

The Great Thoughts on Human Beings by Karl Marx

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Abstract

Marxist philosophy does not prioritize the question of human beings in connection to the theory of capital and surplus value, the materialist dialectic and the socio-economic formation, or the proletarian class and socialism. The primary objective of Marxism does not pertain to the inquiry into the nature of human beings. However, Marx's ideas regarding human beings, mostly introduced during his early years, remain significant enough to be included in the body of human thought as a considerable doctrine. They hold great importance in the field of human sciences and in the pursuit of human freedom. As we celebrate the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, we will examine and assess the significant ideas that Marx had about human beings that are relevant to the current era: 1) Human beings are inherently human entities; 2) The natural world represents the intangible manifestation of human beings; 3) Human beings are distinct individuals, encompassing their actions and material circumstances; 4) The fundamental nature of human beings is derived from the amalgamation of social interactions; 5) The unrestricted growth of each individual is a prerequisite for the unrestricted growth of all individuals. These concepts are actually of immense magnitude. Presently, these ideas continue to serve as the fundamental principles of numerous human disciplines. These beliefs serve as the foundational worldview and methodological principles for numerous social theories in reality. The presentation of Marx's ideas on human beings, as shown in several published works, frequently varies. In light of the aforementioned five primary components, our objective is to faithfully adhere to the canonical works of Marx, refraining from incorporating any further insights beyond his original statements. This approach aims to provide an accurate depiction of Marx's own perspective on the nature of humanity.

Keywords: Marxist Philosophy, Human Beings, Capital and Surplus Value, Materialist Dialectic, Proletarian Class

INTRODUCTION

As we transition into the 21st century, the examination of Marx and Marxist doctrine's significance in the spiritual realm of humanity continues to be a captivating subject, characterized by divergent perspectives. Despite the presence of doubts, criticisms, and instances of prejudice and defamation, particularly from the Right-wing and certain communities that were formerly part of the socialist system, as well as among certain radical social activists, there persists a notable inclination to increasingly elevate Marx's status as a philosopher, a scientist, and a human being.

In a September 1999 opinion poll conducted by the BBC, Karl Marx was unexpectedly ranked first among the greatest philosophers of the previous millennium, while Albert Einstein came in second place[1].

During the period of 2008-2009, amidst the global financial crisis, Karl Marx and his seminal work "Capital" had a resurgence in prominence, capturing the attention and apprehension of numerous Western nations. Marx was prominently featured on the covers of several internationally recognized journals, including Time, Newsweek, Forbes, Financial Times, and Der Spiegel.

The inclusion of the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" and the first volume of Marx's "Capital" in the "Memory of the World" (MOW[2], UNESCO) list occurred in 2013, following a joint proposal by Germany and the Netherlands.

When released in English at Harvard University in 2014, the book "Capital in the Twenty-First Century" by the French economist Thomas Piketty, which explores the significance of Marx and "Capital" in the 21st century, achieved a sales figure of almost 500,000 copies[3]. Piketty is among a group of prominent Western authors who have authored notable works that critically assess the significance of Marx. Examples include Terry Eagleton's book "Why Marx Was Right" published by Yale University Press in 2011, as well as Michel Vadee's work "Marx, penseur du possible." Méridiens Klincksieck was published in Paris in 1992.

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In 2016, a survey of more than one million documents mandated for American students revealed that the "Manifesto of the Communist Party" outperformed other books and emerged as one of the top three most widely read and utilized texts in the social theory curriculum in the United States. This was evident in terms of the quantity of lectures and the frequency of teaching[4].

On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, the City Tourism Office in Trier, where Marx was born and attended high school before departing to pursue his education at the University of Bonn, commemorated the occasion by selling a substantial quantity of EUR notes adorned with his likeness. Significantly, the initial 5,000 notes were completely sold out immediately upon their debut. In order to satisfy the demand from consumers in Australia, Brazil, the United States, and other countries worldwide, the city had to produce an additional 20,000 units[5].

