

## Part Seven. Marxism and Humanism

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### I

Today, Socialist 'Humanism' is on the agenda.

As it enters the period which will lead it from socialism (to each according to his labour) to communism (to each according to his needs), the Soviet Union has proclaimed the slogan: All for Man, and introduced new themes: the freedom of the individual, respect for legality, the dignity of the person. In workers' parties, the achievements of socialist humanism are celebrated and justification for its theoretical claims is sought in *Capital*, and more and more frequently, in Marx's Early Works.

This is a historical event. I wonder even whether socialist humanism is not such a reassuring and attractive theme that it will allow a dialogue between Communists and Social-Democrats, or even a wider exchange with those 'men of good will' who are opposed to war and poverty. Today, even the high-road of Humanism seems to lead to socialism.

In fact, the objective of the revolutionary struggle has always been the end of exploitation and hence the liberation of man, but, as Marx foresaw, in its first historical phase, this struggle had to take the form of the struggle between *classes*. So revolutionary humanism could only be a 'class humanism', 'proletarian humanism'. The end of the exploitation of man meant the end of *class* exploitation. The liberation of man meant the liberation of the working *class* and above all liberation by the dictatorship of the proletariat. For more than forty years, in the U.S.S.R., amidst gigantic struggles, 'socialist humanism' was expressed in the terms of class dictatorship rather than in those of personal freedom.<sup>[1]</sup>

The end of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the U.S.S.R. opens up a second historical phase. The Soviets say, in our country antagonistic classes have disappeared, the dictatorship of the proletariat has fulfilled its function, the State is no longer a class State but the State of the whole people (of everyone). In the U.S.S.R. men are indeed now treated without any class distinction, that is, as *persons*. So in *ideology* we see the themes of class humanism give way before the themes of a socialist humanism of the person.

Ten years ago socialist humanism only existed in one form: that of class humanism. Today it exists in two forms: class humanism, where the dictatorship of the proletariat is still in force (China, etc.), and (socialist) personal humanism where it has been superseded (the U.S.S.R.). Two forms corresponding to two necessary historical phases. In 'personal' humanism, 'class' humanism contemplates its own future, realized.

This transformation in history casts light on certain transformations in the mind. The dictatorship of the proletariat, rejected by Social-Democrats in the name of (bourgeois) personal 'humanism', and which bitterly opposes them to Communists, has been superseded in the U.S.S.R. Even better, it is foreseeable that it might take peaceful and short-lived forms in the West. From here we can see in outline a sort of meeting between two personal 'humanisms', socialist humanism and Christian or bourgeois liberal humanism. The 'liberalization' of the U.S.S.R. reassures the latter. As for socialist humanism, it can see itself not only as a critique of the contradictions of bourgeois humanism, but also and above all as the consummation of its 'noblest' aspirations. Humanity's millenarian dreams, prefigured in the drafts of past humanisms, Christian and bourgeois, will at last find realization in it: in man and between men, the reign of Man will at last begin.

Hence the fulfilment of the prophetic promise Marx made in the 1844 Manuscripts: Communism ... as the real appropriation of the human essence through and for men ... this communism as a fully developed naturalism – Humanism'.

## II

To see beyond this event, to understand it, to know the meaning of socialist humanism, it is not enough just to register the event, nor to record the concepts (humanism, socialism) in which the event itself thinks itself. The theoretical claims of the concepts must be tested to ensure that they really do provide us with a truly scientific knowledge of the event.

But precisely in the couple 'humanism-socialism' there is a striking theoretical unevenness: in the framework of the Marxist conception, the concept 'socialism' is indeed a scientific concept, but the concept 'humanism' is no more than an *ideological* one.

Note that my purpose is not to dispute the reality that the concept of socialist humanism is supposed to designate, but to define the *theoretical* value of the concept. When I say that the concept of humanism is an ideological concept (not a scientific one), I mean that while it really does designate a set of existing relations, unlike a scientific concept, it does not provide us with a means of knowing them. In a particular (ideological) mode, it designates some existents, but it does not give us their essences.

If we were to confuse these two orders we should cut ourselves off from all knowledge, uphold a confusion and risk falling into error.

To show this clearly, I shall briefly invoke Marx's own experience, for he only arrived at a scientific theory of history at the price of a radical critique of the philosophy of man that had served as his theoretical basis during the years of his youth (1840-45). I use the words 'theoretical basis' in their strict sense. For the young Marx, 'Man' was not just a cry denouncing poverty and slavery. It was the theoretical principle of his world outlook and of his practical attitude. The 'Essence of Man' (whether freedom, reason or community) was the basis both for a rigorous theory of history and for a consistent political practice.

This can be seen in the two stages of Marx's humanist period.

*The First Stage* was dominated by a liberal-rationalist humanism closer to Kant and Fichte than to Hegel. In his conflict with censorship, Rhenish feudal laws, Prussian despotism, Marx's political struggle and the theory of history sustaining it were based theoretically on a philosophy of man. Only the essence of man makes history, and this essence is freedom and reason. *Freedom*: it is the essence of man just as weight is the essence of bodies. Man is destined to freedom, it is his very being. Whether he rejects it or negates it, he remains in it for ever: '*So much is freedom the essence of Man that even its adversaries are realizing it when they fight against its reality... . So freedom has always existed, in one way or another, sometimes only as a particular privilege, sometimes as a general right.*'<sup>[2]</sup> This distinction illuminates the whole of history: thus, feudalism is freedom, but in the 'non-rational' form of privilege; the modern State is freedom, but in the rational form of a universal right. *Reason*: man is only freedom as reason. Human freedom is neither caprice, nor the determinism of interest, but, as Kant and Fichte meant it, autonomy, obedience to the inner law of reason. This reason, which has '*always existed though not always in a rational form*'<sup>[3]</sup> (e.g. feudalism), in modern times does at least exist in the form of reason in the State, the State of law and right. '*Philosophy regards the State as the great organism in which legal, moral and political freedom should find their realization and in which the individual citizen, when he obeys the State's laws, is only obeying the natural laws of his own reason, of human reason .*'<sup>[4]</sup> Hence the task of philosophy: '*Philosophy demands that the State be the State of human nature*'.<sup>[5]</sup> This injunction is addressed to the State itself: if it would recognize its essence it would become reason, the true freedom of man, through its own reform of itself. Therefore, politico-philosophical criticism (which reminds the State of its duty to itself) sums up the whole of politics: the free Press, the free reason of humanity, becomes politics itself. This political practice – summed up in *public theoretical criticism*, that is, in public criticism by way of the Press – which demands as its absolute precondition the *freedom of the Press* is the one Marx adopted in the *Rheinische Zeitung*. Marx's development of his theory of history was the basis and

justification for his own *practice*: the journalist's public criticism that he saw as political action *par excellence*. This Enlightenment Philosophy was completely rigorous.

