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HUMAN NEEDS : THEIR NORMATIVE
AND EMPIRICAL ASPECTS

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KARL MARX AND ERICH FROMM

by

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S U M M A R Y

This thesis argues that the concept of human needs involves both normative and empirical considerations. The valuable contributions to the discussion of human needs made by Karl Marx and Erich Fromm, who both hold normative beliefs and values in common with the writer, are discussed.

Chapter One argues that Marx's account of needs is vital to his view of man and that Marx provides valuable insights, particularly in showing that human values such as self-development, relationships and individual freedom are related to need fulfilment. Marx also rightly stresses the problem of false needs and the fact that political and economic systems must consider real needs. However, a serious weakness remains. Marx does not recognise or explore the conceptual difficulties involved in talking about needs.

Chapter Two stresses the normative nature of the concept of needs. Needs are distinguished from wants, some need statements are examined and Fromm's account of basic needs is discussed. Fromm develops many valuable aspects of Marx's account and contributes new and valuable psychological insights in his discussion of scientific ethics and the relationship between need fulfilment and sanity. However, whilst Fromm answers some interesting empirical questions about needs, there are many philosophical questions which remain to be answered.

Chapter Three argues that needs relate to moral goods and th



needs ought to be fulfilled. A different view expressed by Konrad Lorenz and Robert Ardrey is discussed and criticised. It is concluded that the existence of needs involves obligations for individuals and governments.

Because the concept of needs relates to normative and empirical questions, it is only when the skills of the political scientist, psychologist and philosopher are combined, that a complete and consistent account of needs can be given. Only then can a realistic programme for action on needs be drawn up.



Chapter 1

MARX'S ACCOUNT OF NEEDS

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with needs and the concept of needs. It deals in particular with the accounts of needs to be found in the writings of Karl Marx and Erich Fromm. My reason for concentrating on these writers is that my own account of needs has much in common with these other accounts. I shall be arguing that one's concept of needs is very closely connected with more general normative beliefs and values and that the concept of needs has a special status since it involves both normative and empirical questions. My own account of needs (and Fromm's) owe a great deal to Marx's account, and the values and beliefs on which it is based. It is only fitting then, that after looking briefly at the importance of needs, Marx's account should be examined.

The importance of 'needs'.

It seems to me that the concept of needs is both one of the most over-used and confused concepts in the writings of philosophers, social scientists, psychologists and educationalists. Very often analyses and prescriptions for change turn on the concept of needs without there being any attempt at a discussion of what is actually involved in talk of human needs. The confusion over the concept of needs has led some writers to believe that talk of needs has been rendered useless.

B. Paul Komisar adopts an extreme line in explaining the reasons



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why the ambiguous term 'need' survives and even thrives in educational writing and discussion. Its vagueness and multiplicity of meaning, far from impairing its usefulness, enhances it. For its utterance in a slogan in a suitable setting may further or maintain some educational enterprises. ¹

My purpose, however, is not to show that the concept of needs has lost all usefulness. The importance of the concept has been rightly recognised. It is still an important concept, worthy of philosophical investigation but very often ambiguity and lack of clarity have obscured the discussion of human needs and the conclusions which should follow from an analysis of human needs.

In the course of this thesis, I hope to make clear the reasons why I consider the concept of needs to be important but at this stage a brief summary of these reasons is appropriate.

It cannot be denied that the concept of needs has long been thought to be important by philosophers, political scientists, psychologists and educationalists. I believe that it is in the discussion of human needs that the possibility of a 'marriage' between science and ethics emerges. ² I shall argue that, unlike many of the other concepts talked about by philosophers, a full discussion of the concept of needs must involve empirical and normative considerations and thus the skills of people

¹ B. Paul Komisar "Need' and the Needs-Curriculum", Language and Concepts in Education, edited by B. Otharel Smith and Robert H. Ennis, (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, rev. ed. 1987), p. 41.

² In Chapter Two I discuss Erich Fromm's account of needs, an account developed according to the principles of what Fromm calls "scientific ethics".