Indeed, these events are merely external expressions and do not constitute the central focus. However, after a span of 200 years since Marx emerged in human existence, particularly when compared to other prominent individuals, these phenomena will undoubtedly serve as significant markers of an individual, compelling future generations to engage in more profound contemplation of Marx and Marxist ideology.

In contemporary times, capitalism continues to persist and has demonstrated notable advancements. The phenomenon of capitalist mechanism adjustment is deserving of attention and scholarly investigation. In contrast, the prevailing socialism, despite its existence over a span of more than seven decades, has experienced a decline and fragmentation inside the Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations. In the early 21st century, both individuals and society continue to experience the alienation and flaws that Marx had previously spoken against. This fact has led to a downturn in the communist and international workers' movements, resulting in a slight decrease in faith in socialism. However, Marx's principles and those of Marxism, particularly on the eradication of tyranny, exploitation, and injustice, as well as the liberation of individuals and the promotion of human freedom, cannot be equated with the presence of previous socialist societies. Terry Eagleton is an author who has presented compelling views regarding this matter[6].

In order to elucidate the remarkably compelling influence of Marx and Marxist ideology in the contemporary era, we would like to incorporate a few remarks.

Marxism posits that social life, encompassing intricate and diverse manifestations such as unforeseen contingencies or transformative revolutions, is inherently a dynamic process characterized by specific foundations and conditions. This process is propelled by genuine driving forces and is guided by objective laws of human history, rather than being arbitrary or random. The process under consideration is characterized by advancement, but occasionally necessitating the traversal of convoluted or regressive stages.

From ancient civilizations to future societies, all social transformation is not enigmatic. The classics even noted that in the absence of Napoleon, another individual would have assumed his position. This is evidenced by the existence of individuals who were required in specific situations, such as Caesar, Augustus, Cromwell, and others[7].

The aspiration of rational thinking and scientific cognition, particularly among social activists on a large scale, is to perceive human society as a coherent and predictable system governed by logical principles and laws. As the modern world grows increasingly intricate and disordered, there is a growing desire among individuals to organize it intellectually in order to uncover its inherent inclinations, with the aim of finding methods to exert control and influence. Marx and Marxist ideology are often regarded as the most rational approach to meet this requirement.

Furthermore, when compared to other social doctrines, Marxist ideology stands out as a distinctive framework that exhibits empathy towards the impoverished, actively advocating for their rights and advocating for their interests without compromise. Marxist philosophy emphasizes that the social standing of the poor, the poor class, and the poor strata play a crucial role in generating social wealth and fostering social progress, rather than being a "painkiller" or a "dispensation of the benevolence of the upper classes." In contemporary times, there has been a notable increase in the engagement and significance of governments and international organizations in addressing poverty eradication inside nations. However, it is important to note that these attitudes continue

to diverge significantly from the Marxist perspective on poverty and the proletariat. As we transition into the 21st century, it becomes evident that Marxism remains the sole theory capable of supplanting its perspective on the impoverished.

Third, social movements require not just rational guiding principles and efficient strategies for social action, but also an ideal that captivates and motivates a large number of participants. According to Mark Skousen, Marx has been the most passionate thinker or philosopher for about two centuries. Presently, Marx continues to be a symbol of revolution, rather than merely a scientist[8]. Currently, there is a persistent fight among young individuals, workers, social organizations, and social activists to identify a theory that can effectively supplant Marxism in igniting the fervor of the pursuit of human emancipation, addressing social issues, and advancing social progress and equality.

The objective causes for the continued existence and enduring attraction of Marx and Marxist philosophy in the 21st century are as follows.

Marx's Profound Reflections on the Human Condition

Following the initial publication of the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844" in 1932, the Western critique that Marx neglected human people has greatly diminished[9]. Subsequently, in the pursuit of examining Marx's ideas regarding human beings, the excessive exploitation and speculation of future generations occasionally became excessive. The presentation of Marx's ideas on human beings, as shown in several published sources, sometimes lacks clarity regarding Marx's actual conception[10].

