



producer's output becomes more one-sided:

until it becomes entirely incidental and unessential whether the producer immediately enjoys and needs his product and whether the activity ... is his self-satisfaction and the realization of his natural dispositions and spiritual aims. 43

Labour to the worker has become merely a method for providing the necessities of life but it completely ignores his need to participate in his work, to feel part of the work he is performing,

Thus his life-activity is for him only a means to enable him to exist. He works in order to live. He does not even reckon labour as part of his life, it is rather a sacrifice of his life. 47

Both the products of labour - things and money - come to dominate man instead of the reverse. This state of affairs is contrasted by Marx with primitive conditions under which man produces only sufficient for his immediate needs.

While formerly need determined the extent of production, now production, or rather the owning of the product, determines how far needs can be satisfied. 48

But Marx, unlike Rousseau, does not long to return to a 'golden age'.

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

47 K. Marx and F. Engels, "Wage Labour and Capital", in Selected Works, p. 153.

48 K. Marx, "Excerpt Notes", in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 278.



27.

He merely believes that a system where supply and demand are planned to take account of needs, where producers control the means of production, would not exploit man in the way that capitalism does.

δ. Under capitalism man is subject to alienation and false needs.

It appears that Marx himself did not actually use the terms 'false needs' and 'false consciousness'. Marx spoke of 'inhuman, refined, unnatural and imaginary appetites,' 'egoistic needs,' 'personal wants,' 'social needs,' 'an object which seems to be something needed.' Marcuse and others have grouped these under the title 'false needs'. According to Marcuse, false needs:

are those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice. 49

The experience of false needs is inextricably bound up with the alienation that takes place under capitalism. Under capitalism what is normal, real, human, becomes abnormal, unreal, inhuman.

Normal objectification.

Under normal circumstances, reality for a natural being like man is seen and experienced in separateness from other beings and the world:

A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a natural one and has no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not objective. A being which is not itself an object for

49

Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, (London: Sphere Books, rev. ed. 1970), p. 21.



28.

a third being has no being for its object, that is, is not related objectively, its being is not objective. An unobjective being is a nonentity. 50

The subject-object balance which is necessary if man is to be an integrated being, is part of all of human existence, hunger and perception, for instance:

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. 51

For the eye an object is different than for the ear, and the object of the eye is another object than that of the ear. The peculiarity of each essential capacity is precisely its characteristic essence and thus also the characteristic mode of its objectification, of its objectively actual, living being. Thus man is affirmed in the objective world not only in thought but with all his senses. 52

In a social setting, these processes are humanized and attain special meaning from man's specifically human abilities:

Only through the objectively unfolded wealth of human nature is the wealth of the subjective human sensibility either cultivated or created - a musical ear, an eye for the beauty of form, in short, senses capable of human satisfaction, confirming themselves as essential human capacities. For not only the five senses but also the so-called spiritual and moral senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, human sense and the humanity of the senses come into being only through the existence of their object through nature humanized. 53

⁵⁰ K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts (1844)", in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 326.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 325-326. ⁵² Ibid., p. 309.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 309.



Abnormal objectification

However, under capitalism, the natural process of objectifying becomes unnatural. Instead of having a sense of identity from his relationships with the world around him, man finds massive distortions. He exists as a fragmented being with an alien other self, prey to the artificial needs his society creates. His real needs are ignored and at times the individual himself no longer recognises his real needs:

Light, air, etc. - the simplest animal cleanliness - ceases to be a need for man It is not only human needs which man lacks - even his animal needs cease to exist. 54

Under capitalism, man's functions are reversed - what is human becomes animal, what is animal becomes human:

The result, therefore, is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions - eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in his shelter and finery - while in his human functions he feels only like an animal. The animalistic becomes the human and the human the animalistic.

To be sure, eating, drinking, and procreation are genuine human functions. In abstraction, however, and separated from the remaining sphere of human activities and turned into final and sole ends, they are animal functions. 55

Whilst there are certain needs which man shares with other members of the animal kingdom, there are also needs and activities which are specifically human. In fact, Marx would probably have agreed

54 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", in Early Writings introduced by Lucio Colletti, pp. 359-330.

55 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 292.



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with Erich Fromm that man can be distinguished by his "self-awareness, reason and imagination".⁵⁶ But under capitalism, man is unable to transcend his animal existence and realise his human potential.