*The Second Stage* (1842-5) was dominated by a new form of humanism: Feuerbach's 'communalist' humanism. The Reason State had remained deaf to reason: there was no reform of the Prussian State. History itself delivered this judgment on the illusions of the humanism of reason: the young German radicals had been expecting that when he was King the heir to the throne would keep the liberal promises he had made before his coronation. But the throne soon changed the liberal into a despot – the State, which should at last have become reason, since it was in itself reason, gave birth merely to unreason once again. From this enormous disappointment, lived by the young radicals as a true historical and theoretical crisis, Marx drew the conclusion: '*The political State ... encapsulates the demands of reason precisely in its modern forms. But it does not stop there. Everywhere it presupposes realized reason. But everywhere it also slides into the contradiction between its theoretical definition and its real hypotheses.*' A decisive step had been taken: the State's abuses were no longer conceived as misappropriations of the State *vis-à-vis* its essence, but as a real contradiction between its essence (reason) and its existence (unreason). Feuerbach's humanism made it possible to think just this contradiction by showing in unreason the alienation of reason, and in this alienation the history of man, that is, his realization.<sup>[6]</sup>

Marx still professes a philosophy of man: 'To be radical is to grasp things by the root; but for man the root is man himself' (1843). But then man is only freedom-reason because he is first of all '*Gemeinwesen*', 'communal being', a being that is only consummated theoretically (science) and practically (politics) in universal human relations, with men and with his objects (external nature 'humanized' by labour). Here also the essence of man is the basis for history and politics.

History is the alienation and production of reason in unreason, of the true man in the alienated man. Without knowing it, man realizes the essence of man in the alienated products of his labour (commodities, State, religion). The loss of man that produces history and man must presuppose a definite pre-existing essence. At the end of history, this man, having become inhuman objectivity, has merely to re-grasp as subject his own essence alienated in property, religion and the State to become total man, true man.

This new theory of man is the basis for a new type of political action: the politics of *practical* reappropriation. The appeal to the simple reason of the State disappears. Politics is no longer simply theoretical criticism, the enlightenment of reason through the free Press, but man's practical reappropriation of his essence. For the State, like religion, may well be man, but man dispossessed: man is split into citizen (State) and civil man, two abstractions. In the heaven of the State, in 'the citizen's rights', man lives in imagination the human community he is deprived of on the earth of the 'rights of

man'. So the revolution must no longer be merely *political* (rational liberal reform of the State), but '*human*' ('communist'), if man is to be restored his nature, alienated in the fantastic forms of money, power and gods. From this point on, this practical revolution must be the common work of philosophy and of the proletariat, for, in philosophy, man is theoretically affirmed; in the proletariat he is practically negated. The penetration of philosophy into the proletariat will be the conscious revolt of the affirmation against its own negation, the revolt of man against his inhuman conditions. Then the proletariat will negate its own negation and take possession of itself in communism. The revolution is the very *practice* of the logic immanent in alienation: it is the moment in which criticism, hitherto unarmed, recognizes its arms in the proletariat. It gives the proletariat the theory of what it is; in return, the proletariat gives it its armed force, a single unique force in which no one is allied except to himself. So the revolutionary alliance of the proletariat and of philosophy is once again sealed in the essence of man.

### III

In 1845, Marx broke radically with every theory that based history and politics on an essence of man. This unique rupture contained three indissociable elements.

(1) The formation of a theory of history and politics based on radically new concepts: the concepts of social formation, productive forces, relations of production, superstructure, ideologies, determination in the last instance by the economy, specific determination of the other levels, etc.

(2) A radical critique of the *theoretical* pretensions of every philosophical humanism.

(3) The definition of humanism as an *ideology*.

This new conception is completely rigorous as well, but it is a new rigour: the essence criticized (2) is defined as an ideology (3), a category belonging to the new theory of society and history (1).

This rupture with every *philosophical* anthropology or humanism is no secondary detail; it is Marx's scientific discovery.

It means that Marx rejected the problematic of the earlier philosophy and adopted a new problematic in one and the same act. The earlier idealist ('bourgeois') philosophy depended in all its domains and arguments (its 'theory of knowledge', its conception of history, its political economy, its ethics, its aesthetics, etc.) on a problematic of *human nature* (or the essence of man). For centuries, this problematic had been transparency itself, and no one had thought of questioning it even in its internal modifications.

This problematic was neither vague nor loose; on the contrary, it was constituted by a coherent system of precise concepts tightly articulated together. When Marx confronted it, it implied the two complementary postulates he defined in the Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach:

(1) that there is a universal essence of man;

(2) that this essence is the attribute of '*each single individual*' who is its real subject.

These two postulates are complementary and indissociable. But their existence and their unity presuppose a whole empiricist-idealist world outlook. If the essence of man is to be a universal attribute, it is essential that *concrete subjects* exist as absolute givens; this implies an *empiricism of the subject*. If these empirical individuals are to be men, it is essential that each carries in himself the whole human essence, if not in fact, at least in principle; this implies an *idealism of the essence*. So empiricism of the subject implies idealism of the essence and vice versa. This relation can be inverted into its 'opposite' – empiricism of the concept/idealism of the subject. But the inversion respects the basic structure of the problematic, which remains fixed.

