
THE PATHS OF ATHEISM IN MARXISM



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To what extent is the relationship of Marxism to atheism necessary; is it basic and fundamental, or accidental, merely a marriage of convenience?

Further, what is the specific nature of Marxist atheism, for atheism comes in a variety of irreducible forms?

The answer to the first question is that atheism is at the heart of Marxist thought which will become apparent during the course of this paper - the two are inseparable. We shall answer the second question by trying to show how Marxist thought follows along several paths, all of which eventually lead to atheism.

I

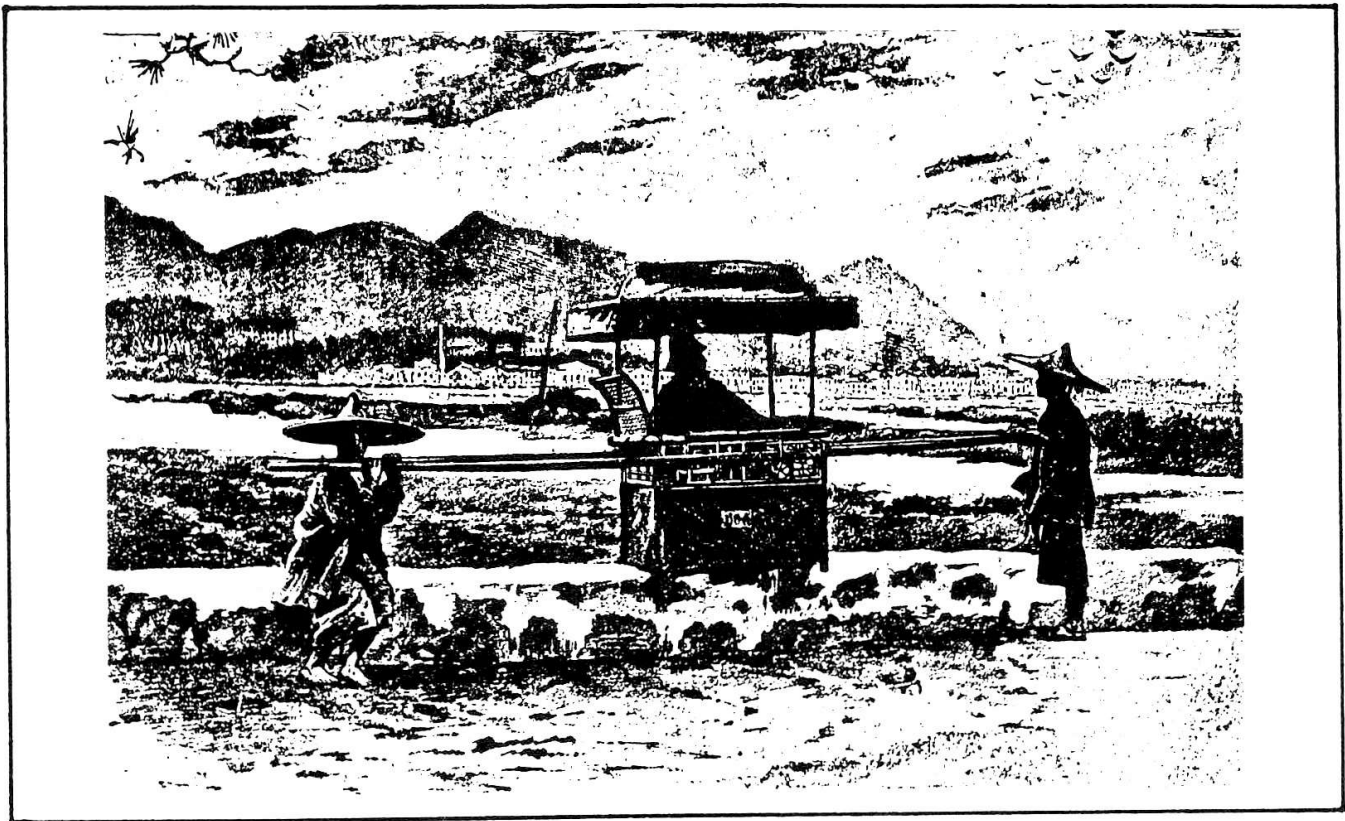
Essentially, Marxism is an ethic, a moral system that defines man's supreme good and proposes the means to attain it. This final end is not presented as something obscured by history and only recently discovered, rather, it is affirmed as that which has always been in violent opposition to all that has existed up to the present. Its intent is to inaugurate a conversion of history by liberating man, uprooting him from all that has alienated him in the past. Thus, it is an ethic of salvation.

This philosophy was born in the Christian West, and it carries its birthmark. It enters into competition with Christianity, setting its own salvation over and against a Christian salvation that has failed.

Pivotal to Marx's thought is the concept of alienation, a concept spelled out in the philosophy of Hegel from which Marx drew all his conclusions.

The term "alienation" comes from "alien", which means "foreign" or "deprived of." Its first usage was juridical, then moral, and, finally, philosophical. One comes across it at several points in J.J. Rousseau's The Social Contract. Here alienated man is seen as alienated from himself, deprived, frustrated, and stripped of that which should be rightfully his as a human being.