Relationships

In the realm of the artificial needs created by capitalism, man is encouraged to exploit his fellow men. He sees them as a means to the satisfaction of his egoistic needs:

Every real or potential need is a weakness which will tempt the fly onto the lime-twig. Universal exploitation of communal human nature. 57

Relationships between people take place in an alien realm of alien powers and needs where:

Each attempts to establish over the other an alien power, in the hope of thereby achieving satisfaction of his own selfish needs. 58

These imaginary needs are insatiable. As with a heavy drinker, the object of desire at first seems to quench the desire, but in fact only aggravates it until it becomes an obsession which obliterates the original thirst or need. Frequently these obsessions involve the desire for wealth or material possessions:

... there is nothing to limit an abstract need - e.g. if the objects of my appetite are not food or poetry, but the multiplication of my money - except the scarcity of the

⁵⁶ Erich Fromm, Man for Himself, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, rev. ed., 1950), p. 40.

⁵⁷ K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", in Early Writings, op.cit., p. 359.

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31.

objects to which it is related. However, abstract appetites are inherently insatiable - i. e. there is nothing in their nature to limit them 'from the inside', in contrast to my mental and bodily appetites 59

Money and religion

Two of the most obvious manifestations of man's alienation and the distortion of his needs are money and religion, both of which would disappear under communism.⁶⁰

Speaking of the elevated place of money under capitalism Marx says:

Subjectively this is manifested partly in the fact that the expansion of production and needs becomes the inventive and ever calculating slave of inhuman, refined, unnatural and imaginary appetites - for private property does not know how to transform crude need into human need. 61

Selling is the practice of alienation As long as man is restrained by religion he can objectify his essence only by making it into an alien, fantastic being. In the same way, when under the sway of egoistic need he can act practically and practically produce objects only by making his products and his activity subordinate to an alien substance and giving them the significance of an alien substance - money. 62

⁵⁹ István Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, (London: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 176.

⁶⁰ According to Marx, labour vouchers would temporarily fulfil some of the previous functions of money under socialism but eventually, under real communism, where each person shares the community's resources according to his needs, money and the old idea of exchange value would be obsolete. Perhaps Marx is overly optimistic about the disappearance of human greed.

⁶¹ K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", in Early Writings, pp. 358-359.

⁶² K. Marx, "On the Jewish Question", Early Writings, p. 241.



Labour

But as we would expect, it is in man's work situation that capitalism's effect on man's needs is most starkly manifested. Far from being the satisfaction of a need, labour is only the means to satisfy needs external to it!

Wage-labour consists of the following elements: (1) the estrangement of labour from its subject, the labourer, and its arbitrariness from his point of view; (2) the estrangement of labour from its object, its arbitrariness vis-a-vis the object; (3) the determination of the labourer by social needs alien to him and which act upon him with compulsive force. He must submit to this force from egoistic need, from necessity; for him the needs of society mean only the satisfaction of his personal wants while for society he is only the slave that satisfies its needs; (4) the labourer regards the maintenance of his individual existence as the aim of his activity; his actual labours serve only as a means to this end. He thus activates his life to acquire the means of life. 63

The products of labour are in no way related to real needs:

Marx understood how a product could precede the need that people feel for it, how it could create this need. Consumption, we are told, is furthered by its objects as a moving spring 64

It is production which determines what will be recognised as needs:

Whereas in the first stage need had been the measure of production, in the second stage production, or rather the possession of produce, became the measure of the extent to which one might satisfy one's needs. 65

63 K. Marx, "James Mill's Elements of Political Economy", in Early Writings, p. 259

64 Bertell Ollman, Alienation - Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, (New York: Cambridge University Press reprinted 1973) p. 147.

65 K. Marx, Ibid., p. 274



33.

Attempts on the part of the individual to realise himself by falling prey to the obsessive desire for material possessions are futile. He merely alienates himself from his fellows and ends up by being possessed by the objects he thought he could possess:

The other person is also a property owner, but of another object which I lack and which I neither can nor want to be without, an object which to me seems to be something needed for the re-integration of my existence and the realization of my nature. 36

Man's alienation and the distortion of his needs can only end with the disappearance of capitalism:

The all-round development of the individual will only cease to be conceived as ideal, as vocation, etc., when the impact of the world which stimulates the real development of the abilities of the individual comes under the control of the individuals themselves, as the communists desire. 37

False Needs - Marcuse's Account.

I should like to look briefly at the account of false needs to be found in the writings of Herbert Marcuse, since Marcuse sees the importance of Marx's account of needs and attempts to develop it and apply it to a more general analysis of alienation under twentieth century capitalism.

Marcuse stresses that needs refer to standards of human potential, that needs are always seen in a social context and that needs can be defined through contradictions:

⁶³ K. Marx, "Excerpt Notes", in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 273.

⁶⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 322.



34.