In this type-structure it is possible to recognize not only the principle of theories of society (from Hobbes to Rousseau), of political economy (from Petty to Ricardo), of ethics (from Descartes to Kant), but also the very principle of the (pre-Marxist) idealist and materialist 'theory of knowledge' (from Locke to Feuerbach, via Kant). The content of the human essence or of the empirical subjects may vary (as can be seen from Descartes to Feuerbach); the subject may change from empiricism to idealism (as can be seen from Locke to Kant): the terms presented and their relations only vary within the invariant type-structure which constitutes this very problematic: *an empiricism of the subject always corresponds to an idealism of the essence (or an empiricism of the essence to an idealism of the subject)*.

By rejecting the essence of man as his theoretical basis, Marx rejected the whole of this organic system of postulates. He drove the philosophical categories of the *subject*, of *empiricism*, of the *ideal essence*, etc., from all the domains in which they had been supreme. Not only from political economy (rejection of the myth of *homo economicus*, that is, of the individual with definite faculties and needs as the *subject* of the classical economy); not just from history (rejection of social atomism and ethico-political idealism); not just from ethics (rejection of the Kantian ethical idea); but also from philosophy itself: for Marx's materialism excludes the empiricism of the subject (and its inverse: the transcendental subject) and the idealism of the concept (and its inverse: the empiricism of the concept).

This total theoretical revolution was only empowered to reject the old concepts because it replaced them by new concepts. In fact Marx established a new problematic, a new systematic way of asking questions of the world, new principles and a new

method. This discovery is immediately contained in the theory of historical materialism, in which Marx did not only propose a new theory of the history of societies, but at the same time implicitly, but necessarily, a new 'philosophy', infinite in its implications. Thus, when Marx replaced the old couple individuals/human essence in the theory of history by new concepts (forces of production, relations of production, etc.), he was, in fact, simultaneously proposing a new conception of 'philosophy'. He replaced the old postulates (empiricism/idealism of the subject, empiricism/idealism of the essence) which were the basis not only for idealism but also for pre-Marxist materialism, by a historico-dialectical materialism of *praxis*: that is, by a theory of the different specific *levels of human practice* (economic practice, political practice, ideological practice, scientific practice) in their characteristic articulations, based on the specific articulations of the unity of human society. In a word, Marx substituted for the 'ideological' and universal concept of Feuerbachian 'practice' a concrete conception of the specific differences that enables us to situate each particular practice in the specific differences of the social structure.

So, to understand what was radically new in Marx's contribution, we must become aware not only of the novelty of the concepts of historical materialism, but also of the depth of the theoretical revolution they imply and inaugurate. On this condition it is possible to define humanism's status, and reject its *theoretical* pretensions while recognizing its practical function as an ideology.

Strictly in respect to theory, therefore, one can and must speak openly of *Marx's theoretical anti-humanism*, and see in this *theoretical anti-humanism* the absolute (negative) precondition of the (positive) knowledge of the human world itself, and of its practical transformation. It is impossible to *know* anything about men except on the absolute precondition that the philosophical (theoretical) myth of man is reduced to ashes. So any thought that appeals to Marx for any kind of restoration of a theoretical anthropology or humanism is no more than ashes, *theoretically*. But in practice it could pile up a monument of pre-Marxist ideology that would weigh down on real history and threaten to lead it into blind alleys.

For the corollary of theoretical Marxist anti-humanism is the recognition and knowledge of humanism itself: as an *ideology*. Marx never fell into the idealist illusion of believing that the knowledge of an object might ultimately replace the object or dissipate its existence. Cartesians, knowing that the sun was two thousand leagues away, were astonished that this distance only looked like two hundred paces: they could not even find enough of God to fill in this gap. Marx never believed that a knowledge of the nature of *money* (a social relation) could destroy its *appearance*, its form of existence – a thing, for this appearance was its very being, as necessary as the existing mode of production.<sup>[7]</sup> Marx never believed that an ideology might be dissipated by a knowledge of it: for the knowledge of this ideology, as the knowledge of its conditions of possibility, of its structure, of its specific logic and of its practical role, within a given society, is simultaneously knowledge of the conditions of its necessity.

So Marx's theoretical *anti-humanism* does not suppress anything in the historical *existence* of humanism. In the real world philosophies of man are found after Marx as often as before, and today even some Marxists are tempted to develop the themes of a new theoretical humanism. Furthermore, Marx's theoretical anti-humanism, by relating it to its conditions of existence, recognizes a necessity for humanism as an *ideology*, a conditional necessity. The recognition of this necessity is not purely speculative. On it alone can Marxism base a policy in relation to the existing ideological forms, of every kind: religion, ethics, art, philosophy, law – and in the very front rank, humanism. When (eventually) a Marxist policy of humanist ideology, that is, a political attitude to humanism, is achieved – a policy which may be either a rejection or a critique, or a use, or a support, or a development, or a humanist renewal of contemporary forms of ideology in the *ethico-political* domain – this policy will only have been possible on the absolute condition that it is based on Marxist philosophy, and a precondition for this is theoretical *anti-humanism*.

## IV

So everything depends on the knowledge of the nature of humanism as an ideology.

There can be no question of attempting a profound definition of ideology here. It will suffice to know very schematically that an ideology is a system (with its own logic and rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts, depending on the case) endowed with a historical existence and role within a given society. Without embarking on the problem of the relations between a science and its (ideological) past, we can say that ideology, as a system of representations, is distinguished from science in that in it the practico-social function is more important than the theoretical function (function as knowledge).

What is the nature of this social function? To understand it we must refer to the Marxist theory of history. The 'subjects' of history are given human societies. They present themselves as totalities whose unity is constituted by a certain specific type of *complexity*, which introduces instances, that, following Engels, we can, very schematically, reduce to three: the economy, politics and ideology. So in every society we can posit, in forms which are sometimes very paradoxical, the existence of an economic activity as the base, a political organization and 'ideological' forms (religion, ethics, philosophy, etc.). *So ideology is as such an organic part of every social totality.* It is as if human societies could not survive without these *specific formations*, these systems of representations (at various levels), their ideologies. Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life. Only an ideological world outlook could have imagined societies *without ideology* and accepted the utopian idea of a world in which ideology (not just one of its historical forms) would disappear without trace, to be replaced by *science*.