This article focuses on the selection and presentation of "Marx on Human Beings", highlighting five significant ideas authored by Marx himself. We want to strictly stick to the classics, refraining from including any additional ideas or concepts that Marx did not explicitly state. The reason we refer to them as "great thoughts" is that they are indeed profound ideas that have significantly influenced several political and social endeavors for over a century. Furthermore, these ideas serve as fundamental theoretical and methodological foundations that significantly impact the advancement of scientific knowledge. Currently, these ideas continue to be the fundamental principles of several modern social theories and human sciences.

Humans Are Inherently Sentient Beings with the Capacity for Empathy

Marx asserts in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 that human beings possess inherent traits and are inherently natural beings [11].

The belief that human beings are inherently natural is a concept proposed by L. Feuerbach, whom Marx saw as having established "the relationship between individuals as the fundamental principle of theory". According to Feuerbach, human beings possess a distinct and unique nature. Unique due of its exclusive possession of consciousness. Nevertheless, the determination of its essence must be approached in a manner akin to other organisms, namely by assessing it based on the characteristics of "external entities" such as air, water, light, food, and materials for activity. These elements are essential for the survival and existence of human beings. Adopting this perspective, Marx underscored the notion that "Man is inherently a natural being." Marx elucidated that human beings, being a natural entity and a "living natural entity," possess inherent capacities in the form of "innate faculties" and "talents." However, it is important to note that human beings are also influenced and constrained by external natural entities that are not independent of them, yet play a crucial role in enabling them to express and validate themselves. Thus, in this regard, human beings can be described as a "suffering being" (Marx employs Feuerbach's terminology once more, indicating that human beings must withstand the forces of nature. According to Marx, a being that lacks inherent naturalness cannot be considered a natural being and does not contribute to the functioning of the natural world[12].

This perspective is highly profound and diverges somewhat from the contemporary understanding of the connection between humans and nature. Currently, the notion of sustainable development, which promotes the preservation of the environment as a fundamental aspect of social and human progress, does not consider nature to be as significant as Feuerbach and Marx have examined. Modern conceptions acknowledge the significant influence of nature, both within and beyond human people. Hence, it is imperative to contemplate

the reasons behind Feuerbach and Marx's significant emphasis on the natural aspect of human existence over a century ago. Additionally, we should consider whether it is necessary to re-emphasize nature in the same manner in the present day.

While acknowledging Feuerbach's perspective on the significance of the natural element in human existence, Marx extended his ideas and developed his own conceptualization of human beings. Marx stated that man is not simply a natural being, but rather a human natural being. This means that he possesses inherent attributes that allow him to exist as a member of a species, and he must affirm and demonstrate this identity both in his existence and in his understanding[13].

Marx's definition of human beings might be characterized as "natural entities with humanity." This statement satisfies the rigorous criteria of a definition in terms of both its presenting format and the depth of thought it conveys.

The Natural World Encompasses the Inorganic Entities That Comprise the Human Body

Regarding the connection between humans and nature, Marx's most distinctive perspective is that the natural world represents the inanimate form of human beings.

Marx posited that the alienation of nature, which arises as a result of work alienation, is intricately intertwined with human existence. Due to two factors: "To begin with, nature serves as the foundation for human existence". Furthermore, nature serves as the focal point, the target, and the tool for human life endeavors. Nature can be seen as the inorganic embodiment of human beings. According to Marx, nature, which is distinct from spirit, refers to the inorganic body of humanity. Man's existence is intertwined with nature, meaning that nature is his physical form, and in order to survive, he must engage in an ongoing conversation with it[14]. In a separate excerpt, Marx put up a highly commendable concept that may be employed to elucidate this phenomenon. Marx posited that the sustenance of human existence is contingent upon its reliance on nature, while simultaneously asserting that nature serves as the origin of human life. If individuals do not engage in self-creation, it follows that the creator must exist externally to them. The creator is nature. This is the rationale behind the inherent difficulty in relinquishing the creation of human beings as a symbol inside the realm of ordinary consciousness. The concept of "the self-positing nature of nature" is often not comprehended by the general population[15].