The judgement of needs and their satisfaction, under the given conditions, involves standards of priority - standards which refer to the optimal development of the individual, of all individuals, under the optimal utilization of the material and intellectual resources available to man. The resources are calculable. 'Truth' and 'falsehood' of needs designate objective conditions to the extent to which the universal satisfaction of vital needs and, beyond it, the progressive alleviation of toil and poverty, are universally valid standards. But as historical standards, they do not only vary according to area and stage of development, they also can be defined only in (greater or lesser) contradiction to the prevailing ones. 68

For Marcuse, the needs imposed on man by society are 'false needs'. Marcuse examines in greater detail than Marx the implications of false needs and false consciousness. Marxist alienation becomes much more complex when applied to the sophisticated capitalism which Marcuse describes.

Not only does the system impose false needs on the individual, but the individual comes to embrace these as if they were his own. However, this cannot hide their repressive character. False needs are:

those which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression . . . Their satisfaction might be most gratifying to the individual, but this happiness is not a condition which has to be maintained and protected if it serves to arrest the development of the ability (his own and others) to recognize the disease of the whole and grasp the chances of curing the disease. The result then is euphoria in unhappiness. Most of the prevailing needs to relax, to have fun, to behave and consume in accordance with the advertisements, to love and hate what others love and hate, belong to this category of false needs. 59

68 Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, p. 22

69 Ibid., pp. 21-22



But Marcuse's account is weakened in several ways. Marcuse confuses the issue by tending to give terms 'biological' and 'instinctual' his own special meaning but then at other times reverting to their standard meaning.

I use the terms 'biological' and 'biology' not in the sense of the scientific discipline, but in order to designate the process and the dimension in which inclinations, behaviour patterns, and aspirations become vital needs which, if not satisfied, would cause dysfunction of the organism ... certain cultural needs can sink down into the biology of man. We could then speak, for example, of the biological need of freedom, or of some aesthetic needs as having taken root in the organic structure of man, in his 'nature' or rather 'second nature'. 70

Moreover, it seems that Marcuse is involved in claiming that there is an objective standard of truth and falsity of needs whilst at the same time holding that all needs except the 'vital' ones are relative. As well, there is confusion as to which needs are enduring or 'vital' and which needs can be changed. Consider the following claims:

The intensity, the satisfaction and even the character of human needs, beyond the biological level, have always been preconditioned. Whether or not the possibility of doing or leaving, enjoying or destroying, possessing or rejecting something is seized as a need depends on whether or not it can be seen as desirable and necessary for the prevailing societal institutions and interests. In this sense, human needs are historical needs and, to the extent to which the society demands the repressive development of the individual, his needs themselves and their claim for satisfaction are subject to over-riding critical standards. 71

⁷ Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation, (London, Penguin, 1969) pp. 10-11.

⁷¹ Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, p. 21 [my emphasis]



Speaking of the radical change which is to transform an inhuman society, Marcuse says it "must reach into a dimension ... in which the vital, imperative needs and satisfactions of man assert themselves. Inasmuch as these needs and satisfaction reproduce a life in servitude, liberation presupposes changes in this biological dimension, that is to say, different instinctual needs, different reactions of the body as well as the mind". 72

The apparent contradictions are never satisfactorily resolved.

I shall later return to this objection to see whether Marx's account can withstand it, when I look at some criticisms of Marx's account.

7. The analysis of needs shows the necessity for revolution.

Revolution or social change of any sort is, for Marx, presupposed by the awareness of capitalism's failure to fulfil needs. The class which is most obviously affected in this respect - the proletariat - must become aware of its condition before it can bring about change. The fact that the analysis of needs shows the necessity for revolution indicates how important the account of human needs is. Marcuse explains this:

In the Marxian conception, socialism is humanism in as much as it organizes the social division of labour, the 'realm of necessity' so as to enable men to satisfy their social and individual needs without exploitation and with a minimum of toil and sacrifice ... the qualitatively new organization of the realm of necessity, upon which the emergence of truly human relationships depends, in turn depends on the existence of a class for which the revolution of human relationships is a vital need. Socialism is humanism in the extent to which this need and goal pre-exist, i. e., socialism as humanism has its historical a priori within capitalist society. 73

72 Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation, pp. 16-17.
[my emphasis]

73 Herbert Marcuse, "Socialist Humanism?" in Socialist Humanism, edited by Erich Fromm, (New York: Anchor Books, rev. ed. 1956), pp. 109-110.