This theme is developed further in the writings of the young Hegel. One text is of special significance. It is dedicated to Abraham and to the Jewish religion, of which the Christian religion, in its traditional form, is seen by philosophers as only a variant.¹



*The submission of a slave
to the power and tyranny of a capricious master...*

Abraham, or The Jew, experiences alienation as a result of his submission to the transcendent God. His submission to God is that of a slave to the power and tyranny of a capricious master. His nomadic existence is sign and symbol of his servitude. Uprooted, he wanders from place to place, having no city or country of his own. His misery and dereliction have an ethical dimension: he is morally debased. His misery is in direct proportion to the condition of his dependency.

In contrast to Abraham, Hegel offers the citizen of the Greek City-State. His God is not the tyrant of heaven. On the contrary, he finds his happiness in the possession of gods which are the equal of man -- the gods of the city. In his city, which envelopes and integrates him, he experience harmony, for the city represents wholeness and wholeness is the proper object of man's life. It is possible that Hegel is offering here a romantic elaboration on Rousseau, who, in Book Four, chapter eight of his Civil Religion, extols the benefits of pagan religions over Christianity.

Whatever may be the case with regard to the last point, Hegel does affirm that ancient man did not exist in a condition of alienation; rather, he was in possession of his good, which was a divine good. The ultimate conflict here is between transcendence and immanence. The Hegelian eye views things pantheistically. The Absolute is immanent to man, to the city; this was the source of his happiness and harmony in the past. In opposition to this is Judaic-Christian transcendence, which robs man, tears him away from his true self.

Hegel adds two more important remarks. In his philosophy, God as a transcendent being receives no recognition. The Spirit, the Absolute, is immanent to the people and to the city. It is Volksgeist (Folkspirit). This system, in its maturity, will be presented as immanent to History, and will reach its climax in the History of Imperial States. As a consequence, transcendence is conceived as a representation of man, that is to say, as the creation of his own spirit and imagination, to which, ontologically speaking, there is no corresponding reality. However, what Hegel hints at, and Marx will later proclaim, is that the representation of a transcendent God originates from, and can be explained by, determining factors in the human condition which are psychological, political, social and economic. So it is that Christianity appears at the moment of the Roman world's decay; it is a religion of slaves and not of free men.

Let us note here that such an explanation already presupposes a precise concept of the relationship between God and man.

God, let us say, is the source of all being; He is Supreme Goodness

who communicates to creatures their being and their activity, giving them to be what they are and causing them to do what they do: "In Him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)

In the Hegelian view, on the contrary, the transcendent God is set against man. No doubt this is part of the legacy of Lutheranism, for whom man, who is essentially sinner, is in a relation of opposition to God. That which is God's cannot be man's, and vice-versa. The relationship between them is one of antagonism, of rivalry. One is not able to give to man without taking from God, nor to give to God without subtracting from man. What is more remarkable is that in this view God is presented as the Master confronting his slave, and not as Father.² The evangelical teaching on the Fatherhood of God finds no echo in Hegelian thought: man is the plaything of God, to do with him as He pleases. He is not in any way God's child, the object of His tenderness.

Thus transcendence now appears as the affirmation of happiness, a happiness of a different kind, a happiness to be found in the hereafter, while in this life, man's existence is one of misery and contempt. This idea, implied in Hegel's philosophy, became the property of one of his disciples who, although a critic of Hegel's, brought it to full fruition. Such, in effect, was the sum and substance of Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity which appeared in 1841.

Feuerbach says that if man posits the existence of God, it is because man is miserable; that is to say, man, alienated, stripped bare, cut off from his true self, victim of a split dividing his real (miserable) existence from his ideal existence simply makes representations of (perhaps better to say unrealistically projects), all the goods and qualities of which he is deprived of here below. Heaven and God are representations forged from out of his own unhappiness. In God, then, is to be found a state representing all the goods of which man has been robbed in his real condition. God is a symbol of man's misery. He is also a compensation which impotent man, dependent and enslaved, provides for himself as he imagines a world beyond, that will be contrary to and the antithesis of the one here below, the only reality. God, then, is an escape from unhappiness, a refuge in which man has placed all the frustrated desires of his being.

Feuerbach makes constant use of the vocabulary of divinity and religion. Initially, his thought is not intended to be profane. This point is very characteristic of his atheism. He intends, rather, to affirm that the true God is not God, but Man. It is necessary, then, to

repossess God from God, and to restore Him to his true owner, who is man. In effect, everything which one affirms about God, that he is wise, good and omnipotent, is, in reality, true of man. Certainly it is not true of this or that individual, but of humanity as a whole. If, for example, we total up the sum of all human knowledge, ought we not to say that man's knowledge is infinite?

The task of the philosopher Feuerbach has for its object the unmasking of the true sense of Christianity: Man, and not the transcendent God who is only an image of man's misfortune, is the true divinity. Happiness will consist in man's enjoyment of his own divinity after he has recovered what properly belongs to him.

