

***The Rich Human Being: Marx and the Concept of Real Human
Development***

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With the introduction of the UN Human Development Reports and the development of the Human Development Index (published annually by the UNDP since 1990), much-needed attention was directed to measures specifically related to the welfare of human beings rather than to statistics on income and production. In particular, levels of health and education were added to income measures as indicators of the relative ability of particular societies to provide people with an environment in which they could develop their potential. And, the results of these measures demonstrated that societies such as Cuba, Kerala and Costa Rica rank much more highly in providing these conditions than states with comparable income levels. In this respect, here (as in the case of an earlier emphasis upon 'basic needs') the focus shifted from economic growth as such to human beings.

Yet, the Human Development Index (HDI) is an example of a model which is impoverished relative to the theory which underlies it. The Human Development Reports draw upon the work of Amartya Sen--- in particular, his emphasis upon the development of human capabilities as the condition for people to function in many ways and to take advantage of opportunities for well-being (Sen, 1992:40). The HDI, however, does not attempt to measure human capability as such but primarily tells us

about the effect of government priorities for expenditures. Thus, while statistical measures of characteristics such as health, education, security and human rights may identify preconditions for the ability of people to develop, in themselves they serve only as proxies for the potential growth of capabilities and do not demonstrate the realisation of that potential. Neither do these studies focus closely upon the precise process by which human capabilities develop.

Marx and Human Capacity

Emphasis upon both the development of human capability and the process by which this occurs, though, was always at the core of Marx's perspective. Right from the outset of his work, he rejected the preoccupations of the political economists of his time and envisioned a 'rich human being'—one who has developed his capacities and capabilities to the point where he is able 'to take gratification in a many-sided way'--- 'the *rich man profoundly endowed with all the senses*' (Marx, 1844b: 302). 'In place of the *wealth and poverty* of political economy,' the Young Marx proposed, 'come the *rich human being* and *rich human need*. The *rich human being* is simultaneously the human being *in need of* a totality of human manifestations of life-- - the man in whom his own realisation exists as an inner necessity, as *need* (Marx, 1844b: 304).

It was not only the Young Marx, however, who spoke so eloquently about rich human beings. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx returned explicitly to the conception of human wealth that he had articulated earlier. "In fact,' he asked, 'when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange'

(Marx, 1973: 488)? In envisioning a rich human being--- ‘as rich as possible in needs, because rich in qualities and relations--- ... as the most total and universal possible social product’, Marx (1973: 409) revealed his understanding that real wealth is the development of human capacity. And, this concept of capacity involved more than simply development of ‘capabilities of production’; it encompasses as well the development of ‘the capabilities as well as means of consumption’ because the development of the ability to enjoy is ‘the development of an individual potential’ (Marx, 1973: 711).

For Marx, in short, there was no contradiction between saying, on the one hand, that ‘real wealth is the developed productive power of all individuals’ and, on the other, that ‘regarded *materially*, wealth consists only in the manifold variety of needs’ (Marx, 1973: 527, 708). Rather than thinking of a being with simple needs and simple productive powers, Marx looked to the ‘development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption’ (Marx, 1973: 325).

This is what Marx’s conception of communism was all about--- the creation of a society which removes all obstacles to the full development of human beings. He looked ahead to that society of associated producers, where each individual is able to develop his full potential--- i.e., the ‘absolute working- out of his creative potentialities,’ the ‘complete working out of the human content,’ the ‘development of all human powers as such the end in itself’ (Marx, 1973: 488, 541, 708). In communist society, the productive forces would have ‘increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly’ (Marx, 1875: 24). The result, in short, would be the production of rich human beings. ‘What is the aim of the Communists,’ Frederick Engels asked in a draft for the Communist Manifesto? He answered, ‘To organise society in such a way that

every member of it can develop and use all his capabilities and powers in complete freedom and without thereby infringing the basic conditions of this society.’ In the final draft of the Manifesto, Marx presented this goal as necessarily indivisible--- as an ‘association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.’

Production of Human Capacity as a Labour Process

But, how does this development of human capacity occur? Marx had one consistent answer. Human beings develop through all their activities. As the French Marxist Lucien Sève (1978: 304, 313) commented, ‘Every developed personality appears to us straight away as *an enormous accumulation of the most varied acts through time*’, and those acts play a central role in producing human ‘capacities’--- ‘the ensemble of “actual potentialities”, innate or acquired, to carry out any act whatever and whatever its level.’