Under capitalism: some men overfill their false needs at the expense of others' real needs since they obtain a monopoly on production. The proletarian shares needs with other people but he cannot satisfy them and in the end this will lead him to see the necessity of revolutionizing his conditions. In The German Ideology where Marx and Engels discuss the needs of the proletariat, it is argued that the situation of the proletarian does not allow him to satisfy the needs arising directly from his 'human nature':

The proletarian, for example, who like every other person is called upon to satisfy his needs and who is not in a position to satisfy even the needs that he has in common with other people, whom the necessity to work a 14-hour day debases to the level of a beast of burden, whom competition degrades to a mere thing, an article of trade, who from his position as a mere productive force, the sole position left to him, is squeezed out by other, more powerful productive forces - this proletarian if only for these reasons is confronted with the real task of revolutionizing his conditions . . . his position does not even allow him to satisfy the needs arising directly from his human nature. 74

Marx seems confident that it is simply a question of making the oppressed aware of their condition and change will automatically follow. This process follows from given realities. Marx criticises Ludwig Feuerbach for treating man as an abstract and for not being aware of man as 'sensuous activity'. In the future man's needs will relate him through sensuous awareness to other men and the world:

⁷⁴ i.e. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 319.

38.

Science is only actual when it proceeds from sense perception in the twofold form of both sensuous awareness and sensuous need, that is, from nature. The whole of history is a preparation for 'man' to become the object of sensuous awareness and for the needs of 'man as man' to become sensuous needs. 75

Some of the problems involved in Marx's optimism concerning the inevitability of change will be examined in what follows where I look at some criticisms of Marx's account of needs.

Criticisms of Marx's Account

So far, Marx's account of needs has been presented without much comment. It now remains to examine the account critically and determine its overall importance. I have grouped the criticisms under several general claims that can be made against the account. I begin with some fairly minor criticisms and lead up to some criticisms which are crucial to Marx's whole account of needs.

(1) Marx fails to consider the possibility of different men having different needs.

Marx is mainly concerned with discussing the condition of the proletariat and the capitalist system's suppression of the proletarian and his needs. Whenever reference is made to a 'need' of the bourgeois employer or capitalist, it is usually implicit that this 'need' is illegitimate since it derives from an immoral system. But surely capitalism has also obscured or neglected the real needs of the bourgeoisie and replaced them with the false 'needs' of acquiring wealth, etc. ? Even

75 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts", (1844) in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 311 -312.

if Marx were to admit that this were so - despite the scant attention given to the ill-effects of capitalism on classes other than the proletariat - presumably Marx could reply that under socialism classes will disappear and therefore the needs of all men would be very nearly identical.

One can defend Marx against this criticism by showing that despite the invective he uses against the bourgeoisie there are times when he recognizes that they too are the victims of circumstance and conditioning:

The possessing class and the proletarian class express the same human alienation. But the former is satisfied with its situation, feels itself well established in it, recognizes this self-alienation as its own power and thus has the appearance of a human existence. The latter feels itself crushed by this self-alienation, sees in it its own importance and the reality of an inhuman situation. It is, to use an expression of Hegel's, 'in the midst of degradation the revolt against degradation', a revolt to which it is forced by the contradiction between its humanity and its situation, which is an open, clear and absolute negation of its humanity. 73

However against Marx one can still argue that he has given no consideration to the possibility of people having different needs not connected with their membership of some economic class but more because of their station in life. Some consideration of the problem of alienation amongst intellectuals might have revealed that they have needs peculiar to their station in life irrespective of the economic system under which they live. That is, intellectuals in different

⁷³ K. Marx, "The Holy Family", translated in Karl Marx, Selected Writings on Sociology and Social Philosophy, edited by T. B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel, reprinted 1953, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 233.

societies may well share similar needs which vary from the needs of other people. Even if society were 'levelled' so that there were no sharp difference between what work was 'important' to society and what work was 'trivial', - even if work could be made creative instead of being sheer drudgery, - surely the problem of alienation and incomplete fulfilment of needs might still exist by virtue of the different jobs performed by individuals? Academics and lighthouse keepers, for example, might have special needs connected with their jobs. It is hard to take literally Marx's naive idea that under socialism there will be time for each man to farm part of the day, fish part of the day, etc.⁷⁷ Even if classes were abolished and labour levelled to a certain extent, men would surely still perform different tasks and this would result in their having problems and needs peculiar to their position.⁷⁸ And would it not be possible to argue that needs can best be fulfilled by a division of labour such that each man does what he is

⁷⁷ "... while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic." (The German Ideology, p. 45). To be fair to Marx, his overall view of labour under socialism is not so romantic.

⁷⁸ Although in this day and age a system somewhere between the realities of work in Marx's day and the ideal he describes can be found. For instance, in some areas of work in Australia job rotation, retraining programmes, staggered hours, shared shifts, etc., would, hopefully, at least lessen the problem of worker's alienation.

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best at? After all, in an ideal situation international trade would operate such that each country would produce goods which it was best able to, and exchange them for other goods that it needed; and Marx appears to accept the value of this.⁷⁹

(2) Can individual needs ever be entirely fulfilled through the fulfilment of social needs?