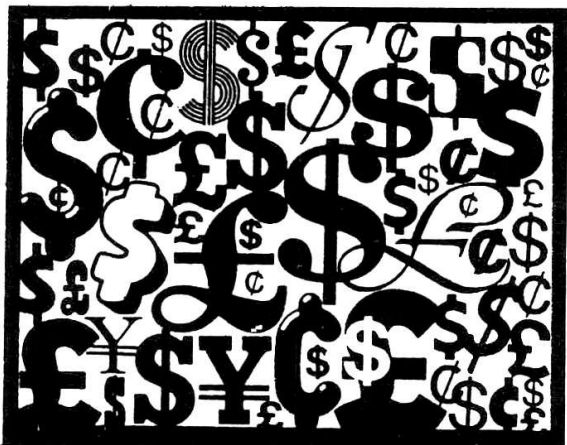
In the meantime, the activity of historical Christianity, and religion in general, is harmful because it leads man to compensate himself for his misfortune and impotence by shoring up his servile condition with illusory consolations. The philosophy of Feuerbach heralds the dawn of a new religion, the Religion of Man, which will allow humanity to gain back what has been stolen from him by the Robber of heaven, who has also frustrated his attempts at repossession.

Feuerbach's explanation of religion has been widely disseminated, most notably through Marxism. Has his relative success been due to his naivete? His philosophy seems to acknowledge the existence of those perfections called "divine attributes," such as goodness, knowledge, etc. But what do these attributes mean? What can be their foundation and explanation in a world without God? Can one still speak of these values without an Absolute on which to base them? Actually, Feuerbach deified man from the start, and it is this which permits him to confer divine perfections on man afterwards. Max Stirner, whose writings greatly impressed the young Marx, remarked in regard to Feuerbach that any subsequent philosophy of atheism ought to be exorcised of all traces of transcendentals.³

The concept of alienation formulated by Feuerbach directly influenced Marx, who would draw from it all possible conclusions. He would repeat the concept that religious alienation can be explained by man's miserable condition. Of what does this misery consist? It can only be an earthly misery. In other words, a profane alienation is the root and cause of religious alienation. Is not the religious world an imaginary world, a representation? Of what, then, does "real" alienation consist which has repercussions on the whole of man's "ideological life," that is, the "represented" or "unreal" life?

Following on Feuerbach, Marx intends to show that Hegelian philosophy itself is a form of religion, which, along with art, ethics, ideas and political institutions, make up the world of "ideology".

In order to know the full significance of alienation and to dispel these ideologies that like clouds of parasites continue to plague him, an anatomy of reality must first be made. This "reality" primarily consists of what Marx calls the "economy". "Economy" is used here to mean the cause of the proliferation of ideas and institutions which keep man in the misery of his divided condition.



In Marx's notion, economy defines a precise object. It essentially consists of all the "relationships of production".

◁ *Economy determines relationship of production.*

With the development of the forces of production - the instruments of work - men assembled for collective work, thereby establishing relationships with each other. It is here, in these relationships springing from basic human work (for man is first of all a worker) that alienation is situated.

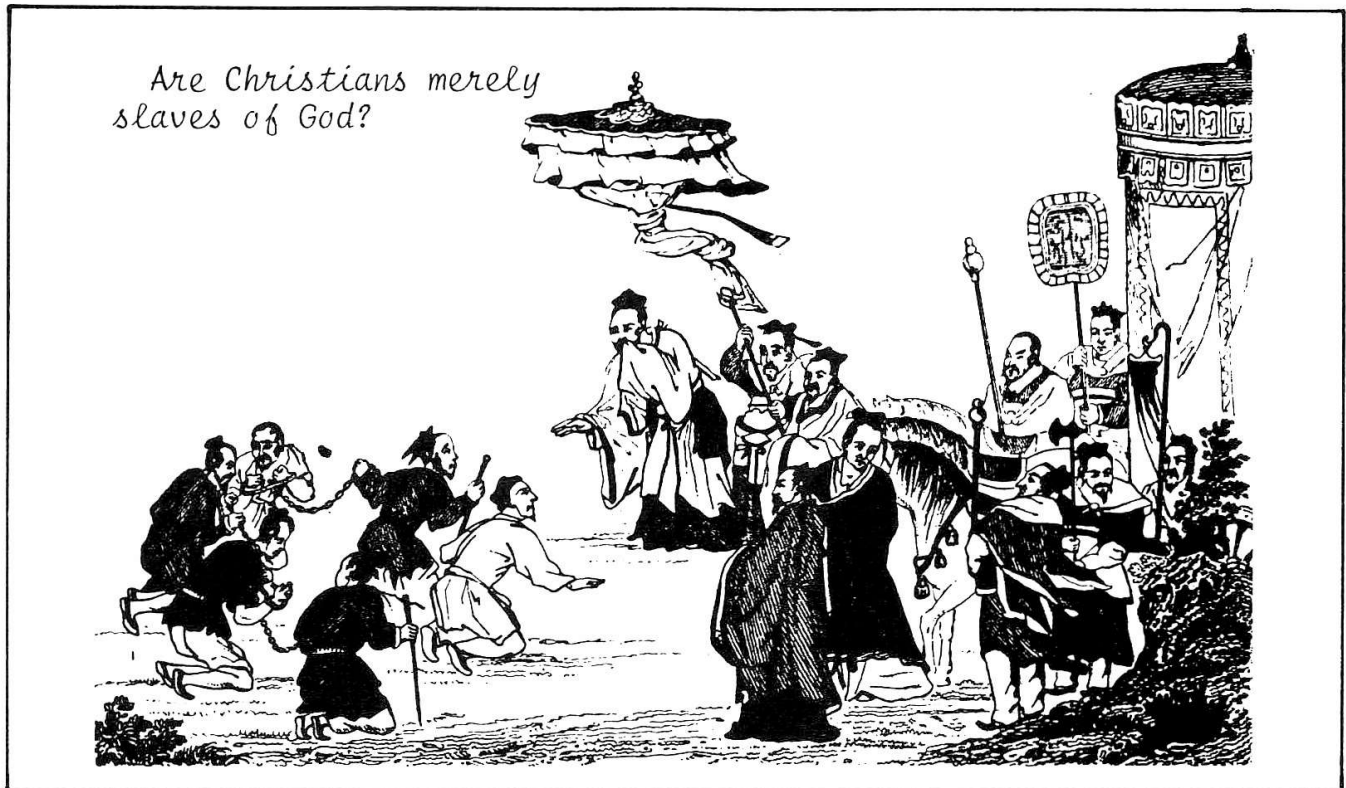
Alienation, in effect, began with the division of labor. At a certain stage in the evolutionary process of mastering nature, some men became the owners of the instruments used by the others for production. From that time on, humanity found itself divided into two factions: owners and those deprived of property. That which determined the alienating relationship, the mother-alienation, need not be sought for in any other place than in the ownership of the means of production, for it was here where human relationships became relationships of exploitation and humanity was divided into masters and slaves.