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working in the fields mentioned above. The examination of the needs of man looks at man in his entirety - embraces questions of man's physical needs and his 'psychological' needs and shows man's similarities with other members of the animal kingdom and at the same time his differences.

It is the concept of needs which is often at the heart of other important psychological, ethical and political concepts, for example, alienation, sanity and equality, and to be able to talk about these, we need to have a workable account of needs.

If it can be shown that human beings do have certain specifiable needs (as Erich Fromm argues) then enormous consequences concerning social arrangements and the necessity for political change follow. A full account of human needs should be at the heart of a programme for a humane society. Marx criticised nineteenth century capitalism for failing to take account of human needs. Today, examinations of social institutions and suggestions for change should still recognise the importance of human needs.

In the remainder of this chapter, I propose to examine the account of needs to be found in Marx's writings. Marx's account of needs is discussed in the following way: Firstly, I make some preliminary comments on the task of the philosopher writing on Marx. Secondly, I look at what I consider to be Marx's valuable contributions to talk of human needs, stressing the influence of Georg Hegel. Next, I examine some criticisms of Marx's account and finally the overall values of the account are summed up.



Approaching the Problem

A philosopher who was interested in the concept of 'needs' would no doubt look through philosophical journals to see what had been written on the subject. He would probably be looking for the type of article of which Paul Taylor's "'Need' Statements"³ is a good example. This sort of philosophical analysis would probably start by giving some examples of different statements which include reference to 'needs', then attempt to abstract some common meaning or group of meanings attributable to needs. Now Marx never engages in this sort of linguistic analysis.

Some commentators⁴ maintain that Marx is not a philosopher. True, Marx does not fit Plamenatz's⁵ definition of a philosopher, but he certainly uses the tools of the areas cited by Plamenatz, for example, dialectical logic. In any case, fortunately, many philosophers would agree that Plamenatz's definition of philosophy shows little understanding of its nature and versatility. To assert that Marx is not a philosopher is to prejudge what Marx himself wrote as well as the methodology applicable to an examination of his writing. Certainly, since Marx

³ P. W. Taylor, "'Need' Statements," analysis, XIX, (1958), pp. 106-111.

⁴ "Marx did not intend to write a philosophy and would have regarded 'Marxist Philosophy' as a contradiction in terms." Neil McInnes, "Marxist Philosophy," Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, edited by Paul Edwards, (New York: Macmillan), Vol. 5, p. 173.

⁵ Defining a philosopher as "the logician, epistemologist, and the maker of theories about what is called the 'essential nature' of the universe," (Introduction to German Marxism and Russian Communism, (London: Longmans, rev. ed. 1933, p. xix,) John Plamenatz states that Marx "was no philosopher".



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believed that abstract philosophical speculation should never replace the study of observable phenomena, the sense in which his writing could be called philosophical is very specific.⁶

In his writings, Marx attempts to establish values and judgments on the basis of empirical claims and observations (made largely in the fields of economics and history). Marx argued that philosophers should not only interpret the world, their conclusions should lead them to seeing the necessity of change. In fact, for Marx there is no separate distinct activity called philosophy, since philosophy involves abstraction:

Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. In the first method of approach the starting-point is consciousness taken as the living individual; in the second method, which conforms to real life, it is the real living individuals themselves, and consciousness is considered solely as their consciousness. ⁷

Most philosophers would disagree, quite rightly, with Marx's claim that philosophy has no distinct role. But this does not mean that a philosopher cannot write about Marx or assess that part of his thought which involves philosophical questions. Nevertheless, a

⁶ George Lichtheim, in his Marxism - an historical and critical study. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, rev. ed. 1964), suggests that Marx did not abandon philosophy but used it as a weapon for revolution.

⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, rev. ed. 1938), p. 38.



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philosopher writing on Marx's account of needs must approach his subject quite differently and more cautiously than he would if he were dealing with 'pure' philosophical analysis. It is not the task of the philosopher to adjudicate on questions of economics or statistics. Although the philosopher uses this factual information as a basis for his arguments, he usually relies on others - economists and political scientists, for example - to actually collect the facts. The philosopher is primarily concerned with extracting and assessing arguments, judgements and value-systems. But for Marx, values and facts were tightly linked and herein lie the difficulties for the philosopher who is familiar with the problems of going from description to prescription, of breaking the 'is/ought' gap and so on.