Marx contrasted present substitutes for the community with the real community which would unite and not divide individuals:

... within the division of labour social relationships take on an independent existence, there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it. 80

Whereas in:

the real community the individuals obtain their freedom in and through their association. 81

Under socialism, individual needs would merge with social needs.

I am in full agreement with Marx when he claims that many needs arise from the individual's intercourse with other people and depend

⁷⁹ "In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes. In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." (K. Marx and F. Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," Basic Writings edited by Lewis S. Feuer, pp. 52-53).

⁸⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 95

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 93.



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on others for their fulfilment,⁸² but it is not so clear that all individuals will be able to fulfil their needs through the satisfaction of socially shared needs. Marx does not attempt in any way to deal with the problem of individuals who do not conform with the majority in this respect. He simply assumes that his account of man's species being is sufficiently all-embracing for this not to be a problem. It is not enough to call the new system of relationships the 'real community' and to suggest that deviating from the norm would be 'unreal'.

Marx makes little attempt to deal with the problem of individuals who transgress written or unwritten social rules. J. S. Mill, on the other hand, devotes much of On Liberty to this issue. Mill criticises the situation where "... conformity is the first thing thought of ... peculiarity of taste, eccentricity of conduct, are shunned equally with crimes ..." ⁸³ Individuality, to the point of eccentricity is to be admired, according to Mill, but he also lays down guidelines for limiting individual behaviour where it conflicts with the rights of others. For Marx, the situation is rather black and white - under capitalism, the interests of individuals are suppressed but under communism individuals will find fulfilment through social channels. The problem of the individual who seeks fulfilment in other than accepted social patterns is never fully dealt with

⁸² Although this is not necessarily the case with some of the physical needs, e. g. food, drink, warmth.

⁸³ J. S. Mill, On Liberty, (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, reprinted, 1925), p. 119.

by Marx. He extols the virtues of individuality and fulfilment of individual potential but stresses that this fulfilment can only be found in the community. The individual is primarily a social being - "the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations."⁸⁴ Whilst one may agree with Marx's argument that the individual is a social being - some attempt must be made to deal with the problem of social 'deviants'.⁸⁵

(3) Insufficient analysis of human nature

Erich Fromm criticises Marx claiming that "he had not sufficiently recognized that human nature has its own needs and laws which are in constant interaction with the economic conditions which shape historical development..."⁸⁶ Fromm himself argues that there are certain specifiable human needs⁸⁷ shared by all people which must be fulfilled if man is to remain sane. Rather than stating that there are needs which all men must fulfil Marx merely hints that this is so and over-emphasizes (according to Fromm) the importance of the economic situation in which man finds himself.

⁸⁴ K. Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" in Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy, p. 285.

⁸⁵ Be they eccentrics or criminals. Attempts have been made to talk about crime and punishment within a Marxian framework. One such attempt is Jeffrie G. Murphy's "Marxism and Retribution", Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 2, No. 3, (Spring 1973). However, Murphy admits that there is a paucity of passages in Marx's own writings dealing with these topics.

⁸⁶ Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, rev. ed. 1968), pp. 262-3.

⁸⁷ These are discussed in my Chapter Two.

But perhaps Marx's preoccupation with economic conditions can be at least understood, if not excused, if we take into account the fact that Marx was writing at a time when the reverse had been the case -- that is, writers prior to Marx had indulged in abstract philosophising about man and his situation in the world. Marx and Engels were amongst the first to realize the significance of economics and history in an analysis of man. Engels later admitted that they had not paid enough attention to factors which influenced the economic basis of society. But apart from this Marx did discuss (if only rarely) needs of human nature, which seem independent of economic circumstances. I have already⁸⁸ mentioned the needs to relate to other human beings, to indulge in social activities, to seek intellectual development, and education. Marx, also made reference to 'human nature' or 'character'. Of individuals, Marx says: "... their needs, consequently their nature and the method of satisfying their needs, connected them with one another ..."⁸⁹ Marx's analysis of 'species being' is quite similar to what Fromm and others mean by 'human nature'. Man's species being is revealed in labour:

The object of labor is thus the objectification of man's species-life: he produces himself not only intellectually, as in consciousness, but also actively in a real sense and sees himself in a world he made. In taking from man the object of his production, alienated labor takes from his species-life his actual and objective existence as a species. 90

88 See pages 14 and 23 of this chapter.

89 K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 493.

90 K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," in Writings of The Young Marx on Philosophy and Society, p. 295.

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This also results in man's alienation from his fellow man. Marx in these references to 'species-life', 'species-being', 'species existence' is using these terms very similarly to the way in which other writers on alienation analyse it as a denial or suppression of human nature. Although Marx's discussion of human nature inevitably involves discussion of labour processes, class divisions and other economic factors, he does discuss man as man - and labour as distinct from animal activity, man's life as distinguished from animal existence - without reference to economics.