We now know the true identity of the Master in heaven who is crushing Abraham, the believer, with his arbitrary power. He is only the reflection of the master on earth, the owner, who, in his modern form, is the capitalist.

The religious slave, who sees himself as being dependent on a transcendent God, is, in turn, only a projection of the earthbound slave working for one who exploits him and who enjoys the fruit of his labor.

Moreover, religious ideology also fulfills the "useful" function of serving the interests of owners by "consecrating" their domination. Is it not beneficial, then, for owners to maintain these religious representations of their slaves, so that they will accept with resignation their submission, and, perhaps, even learn to love and venerate their chains? And is it not also true that religion embellishes these chains, transforms them, as it were, into flower chains? Religion is a "fragrance", a narcotic, an opium, in other words, a mystification, an invention which causes one to accept that which ought to be rejected and overturned. It consecrates and firms up a condition of slavery in this world, and it destroys the impetus to revolt in the souls of its slaves.

As a result, Marx concludes, it is not merely a matter of refuting religion on the theoretical level as Feuerbach thought. One can do away with it only by suppressing its causes. The solution is a practical one. In destroying profane alienation, one destroys, with one and the same stroke, religious alienation, the root cause. When man becomes happy here below, he will stop thinking about God. God will become a "useless"



representation. Thus, religion is the pathological expression of an economic evil. In curing this sickness, one cures oneself of the aberrant need for God.

However, the struggle on the level of theory is not to be neglected, for as a reflection of profane alienation, ideological alienation, remains active for as long as it continues to exist. To liberate man, then, one must equally do battle on the ideological front.

It is important to note here that this theory of alienation presupposes a concept of man as determined. It begins with the affirmation of the divinity of man. Such a concept can only draw from the doctrine of immanence consequences of an extreme nature. There is nothing transcendent about man, nothing "foreign" (since what is transcendent is identified as "foreign"). Man is not dependent; rather, he depends only on himself. He is autonomous and totally self-sufficient.

Here, without doubt, we touch upon that which constitutes the heart of Marx's atheistic humanism: the will for man's total autonomy and total self-sufficiency. Man has nothing to receive; there is no one to whom he owes anything; he is in debt only to himself.

Such an autonomy belongs to the moral order. It is an affirmation of the will. Man chooses to be content with himself and with the world, and to find his satisfaction only there. He does not want to have recourse to God. It is this refusal, this rejection of God in the name of a purely earthly happiness, a happiness which cannot be taken away by someone else, that ultimately explains the genesis and existence of the idea of God. If for man happiness resides in the enjoyment of his own divinity, unhappiness can only come from the acknowledgment of a "foreign" divinity.

The Marxist concept of dependence is loaded down with serious ambiguity. Primitive man is dependent on the forces of nature, the slave is dependent on his master, the child is dependent on the adult, and the creature is dependent on the creator. All these dependencies are presented to us as identical, and as being in opposition to man's full development. As a result, the liberation of man is conceived of as a total emancipation from the world, from other men and from God. Free man has broken away from all attachments, and depends only on himself.

In actual fact, it is by diverse ways and analogies that the term "dependence" describes the different relationships which we have mentioned above.

The relationship to nature which dominates and overwhelms man is of the historical - and cultural - order, i.e., provisional. In fact, man possesses in his knowledge and power the necessary resources to reverse this relationship, to obtain dominion over material things, and this in conformity with the demands of his human nature.