Both within an organised labour process as well as away from such a process, people develop their capacities. ‘It goes without saying,’ Marx (1973: 712) commented, ‘that direct labour time itself cannot remain in the abstract antithesis to free time in which it appears from the perspective of bourgeois economy.’ ‘Time for education, for intellectual development, for the fulfillment of social functions, for social intercourse, for the free play of the vital forces of his body and his mind’ is time when people are engaged in *different* kinds of production (Marx, 1977: 375). ‘Every kind of consumption,’ Marx pointed out, ‘in one way or another produces human beings in some particular aspect;’ thus, when ‘attending lectures, educating his children, developing his taste, etc,’ the worker expands his capacities in different dimensions (Marx, 1973: 90-1, 287; Lebowitz, 2003a: 66-72). In short, those who

have this opportunity to develop their capacities differently transform themselves and enter 'into the direct production process as this different subject.' From this standpoint, free time can be regarded as 'the production of fixed capital, this fixed capital being man himself' (Marx, 1973: 712).

People also produce themselves, however, when the development of their capacities is not their preconceived goal. 'The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change'--- here is the essence of Marx's view of 'the self-creation of man as a process', an understanding he drew initially from Hegel but which always remained central to his perspective (Lebowitz, 2003a: 178-81). Marx was most clear on this point when talking about the struggles of workers against capital and how this revolutionary practice transforms 'circumstances and men', expanding their capabilities and making them fit to create a new world (Lebowitz, 2003a: 180-3). His point, though, was not at all limited to the process of struggle. In the very act of producing, Marx noted in the *Grundrisse*, 'the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and new ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language' (Marx, 1973: 494). The worker as outcome of his own labour, indeed, enters into Marx's discussion in *Capital* of the labour process--- there the worker 'acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature' (Marx, 1977: 283).

In short, every act of production, every human activity, has as its result a joint product--- both the change in the object of labour and the change in the labourer herself. Of course, there are obvious differences between a labour process in which development of human potential is the goal and one in which changes in human beings appear as a residual effect of the process of capitalist reproduction. The social

relations characteristic of the labour process necessarily shape the changes in the capacity of the producers. Thus, in capitalist production, human capacity develops as an unintended consequence, a joint product, of capital's attempt to drive beyond all barriers to its growth. The 'ceaseless striving' of capital to grow, Marx (1973: 325) argued, is why, compared to its predecessors, the rule of capital 'creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality.' The daily activity of people in pre-capitalist societies--- 'the traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life' restricted the expansion of human capacities. Capital's civilising mission, thus, was to destroy these barriers to human development:

It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces (Marx, 1973: 410).

Similarly, capital creates the material elements for expanded human capacity insofar as it transforms the existing mode of production into one appropriate to its needs. New forms of cooperation among producers introduced by capital provide conditions in which the worker 'strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species' (Marx, 1977: 447). Further, with development of large-scale industry, capital's need for 'the fitness of the worker for the maximum number of different kinds of labour' provides historical conditions for the emergence of 'the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn' (Marx, 1977: 618). Indeed, the capitalist drive for surplus value 'spurs on the development of society's productive forces, and the

creation of those material conditions of production which alone can form the real basis of a higher form of society, a society in which the full and free development of every individual forms the ruling principle' (Marx, 1977: 739). However, while Marx (1973: 325, 409-10) understood that capital strives in this way toward universality, producing 'this being as the most total and universal possible social product,' he was very clear that capital produces its own barriers to the production of rich human beings.

The Production of Poor Human Beings

Within capitalist relations of production, people are subjected to 'the powerful will of a being outside them, who subjects their activity to his purpose.' The creative power of the worker's labour in this case 'establishes itself as the power of capital, as an *alien power* confronting him' (Marx, 1977: 450; 1973: 453, 307). Thus, fixed capital, machinery, technology, all 'the general productive forces of the social brain', appear as attributes of capital and as independent of workers (Marx, 1973: 694; 1977: 1053-4, 1058). As a by-product of its drive for surplus value, capital produces people who are dependent upon capital and who are conscious of that dependence--- 'a working class which by education, tradition and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws' (Marx, 1977: 899; Lebowitz, 2003a: 156-58). And, with the development of capitalist production, that dependence grows: 'the world of wealth expands and faces him as an alien world dominating him, and as it does so his subjective poverty, his need and dependence grow larger in proportion' (Marx: 1977: 1062).

