

## THE REALIZATION OF ETHICALITY THROUGH LABOUR BY KARL MARX

### Introduction

In 1848, Marx and Engels published the manifesto of the Communist Party setting forth what they considered to be a complete theoretical and practical programme to cure the social ills of their time. They developed the thesis that every aspect of society—its social relations, values and beliefs, and indeed the whole institutional fabric—was conditioned and determined by the existing mode of economic production. Marx and Engels suggested strongly that every individual was bound to a particular class in the social strata of the society and that all through history there is record of struggle of one class with another. The struggle between these classes determine the social relations among men. The ruling class, because it controls the means of production, controls also the working class in its whole moral and intellectual life. "According to Marx, law and government, art and literature, science and philosophy : all serve more or less directly the interests of the ruling class."<sup>1</sup>

Marx applied the Hegelian dialectic of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis in the socio-economic life of the society and predicted that there would be no end to class struggle unless the cause of the evil was uprooted. The Bourgeoisie, after they have fought and felled the feudal Lords, would themselves strengthen their position against any ingression by the Proletarians, who in turn would fight and fell the Bourgeoisie and the struggle would continue ad infinitum. "The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself... But not only has the bourgeoisie forged the weapons that bring death to itself; it has also called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class—the proletariat.."<sup>2</sup>

How should this struggle be put to an end? What attitudinal changes are required of the individualistic opposing classes in order to create harmony in the human society? Marx saw an answer to these questions in the Hegelian notion of ethicality.

### Notion of Ethicality According to Hegel

Ethicality according to Hegel is the highest realization of the identity between ego and nature, the explication of which occupies the greater portion of the *Phenomenology of Mind*. Hegel noted a separated identity between ego and nature; I and the other, in all the four levels of consciousness. His whole philosophical effort was to reconcile the one-sided identity and to show the sameness of ego and nature within their difference. "The present standpoint of philosophy is that the idea is known in its necessity, the sides of its diremption, nature and spirit, are each of them recognised as representing the totality of the idea, and not only as being themselves identical but as producing this one identity from themselves; and in this way the identity is recognised as necessary. Nature and the World or History of spirit are the two realities; what exists as actual nature is an image of divine reason, the forms of self-conscious reason are also the forms of nature. The ultimate aim or business of philosophy is to reconcile thought or the notion with reality".<sup>3</sup>

For purposes of this paper the chapter on Lordship and Bondage serves to connect the Hegelian with Marxian notion of ethicality. The level of consciousness that operates at this level is that by which I am conscious of myself as the negation of the other by a process of objectification. The other is regarded as a 'thing' which is useful (or not) depending on the service it renders me. I make a universal out of the other. I never reach the individual, I never reach the individual character or personality of the other. "By serving he cancels in every particular aspect his dependence on and attachment to natural existence, and by his work removes this existence away . . . . Through work and labour, however, this consciousness of the bondsman comes to itself. In the moment which corresponds to desire in the case of the master's consciousness, the aspect of the non-essential relation to the thing seemed to fall to the lot of the servant, since the thing there retained its independence."<sup>4</sup> Indeed this gives rise to social and political control injustices and wars. Sartre suggests that humanity cannot come out of this mess. He writes: "The other is presented in a certain sense as a radical negation of my experience, since he is the one for whom I am not subject but object. Therefore as a subject of knowledge, I try to determine as object the subject who denies my character as subject and who himself determines me as object".<sup>5</sup>

**Ethical Disposition — Solution of Master/Slave Problem**

Many philosophers and sociologists took off from the level of consciousness described by Hegel in the chapter on Lordship and Bondage. Sartre testifies to this in his book *Being and Nothingness*. The whole discipline of sociology in its opinion, research, predictions, surveys, approximations, deals with persons as "things", "utensils", who can be socially controlled and whose actions and whims can be predicted. Man, in the words of Heidegger, becomes violent to other men, because he is all the time reflecting how to maintain himself in the face of his negation by others." Man is a violent one, not aside and alone with other attributes but solely in the sense that in his fundamental violence he uses power against the overpowering".<sup>6</sup>