Slavery, that economic, social, and, finally, ideological relationship which establishes among human beings relationships of inequality based on violence, constitutes a violation of the natural order of things. It implies a failure to recognize both the nature of the human person, treating him as a thing, and the fundamental equality of men, the subjects of natural rights, which are correctly called human rights. It represents, then, a disorder and an injustice; it perverts the profound order of creation. Christian philosophy teaches that the ultimate source of this perversion is sin.

Another kind of relationship of inequality exists between the child and the adult. The child needs the adult for his education, that is, in order to reach maturity, and to become, in his turn, an adult. This growth is often accompanied by crises of a psychological nature. The affirmation of the emerging adult will clothe itself in an aggressive mode, and will present itself as a rejection of the parents. However, this period of adolescent crisis and revolt does not constitute the relationship between children and parents as such. The child's dependence is for the benefit of the child, who, upon becoming an adult, will then be capable of establishing a relationship of friendship with his parents, of honoring them, and showing gratitude to them.

The theme of father rejection, and the assertion that adulthood is marked by revolt against the father is at the heart of contemporary atheism. It represents only an extrapolation of a psychological crisis on the metaphysical level. The very fact that such an idea can impose itself on the mind, far from being a sign of maturity, indicates that the personality has never succeeded in passing through the infantile or juvenile stage of its development. It has, on the contrary, become frozen around some specific problems. In this regard, it would be of some interest to outline a pathology of intellect in order to determine the content of the concept of maturity.

Finally, the relationship of man's dependence on God, or of the creature on the Creator, belongs properly to the metaphysical order. The creature, in all that he is and in all that he has received, exists and acts for God. Everything comes to him from the Primary Good: it gives him existence, it gives him freedom, and it allows his freedom to

expand fully. Without this initial gift of God, who supports all that is, beings would not exist, freedom and its conquests would not exist.

The mistake of atheistic Marxism is to confuse this metaphysical dependence, which is the basis for the autonomy of the created person, with dependencies of a psychological or sociological order, which oppose the requirements of human nature, thwarting its legitimate needs and deepest postulations. Other people, then, seem to be the obstacles and adversaries which must be overcome in order that each man may assert his proper rights.

Marxist atheism ignores the spiritual maturity found in the recognition of God and in an intimate personal dialogue with him. In place of God, it substitutes this caricature of God who is the Master of the Slave, or the tyrannical Father of the rebellious Adolescent, thereby making this revolt an assertion of human liberty. Spiritual man is thus made to carry the ignominious stigmata of slave and child. On the other hand, the adult is seen as one who rejects this humiliation, and his freedom is presented as a liberation that breaks all bonds whatever they may be.

The argumentation above rests on an initial confusion regarding the different meanings which the concept of dependence, analogical in itself, can take. Such a confusion has a dual explanation. First, it can originate from man's rejection of God, which then, by an improper assimilation and under the title of self-justification, leads him to regard the relationship of creature to creator as a relationship of tyranny. Second, this confusion can come from sociological or psychological experiences, i.e. social exploitation or adolescent revolt, the impact of which will be such that the intellect is hindered from its work of elucidating in an exhaustive manner the idea of dependence, and thereby frustrate its efforts to bring into proper balance these two forces. In lieu of a true and precise analogical concept, one will project an image of the affective order on aspects of reality alien to it. In fact, such a projection, far from opening the intellect to reality, constitutes an obstacle to it and sows confusion. The intensity of the emotion hinders the intellect from exercising its full capacity. It would be most interesting if a philosopher were to make a study of certain decisive and typical human experiences. Such an investigation of the phenomenological order would have the following purpose: at a pre-metaphysical stage, to elaborate on the material needed by the metaphysical intelligence to formulate essential concepts.

Let us also note how much the reasoning which we are analyzing can be seductive to the intelligentsia of developing countries, where the invasion of Western technology leads to the breakup of "traditional" civilizations. We wish to point out concerning these civilizations, that their traditions and customs, which have not been questioned up to now, are the principle vehicles for recognized "values." However, Marxist atheism presents itself as an effective critic of the past as such. It proclaims the superiority of the new. The past, it holds, is marked by alienation and ideology, in short, by a whole ensemble of old ethico-religious concepts, which only serve to bind man in his own impotence, to immobilize him, and at the same time continue to maintain the unchangeable character of the status quo. It posits that up to now man has been the victim of an immense fraud. He must shake off his chains. Defiance and resentment towards everything traditional is de rigueur.

One cannot deny that the analogous confusions which we have pointed out in Marxist reasoning, and which are able to give the illusion of experimental verification, are frequent phenomena. These disorders arise more easily in certain societies, where persons are more dependent upon groups. One thinks, for example, of the patriarchal form of the family, where the father exercises an excessive and lasting guardianship, religiously reenforced thereby impeding psychological and political emancipation in the direction of adulthood. The risk of total rebellion, that which would attack without discernment both grave abuses and authentic values is great.