In the course of what follows, these difficulties will, hopefully, be resolved. The purpose of this thesis is to present a coherent and convincing account of the concept of needs. It will be seen that there is much valuable material which can be extracted from the account of needs given by Marx but that in itself, it is not sufficient to constitute a comprehensive account of needs. A comprehensive account can be arrived at only by clearing up some of the conceptual problems implicit in the notion of 'needs'. In other words, the valuable insights provided by Marx must be supplemented by a philosophical analysis of the concept of needs.

Marx's Account of Needs

I now propose to look at Marx's account of needs in detail and to bring out what I consider to be Marx's valuable contributions to the

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discussion of human needs.

In looking at what Marx had to say on almost anything, it is impossible to ignore the influence other writers had on him. One has only to glance through the index of authors, names and publications cited by Marx in Capital⁸ to gain some impression of the extent of his scholarship. In order to set the historical scene from which the account of needs emerged, one would have to cover a wide territory. Instead, I shall indicate Marx's borrowings from one of his immediate predecessors, Georg Hegel, since it was Hegel who played a major role in the forming of Marx's account.⁹ In fact the similarity between Hegel's and Marx's accounts of needs is so marked, even, at times, to the extent of wording, that it is more than likely that the latter borrowed from the former. (But, characteristically, we find that although the analysis and questions discussed by Hegel and Marx are very similar, the conclusions reached concerning action are quite different.)

⁸ K. Marx, Capital - A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, edited by F. Engels, (New York: International Publishers, rev. ed. 1968).

⁹ Most of Marx's writing bears the influence of Hegel's writing. Marx had himself been a Hegelian. Although he later subjected Hegel's philosophy to extensive criticism, it never ceased to have an important influence on his own work. As late as 1873, Marx declared himself a "pupil of that mighty thinker". (Ibid., p. 20)



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Marx's references to needs¹⁰ are to be found largely in some of his early work, written around 1844, and in The German Ideology which he wrote in collaboration with Engels. In what follows, Marx's account is discussed under headings which indicate aspects of the account which I believe provide valuable insights into human needs.

1. The discussion of human needs is tied to empirical questions.

Marx's account of needs is vital to his more general accounts of man, society and revolution. It is clear that Marx sees the discussion of needs as important since for him it is closely tied to empirical questions.

Unlike many of his predecessors in the field of political philosophy (and especially Locke), Marx avoids talking of 'rights'. This is a function in part of his distrust of philosophising which can become so abstract as to lose its grounding in reality and existing conditions. Elevating a set of rights as political and ethical ideals could lead to reference to a standard other than the standard of men as they really are.¹¹ Although the concepts of 'needs' and

¹⁰ Of those German words which can be translated by the English 'need', most (for example die Not, das Bedürfnis, der Mangel, der Bedarf, die Bedürftigkeit) can be translated also as 'want'. In English translations of Marx's work the term 'want' sometimes appears where one might expect to see 'need'. For example - Big industry "... made all civilised nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of their wants on the whole world ..." (The German Ideology, p. 77). Whether 'wants' or 'needs' is used depends often on the translation in question. I have not made a distinction between 'need' and 'want' where they appear to mean the same in Marx's writing. Later (Chapter Two pp. 58-63), however, I suggest that there are important differences between the English 'needing' and 'wanting'.

¹¹ Although the dialectical process reveals potential (or men as they are not) in men as they are.



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of 'rights' are different, I believe that Marx uses the former in such a way that it is unnecessary for him to discuss the concept of human 'rights' at any length.¹² 'Needs' is a concept which seems more easily grounded in empirical conditions and Marx always stresses that this was what mattered - not vague, abstract ethical principles.