Hegel on his part, proceeds to the exposition of ethicality to show how the difference between ego and nature, I and the other, can be reconciled. The subjection of the slave by the master vanishes under their mutual recognition that the ego of each has no meaning without the other; the realization that the master *is* the servant within their difference and that the master *is* then a servant to the servant. This is possible under the christian principle of love which means helping the other to realise that he is in you and you in him. "For love implies a distinguishing between two and yet these two are, as a matter of fact, not distinguished from one another. Love, this sense of being outside of myself, is the feeling of consciousness of this identity. My self-consciousness is not in myself but in another, but this other in whom alone I find satisfaction and I am at peace with myself. . . . Thus the two are represented simply by this consciousness of their being outside of themselves and of their identity; and this perception, feeling of unity, is love."<sup>7</sup> The ability to practice this mutuality is the highest act of the spirit. This is meaning for existence. This is the end of Marxian class struggle and social injustice; an end to self alienation of the worker. This is Absolute Unity in the usage of Nicholas Cusanos, to which nothing is opposed in the absolute magnitude, which is the blessed God.<sup>8</sup>

The order of Hegel's ethicality which Marx inaccurately termed abstract, takes its root in the Absolute Mind and derives its authority and direction from it. It is universal and permanent. It applies to every society in whatever stage of development, culture

and custom. "Just as for sense-perception bare 'being' becomes a 'thing' with many properties, so for ethical perception a given act becomes a reality involving many ethical relations... The ethical substance is spirit which is for itself, since it maintains itself by being reflected in the minds of the component individuals... Qua actual substance, the spirit is a Nation, qua concrete consciousness, it is the citizens of the nation. This consciousness has its essential being in simple spirit, and is certain of itself in the actual realization of this spirit in the entire nation".<sup>9</sup>

### **Marx : Labour as Realization of Hegelian Ethicality**

Before entering on an exposition of Marxian application of labour to ethicality, it would be in place to say a word about Feuerbach who was an immediate influence on Marxist materialism. While the early Feuerbach is a nominalist, the late Feuerbach, a materialist, questions the metaphysical presuppositions of Hegel. "The idealist sees also in nature, life and reason, but only as his own life and his own reason. What he saw in nature, that he has imposed himself on nature—what he imposed on nature he took back into himself again".<sup>10</sup>

The late Feuerbach appropriated the Hegelian system and inverted it to suit his materialistic doctrine. Instead of Nature realizing itself in the Absolute Spirit, Feuerbach makes man the highest realization of Nature. The whole idea of God and religion as the realization of ethicality was thrown over-board by Feuerbach. "The task of modern era was the realization and humanization of God—the transformation and dissolution of theology into anthropology".<sup>11</sup> He claims he wants to make the love or charity of Hegel concrete and not an abstract notion. From the development of techno-structure, he shows how the security once thought of as the prerogative of the divine can be given by organizations resultant from techno-structure. "We have shown that the substance and objective of religion is altogether human. We have shown that divine wisdom is human wisdom; that the secretes of theology is anthropology. . . . the necessary turning of history is therefore the open confession that the consciousness of God is nothing else than the consciousness of the species. Homo homini Deus est;—this is the greatest practical principle. . the relations of child and parent, brother and friend—in general of man to man; in short all the moral relations are per se religious."<sup>12</sup>

### The Position of Marx

Influenced by Feuerbach, Marx said, "My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian but is its direct opposite. . . With me on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought. . . . The mystification which dialectics suffers in Hegel's hands, by no means prevent him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner."<sup>13</sup> Equipped with the idealistic general system of Hegel and its material inversion by Feuerbach, Marx goes on to expound his doctrine of labour as the realization of ethicality. First of all Marx criticised Feuerbach for not stretching his material explication far enough to give practical suggestions of how to remove the obstacle to the realization of this ethicality, namely, Capitalism. "Feuerbach. . . . knows no other 'human relationships' 'of man to man' than love and friendship and even idealized. He gives no criticism of the present condition of life. . . . He is compelled to give refuge in the 'higher perception' and the idealistic compensation of the species and thus to relapse into idealism at the very point where the communist materialist sees the necessity, and at the same time the condition of a transformation both of industry and of social structure."<sup>14</sup>

Marx believes that the diremption in society, is due to the system of labour which creates the capitalist and proletariat classes. The social relations resulting from this situation is that the capitalists deprives the workers of all opportunities to obtain psychological satisfaction from their work. The worker is alienated from his own labour in order to increase the accumulation of surplus for the Capitalist. "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole."<sup>15</sup>

The remedy for all these social ills is the advent of Communism. Marx predicts the dictatorship of the Proletariat who would take over the techno-structure. For this a revolution is necessary and the State should help the proletariat to take control of the industries. The reason why Marx wishes the take-over by the Proletariat is that they are in a position to rule with justice, after having been enslaved and underpaid by the capitalists.