The intellect forms its ideas by analyzing sensible experience. Analogous concepts reveal to it the more universal aspects of being. From the sensible origin of its ideas one's intellect should easily overcome the obstacles in its path. Its quest is not always successful. It can run aground in its effort to form ideas at a properly intelligible level. What happens then? In place of analogous concepts, it will take hold of imaginative schemes, which in virtue of its need for universality, it will project on the whole of reality. Such "projections" constitute substitutes of metaphysical views; it is these which are the source of a more destructive confusion. This is why we cannot pay too much attention to the outer wrappings of "representations," for these are the compost from which abstract intellect derives its ideas. For the intellectual life, the configuration of the world of images is a decisive factor. It is especially necessary to underline the importance of affectivity and social life in the elaboration of a system of images. And so, we repeat again what we have proposed above: a sociology of imagination would especially provide, we think, many bright gems of clarity.

II

Man is god. Economic alienation is the root cause of religious representation which keeps man in a condition of slavery. It is not enough to denounce such a situation; it is necessary to reverse it. It is, therefore, in practical activity that man will be able to affirm his own autonomy and independence.

The Marxist notion of praxis implies atheism.

"Man is the god of man": his divinity is the product of his own activity. He owes it to no one but himself; that is, he creates it, he constructs it. Man is a product of man. This idea of praxis is taken from a theme of Hegel's philosophy: man is causa sui (the maker of himself).

Therefore, for the Marxist, man is praxis or work. Such is his specific character, that which distinguishes him from other animals. He is a being whose function is to transform nature; to satisfy his own needs not in a natural, spontaneous way, but rather by a transforming activity, in view of which he keeps inventing new instruments. If man is work, activity transforming nature, it follows that he has no other purpose than this transforming activity, and his horizon is restricted to this. The activity of reason itself is at the service of work. By his transforming activity, man appropriates Nature, makes it his own. Furthermore, he himself is not made of any different material apart from Nature: Man also is Nature, he is a "material" being. Nature and praxis make up the two poles of one homogeneous reality.

Being material, man is himself the object of such praxis. This has a double application: transforming nature through industry, transforming society through social praxis (revolutionary). Both nature and society are the object of the transforming activity of praxis.

Furthermore, work is not the achievement of an individual. By its very nature it is collective. If man is work and his work is always social, it follows that man is a social being. He is constituted by his various "social relations", which, fundamentally, are production relations, determined, in turn, by the "forces of production", that is to say by a specific way of tapping natural resources.

Man creates himself by transforming nature, more exactly by changing the means through which he exploits nature. In fact, by changing

the means he changes himself.

Being a product of "circumstances", he is also capable of producing new circumstances, and of acting upon them. Here we refer back to what has been mentioned above with regard to the economic basis of alienation. Man's being is essentially economic: he exhausts his potentialities in the human relations that stem from his work of exploiting nature.

Finally, as we mentioned already, this transforming action of man, who himself is a product of circumstances, can assume a style that while it is always social, is even more directly ordered to social change: such will be the revolutionary praxis.

All activity is praxis which transforms reality: it is homogeneous, both as nature and as society. The same law, therefore, regulates the activity through which man creates himself. Here let us add a word concerning the norms of human action.

There is no need to underline the atheistic character of such a conception of praxis. Man is a product of nature transformed by man; he creates himself by transforming nature. This concept runs counter to and is directly opposed to the doctrine of creation.

The object of work, the products of man satisfy all man's needs. It seems that he does not need anything else. In the world of artificial objects created by himself, man is fully at home; or rather, he will be completely at home after he has taken full possession and command of his world. He is confined to this world alone.

In such a view, one cannot see room for any spiritual, disinterested, contemplative, gratuitous aspirations. However, it is in this way that the notion of person is dealt a mortal blow. Since authentic man is collective man, then, does it not follow that his happiness is reduced to self-indulgence, a narcissism extended to the dimension of collective being and bought and paid for by effort and struggle?

Did Marx personally feel this oppressive aspect of such a doctrine? He states that with communism work will become a desirable good, a free expression of man. Work will then be brought to the level of artistic creation, but never relinquishing its atheistic view of immanence. Marx also states that in and through integral collectivization, man will find himself anew.

The Marxist concept of nature, as noted above, goes against the doctrine of creation. In fact, it leaves no room for a metaphysical outlook on the world at the deepest level where created being is seen as the expression of God. On the contrary, it sees nature standing before technical activity, awaiting man's praxis to manipulate and transform it. Nature is unable to communicate with man.

III

The praxis, which is work and revolutionary action or work on social material, is, therefore, affirming the autonomy of man, the creation of man by man. Does such praxis obey any norms, and, if so, what are these norms? Materialism and its scientific pretensions give us the answer.

While, by definition, any philosophy of materialism certainly implies the denial of God, still it is of some value for us to specify the particular characteristics of Marxist materialism. Let us note here that the formulation of Marxist materialism owes more to Engels and Lenin than to Marx himself.

It is, first of all, an evolutionary materialism. Matter is evolving, progressing, animated by an ascending movement which reaches its summit in the brain of man, who is, as we have seen, a social creation. It is, in fact, through confronting nature in work, that the human brain multiplies sensations, then notions; it is through collective work that it develops language as a tool. To say that "matter evolves" means that it is essentially matter-in-motion. Now the law governing such movement is the law of dialectics, from which change springs forth out of contradiction. Therefore, contradiction is the engine of progress: contradiction is at the heart of reality.