The notion that "the natural world is the body of human beings" is a distinctive perspective, as far as our understanding goes, no one else, apart from Marx, has ever considered nature as the body of human beings from ancient times to the present day. Many ancient Eastern philosophical schools placed significant emphasis on the concept of human-nature harmony, perceiving human beings and nature as a unified entity. These schools advocated for the unity of heaven and man, as well as the interaction between heaven and man. However, it is important to note that these schools did not extend their perspective to consider nature as a distinct entity separate from human beings.

The subtlety and profundity of Marx's ideas are evident in the fact that, during his era, environmental concerns did not present such a significant threat to human existence as they currently do. During that particular period, it is evident that Marx lacked knowledge regarding the ozone hole, the greenhouse effect, and other intricate ecological processes that are presently recognized as significant ecological challenges. Marx conceptualized nature as the corporeal form of human beings. Marx aimed to assert that every human influence on the natural world also entails an influence on the human physique. The act of causing harm to nature inherently results in harm to human beings. This assertion is not a deduction, but rather a statement made by Marx himself. He stated that the connection between man's bodily and mental existence and nature implies that nature is interconnected with itself, as man is an integral element of nature[16].

Human Beings Are Distinct Entities, Characterized by Their Actions and Their Physical Surroundings.

In their work titled "The German Ideology," Marx and Engels assert that the foundational principles upon which we commence are not arbitrary or dogmatic in nature, but rather tangible premises that can only be abstracted through the faculty of imagination. These individuals are actual entities, influenced by their actions

and the material circumstances in which they reside, including both pre-existing conditions and those created by their own actions. Therefore, these premises may be confirmed alone through empirical means[17]. The manner in which individuals generate their livelihoods is mostly contingent upon the characteristics of the existing means of sustenance that they encounter and must perpetuate. This process of production should not be regarded solely as the replication of persons' bodily existence. Instead, it is an unequivocal manifestation of these individuals' action, a clear manifestation of their existence, a distinct way of life on their behalf[18].

The main argument is that if we solely focus on the biological aspects of human beings, there would be minimal variation among human beings throughout different time periods. Hence, the fundamental distinction among individuals resides in what aspect? Marx posited that a comprehensive comprehension of human beings necessitates commencing the study of human beings from genuine premises. The following pertains to the activities and material living situations experienced by individuals. To be more specific, individuals can be identified as human beings who engage in various activities and are influenced by their material living situations. These conditions encompass both pre-existing circumstances and those that are generated by their own actions.

These fundamental ideas served as the basis for the development of activity theory, which was further expanded upon by Soviet scientists in the early 20th century, including A.R. Luria, L.S. Vygotsky, N.A. Leontiev, S.L. Rubinstein, as well as numerous psychologists from Germany, France, and Bulgaria. This theory evolved into a comprehensive framework for studying human psychology. This educational institution promotes the comprehensive elucidation of psychological processes, encompassing even the most intricate ones, by means of activity, communication, and social interactions. The field of human psychology is inherently social in character and emerges as a result of human action and communication. This school has accomplished numerous accomplishments and exerted a substantial impact on the fields of psychology, education, and other related areas, up until the present time[19].

Human Beings are Fundamentally Composed of Social Interactions

According to Marx's Sixth Thesis on Feuerbach, the religious essence is assimilated into the human essence. However, the human essence is not a conceptual concept that is innate in every individual. In actuality, it is the collection of social connections [20].

Throughout the 20th century, this concept served as the fundamental basis for extensive scientific investigation, exploration, and the development of strategies for societal change.

This thesis effectively documented the inherent contradiction between the essence of humanity and the nature of human beings. The essence of humanity plays a crucial role in shaping both individuals and communities. It is an inherent trait that is not distinct from each person, but rather interconnected with history and the broader world, contrary to the notions put out by Feuerbach and other scholars. This essence is the amalgamation of all the social connections that each individual must engage with - the genuine social connections, ranging from the sacred and noble to the common and routine, within their actuality. According to I.T. Frolov, this thesis is regarded as one of the most profound and brilliant aspects of Marx's ideology. It represents a significant breakthrough in understanding the vast range of human people, and can be likened to a remarkable exploration formula. Frolov posited that throughout the annals of scientific knowledge, it would prove arduous to uncover any truth that appears ostensibly uncomplicated and self-evident, but is, in reality, so profound that it took centuries of arduous investigations amidst intense ideological conflicts to uncover and validate.

