of historical change as material rather than spiritual.
- Alienation, he believed, is at root neither metaphysical nor religious but social and economic. Under the capitalist system, labor is something alien to the laborer
- This conception of alienation is expressed in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, which Marx wrote in Paris in 1844 but which remained unpublished for a century.

WHEN HE ENTERED SCIENCE...

- Marx was an atheist, and in the general trend of his thought was materialist and determinist
- As a would-be social scientist, he proposed to explain all human phenomena by the methods of science, as he understood them.
- He held that there are general socioeconomic laws that operate in human history, and that the major social and political changes can be explained by applying these laws to the prevailing conditions.

MARX'S ECONOMICAL ANGLE

- It is undeniable that economic factors are hugely important and that no serious study of history or social science can ignore them.
- Marx can take much of the credit for the fact that we now recognize this so readily.
- He talks of "the material powers of production," which presumably include natural resources (land, climate, plants, animals, minerals); tools and machinery; and perhaps the knowledge and skills embodied in human beings ("human resources").
- But he also talks of the "economic structure" as including "relations of production," which presumably means the way in which work is organized

MARX'S ECONOMICAL SOCIETY

- Marx divided history, very roughly, into epochs identified by their different economic systems—the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal, and the "bourgeois" or capitalist phases—and he held that each phase had to give way to the next when the economic conditions were ripe.
- It is undeniable that any society has to produce enough of the necessities of life to provide for survival and reproduction.
- Marx himself did say, it sets limits within which the other factors play their parts. The way in which a society produces the necessities of life at any one stage of economic development will have an important influence on how people in that kind of society characteristically think.

RELATING SCIENCE WITH HISTORY

- For any particular set of events, even the fall of an apple from a tree, there is no clear limit to the number of different laws and contingent facts that may be involved in its causation—the laws of gravity and mechanics, the wind pressure and the weather, the decay of wood etc
- a trend is not a law; its continuation is not inevitable but may depend on conditions that can change.
- On the basis Marx expected that capitalism would become more unstable economically, that the class struggle between the owners of capital and the members of the proletariat, who have to sell their labor, would increase, with the proletariat getting both poorer and larger in number, until in a major social revolution the workers would take power and institute the new, communist phase of history.

MARX'S PREDICTION

- About Russia and China Marx seems to have been roughly right in predicting the revolution
- the economic system has become more stable, conditions of life for most people have improved vastly over what they were in Marx's time, and class divisions have been blurred rather than intensified
- This is a major refutation of Marx's prediction. It cannot be explained away by saying that the proletariat has been "bought off" by concessions of higher wages for Marx predicted their lot would get worse.
- It may be suggested, however, that capitalism as Marx knew it has ceased to exist, that peaceful, gradual reforms have radically changed the nature of our economic system.

MARX'S OPINION ON HUMAN NATURE

- Marx's concept of humanity is his view of our essentially social nature: "the real nature of man is the totality of social relations." Apart from the existence of obvious biological facts such as the need to eat and reproduce, Marx believed that there is no such thing as a fixed, individual human nature.
- All history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature.
- Even the ways in which we produce our food and bring up our children are socially learned. This is true of all economic production, which is typically a social activity requiring cooperation in one way or another.

MARX'S ON FEMINISM

- Marx was a man of his time in his assumption that the traditional sexual division of labor in the family, with women being almost totally responsible for childcare, has a "purely physiological foundation
- Technical developments like reliable contraception and formula milk for babies and an economic structure that requires mental skills more than heavy manual labor have transformed the question of male and female "nature" in ways that Marx himself did not foresee but that his theory has the resources to accommodate.

MARX'S ON ALIENATION

- For Marx, "alienation" comprises both a description of certain features of capitalist society and a value judgment that they are fundamentally wrong. But the notion is so vague that it is often difficult to decide exactly which features of capitalism Marx is criticizing. He believed that capitalism is a necessary stage of economic and social development, but he thought that it would be and ought to be surpassed.
- Marx says that alienation is "from man himself and from Nature."
- For Marx, Nature seems to mean the humanly made world, so we can take him as saying that people are not what they should be because they are alienated from the objects and social relations that they create.

ALIENATION ON LABOUR

- Marx describes this alienation of labor as consisting in the fact that the work is not part of the worker's nature; he does not fulfil himself in his work but feels miserable, physically exhausted, and mentally debased.
- His work is forced on him as a means for satisfying other needs, and at work he does not "belong to himself; he is under the control of other people
- Even the materials he uses and the objects he produces are alien to him, because they are owned by someone else. Sometimes Marx seems to be blaming alienation on the institution of money as a means of exchange that reduces all social relationships

ALIENATION NOWADAYS

- in the advanced nations where capitalism is trumpeted as a stunning success story, there is a constant tendency for the managers of corporations to try to beat the competition by extracting the greatest possible profit from the labor of their employees, by driving down wages, cutting the workforce, or extending working hours.
- The state may put restrictions on these practices, but as soon as the regulations are relaxed, each business naturally makes the most of its competitive opportunities.
- Such exploitation did take place in the unrestrained capitalism of the early nineteenth century, when children worked long hours in filthy conditions and workers died early deaths after miserably unfulfilled lives.

COMUNISM REVOLUTION

- Marx thought that this was bound to happen anyway capitalism would burst asunder because of its inner contradictions, and the ensuing communist revolution would usher in the new order of things.
- Marx and his followers constantly appealed to people to realize the direction in which history is moving and to act accordingly, to help bring about the communist revolution.
- . Limited reforms of capitalism, such as higher wages, shorter hours, and pension schemes may be welcome ameliorations of the harshnesses of the system, but they do not alter its basic nature. Hence the radical difference between the Communist Party, on one hand, and most trade unions and social democratic or democratic socialist parties, on the other

MARX'S VIEWS ON HIS FAILURES

- In the higher phase of communist society, the state is supposed to wither away, and the true realm of freedom will begin.
- There is no ground for expecting any set of economic changes to eliminate all conflicts of interest.
- Yet, with other elements in Marx's vision we can surely agree. application of science and technology to produce enough for all; the shortening of the working day; the provision of universal education so that all human beings can develop their potential; the vision of a decentralized society in which people cooperate in communities for the common good and of a society in balance with nature—all these are ideals that almost everyone will share, though it is no easy matter to work out how they can be compatibly realized.

THANK YOU!!