For example, this utopia is the principle behind the idea that ethics, which is in its essence ideology, could be replaced by science or become scientific through and through; or that religion could be destroyed by science which would in some way take its place; that *art* could merge with knowledge or become 'everyday life', etc.

And I am not going to steer clear of the crucial question: *historical materialism cannot conceive that even a communist society could ever do without ideology*, be it ethics, art or 'world outlook'. Obviously it is possible to foresee important modifications in its ideological forms and their relations and even the disappearance of certain existing forms or a shift of their functions to neighbouring forms; it is also possible (on the premise of already acquired experience) to foresee the development of new ideological forms (e.g. the ideologies of 'the scientific world outlook' and 'communist humanism') but in the present state of Marxist theory strictly conceived, it is not conceivable that communism, a new mode of production implying determinate forces of production and relations of production, could do without a social organization of production, and corresponding ideological forms.

So ideology is not an aberration or a contingent excrescence of History: it is a structure essential to the historical life of societies. Further, only the existence and the recognition of its necessity enable us to act on ideology and transform ideology into an instrument of deliberate action on history.

It is customary to suggest that ideology belongs to the region of 'consciousness'. We must not be misled by this appellation which is still contaminated by the idealist problematic that preceded Marx. In truth, ideology has very little to do with 'consciousness', even supposing this term to have an unambiguous meaning. It is profoundly *unconscious*, even when it presents itself in a reflected form (as in pre-Marxist 'philosophy'). Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as structures that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. Men 'live' their ideologies as the Cartesian 'saw' or did not see – if he was not looking at it – the moon two hundred paces away: *not at all as a form of consciousness, but as an object of their 'world' – as their 'world' itself*. But what do we mean, then, when we say that ideology is a matter of men's 'consciousness'? First, that ideology is distinct from other social instances, but also that men live their actions, usually referred to freedom and 'consciousness' by the classical tradition, in ideology, *by and through ideology*; in short, that the 'lived' relation between men and the world, including History (in political action or inaction), passes through ideology, or better, *is ideology itself*. This is the sense in which Marx said that it is in ideology (as the locus of political struggle) that men *become conscious* of their place in the world and in history, it is within this ideological unconsciousness that men succeed in

altering the 'lived' relation between them and the world and acquiring that new form of specific unconsciousness called 'consciousness'.

So ideology is a matter of the *lived* relation between men and their world. This relation, that only appears as '*conscious*' on condition that it is *unconscious*, in the same way only seems to be simple on condition that it is complex, that it is not a simple relation but a relation between relations, a second degree relation. In ideology men do indeed express, not the relation between them their conditions of existence, but *the way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an '*imaginary*', '*lived*' relation. Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their 'world', that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses* a *will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.

It is in this overdetermination of the real by the imaginary and of the imaginary by the real that ideology is *active* in principle, that it reinforces or modifies the relation between men and their conditions of existence, in the imaginary relation itself. It follows that this action can never be purely *instrumental*; the men who would use an ideology purely as a means of action, as a tool, find that they have been caught by it, implicated by it, just when they are using it and believe themselves to be absolute masters of it.

This is perfectly clear in the case of a *class society*. The ruling ideology is then the ideology of the ruling *class*. But the ruling class does not maintain with the ruling ideology, which is its own ideology, an external and lucid relation of pure utility and cunning. When, during the eighteenth century, the 'rising class', the bourgeoisie, developed a humanist ideology of equality, freedom and reason, it gave its own demands the form of universality, since it hoped thereby to enroll at its side, by their education to this end, the very men it would liberate only for their exploitation. This is the Rousseauan myth of the origins of inequality: the rich holding forth to the poor in 'the most deliberate discourse' ever conceived, so as to persuade them to live their slavery as their freedom. In reality, the bourgeoisie has to believe in its own myth before it can convince others, and not only so as to convince others, since what it lives in its ideology is *the very relation* between it and its real conditions of existence which allows it simultaneously to act on itself (provide itself with a legal and ethical consciousness, and the legal and ethical conditions of economic liberalism) and on others (those it exploits and is going to exploit in the future: the 'free labourers') so as to take up, occupy and maintain its historical role as a ruling class. Thus, in a very exact sense, the bourgeoisie *lives* in the ideology of *freedom* the relation between it and its conditions of existence: that is, *its* real relation (the law of a liberal capitalist economy) *but invested in an imaginary relation* (all men are free, including the free labourers). Its ideology consists of this play on the word *freedom*, which betrays the

bourgeois wish to mystify those ('free men'!) it exploits, blackmailing them with freedom so as to keep them in harness, as much as the bourgeoisie's need to *live* its own class rule as the freedom of those it is exploiting. Just as a people that exploits another cannot be free, so a class that *uses* an ideology is its captive too. So when we speak of the class function of an ideology it must be understood that the ruling ideology is indeed the ideology of the ruling class and that the former serves the latter not only in its rule over the exploited class, *but in its own constitution of itself as the ruling class*, by making it accept the lived relation between itself and the world as real and justified.

But, we must go further and ask what becomes of *ideology* in a society in which classes have disappeared. What we have just said allows us to answer this question. If the whole social function of ideology could be summed up cynically as a myth (such as Plato's 'beautiful lies' or the techniques of modern advertising) fabricated and manipulated from the outside by the ruling class to fool those it is exploiting, then ideology would disappear with classes. But as we have seen that even in the case of a class society ideology is active on the ruling class itself and contributes to its moulding, to the modification of its attitudes to adapt it to its real conditions of existence (for example, legal freedom) – it is clear that *ideology (as a system of mass representations) is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence*. If, as Marx said, history is a perpetual transformation of men's conditions of existence, and if this is equally true of a socialist society, then men must be ceaselessly transformed so as to adapt them to these conditions; if this 'adaptation' cannot be left to spontaneity but must be constantly assumed, dominated and controlled, it is in ideology that this demand is expressed, that this distance is measured, that this contradiction is lived and that its resolution is 'activated'. It is in ideology that the classless society *lives* the inadequacy/adequacy of the relation between it and the world, it is in it and by it that it transforms men's 'consciousness', that is, their attitudes and behaviour so as to raise them to the level of their tasks and the conditions of their existence.