This concept faced criticism in the 1980s for its perceived underestimation of the significance of individual, personal, and biological elements. Scientists employed diverse methodologies to carry out verifications. In the end, after many deliberations, it was acknowledged that the fundamental nature of humanity, although transcending individuality, does not assume a personified manifestation and instead materializes as the cohesive amalgamation of all societal connections[21].

From a scientific standpoint, this understanding enables the deductive analysis of the categorization of human essences, which holds great importance for practical endeavors.

The Condition for the Free Development of All is Contingent Upon the Free Development of Each Individual.

Marx and Engels stated in the Manifesto of the Communist Party that the unrestricted progress of every individual is a prerequisite for the unrestricted progress of the entire society[22].

According to Marx and Engels, once capitalist connections are abolished in human society, the proletarian class and its regime cannot persist indefinitely. After successfully accomplishing its objective, the aforementioned rule would be compelled to yield to a "group of individuals" - a novel manifestation of social structure in the annals of history, namely a communist society. The condition for the unfettered development of all would be contingent upon the unrestricted growth of each individual.

It is imperative to acknowledge that within the realm of human spirituality, the pursuit of freedom has consistently been regarded as a noble aspiration across all social strata, encompassing both the privileged and the ordinary. Each religious doctrine emphasizes the need of honoring the liberty of others by limiting one's own personal freedom. Hegel's philosophical framework likewise emphasized the significance of the "consciousness of freedom," but in the context of acknowledging necessity. Essentially, the personal autonomy of each individual cannot prevent the curtailment of the freedom of others and society at large. Different doctrines and religions present distinct approaches and resolutions to address this inherent contradiction. However, it is noteworthy that no ideology or religion has acknowledged the compatibility of individual freedom and the freedom of others, and even the necessity for each other, as Marx did.

Marx's concept is undeniably distinctive and captivating. The prospective societal structure entails a "association of individuals" wherein the autonomous growth of one individual serves as a catalyst for fostering an environment conducive to the unrestricted development of others. Even the contemporary notions of human growth put out by international organizations in the present era are unable to attain such a degree of achievement.

CONCLUSION

Despite ongoing doubts about Marxism and cynicism towards socialism, the future generation's perception of Marx as a philosopher, scientist, and individual is mostly distinct. Over time, his height increases, while others continue to perceive and assess him unfavorably.

Marx himself acknowledged that as a human being, he felt that nothing human is foreign to him (*Nihil humani a mine alienum puto*)[23]. This perspective enabled Marx to gain a profound comprehension that the fundamental essence of the human being is inside the human being itself[25]. Human beings can be described as "natural beings with human qualities," referring to humans who possess genuine human characteristics and are the result of human endeavors. Marx is esteemed and revered mostly due to his distinct nature as a human being, rather than being a deity.

In his seminal work "De Omnibus Dubitandum," Marx, in his capacity as a scientist, openly admitted his inherent uncertainty. He provided significant and innovative contributions to humanity, such as uncovering surplus value, historical materialism, and socioeconomic formations, from an objective perspective. The history of human civilization now unfolds in a non-random manner, driven by concrete foundations and driving forces, adhering to objective and unavoidable laws of social growth, stemming from these basic discoveries.

Marx is widely regarded as the most influential intellectual in more than a millennium of human history. He devised practical solutions to eradicate all forms of oppression, exploitation, and injustice. He advocated for the establishment of a society where the unrestricted progress of every individual is essential for the unrestricted progress of all.

Presently, individuals in the workforce, social movements, social activists, and progressive society have not yet encountered another intellectual who can supplant Marx in instigating the endeavor to address societal problems and advocate for the admirable concept of societal advancement and human liberation.

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