In this respect, capitalism does not produce a rich human being but an impoverished one: a person with the need to buy things, a person with one real need--- the need for money. In capitalism, Marx commented, 'this complete working-out of

the human content appears as a complete emptying-out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end' (Marx, 1973: 488). So long, too, as they accept the logic of capital 'as self-evident natural laws,' workers are simply the products of capital--- 'apathetic, thoughtless, more or less well-fed instruments of production'. However, Marx understood that struggles to satisfy their needs as socially developed human beings were *another* product of capitalist production--- i.e., capitalism produces class struggle on the part of workers. As workers organise to struggle for themselves, i.e., engage in a process of purposeful activity and subordinate their will to their preconceived goals, they transform themselves into subjects with the capacity to build a new world (Lebowitz, 2003a: 179-84).

Marx's Capital and Rich Human Beings

Unfortunately, Marx said very little about the specific characteristics of these new subjects in this new world. Nevertheless, there is an obvious place to discover his concept of rich human beings. Once we understand Marx's consistent focus on human development, it is clear that the premise of Marx's *Capital* is the concept of communism, that society in which the development of all human powers is an end in itself. This 'society of free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on the subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth' --- communism --- is the spectre that haunts Marx's *Capital* (Marx, 1973:158). Its presence can be felt right from the opening disparagement of capitalism as a society in which wealth appears not as real human wealth but, rather, as 'an immense collection of commodities' (Marx, 1977: 125). Indeed, the concept of communism drops from the sky without any logical development in *Capital* when

Marx (1977: 772) evokes a society characterised not by the capitalist's impulse to increase the value of his capital but, rather, by 'the inverse situation in which objective wealth is there to satisfy the worker's own need for development'.

We need to recognise that this 'inverse situation' that Marx introduces is the perspective from which Marx critiques capitalism. Consider his description of the fact that means of production employ workers as 'this inversion, indeed this distortion, which is peculiar to and characteristic of capitalist production'. An inversion and distortion of *what?* Simply, the 'relation between dead labour and living labour' in a different society, one in which the results of past labour are 'there to satisfy the worker's own need for development' (Marx, 1977: 425).

Accordingly, by identifying the inversions and distortions that produce truncated human beings in capitalism, we can get a sense of Marx's idea of what is 'peculiar to and characteristic of' production in that inverse situation, communist society. We can understand what the rich human being is by seeing its inversion. Not only do we see Marx reject the mutilation, the impoverishment, the 'crippling of body and mind,' of the worker 'bound hand and foot for life to a single specialized operation' in the capitalist process of manufacturing but we also can see the horror with which he views the further advance of capitalist machine industry which provides a technical basis for the capitalist 'inversion', completing the 'separation of the intellectual faculties of the production process from manual labour' (Marx, 1977:482-4, 548, 607-8, 614). Head and hand become separate and hostile, 'every atom of freedom, both in bodily and in intellectual activity' is lost. 'All means for the development of production undergo a dialectical inversion,' he indicated; 'they distort the worker into a fragment of a man,' they degrade him and 'alienate from him the intellectual potentialities of the labour process'--- these are just some of the

distortions characteristic of capitalist production (Marx, 1977: 548, 643, 799). In short, in addition to producing commodities and capital itself, the joint product of capitalist production that Marx identified was the fragmented, crippled human being whose enjoyment consists in possessing and consuming things.

There can be no surprise, then, that Marx looked to the re-combining of head and hand, the uniting of mental and physical labour, to restoring a situation in which the individual worker calls ‘his own muscles into play under the control of his own brain.’ By ‘combining education and gymnastics with manual labour’--- here was ‘the germ of the education of the future;’ it was ‘the only method of producing fully developed human beings’ (Marx, 1977: 613-4, 643). The answer was ‘variation of labour, fluidity of functions, and mobility of the worker in all directions’---- this is what is meant by the development of human capacity. The partially developed individual, he argued, ‘must be replaced by the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn’ (Marx, 1977: 617-8).