We must also remember, as Fromm himself points out, that for Marx there was "no dynamic psychology which he could have applied to the problem of man"⁹¹ at the time in which Marx was writing.

(4) Marx's ethics

An objection which can be made against Marx's account of needs is made more generally against Marxist ethics by Eugene Kamenka. Marxists, Kamenka argues:

attempt to avoid the problems of moral philosophy by appealing to what are allegedly common human demands, rejected only by the pathological. In doing so, the writers in question reduce ethics to politics (make it a matter of 'common consent', or counting heads) and import into ethical discussion the techniques characteristic of the political agitator Marxist moral philosophy or ethical discussion, especially in recent years, has tended to vague proclamations of welfare and satisfaction and self-realization of the individual as goals that all rational people pursue . . . the Marxian appeal to what men really want, to human satisfaction and self-realization, depends on the constant

⁹¹ Erich Fromm, "The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's theory," in Socialist Humanism, edited by Erich Fromm, p. 229.



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use of vague, and morally loaded terms in an attempt to suggest agreement where there is fact disagreement, unanimity where there is conflict. 92

Kamenka also claims that in Marxist writing:

there is the distinction . . . between men's true or rational interests and their apparent, diseased, limited interests which are not to be counted as providing moral norms. Allied with this is the distinction, common in Marxist propaganda, between real 'needs' and mere irrational desires. Morality, in other words, is based on what men want, but we are to include only their rational, real (read approved?) wants. 93

Now there are two ways of answering Kamenka's criticisms.

Firstly, I suspect that many Marxists would say something like the following: Kamenka's claims amount to criticising Marx for not operating in the traditional framework of 'bourgeois', analytic philosophy. Why should Marx use the arguments, the style the language of a method he believes to be totally unenlightening in providing us with a picture of man and his world? Kamenka has missed the point: for Marxists, there are no problems of moral philosophy, since there is no distinct discipline called 'ethics'.

I think there is some merit in making the above retort to Kamenka's arguments but, for the moment, I shall look at Kamenka's arguments on his terms to see if they stand up to examination.

92 Eugene Kamenka, Marxism and Ethics, (New York: Macmillan, 1969), p. 50.

93 Ibid. p. 49.



47.

It seems to me that Kamenka himself actually confuses quite separate concepts. He switches between 'human demands', 'wants', 'interests', 'needs', and 'desires' as if they were one and the same. The difference between wants and genuine needs is in fact quite clearly revealed in what Marx says about needs. Due to circumstances, men are very often not aware of their needs. They may indeed want things which do not fulfil their needs. Marx constantly contrasts the effects of 'whims', 'caprices', 'imaginary appetites and desires' with the satisfaction that comes from the fulfilment of real needs. Capitalist production produces a situation where "needs become the inventive and ever calculating slave of inhuman, refined, unnatural and imaginary appetites . . ." 94

Whilst Kamenka's objection is obscured by his confusion between wants and needs, it seems to me that he is attempting to make three quite separate points:

- (a) it is illegitimate to use the technique of head-counting
in ethics
- (b) Marxist ethics is vague and uses morally loaded terms
- (c) Marxists prejudge ethical issues according to political
approval

(a) Whilst I would agree that it would be odd to argue that moral questions can be settled simply by head-counting, one cannot simply

⁹⁴ K. Marx, "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," in Early Writings, introduced by Lucio Colletti, p. 359.

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dismiss this as a political rather than an ethical technique. Surely the way in which the majority of people respond, believe, etc. is at least relevant to moral questioning, although not the deciding factor. If one is to examine fully the notion of human needs there would be several considerations which at least would throw light on some aspects of the analysis and at most would be influential in one's conclusion. Examples of these considerations would be the way in which most people talk about needs, the type of 'need behaviour' people exhibit, statements made about needs by psychiatrists, political philosophers and others. For a concept like 'needs' it seems these considerations are even more relevant since it would be difficult to argue that needs are in no way empirical. I do not want to suggest that vague appeals to common human sentiment or behaviour are legitimate parts of philosophical argument but that a precise and documented examination of the way in which most people actually appear to think or behave can at least be illuminating.