In a class society ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is settled to the profit of the ruling class. In a classless society ideology is the relay whereby, and the element in which, the relation between men and their conditions of existence is lived to the profit of all men.

## V

We are now in a position to return to the theme of socialist humanism and to account for the theoretical disparity we observed between a scientific term (socialism) and an

ideological one (humanism).

In its relations with the existing forms of bourgeois or Christian *personal* humanism, socialist personal humanism presents itself as an ideology precisely in the *play on words* that authorizes this meeting. I am far from thinking that this might be the meeting of a cynicism and a naïveté. In the case in point, the play on words is still the index of a *historical reality*, and simultaneously of lived ambiguity, and an expression of the desire to overcome it. When, in the relations between Marxists and everyone else, the former lay stress on a socialist personal humanism, they are simply demonstrating their *will* to bridge the gap that separates them from possible allies, and they are simply anticipating the movement, trusting to future history the task of providing the old words with a new content.

It is this content that matters. For, once again, the themes of Marxist humanism are not, first of all, themes for the use of *others*. The Marxists who develop them necessarily do so *for themselves* before doing so for others. Now we know what these developments are based on: on the new conditions existing in the Soviet Union, on the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat and on the transition to communism.

And this is where everything is at stake. This is how I should pose the question. *To what* in the Soviet Union does the manifest development of the themes of (socialist) personal humanism correspond? Speaking of the idea of man and of humanism in *The German Ideology*, Marx commented that the idea of human nature, or of the essence of man, concealed a *coupled value judgment*, to be precise, the couple human/inhuman; and he wrote: ‘the “inhuman” as much as the “human” is a product of present conditions; it is their negative side’. The couple human/inhuman is the hidden principle of all humanism which is, then, no more than a way of living-sustaining-resolving this contradiction. Bourgeois humanism made man the principle of all theory. This luminous essence of man was the visible counterpart to a shadowy inhumanity. By this part of shade, the content of the human essence, that apparently absolute essence, announced its rebellious birth. The man of freedom-reason denounced the egoistic and divided man of capitalist society. In the two forms of this couple inhuman/human, the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth century lived in ‘rational-liberal’ form, the German left radical intellectuals in ‘communalist’ or ‘communist’ form, the relations between them and their conditions of existence, as a rejection, a demand and a programme.

What about contemporary socialist humanism? It is also a *rejection* and a denunciation: a rejection of all human discrimination, be it racial, political, religious or whatever. It is a rejection of all economic exploitation or political slavery. It is a rejection of war. This rejection is not just a proud proclamation of victory, an exhortation and example addressed to outsiders, to all men oppressed by Imperialism, by its exploitation, its poverty, its slavery, its discriminations and its wars: it is also and primarily turned *inwards*: to the Soviet Union itself. In personal socialist humanism,

the Soviet Union accepts on its own account the supersession of the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, but it also rejects and condemns the 'abuses' of the latter, the aberrant and 'criminal' forms it took during the period of the 'cult of personality'. Socialist humanism, in its internal use, deals with the historical reality of the supersession of the dictatorship of the proletariat and of the 'abusive' forms it took in the U.S.S.R. It deals with a 'dual' reality: not only a reality superseded by the rational *necessity* of the development of the forces of production of socialist relations of production (the dictatorship of the proletariat) – but also a reality which *ought not to have had to be superseded*, that new form of '*non-rational existence of reason*', that part of historical '*unreason*' and of the 'inhuman' that the past of the U.S.S.R. bears within it: terror, repression and dogmatism – precisely what has not yet been completely superseded, in its effects or its misdeeds.

But with this wish we move from the shade to the light, from the inhuman to the human. The communism to which the Soviet Union is committed is a world without economic exploitation, without violence, without discrimination – a world opening up before the Soviets the infinite vistas of progress, of science, of culture, of bread and freedom, of free development – a world that can do without shadows or tragedies. Why then all this stress so deliberately laid on *man*? What need do the Soviets have for an *idea of man*, that is, an idea of themselves, *to help them live their history*? It is difficult here to avoid relating together the necessity to prepare and realize an important historical mutation (the transition to communism, the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the withering-away of the State apparatus, presupposing the creation of new forms of political, economic and cultural organization, corresponding to this transition) on the one hand – and, on the other, the *historical conditions* in which this transition must be put into effect. Now it is obvious that *these conditions* too, bear the characteristic mark of the U.S.S.R.'s past and of its difficulties – not only the mark of the difficulties due to the period of the '*cult of personality*', *but also* the mark of the more distant difficulties characteristic of the '*construction of socialism in one country*', and in addition in a country economically and culturally 'backward' to start with. Among these 'conditions', first place must be given to the 'theoretical' conditions inherited from the past.

The present disproportion of the historical tasks to their conditions explains the recourse to this ideology. In fact, the themes of socialist humanism designate the existence of real problems: *new* historical, economic, political and ideological problems that the Stalinist period kept in the shade, but still produced while producing socialism – problems of the forms of economic, political and cultural *organization* that correspond to the level of development attained by socialism's productive forces; problems of the new form of *individual development* for a new period of history in which the State will no longer take charge, *coercively*, of the leadership or control of the destiny of each individual, in which from now on each man will *objectively* have *the choice*, that is, *the difficult task* of becoming by himself what he is. The themes of socialist humanism (free development of the individual, respect for socialist legality,

dignity of the person, etc.) are the way the Soviets and other socialists are *living* the relation between themselves and these problems, that is, the *conditions* in which they are posed. It is striking to observe that, in conformity with the necessity of their development, in the majority of socialist democracies as in the Soviet Union, problems of politics and ethics have come to the fore and that for their part, Western parties, too, are obsessed with these problems. Now, it is not less striking to see that these problems are occasionally, if not frequently, dealt with *theoretically* by recourse to concepts derived from Marx's early period, from his philosophy of man: the concepts of alienation, fission, fetishism, the total man, etc. However, considered in themselves, these problems are basically problems that, far from calling for a 'philosophy of man', involve the preparation of new forms of *organization* for economic, political and ideological life (including new forms of individual development) in the socialist countries during the phase of the withering-away or supersession of the dictatorship of the proletariat. Why is it that these problems are posed by certain ideologues as a function of the concepts of a *philosophy of man* – instead of being openly, fully and rigorously posed in the economic, political and ideological terms of Marxist theory? Why do so many Marxist philosophers seem to feel the need to appeal to the pre-Marxist ideological concept of *alienation* in order supposedly to think and 'resolve' these concrete historical problems?