One must add that such matter-in-motion, moved by the dialectic contradiction, can be known perfectly. Hence the term "scientific" materialism. What can be known, therefore, is the total reality, which is nature and society, together with the various laws governing reality. From these principles, a conclusion can be drawn; namely, that Marxism, in its political action, acts from the knowledge it possesses of such laws; therefore, its action is true.

This point is essential. If, in fact, matter is motion, if human ideas reflect only matter, in so far as they also belong to the same

material nature, there could not possibly exist any fixed truth. (Criticizing the "eternal truths" which are said to congeal around the immobilizing thoughts of death, is one of the favourite themes of Marxist literature.)

Since a truth according to Marx does not belong to the theoretical order, it is, of necessity, a practical truth. The proof, for instance, that our ideas of nature are true is demonstrated by their efficacy, like those truths found in scientific technology. The tensile strength of a bridge proves that the calculations of the engineer were correct. A true idea is an idea that has been verified.

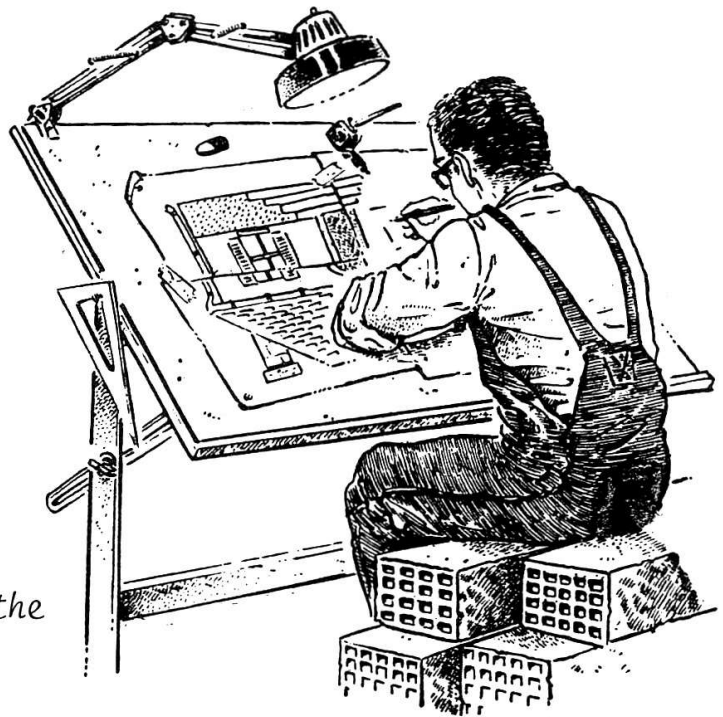
The philosophy of praxis casts into the exterior darkness all bourgeois ideology. It reacts in horror to any idea of the existence of speculative truth. When Marxism speaks of realism in reference to knowledge, and when it states that we can know the reality of things, it does not refer to truth as adequatio rei et intellectus (correspondence between thing and mind), because the concept of praxis excludes all such kinds of truth. Does not this imply that the intelligence finds its objective measure in the intelligibility of the being itself, and that such intelligibility flows, in the long run, from a primary intelligence? But, the Marxist theory of praxis is incompatible with the affirmation of an absolute truth.

It might be helpful to specify further in what sense a truth is a practical truth.

There is a truth in my actions. When I act, I act in conformity to what I love. That primary love is the supreme good of my life, as it is the object of my will, and it provides the measure, the truth of my acts. But the good can be a true or a false good. Is this supreme good towards which I tend authentic? It has to be judged, in its turn, and measured by the supreme truth which belongs to the speculative level. Prudential truth presupposes, in the final analysis, speculative truth. It is, therefore, incompatible with the Marxist notion of praxis.

But there is another type of practical truth: the truth of scientific technology. Here man acts on things to transform them, and imposes on them his own measure. If, in a certain sense, things still can be measured, not any longer in an imperative way, but only as obstacles and resistences to be overcome. The greater the resistance, the greater will be man's triumph. Man dictates what is true to the things he conceives.

Man dictates what is true to the things he conceives.



To go back to our example. Let us say that the bold plan of the engineer is a response to the challenge posed by the resistance of the materials. The difficulties encountered become for him a stimulus in bringing to fruition his technical achievement. Now, in the same way, all truth according to the Marxist conception belongs to this type. An idea is true as long as it can be verified. The criterion of truth is success. The repression of the Hungarian revolution was true, and the proof of such a truth is in the fact that it succeeded in bringing down the rebels.

In this way the Marxist idea of truth is an extrapolation that overflows into the whole field of knowledge and technological truth. The root of such a conception must be found in materialism. What is true in the world of things which are transformed and dominated by man becomes true in any reality, including the human and social reality, because all reality belongs to the same homogeneous material.

Consequently, praxis does not leave any room for ethical transcendent norms. In this sense, Marxism is atheist. In its behaviour and in the way it justifies behaviour, it does not refer to anything but the man who acts.