Marx was familiar with the writings of other philosophers where the notion of 'rights' was very important. But the rights had always been explained in an abstract way rather than by reference to the way man actually lives and behaves. In Lockean philosophy, for instance, man's natural rights derive from Natural Law. Marx wanted to show that he was concerned with man as he actually was and with influences which prevented man from becoming what he could be. Even those needs which were highly sophisticated still showed (to a lesser extent) the empirical nature of the physical needs which could be discovered by an examination of man without reference to abstracts like 'Natural Law' or 'Divine Law'. On the other hand, the concept of 'rights' seems grounded in purely ethical questions and abstract philosophising, and Marx emphasised, particularly in

¹² It may be true, as Arnold S. Kaufman argues (in "Wants, Needs and Liberalism," Inquiry, Vol. 14, 1971, that "because Marx is morally committed to a doctrine of human needs, he is also logically committed to a doctrine of human rights". But I believe it is more useful to examine Marx's account of needs in his own terms rather than in the terminology of liberal philosophy, since the initial premises on which liberalism and Marxism are based are quite different.

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his later writings, that his work was objective and scientific in character.

This empirical, factually based approach is seen clearly in what Marx says about needs. Marx is usually regarded as analysing society in terms of an economic base from which grew a super-structure of ethics, art and so on. Always the initial (economic) premises of any discussion of society should be empirical and confirmable. Now if needs derive from essentially economic categories and if men are happier or better off, or less alienated when needs are fulfilled, it seems that we should work for a political system where maximum need fulfilment is possible.

The problem lies, however, in the steps by which we arrive at the conclusion (above) that "we should work for a political system where maximum need fulfilment is possible". Whilst Marx rightly stressed the influence of historical and economic factors on human needs, he failed to explore fully the normative implications of much of what he said about human needs. But I shall return to this point later when I look more closely at some criticisms of Marx's account.

2. Human needs can be distinguished from animal needs, thereby showing the importance of the former to human society.

Both Marx and Hegel make a distinction between physical needs and more sophisticated needs. The choice of words used by both to describe physical and 'refined' needs often seems rather arbitrary. However, 'physical', 'immediate', or 'natural' needs appear to be those needs of man related to the maintenance of his physical existence.

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Examples of physical needs are food, drink and warmth. These needs are distinguished from the more refined needs which emerge as society develops: when "social conditions tend to multiply and subdivide needs, means, and enjoyments indefinitely - a process which, like the distinction between natural and refined needs, has no qualitative limits - this is luxury".¹³ Hegel's 'refined needs' are a sophisticated sort of 'social need' which Hegel defined as "the conjunction of immediate or natural needs with mental needs arising from ideas ..."¹⁴ In their complexity and different means of satisfaction these needs distinguish men from other animals and their needs:

An animal's needs and its ways and means of satisfying them are both alike restricted in scope. Though man is subject to this restriction too, yet at the same time he evinces his transcendence of it and his universality, first by the multiplication of needs and the means of satisfying them, and secondly by the differentiation and division of concrete needs into single parts and aspects which in turn become different needs, particularized and so more abstract. ¹⁵

Marx distinguishes the two sorts of needs rather differently - by emphasising the difference between production which takes place as a result of physical need and production which is creative: The

¹³ G. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, translated by T. M. Knox, (London: O. U. P. rev. ed. 1957) p. 123.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 127.

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animal which "produces under the domination of immediate physical need ... builds only according to the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs ... "whilst man who only produces freely when free from physical need" ... knows how to produce according to the standard of any species and at all times knows how to apply an intrinsic standard to the object.¹⁵ The 'natural' or 'physical' needs are man's basic requirements for life. They are 'objective' in that they require an object outside themselves to be satisfied:

Hunger is a natural need; it thus requires nature and an object outside itself to be satisfied and quieted. Hunger is the objective need of a body for an object existing outside itself, indispensable to its integration and the expression of its nature. 17

These needs must be fulfilled if human life is to be sustained:

... life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which ... must daily or hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life. 18

Although Marx leaves it open and vague as to what these 'other things' are, we could say that anything is a natural or physical need

¹⁵ From "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts" in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, edited and translated by Lloyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat, (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), pp. 294-295.