The above is a fairly mild retort to the claims that head-counting is illegitimate in ethical debates. Marx's answer would be much stronger than mine. Marx would argue that ethical and political discussions are inseparable and that there is therefore no technique which is either specifically ethical or specifically political. Both ethical and political conclusions are reached by observation of what is empirically the case and it is largely the failure to take account of this which has led to the defence of iniquitous systems in the name of 'Reason' or the 'Good'. The answer to the dilemma lies, I believe,

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somewhere between Marx's position and that of those who believe that philosophy should not involve itself in the real world. There are some philosophical techniques which are utilized by other disciplines and which are concerned with conceptual analysis rather than empirical data. But the fact is that many of the ethical concepts essential for Marx's theories are amongst those which 'fall in the middle'. The concept of 'needs' is one such concept since it raises empirical, conceptual and normative questions. For this reason neither Marx's nor Kamenka's view on what constitutes ethics would do justice to the concept of needs since a full discussion would benefit from the techniques of ethical discussion, psychology, politics and economics.

(b) I claimed in answer to the first objection that many of the ethical concepts in Marx's writings are ones which are arrived at by empirical observation but this is not, of course, true of all of Marx's writing. The charge that Marxist ethics uses morally loaded terms is harder to answer. Marx appears to try to have it both ways. He dismisses pure philosophy and stresses that it is an examination of the facts which is important. He claims that this examination of the facts will lead necessarily to change which will end oppression and social inequity. Yet from the start the examination of the facts is often conducted in language which uses moral terms in a loaded and persuasive way. The examination purports to be objective⁹⁵ but often, right from the beginning, instead of the neutral descriptive terms of an objective examination, one finds terms of moral condemnation. Consider the moral

⁹⁵ And of course, sometimes it is: There are long passages in Capital which simply document the facts regarding, for example, child labour.

outrage in the following:

... no eunuch flatters his despot more basely or uses more despicable means to stimulate his dulled capacity for pleasure in order to sneak a favour for himself than does the industrial eunuch - the producer - in order to sneak for himself a few pennies - in order to charm the golden bird out of the pockets of his Christianity beloved neighbours. He puts himself at the service of the other's most depraved fancies, plays the pimp between him and his need, excites in him morbid appetites, lies in wait for each of his weaknesses - all so that he can then demand cash for his services of love. 96

Marx clearly uses ethical terms and makes moral judgements.

At times (particularly in early writings) he even uses the traditional vocabulary of liberal philosophers:

... Marx made many normative judgements of a familiar and typical "liberal" sort. One thinks of, for instance, his opposition to capital punishment, easy divorce laws, and censorship of the press. That he did not always refrain from the explicit language of rights and duties ... is seen in his comment on the deterrence argument for capital punishment, "now what right have you to punish me for the amelioration or intimidation of others?" 97

But can one dismiss philosophising and then put philosophical terms to use in argument? In response to this we could conclude that Marx is guilty of glaring inconsistency. But, more plausibly, we could disagree with Kamenka's claim that Marx attempts to avoid the problems of morality. Marx's remark that communists are not concerned with

⁹⁶ K. Marx, "1844 Manuscripts," quoted by Bertell Ollman in Alienation - Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society, p. 290.

⁹⁷ Donald Van de Veer, "Marx's View of Justice," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. XXX111 (1972-1973), p. 379.

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morality should be interpreted as meaning communists are not concerned with bourgeois morality and its terminology.⁹⁸

Marx himself constantly makes moral judgements. The whole idea that communist society is better than capitalist society derives from many value judgements and ethical arguments. Marx is engaged in ethics⁹⁹ and not simply in 'head-counting'. Admittedly, his opposition to 'abstract philosophising' and 'bourgeois morality' makes him shy away from the traditional techniques of the philosopher and this sometimes results in lack of clarity and detail. But the ethics is there in his writing nevertheless.

(c) The third objection is quite closely bound up with the second, in many ways, since the prejudging of issues is revealed in the language Marx uses. Marx would answer that to prejudge something politically

⁹⁸ In arguing against the view that Marx is not concerned with justice, Donald Van de Veer writes that "Many of Marx's comments can be construed more plausibly not as a rejection of the principle of fair distribution, or distributive justice, but as a rejection of the rhetoric of 'justice', 'equal right', and 'fair distribution', on the tactical basis that such terminology had been commandeered by the bourgeoisie and drained of any content that would make them useful expressions in the spread of socialist doctrines" (Donald Van de Veer, *op. cit.*, p. 339) Van de Veer also points out that "in the Manifesto Marx is very careful to make it clear that communism is not against property generally but against bourgeois property, not against individuality and freedom but against bourgeois individuality and bourgeois freedom . . ." (*Ibid.*)

⁹⁹ Many interpretations have been given of Marx's ethics. Attempts have been made to fit Marx into the traditional philosophical framework. For instance, it is argued by Derek P. H. Allen that the moral judgements in Marx's writings "are utilitarian in all but name". See Derek P. H. Allen, "The Utilitarianism of Marx and Engels," American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 10, 1973, p. 189.



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is also to prejudge it ethically since political and ethical questions cannot be separated. For Marx there is no separate distinct discipline called ethics.