At the core of all this is the importance of *variety*, variety of activity--- people develop their capabilities only through their own activity. Through new acts which allow for the growth of their specific capacities, through that ‘accumulation of the most varied acts through time’ to which Sève refers. In this way, they produce in themselves the potentialities to carry out other acts which reproduce and expand their capabilities. When they are denied the opportunity to exercise these potentialities, however, they do not develop--- which is precisely what Marx recognised was inherent in a society in which human beings exist as means for the expansion of capital.¹ Where the interconnection of workers in production ‘confronts them, in the

¹ Sève (1978: 358) identifies another problem--- the negative effect upon the development of the personality where capacity is developed but is underutilized.

realm of ideas, as a plan drawn up by the capitalist, and, in practice, as his authority', workers cannot develop their potential as human beings. Without 'intelligent direction of production' by workers, without production 'under their conscious and planned control,' their own power becomes a power over them.

It is not accidental, accordingly, that Marx indicated that the 'revolutionary ferments whose goal is the abolition of the old division of labour stand in diametrical contradiction with the capitalist form of production' (Marx, 1977: 619). Just as with the capitalist state, the 'systematic and hierarchic division of labour' characteristic of capitalist production, with its own 'trained caste' above workers ('absorbing the intelligence of the masses and turning them against themselves in the lower places of the hierarchy') does not permit the 'all-round development of the individual' (Marx, 1977: 173, 450, 482; Lebowitz, 2003a: 193-96). Just as with the concept of the self-government of the producers that workers 'at last discovered; during the Paris Commune, rich human beings are the product of a labour process which is characterised by 'the people---acting for itself by itself' (Lebowitz, 2003a: 196).

The 'Becoming' of Communism

What are the implications of this conception for the building of communism? In both communism as an organic system and also communism in the process of becoming, every labour process produces joint products--- particular use-values and particular producers. Certainly, once it develops upon its own foundations, communism would produce the human beings who are the premises of the system itself. Once the idea of producing directly for the needs of others becomes 'by education, tradition and habit' common sense, the activity of people no longer is 'dominated by the pressure of an extraneous purpose which must be fulfilled, and the

fulfillment of which is regarded as a natural necessity or a social duty'; at that point it becomes free activity--- 'the creative manifestation of life arising from the free development of all abilities of the "whole fellow"'--- i.e., 'life's prime want' (Marx, 1971: 257; Marx and Engels, 1976: 225) People produce here in the knowledge that their activity is important to others in the society and they are thus affirmed in their selves. They produce not only use-values but also themselves as social human beings, as rich human beings--- the premises of communism as an organic system (Marx, 1844a; 1973: 278).

Just as certainly, however, communism as it first emerges does not spontaneously produce its own premises. In particular, as discussed in my paper for the conference last year (and published in *Marx Ahora*), the initial defect of communism, the self-interested behaviour rooted in the private ownership of labour-power, inherently endangers solidarity within the society. The claim of associated producers upon society's output in accordance with 'the labour they supply' rather than by their membership in society not only generates inequality but also carries within it the tendency toward the disintegration of the common ownership of the means of production (Lebowitz, 2003b). Insofar as producers view their work primarily as a means to secure desired use-values (i.e., are driven by consumerism), the nature of the people produced in the process is that of people for whom other people are mere means to get money. Precisely because human consciousness cannot change as rapidly as the property rights to things, overcoming the private ownership of labour-power is more difficult than overcoming the private ownership of the means of production.

For this reason, the 'becoming' of communist society must be understood as a process which challenges the spontaneous tendencies present in communism as it first

emerges. There are a number of aspects to this. Firstly, recognition that every labour process generates joint products --- both the change in the object of labour and the change in the labourer herself--- points to the error in the assumption that the development of rich human beings is the project for some distant realm of freedom, the error of assuming that everything depends upon development of the productive forces. In contrast to earlier periods when ‘the development of human abilities and social potentialities (art, etc., science)’ had as its premise the surplus labour of the masses and ‘free time on one side corresponds to subjugated time on the other side,’ the organisation of production by the associated producers themselves permits the development of a mode of production which provides the opportunity for the development of human abilities and which, by reducing alienation, reduces the need to possess things (Marx and Engels, 1988: 190-92).