We would not observe the temptation of this ideological recourse if it were not in its own way the index of a necessity which cannot nevertheless take shelter in the protection of other, better established, forms of necessity. There can be no doubt that Communists are correct in opposing the economic, social, political and cultural *reality* of socialism to the 'inhumanity' of Imperialism in general; that this contrast is a part of the confrontation and struggle between socialism and imperialism. But it might be equally dangerous to use an ideological concept like humanism, with neither discrimination nor reserve, as if it were a theoretical concept, when it is inevitably charged with associations from the ideological unconsciousness and only too easily blends into themes of petty-bourgeois inspiration (we know that the petty bourgeoisie and its ideology, for which Lenin predicted a fine future, have not yet been buried by History).

Here we are touching on a deeper reason, and one doubtless difficult to express. Within certain limits this recourse to ideology might indeed be envisaged as the substitute for a recourse to theory. Here again we would find the *theoretical conditions* currently inherited by Marxist theory from its past – not just the dogmatism of the Stalinist period, but also, from further back, the heritage of the disastrously opportunist interpretations of the Second International which Lenin fought against throughout his life, but which have neither as yet been buried by History. These conditions have hindered the development which was indispensable if Marxist theory was to acquire precisely those concepts demanded by the new problems: concepts that would have allowed it to pose these problems today in scientific, not ideological terms; that would have allowed it to call things by their names, that is, by the appropriate

Marxist concepts, rather than, as only too often happens, by ideological concepts (alienation) or by concepts without any definite status.

For example, it is regrettable to observe that the concept by which Communists designate an important historical phenomenon in the history of the U.S.S.R. and of the workers' movement: the concept of the 'cult of personality' would be an 'absent', unclassifiable concept in Marxist theory if it were taken as a theoretical concept; it may well describe and condemn a mode of behaviour, and on these grounds, possess a doubly practical value, but, to my knowledge, Marx never regarded a mode of political behaviour as directly assimilable to a historical *category*, that is, to a *concept* from the theory of historical materialism: for if it does designate a reality, it is not its concept. However, everything that has been said of the 'cult of personality' refers exactly to the domain of the *superstructure* and therefore of State organization and ideologies; further it refers largely to *this domain alone*, which we know from Marxist theory possesses a 'relative autonomy' (which explains very simply, in theory, how the socialist *infrastructure* has been able to develop without essential damage during this period of errors affecting the superstructure). Why are existing, known and recognized Marxist concepts not invoked to think and situate this phenomenon, which is in fact described as a mode of behaviour and related to one man's 'psychology', that is, merely *described* but not thought? If one man's 'psychology' could take on this *historical* role, why not pose in Marxist terms the question of the historical conditions of the possibility of this apparent promotion of 'psychology' to the dignity and dimensions of a historical fact? Marxism contains in its principles the wherewithal to pose this problem in terms of theory, and hence the wherewithal to clarify it and help to resolve it.

It is no accident that the two examples I have invoked are the concept of alienation and the concept of the 'cult of personality'. For the concepts of socialist humanism, too (in particular the problems of law and the person), have as their object problems arising in the domain of the superstructure: State organization, political life, ethics, ideologies, etc. And it is impossible to hold back the thought that the recourse to ideology is a short cut there too, a substitute for an insufficient theory. Insufficient, but latent and potential. Such is the role of this temptation of the recourse to ideology; to fill in this absence, this delay, this gap, without recognizing it openly, by making one's need and impatience a theoretical argument, as Engels put it, and by taking the need for a theory for the theory itself. The philosophical humanism which might easily become a threat to us and which shelters behind the unprecedented achievements of socialism itself, is this complement which, in default of theory, is destined to give certain Marxist ideologue the *feeling* of the theory that they lack; a feeling that cannot lay claim to that most precious of all the things Marx gave us – the possibility of scientific knowledge.

That is why, if today socialist humanism is on the agenda, the good reasons for this ideology can in no case serve as a caution against the bad ones, without dragging us into a confusion of ideology and scientific theory.

Marx's philosophical anti-humanism does provide an understanding of the necessity of existing ideologies, including humanism. But at the same time, because it is a critical and revolutionary theory, it also provides an understanding of the tactics to be adopted towards them; whether they should be supported, transformed or combated. And Marxists know that there can be no tactics that do not depend on a strategy – and no strategy that does not depend on theory.

October, 1963

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1. Here I am using 'class humanism' in the sense of Lenin's statement that the October socialist revolution had given power to the working classes, the workers and the poor peasants, and that, *on their behalf*, it had secured conditions of life, action and development that they had never known before: democracy *for* the working classes, dictatorship *over* the oppressors. I am not using 'class humanism' in the sense adopted in Marx's early works, where the proletariat in its 'alienation' represents the human essence itself, whose 'realization' is to be assured by the revolution; this 'religious' conception of the proletariat (the 'universal class', since it is the 'loss of man' in 'revolt against its own loss') was re-adopted by the young Lukács in his *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*.

2. *Die Rheinische Zeitung*, 'The Freedom of the Press', 12 May 1842.

3. Letter to Ruge, September 1843 – an admirable formulation, the key to Marx's early philosophy.

4. *Die Rheinische Zeitung*, 'On the leading article in no. 179 of the *Kölnische Zeitung*', 14 July 1842.