¹⁷ Ibid. pp. 325-323.

¹⁸ K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 39.

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it it is needed to physically sustain a man's life. Although these needs are shared by all men, the method of satisfaction will differ according to historical circumstances:

Certain of man's needs pertain to him as a biological creature, although a human manner of satisfying them is different from the animal's satisfaction of its natural needs. Perennial and elementary needs are in fact satisfied in a variety of historically and culturally qualified ways. 'Hunger is hunger, but the hunger that is satisfied by cooked meat eaten with knife and fork differs from hunger that devours raw meat with the help of hands nails and teeth.' 19

The more sophisticated or refined needs form a fairly open ended group. This group comprises those needs which develop once the physical needs described above have been fulfilled. The character of these needs existing at any time or place is determined initially by the modes of production:

The sheep-like or tribal consciousness receives its further development and extension through increased productivity, the increase of needs, and, what is fundamental to both of these, the increase of population. 20

Marx sees the system of needs of any society as an indication of its development. We cannot fulfil needs of the second type until needs of the first type are fulfilled and within this second group there is a continuing sophistication of needs depending on the development of the

19 Graeme Duncan, Marx and Mill, two views of social conflict and social harmony, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 52.

20 K. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts,' (1844) in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 43.



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society in question. We free ourselves from one set of needs to develop another. For example - production is only free and creative when it is free from the basic level of physical need:

The animal produces under the domination of immediate physical need while man produces free of physical need and only genuinely so in freedom from such need ... man reproduces the whole of nature Thus man creates also according to the laws of beauty. 21

What are some of the human needs which society ought to enable men to fulfil but which capitalism suppresses? The principle needs which Marx mentions are the following: self-development; relationships with others; happiness; realisation of being useful to society and to other individuals; education; intellectual development; bodily and mental activity and love. Criticising the asceticism which is encouraged in workers by capitalist political economists Marx says:

Self-denial, the denial of life and of all human needs, is its principal doctrine. The less you eat, drink, buy books, go to the theatre, go dancing, go drinking, think, love, theorize, sing, paint, fence, etc., the more you save and the greater will become the treasure which neither moths nor maggots can consume - your capital. The less you are the less you give expression to your life, and the more you have the greater is your alienated life and the more you store up of your estranged life. 22

Under communism, labour would contribute to all of these needs instead of being the negation of them.

21 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", (1844) in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, pp. 294-5.

22 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", in Early Writings, introduced by Lucio Colletti and translated by Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton, (London: Penguin, 1975), p. 331. See also the passages quoted on page 23 of this chapter.

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Whilst Marx emphasises the ignored needs of the proletariat, I believe he holds that the needs mentioned above are shared by all men. True, the emphasis is usually on the needs of the oppressed, but there are times when Marx admits that the bourgeoisie are also victims of circumstance :

To say that the interests of capital and those of the workers are one and the same is only to say that capital and wage labour are two sides of one and the same relation. The one conditions the other, just as usurer and squanderer condition each other. 23

The rich man is simultaneously the man in need of a totality of vital human expression; he is the man in whom his own realisation exists as inner necessity, as need. 24

If there are needs which are shared by all, one obvious problem arises: is the apparent universality of those needs incompatible with historical determinism or moral relativity? I shall return to this point later when I look at some criticisms of Marx's account.

3. Individuals should be free and have power over their own lives.

Both Hegel and Marx hold that man cannot be free whilst he is bound down by the satisfaction of his 'natural' needs. In a remark that was almost certainly directed against Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Hegel says:

23 K. Marx and F. Engels, "Wage Labour and Capital", Selected Works, Vol. 1, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, rev. ed. 1973), p. 133.

24 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", in Early Writings, introduced by Lucio Colletti, p. 353. See also the passage from "The Holy Family" quoted in this chapter on page 39.