Of course, the associated producers will choose the length and intensity of a workday which will leave them time and energy for their own personal development. However, the ‘time at society’s disposal for the intellectual and social activity of the individual’ is not limited to time away from production (Marx, 1973: 706; 1977: 667). If the nature of the labour process is such as to fragment and cripple the producer, she is distorted, fragmented and crippled away from that labour process as well. By ending the separation of ‘the intellectual potentialities of the labour process’ from the producers, communist society breaks with the old pattern in which ‘the development of the human capacities on the one side is based on the restriction of development on the other side’ (Marx, 1973: 711; Marx and Engels, 1988: 190-92).

A second aspect to the process of the ‘becoming’ of communism, though, is that it is essential to recognise that the labour process should not be confused with production of specific use-values. In a society which focuses on human beings,

something that could only be revealed in capitalism by analysis is here transparent---
all specific products and activities are mere moments in a process of producing human beings, the real result of social production. As Marx commented about capitalism:

When we consider bourgeois society in the long view and as a whole, then the final result of the process of social production always appears as the society itself, i.e., the human being itself in its social relations. Everything that has a fixed form, such as the product, etc appears as merely a moment, a vanishing moment, in this movement (Marx, 1973: 712).

Thus, not only production of specific material commodities (in the so-called ‘productive sector’) but also educational and health services, household activity which directly nurtures the development of human beings, community maintenance--- all these are recognised as integral parts of the process of producing the social beings who enter into all these activities (Lebowitz, 2003: 200-202). And, that points to the importance not only of making each moment a site for the collective decision-making and variety of activity that develops human capacities but also for building relations of solidarity in all these moments. The act of solidarity has joint products--- it both provides support for the needs of others and produces rich human beings. Acts of solidarity express the indivisibility of the development of human capacity in that ‘association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.’

The process of producing the premises of communism as a reproducing, organic system, in short, removes the veil that mystifies the organic links between the limbs of the collective worker. The associated producers, Marx commented, expend

‘their many different forms of labour-power in full self-awareness as one single social labour force’ (Marx: 1977, 171). We see the rationality of solidarity between all those limbs of the collective worker to the extent that this production by freely associated human beings ‘stands under their conscious and planned control’ (Marx, 1977: 173). And that necessity for conscious and planned control points to an essential aspect of that process of becoming: if the plan is to be their power rather than a power over them, then the goals of the labour process must be transparently, in the realm of ideas, the result of their own plans and, in practice, their own authority. The starting point of the communist labour process, in short, is the democratic conception of the plan; and the essential joint product of this process is production of the capacity for ‘intelligent direction of production’--- a premise of Marx’s notion of rich human beings.

Real Human Development

Real human development for Marx went far beyond anything that the UN Development Program attempts to measure in its Human Development Reports. The idea of human capacity that Marx advanced was one that stressed the actual development of human ability--- the idea of ‘the totally developed individual, for whom the different social functions are different modes of activity he takes up in turn.’ Variation of labour, mobility of the producer in all directions, points to capacities which, once developed, can be applied to new challenges, to the overcoming of new obstacles which is ‘in itself a liberating activity’ and, thus, a process of self-realisation (Marx, 1973: 611).

But, what kind of activities produce this rich human being whose ‘own realisation exists as an inner necessity, as *need?*’ How are these capacities produced?

For Marx, it is from the process of co-operation itself. As he indicated, ‘when the worker co-operates in a’ planned way with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality, and develops the capabilities of his species’ (Marx, 1977: 447). In short, the process of collective decision-making, of collective problem-solving, of ‘self-working and self-governing communes’ (Lebowitz, 2003a: 194) produces real human development.

No one could ever suggest, however, that data on variables such as literacy, life expectancy, etc at all approach the richness of Marx’s concept of human development. However useful they may be, these are not the measures of the rich human beings of communist society. Where is the measure for the self-confidence in people that is created through the conscious development of cooperation and democratic problem-solving in communities and workplaces? How can we measure the sense of solidarity with others that comes from the simultaneous changing of circumstances and self-change when activity is focused on the needs of people?

If we share Marx’s vision of rich human beings, we need to promote his concept of human capacity rather than speak about human capital, which obscures the nature of capital as a social relation based upon exploitation. Further, we face two challenges--- that of working to develop measures which reflect this concept of human capacity and, especially, that of working to create the conditions which permit the self-development of those rich social beings.

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