5. *Ibid.*

6. This confluence of Feuerbach and the theoretical crisis in which history had thrown the young German radicals explains their enthusiasm for the author of the *Provisional Theses*, of the *Essence of Christianity* and of the *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*. Indeed, Feuerbach represented the *theoretical* solution to the young intellectuals' theoretical crisis. In his humanism of alienation, he gave them the theoretical concepts that enabled them to think the alienation of the human essence as an indispensable moment in the realization of the human essence, unreason (the irrational *reality* of the State) as a necessary moment in the realization of reason (the idea of the State). It thus enabled them to *think* what they would otherwise have suffered as irrationality itself: the necessary *connexion* between reason and unreason. Of course, this relation remained trapped in a philosophical anthropology, its basis, with this theoretical proviso: the remanipulation of the concept of man, indispensable to think the historical relation between historical reason and unreason. Man ceases to be defined by reason and freedom: he becomes, in his very principle, 'communist', concrete intersubjectivity, love, fraternity, 'species being'.

7. The whole, fashionable, theory of 'reification' depends on a projection of the theory of alienation found in the early texts, particularly the 1844 *Manuscripts*, on to the theory of 'fetishism' in *Capital*. In the 1844 *Manuscripts*, the objectification of the human essence is claimed as the indispensable preliminary to the reappropriation of the human essence by man. Throughout the process of objectification, man only exists in the form of an objectivity in which he meets his own essence in the appearance of a foreign, non-human, essence. This 'objectification' is not called 'reification' even though it is called *inhuman*. Inhumanity is not represented *par excellence* by the model of a 'thing': but sometimes by the model of animality (or even of pre-animality – the man who no longer even has simple animal relations with nature), sometimes by the model of the omnipotence and fascination of transcendence (God, the State) and of money, which is, of course, a 'thing'. In *Capital* the only social relation that is presented in the form of a *thing* (this piece of metal) is



*money*. But the conception of money as a *thing* (that is, the confusion of value with use-value in money) does not correspond to the reality of this ‘thing’: it is not the brutality of a simple ‘thing’ that man is faced with when he is in direct relation with money; it is a *power* (or a *lack* of it) over things and men. An ideology of reification that sees ‘things’ everywhere in human relations confuses in this category ‘thing’ (a category more foreign to Marx cannot be imagined) every social relation, conceived according to the model of a money-thing ideology.

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## A Complementary Note on ‘Real Humanism’

‘A Complementary Note on “Real Humanism”’ first appeared in *La Nouvelle Critique*, March 1965.

The concept of ‘real-humanism’ sustains the argument of an article by Jorge Semprun published in *Clarté*, no. 58 (see *Nouvelle Critique*, no. 164, March 1965). It is a concept borrowed from Marx’s Early Works.

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Just a word or two on the phrase ‘real humanism’.

The specific difference lies in the adjective: *real*. Real-humanism is scientifically defined by its opposition to unreal humanism, ideal(ist), abstract, speculative humanism and so on. This *reference* humanism is simultaneously invoked as a reference and rejected for its abstraction, unreality, etc., by the new real-humanism. So the old humanism is judged by the new as an abstract and illusory humanism. Its illusion is to aim at an unreal object, to have as its content an object which is not the real object.

Real humanism presents itself as the humanism that has as its content not an abstract speculative object, but a real object.

But this definition remains a negative one: it is sufficient to express the rejection of a certain content, but it does not provide the new content as such. The content aimed at by real-humanism is not in the concepts of humanism or ‘real’ as such, but outside these concepts. The adjective *real* is *gestural*; it points out that to find the content of this new humanism you must look in *reality* – in society, the State, etc. So the concept of real-humanism is linked to the concept of humanism as its theoretical reference, but it is opposed to it through its rejection of the latter’s abstract object – and by providing a concrete, real, object. The word *real* plays a dual role. It shows up the idealism and abstraction in the old humanism (negative function of the concept of reality); and at the same time it designates the *external reality* (external to the old humanism) in which the new humanism will find its content (positive function of the concept of reality). However, this positive function of the word ‘real’ is not a positive function of *knowledge*, it is a positive function of *practical gesture*.

What, indeed, is this 'reality' which is to transform the old humanism into real-humanism? It is society. The Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach goes so far as to say that the non-abstract 'man' is 'the ensemble of the social relations'. Now if we take this phrase literally as an adequate definition *it means nothing at all*. Try and give it a literal explication and you will see that there is no way out without recourse to a periphrasis of the following kind: 'If anyone wants to know what reality is, not the reality corresponding adequately to the concept of man, or of humanism, but the reality which is directly at issue in these concepts, it is not an abstract essence but the ensemble of the social relations.' This periphrasis immediately highlights the *inadequacy* of the concept of man to its definition: the ensemble of the social relations. Between these two terms (man/ensemble of the social relations) there is, doubtless, some relation, but it is not legible in the definition, *it is not a relation of definition, not a relation of knowledge*.

But this inadequacy has a meaning, this relation has a meaning: a *practical* meaning. This inadequacy manifestly designates an *action to be achieved*, a *displacement* to be put into effect. It means that to find the reality alluded to by seeking abstract man no longer but real man instead, it is necessary *to turn to society*, and to undertake an analysis of the ensemble of the social relations. In the phrase real-humanism, in my opinion, the concept 'real' is a practical concept, the equivalent of a *signal*, of a notice-board that 'points out' what movement is to be put into effect and in what direction, to what place, must there be *displacement* to reach the real earth rather than the heaven of abstraction. 'The real this way!' We follow this *guide* and we come out into society, the social relations, and the conditions of their real possibility.

But it is then that the shocking paradox appears: once this *displacement* has really been put into effect, once the scientific analysis of this real object has been undertaken, we discover that a knowledge of concrete (real) men, that is, a knowledge of the ensemble of the social relations is only possible on condition that we do completely without the *theoretical services* of the concept of man (in the sense in which it existed in its theoretical claims even before the displacement). In fact, this concept seems to me to be useless from a scientific viewpoint, not because it is abstract! – but because it is not scientific. To think the reality of society, of the ensemble of social relations, we must put into effect a radical *displacement*, not only a spatial displacement (from the abstract to the concrete) but also a conceptual displacement (we change our basic concepts!). The concepts whereby Marx thought reality, which real-humanism pointed out, never ever again introduce as *theoretical* concepts the concepts of man or humanism; but other, quite new concepts, the concepts of mode of production, forces of production, relations of production, superstructure, ideology, etc. This is the paradox: the practical concept that pointed out for us the destination of the displacement has been consumed in the displacement itself, the concept that pointed out for us the site for investigation is from now on absent from the investigation itself.