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The idea has been advanced that in respect of his needs man lived in freedom in the so-called 'state of nature' when his needs were supposed to be confined to what are known as the simple necessities of nature, and when he required for their satisfaction only the means which the accidents of nature directly assured to him. 25

This view is false, Hegel claims, since to be confined to mere physical needs plunges the mental into the physical and freedom can exist only when the mind²⁶ is free to reflect upon itself. Freedom for the individual (that is, the mind's ability to reflect upon itself) can only be reached in an advanced stage of the history of the world. In primitive times men could not be free since their lives were governed by physical needs and the maintaining of life. Man can only be free when he has transcended these considerations and civilisation nears its most perfect stage. So, for Hegel, freedom consisted in the mind's reflection upon itself and the creation of new objects, products and so on, which resulted from the mind imposing itself through labour on the natural world. -In fact Hegel saw, in the labouring process, the servant emerging as superior to the master since :

²⁵ G. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, p. 128.

²⁶ 'Geist' usually translated as 'mind', 'spirit' or 'intellect'. "But what is Spirit? It is the one immutably homogeneous Infinite - pure Identity - which in its second phase separates itself from itself and makes this second aspect its own polar opposite, namely as existence for and in Self as contrasted with the Universal." Quoted by Bertrand Russell in History of Western Philosophy, (London: Allen and Unwin, rev. ed. 1937) p. 707.



For the master the inessential consciousness is the object which constitutes the truth of his self-certainty For servitude the essence is the master; thus its truth is the independent consciousness existing for itself. 27

No doubt Marx was (as Soll suggests) very taken with this description of the servant, as the higher realisation of self consciousness but, in general, freedom for Marx meant something less abstract and much more practical. The sort of freedom Marx was talking about when discussing the transcendence of purely physical needs was not compatible with exploitation and oppressive economic systems. In a society where economic advancement takes place at the expense of the oppression of large numbers of individual members of society real freedom is not possible.

4. Only a society which recognises and fulfils human needs can be a real community of people.

Hegel and Marx share a common general attitude to society. Rousseau had described man in the original state of nature as innocent and good. Men's lives were closely bound with nature and they could cooperate at a basic level for their common good. However, when cultivation and private property brought structure to society things began to go wrong. Hegel and Marx, on the other hand, hold that man is capable of realising his potential only in

27 From Phenomenology of the Spirit quoted by Ivan Soll, in An Introduction to Hegel's Metaphysics, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 21. Soll goes on to comment: "This is outrageous; one might analogously argue that the loser of a chess game knew more about chess than the winner because the loser could observe the superior play of the winner, while the winner could observe only the inferior play of the loser."



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society; and both see the development and sophistication of society as a good.

Both Hegel and Marx see man's ability to satisfy his needs as an indication of the level of social development. In Hegel's analysis of civil society he describes three 'moments',²⁸ of which the first is the system of needs, the second the Administration of Justice and the third the Police and Corporations. The system of needs is defined as the "mediation of need and one man's satisfaction through his work and the satisfaction of the needs of all others . . ." ²⁹

Subjective or individual needs attain their objectivity or satisfaction by means of external things and work since they are universalized by their bearing on the needs of others.

Marx stresses that man is a social being who only truly realises himself in community with other people. Needs relate men:

Marx's idea of a rational society implies an order in which it is not the universality of labour but the universal satisfaction of all individual potentialities that constitutes the principle of social organization. He contemplates a society that gives to each not according to his work but his needs. Mankind becomes free only when the material perpetuation of life is a function of the abilities and happiness of associated individuals. ³⁰

²⁸ The German 'moment' literally means 'moment' or 'instant' but in Hegel's writing is equivalent to 'aspect' or 'element'.

²⁹ J. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, p. 126.

³⁰ Herbert Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, (London: Routledge and Megan Paul, rev. ed. 1969, p. 253.