(5) Is there a contradiction involved in the relativist account of needs and the objective superiority of communism?

This objection applies in a much more general sense to Marxist ethics as a whole. It is discussed by Eugene Kamenka in The Ethical Foundations of Marxism and in Marxism and Ethics where Kamenka claims that:

Such ethical relativism, however, seems at best difficult to reconcile with belief in the objective moral superiority of socialism, in the scientific basis (i. e. justification) of proletarian or Communist morality, or in moral progress (a conception which seems to imply underlying or meta-criteria logically independent of the actual historical moralities judged in terms of these criteria) 100

Attempts have been made to deal with this apparent paradox in Marx's writing. For example, Van de Veer argues that Marx's seeming relativist position does not preclude him from holding a kind of absolutist view.¹⁰¹ Van de Veer argues that:

The Marxian emphasis on the fact that moral concepts are historical products is not, then, inconsistent with maintaining that some moral claims are justified and others are not. Aristotelian and Einsteinian physics are

¹⁰⁰ Eugene Kamenka, Marxism and Ethics, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰¹ For example Engels (apparently with Marx's approval) writes: "Not one of them, in the sense of having absolute validity, but certainly that morality which contains the maximum of durable elements is the one which, in the present, represents the overthrow of the present, represents the future - that is, the proletarian". (F. Engels: "Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science," in Basic Writings, edited by Lewis S. Feuer, p. 312.



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both historical products but not, therefore, equally plausible. 102

It may be that our judgements are determined by history, economics and the social situation in which we find ourselves but this does not mean that some 'truths' or 'norms' are not more plausible, defensible or durable than others. This is clearly seen in what Marx says about needs.

Marx's initial premise is always man and the world he lives in and never philosophical abstractions. For Marx, value and needs are linked - they evolve together. In the Marxist conception:

the values we assert, with a simple gesture or by means of complicated philosophical arguments, have their ultimate foundation and natural basis in human needs. There can be no values without corresponding needs. Even an alienated value must be based on a -correspondingly alienated - need. 103

As society develops there is a continual legitimate increase in needs. These are relative in that they depend on the particular social conditions and methods and extent of production for their emergence and fulfilment.

Marx does appear, however, to believe that there are some needs which all men share apart from the mere physical needs. He refers, for instance, to the fact that the proletarian "is not in a position to satisfy even the needs that he has in common with other people ..." 104

102 Donald Van de Veer, Op. cit., p. 331.

103 István Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, pp. 191-192.

104 K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 319.



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elsewhere Marx is more explicit as to what these needs are.

Under capitalism, he argues, the labourer's whole life is determined by the fact that he is regarded as labour-power, solely as a commodity -

Time 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, even the rest time of Sunday (and that in a country of Sabbatar-ians!) - moonshine! 105

Even though Marx does not spell out fully any account of basic needs, we can see, from his account of alienated labour and from his criticisms of capitalism in general, much of what Marx thought of value in human terms. In rare passages like the one I have quoted on page 23 we get some picture of the alternative meaningful work and existence which Marx envisaged.

I would argue that as far as the account of needs is concerned there is no necessary contradiction in the Marxist conception. Socialism would, according to Marx, fulfil firstly man's physical needs and secondly those needs (which Marx never categorized but to which Fromm gives the name "basic needs"), such as the need to relate to others, to engage in meaningful, creative work, to seek education, intellectual development, social fulfilment and so on. But of course, the level of need fulfilment will depend on the progress in production and social progress and, even so, no stage will ever be reached where all the newly acquired legitimate needs will be

105 Capital, Vol. 1, p. 234.

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fulfilled, since the fulfilment of one set of needs will mean the emergence of another. This is because a socialist society will never be static :

Marx never denies that further developments may occur under socialism, and therefore he never believes in a static, absolutizing blue-print for the socialist society. He contends only that, once the distinct political element has been abolished, the disturbing effects of further development could be neutralized in class terms so that no new tension between the content of social life and its form would arise: 'It is only in an order of things in which there are no more classes and class antagonisms that social evolutions will cease to be political revolutions.' 106

These social evolutions will bring a legitimate increase of needs. In fact the "production of new needs is the first historical act". 107

So whilst there are needs which all men share irrespective of their social circumstances - the physical needs and basic needs, the particular needs into which these are channelled and the method and level of fulfilment of these needs will depend on the level of development of the society in question - and to this extent the account is relativistic.

(6) Lack of conceptual analysis

I have argued, and, I hope, shown, that the concept of need is vital to Marx both in his analysis of man and in his analysis of society. It is of particular importance to his discussion of alienation and capitalism. However, any investigation of human needs should have as a

106 Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, (London: Cambridge University Press, rev. ed. 1970), p. 237.

107 K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 40.