The proletariat was a servant who has worked and has known how to love by his labour; he has learned how to overcome selfishness and therefore can direct the administration of the state in its march towards communism.

The dictatorship of the proletariat constitutes the transition to the abolition of classes and the realisation of a classless society where there will be no distinction in terms of the relation to the ownership of production. Then will be fulfilled the communist ethical maxim: from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs. Lenin holds that this labour-oriented ethicality is possible. He writes, "People will gradually become accustomed to observing elementary rules of social intercourse that have been known and repeated for thousands of years in all copy-book maxims. They will become, accustomed to observing them without force, without coercion without sublimation, without the special apparatus for coercion called the State".<sup>16</sup> The loving atmosphere that will hopefully prevail in the communistic society will come about from the fact that kind of private property on the means of production must be abolished, nay, differences between urban and rural areas, manual and intellectual workers. This however is as utopian as the common ownership proposed by Plato for the Guardians of the Greek States. It was tried in 1917 in the Soviet Union but with devastating results.

Yet this was Marxian idea of the realization of ethicality through labour. The economic and social conditions of his time and perhaps the passion for originality, forced him into this interpretation of the Hegelian notion of ethicality. Marx criticised, though wrongly, Hegel's doctrine on labour as being abstract and not concerned with current socio-political facts: "The only labour, which Hegel knows and recognizes is abstractly mental labour."<sup>17</sup> This accusation is far from the truth because for Hegel, "labour, on the other hand is desire restrained, evanescence delayed... This negative mediating agency which is, this activity giving shape, is at the same time the individuality—which now in the work it does is externalized and passes into the condition of permanence."<sup>18</sup>

So far the proposal of Marx has not worked as smoothly as he envisaged. Perhaps it may happen in the future as Stalin said. However communists like Stalin and Mao-tse-Tung had to make some changes in the great marxist ethical maxim. For

Mao-tse-Tung it becomes "from each according to this ability, to each according to his work as well as that of meeting the needs of work."

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#### NOTES

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2. K. Marx and F. Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* ( New York: International Publishers, 1932 ), p. 14.
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4. G. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* ( New York: Humanities Press, 1966 ), p. 238.
5. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* ( New York: Citadel Press, 1965), p. 228.
6. M. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* ( New York: Double day and Co., Inc., 1961 ), p. 126.
7. G. W. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 10.
8. Nicholas Cusanos, *De Docta Ignorantia* Vol. I., p. 14.
9. G. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* p. 467.
10. Feuerbach, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Philosophie* p. 82.
11. Feuerbach, *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*
12. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* p. 270.
13. K. Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1., p. 19
14. K. Marx and F. Engels, *German Ideology*, p. 37.
15. K. Marx, *Capital* ( New York: Modern Library, 1956 ), p. 709.
16. Lenin, " *The State and Revolution* " in Selected Works Vol. II, p. 335.
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18. G. W. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind* p. 238.

Man-tung is because "then each according to his ability, to each according to his work as well as that of meeting the needs of each."

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NOTES

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2. H. Hume and S. M. Hume, *How to Live*, New York, International Publishers, 1927, p. 14.
3. G. W. Hegel, *System of the Philosophy of Mind*, Vol. III, p. 202.
4. G. W. Hegel, *System of the Philosophy of Mind*, New York, International Publishers, 1907, p. 128.
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6. M. Hume, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907, p. 128.
7. G. W. Hegel, *System of the Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. III, p. 19.
8. *Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I, p. 14.
9. G. W. Hegel, *System of the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 202.
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13. H. Hume, *How to Live*, p. 19.
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