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But capitalism prevents men from relating in a meaningful way. Massive distortions take place in life and reification occurs whereby the relationships of man to himself, man to his employer, man to the product of his work, man to his spouse, to society - all are demeaned to relationships between 'things'. For example, under capitalism marriage which reduces women to economic entities becomes like prostitution - based on material consideration instead of feeling.³¹ The man/woman relationship is thought by Marx to be an indicator of mankind's development:

In this relationship the extent to which the human essence has become nature for man or nature has become the human essence of man is sensuously manifested, reduced to a perceptible fact. From this relationship one can thus judge the entire level of mankind's development. 32

The nature of a society will depend on its level of need fulfilment and development:

The various shaping of material life is, of course, in every case dependent on the needs which are already developed, and the production, as well as the satisfaction, of these needs is an historical process ... 33

31 Marx was of course writing in the nineteenth century, but it is reasonable to expect that he would hold that this attitude lingers on under twentieth century capitalism.

32 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", (1844) in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 303.

33 K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 89.



So as production increases and society develops there is a resultant legitimate increase of needs. Even under communism, there will be needs which must be constantly recognized and fulfilled:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour has vanished ... and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly - only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!' 34

5. The question of human needs is at the centre of other social questions.

This claim is not made by Marx in so many words, but is a reasonable interpretation given what Marx actually says about needs. For example, the question of human needs and capitalism's failure to fulfil them is central to the discussions of class divisions, labour and alienation. Here, again, Marx draws heavily on Hegel's analysis.

According to Hegel, the system of needs is complex and changing. An animal's needs are restricted in scope as are its means of satisfying them and man also is subject to this restriction but at the same time goes beyond it in the sophistication of needs.

One of the reasons for this expansion and multiplication of needs is the legitimate desire for the equality of satisfaction amongst individuals. Work contributes to this sub-division of needs and the means of

³⁴ K. Marx and F. Engels, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", in Marx and Engels - Basic Writings, edited by Lewis S. Feuer, (London: Collins, rev. ed. 1939), p. 160.



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satisfying them. Division of labour comes about. In work men are reciprocally related through their needs, thus self-interest involves contributing to the satisfaction of the needs of others. (Just what these needs are has, of course, to be spelt out more clearly.)

Hegel explains, rather simplistically, the complex of needs as breaking down into groups which depend on what each individual does - that is into three main class divisions - (a) the agricultural class (b) the business class (c) the class of civil servants. Agriculture is compared, by Hegel, to marriage - both bring security, consolidation and the lasting satisfaction of needs. Hegel makes the business class wider than we might expect - it encompasses craftsmanship which satisfies single needs, manufacture which is mass production to satisfy single needs in universal demand, and trade which exchanges needed commodities. The class of civil servants, which is supported by the State, is assigned the vague task of looking after "the universal interests of the community".³⁵

Hegel and Marx both emphasize the importance of class divisions in an analysis of needs but their purposes were quite different. Hegel sees class divisions and the division of labour as bound up with need satisfaction:

The universal and objective element in work, on the other hand, lies in the abstracting process which effects the subdivision of needs and means and thereby *eo ipso* subdivides production and brings about the division of labour. By this division, the work of the individual becomes less complex, and consequently his skill at his section of the job increases, like his output. 36

35 G. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, p. 132.

36 Ibid., p. 129.



22.

Obviously for Hegel, the division of labour had its good points. Marx, however, argued that class divisions and the enforced division of labour prevented the fulfilment of needs since they stopped men from realising their full potential.

Marx's analysis, although it is bound up with a discussion of existing class divisions, is concerned with what might be called 'universal' needs or needs applicable to men irrespective of the situation in which they find themselves. (Although to what extent this account is general enough remains to be seen.)

Hegel does indicate some of the needs which he considers to be common to all men. Like Marx, he saw meaningful unalienated work as a real need of man:

Practical education, acquired through working, consists first in the automatically recurrent need for something to do and in the habit of simply being busy; next, in the strict adaption of one's activity according not only to the nature of the material worked on, but also, and especially, to the pleasure of other workers; and finally, in a habit ... of objective activity and universally recognised aptitudes. 37

Marx later developed at length the theory of alienated labour which turned largely on an account of capitalism's failure to fulfil man's needs. The meaningless drudgery of work under capitalism is contrasted by Marx with meaningful significant work which satisfies man's need for creative activity. Hegel and Marx both see this latter kind of work as one in which human beings can relate to one another

³⁷ G. Hegel, Philosophy of Right, p. 129.