IV

Is, then, man the "measure of all things"? Are we dealing with a total relativism? If man, on the one hand, is left to his own immanence, on the other hand, his action obeys a criterion, a law which is History. Marxist philosophy, which we have seen as fundamentally atheistic, conceals within itself an idolatry of History.

The dialectic contradiction, as we have said, is at the heart of reality-in-motion, is at the heart of work, and is, therefore, inscribed by relationships of production: men, who transform nature, act in opposition to one another, forming the antagonistic classes of the exploiters and the exploited.

This relationship of domination explains the way in which each period in History appears stratified, receiving its physiognomy from the dominant class. We can say that this (dominant class) is the expression of History.

The dominant class takes power through violence, reaches a climax and then declines. This last phase starts when the exploited class, becoming progressively conscious of being exploited, begins a struggle that will eventuate in its becoming the new dominant class of tomorrow. Each period is, therefore, marked by one class - a class of rulers.

But since the new is also superior to the old, the new class, which is the class of the future, as it becomes more and more conscious of its own interests and organizes itself to defend them, becomes the expression of truth.

The conscious class is the organized class. And when one says organization, one means the organizers. The consciousness of History is summed up by those who organize the class of the future.

Up to the present, such a process always took place in a situation of alienation, the dominant classes were always the minority classes. Due to large scale industrialization and to capitalism, objective conditions are now being created which allow, for the first time in History, the dominant class of tomorrow to be the class of the majority. When this class moves to crush the few remaining exploiters, it will wipe out, suddenly and forever, all relationships of exploitation. Therefore, there is a qualitative difference between the modern proletariat and the

minorities which made a bid for power in the past.

The Proletariat is the class of the future, that is to say the "conscious and organized" Proletariat. Holders of the Proletariat's consciousness are the Proletariat's Organizers, which make up the Party. By such logical steps, we come to the Marxist myth, (which has become mortally ill ever since Khrushchev's report on the Party-truth). Such a myth presupposes the idolatry of History, summed up in the consciousness of the Proletariat. The Party's thought which flows from History is in this way invested with infallibility. From such a perspective one can understand Stalin's formula referring to militants as "engineers of the soul". Such reasoning, obviously, turns out to be an exercise in conjuring. Only the Party, which creates truth, expresses History, which, in turn, simply verifies its "science". Furthermore, truth, which we know to be practical, cannot but be partisan truth. One cannot make, nor can one know, what is true except by taking part in the building up of History, i.e. socialism, working together with those to whom History itself has entrusted the mission of its own creation. In this sense, there is no "objective" truth.

Materialism is, in itself, the source of a concept of "truth" without transcendent foundation, and, in the final analysis, contradictory. It becomes, in the realm of action, amoral. It is, no doubt, the incongruous Marxist notion of truth which gave birth to the myth of History, purveyor of a pseudoabsolute.

But Marxist materialism is a dual source of amorality in so far as it is by nature dialectic. If the real is understood as being homogeneous and belonging to the material world, and if, on the other hand, its inner law is the driving power of contradiction, the result is that human relations, and particularly political actions, do not need to obey any other specific law. Violence, the triumph of the dominant force, will become the law of such action - that violence when put at the service of the Party, will be called "scientific", an authentic expression of the "interests" of History. Consequently, the relationships of violence, which will be said to be the only effective ones, are the only relationships recognized as having no reference to any absolute or transcendent norm. Such is the cold logic of the system, even though there runs throughout Marxism the utopian longing for a world from which all violence will be banned.

Furthermore, the conscience of many communists has been wounded by the extreme consequences of their own doctrine.⁴

In conclusion, then, explaining alienation, divinizing man, defining him as praxis, i.e. collective work and social action, materialism: these main components of the system constitute the many affirmations of atheism in the Marxist philosophy.

If we were to attempt to summarize Marxism in just a few words, we would say that Marxism is a morality of action, a more complete form of the older philosophy of Naturalism where man is presented as the artisan of his own being, i.e. social being. He is in debt to no one but himself for what he is and what he has. He refuses any gifts from God. No norm superior to the truth created by himself should enlighten and guide him in his Promethean task of building up himself by his own efforts, and this is called History.

FOOTNOTES:

1. These texts have been translated under the title: "L'Esprit du Christianisme et son Destin," (The Spirit of Christianity and its Destiny), J. Martin, Paris, 1948.

2. On this subject see our work: French Title: "L'Athéisme du Jeune Marx et ses Origines Hégéliennes," (The Atheism of the Young Marx and Its Hegelian Origins), Paris, 1959, pp. 34-75.

3. For this critique of Stirner, see H. Arvon, Aux Sources de l'Existentialisme Max Stirner Paris, 1954. For the evolution of atheism see our study "L'Athéisme Moderne, Brève Esquisse historique," in Nova et vetera, Geneve, XXXV year, No. 1, Jan. - Mar., 1960, pp. 20-51.

4. See for instance the touching report by Imre Nagy: Un Communisme qui n'oublie pas l'Homme, Tribune libre, 9, Paris, 1957.

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