This is a characteristic phenomenon of the *transitions – breaks* that constitute the advent of a new problematic. At certain moments in the history of ideas we see these *practical concepts* emerge, and typically they are *internally unbalanced* concepts. In one aspect they belong to the old ideological universe which serves as their ‘theoretical’ reference (humanism); but in the other they concern a new domain, pointing out the *displacement* to be put into effect to get to it. In the first aspect they retain a ‘theoretical’ meaning (the meaning in their universe of reference); in the second their only meaning is as a *practical* signal, pointing out a direction and a destination, but without giving an adequate concept of it. We still remain in the domain of the earlier ideology; we are approaching its frontier and a signpost points out to us a beyond, a direction and a destination.’ Cross the frontier and go on in the direction of society and you will find the real.’ The signpost is still standing in the ideological domain, *the message is written in its language*, even if it does use ‘new’ words, even the rejection of ideology is written in ideological language, as we see so strikingly in Feuerbach; the ‘concrete’, the ‘real’, these are the names that the opposition to ideology bears in ideology.

You can stay indefinitely at the frontier line, ceaselessly repeating concrete! concrete! real! real! This is what Feuerbach did, and Feuerbach, too, spoke of society and State, and never stopped talking about real man, man with needs, concrete man, who is merely the ensemble of his developed human needs, of politics and industry. He stayed with the words which in their concreteness itself referred him to the image of man whose *realization* he called for (Feuerbach, too, said that real man is society, in a definition *then adequate* to its concept, since society was for him in each of its historical moments never more than the progressive manifestation of the *human essence*).

Or, on the contrary, you can cross the frontier for good and penetrate into the domain of reality and embark ‘seriously on its study’, as Marx puts it in *The German Ideology*. Then the signal will have played its practical part. It remains in the old domain, in the domain *abandoned* by the very fact of *displacement*. There you are face to face with your real object, obliged to forge the requisite and adequate concepts, to think it, obliged to accept the fact that the old concepts and in particular the concept of real-man or real humanism will not allow you to *think the reality of man*, that to reach this immediacy, which is precisely not an immediacy, it is necessary, as always where knowledge is concerned, to make a long detour. You have abandoned the old domain, the old concepts. Here you are in a new domain, for which new concepts will give you the knowledge. The sign that a real change in locus and problematic has occurred, and that a new adventure is beginning, the adventure of science in development.

So are we condemned to repeat the same experience? Real humanism may today be the *slogan* of a rejection and a programme and thus in the best of cases a *practical* signal, the rejection of an abstract ‘humanism’ which only existed in the discourse and

not in the reality of institutions – and the gesture towards a beyond, a reality which is still *beyond*, which is not yet truly *realized*, but only hoped for, the programme of an aspiration to be brought to life. It is only too clear that profound rejections and authentic wishes, as well as an impatient desire to overcome still unconquered obstacles, are, in their own way, translated in this concept of real humanism. It is also certain that in every epoch of history men must make their own experiments on their own account, and it is no accident that some of them retrace the ‘paths’ taken by their elders and ancestors. It is certainly indispensable that Communists should take seriously the real meaning concealed in this wish, the realities for which this practical concept is an index. It is certainly indispensable that Communists should pass to and fro between the still uncertain, confused and ideological forms in which this wish or some new experiment are expressed – and their own theoretical concepts; that they should, when the need has been absolutely proved, forge new theoretical concepts adequate to the upheavals of practice in our own time.

But we should not forget that the frontier separating ideology from scientific theory was crossed about one hundred and twenty years ago by Marx; that this great undertaking and this great discovery have been recorded in the works and inscribed in the conceptual system of a knowledge whose effects have little by little transformed the face of the earth and its history. We cannot and must not for one instant renounce the benefits of this irreplaceable gain, the benefits of these theoretical resources which far transcend in wealth and potential the use that has so far been made of them. We must not forget that an understanding of what is going on in the world today and the political and ideological interchange indispensable to the broadening and reinforcement of the base of socialism are only possible if, for our part, we do not fall *behind* what Marx gained for us, as far behind as that still uncertain frontier between ideology and science. We can give help to all those who are near to crossing that frontier, but only on condition that we have crossed it ourselves, and have inscribed in our concepts the irreversible result of this change of scene.

For us, the ‘real’ is not a *theoretical slogan*; the real is the real object that exists independently of its knowledge – but which can only be defined by its knowledge. In this second, theoretical, relation, the real is identical to the means of knowing it, the real is its known or to-be-known structure, it is the very object of Marxist theory, the object marked out by the great theoretical discoveries of Marx and Lenin, the immense, living, constantly developing field, in which the events of human history can from now on be mastered by men’s practice, because they will be within their conceptual grasp, their knowledge.

This is what I meant when I demonstrated that real-humanism or socialist humanism may be the object of a recognition or of a misunderstanding, according to the status assigned it in respect to theory; that it can serve as a *practical, ideological slogan* in so far as it is exactly adequate to its function and not confused with a quite different function; that there is no way in which it can abrogate the attributes of a

*theoretical* concept. I also meant that this slogan is not itself its own light, but can at most point out the *place, beyond it*, where light reigns. I meant that a certain *inflation* of this practical, ideological concept might induce Marxist theory to fall behind its own frontiers; and what is more, might even hinder, if not bar, the way to truly *posing*, and hence truly solving, the problems whose existence and urgency it is intended to designate, in its own way. Simply put, the recourse to ethics so deeply inscribed in every humanist ideology may play the part of an imaginary treatment of real problems. *Once known*, these problems are posed in precise terms; they are organizational problems of the forms of economic life, political life and individual life. To pose these problems correctly and to resolve them in reality, they must be called by their names, *their scientific names*. The slogan of humanism has no theoretical value, but it does have value as a practical index: we must get down to the concrete problems themselves, that is, to their knowledge, if we are to produce the historical transformation whose necessity was thought by Marx. We must be careful that in this process no *word*, justified by its practical function, usurps a theoretical function; but that in performing its practical function, it simultaneously disappears from the field of theory.

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