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as human beings since they are satisfying one another's needs.³⁸

In the higher phase of communist society, Marx claims, labour will "become not only a means of life but life's prime want",³⁹ and productive forces will increase with the "all-round development of the individual".⁴⁰

Capitalism reduces men to mere labour-power. No time is left for "education, for intellectual development, for the fulfilling of social functions and for social intercourse, for the free-play of his bodily and mental activity . . ." ⁴¹ This picture is contrasted with a description of the meaningful labour which socialism will bring about:

Suppose we had produced things as human beings: in his production each of us would have twice affirmed himself and the other. (1. In my production I would have objectified my individuality and its particularity, and in the course of the activity I would have enjoyed an individual life; in viewing the object I would have experienced the individual joy of knowing my personality as an objective sensuously perceptible, and indubitable power. (2. In your satisfaction and your use of my product I would have had the direct and conscious satisfaction that my work satisfied a human need, that it objectified human nature, and that it created an object appropriate to the need of another human being. (3. I would have been the

³⁸ However, Hegel's and Marx's ideas as to the sort of political system which would bring this state of affairs about were quite different.

³⁹ K. Marx, "Critique of the Gotha Programme", in Basic Writings edited by Lewis S. Feuer, p. 130. As mentioned before, (p. 8) 'need' can often be substituted for 'want' in Marx's writing. Which is used frequently depends on the translation in question. In the remark quoted, it would be reasonable to assume that 'need' could replace 'want'.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Capital, Vol. I, p. 234.



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m.ediator between you and the species and you would have experienced me as a redintegration of your own nature and a necessary part of yourself; I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love.

(4) In my individual life I would have directly created your life; in my individual activity I would have immediately confirmed and realized my true human and social nature. 42

I have quoted this passage in its entirety because I think it is one of the more explicit statements to be found in Marx's writing of the sort of life, work and relationships which he expected creative, meaningful work under socialism to bring about. This kind of work is not an evil but a real need of man since it expresses his true human potential. What should distinguish human labour from mere animal activity is its intentional, creative aspect:

... what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own that gives a law to his modus operandi 43

Labour under capitalism is thus like animal activity - lacking the creative, intentional quality which would fulfil a deep need of man.

According to Marx, alienation in labour under capitalism has four aspects - man's alienation from his fellow man, his alienation from the process of production, his alienation from the product of his work and his self-alienation. Alienation or estrangement is due to

⁴² "Excerpt Notes" (1844) in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 281.

⁴³ K Marx Capital. Vol. 1, p. 178.



the fact that labour has become something which is divorced from and takes no account of real human needs. The employer is obsessed with making more and more profit and takes no account of the need for the products but only their money value:

... the product of the laborer, stands in no immediate relationship to his need and to his status but is rather determined in both directions through social combinations alien to the laborer ... 44

The amount of work performed by the labourer bears a false relationship to his actual need to survive, according to the theory of surplus value. The process which creates surplus value is one in which:

the capitalist obtains without exchange, without equivalent, free of charge, some of the labor time crystallized in value. And this process is nothing other than the enjoyment by the capitalist of the use value of labor power, which has the quality of being able to produce value much in excess of the equivalent of its own exchange value, its own cost of upkeep, once given a certain level of productivity of labor, without which the capitalist mode of production would be inconceivable. 45

Under this system production becomes more varied and the

44 "Excerpt Notes", in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society. p. 275.

45 Ernest Mandel, The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx, 1843 to Capital, (New York: Monthly Review Press, rev. ed. 1971), p. 83. Mandel quotes Marx's explanation of the way in which exchange takes place between capital and labour: "If a day's labor was required in order to keep a worker alive for a day, capital could not exist, for the day's labor would not be exchanged for its own product and capital would not be able to function as capital and consequently could not survive ... If, however a mere half-day's labor is enough to keep a worker alive during a whole day's labor, then surplus value results automatically ... " (Ibid.)