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What Is Man? Interpreting the Philosophical- Anthropological Ideas of Karl Marx Part 2: Sociality and Historicity of Man*

*P.N. Kondrashov**Institute of Philosophy and Law, Ural Branch,**Russian Academy of Sciences, Yekaterinburg, Russia*

Abstract

This article uses the key concepts available in Karl Marx's texts and attempts to answer the question, "What is man?" The author explores such constitutive aspects of man's generic essence (*Gattungswesen des Menschen*) and of man's worldly being as corporeality and relationship with nature; suffering as a product of desire; praxis (*Praxis*) as productive creative activity (*produktive Tätigkeit, Selbstbetätigung*) that is carried out in the dialectical processes of objectification (*Vergegenständlichung, Äußerung*) and de-objectification (*Entgegenständlichung, Aneignung*); man's universality; objectivity (*Gegenständlichkeit*) of the man-made human world; intersubjectivity and sociality/sociability (*Gesellschaftlichkeit*); interplay of social relations (*das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*); the existential and emotional relations of man (*menschlichen Verhältnisse zur Welt*) to the world of nature, to human activity, to the results of one's labor, to other people, and to oneself. We demonstrate that the generic essence of man is not granted by nature but evolves in the course of historical development. Moreover, in *Capital*, Marx distinguishes between the invariant essence (*Praxis*) and historical modifications of praxis. Therefore, history is understood as "continuous change of human nature," and man himself as a historical being. In spite of later reductionist interpretations, Marx conceptualizes man as a living, uniquely generic (socially individual), integral being, whose essential mode of existence is praxis (social conscious purposeful transforming objectal-instrumental material and spiritual activity). Man is an integral bodily-spiritual being, transforming the natural world (*Welt*) and creating "worlds" of his own, those of material, social, and spiritual culture (*Umwelt*), society and its relations (*Mitwelt*), which are interiorized and form an inner world (*Innerlichkeit, Eigenwelt*) in the process of

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practical activity. The article concludes that, following Marx's philosophical anthropology, man should be considered not only as a "practical being" but also a suffering one, experiencing his worldly existence in the form of partial, existential relations to the world and to himself.

Keywords: generic essence of man, praxis, universality, instrumentality, objectivity, historicity, social relations, existential relations to the world.

Petr N. Kondrashov – D.Sc. in Philosophy, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Philosophy and Law, Ural Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences.
pnk060776@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0975-4418>

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Что такое человек? Осмысление философско-антропологических идей Карла Маркса

Часть 2. Социальность и историчность человека*

П.Н. Кондрашов

*Институт философии и права Уральского отделения РАН,
Екатеринбург, Россия*

Аннотация

На основе анализа ключевых понятий, содержащихся в текстах Карла Маркса, в статье предпринята попытка ответить на вопрос «Что такое человек?» Автор исследует такие конститутивные аспекты родовой сущности человека (*Gattungswesen des Menschen*) и человеческого бытия-в-мире, как телесность и взаимоотношения с природой; страдание как чувство, обусловленное наличием потребностей; праксис (*Praxis*) как творческая продуктивная деятельность (*productive Tätigkeit, Selbstbetätigung*), которая осуществляется в диалектическом процессе опредмечивания (*Vergegenständlichung, Äußerung*) и распредмечивания (*Entgegenständlichung, Aneignung*); универсальность человека; предметность (*Gegenständlichkeit*) как искусственный мир человека; интерсубъективность и социальность (*Gesellschaftlichkeit*); ансамбль общественных отношений (*das ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse*); экзистенциальные, эмоциональные отношения человека и мира (*menschlichen Verhältnisse zur Welt*) природы, человека к собственной деятельности, результатам своего труда, к другим людям и самому себе. Показано, что родовая сущность человека не дана природой, а возникает в ходе исто-

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рического развития. Более того, в «Капитале» Маркс различает инвариантную сущность (*Praxis*) и исторические модификации праксиса. Поэтому история понимается как «непрерывное изменение человеческой природы», а человек – как историческое существо. Несмотря на последующие редукционистские интерпретации, человек у Маркса – живое уникально-родовое (социально-индивидуальное) целостное существо. Его сущностью и способом существования является праксис, т.е. общественная сознательная целеполагающая преобразующая предметно-орудийная материально-духовная деятельность. Человек – единое телесно-духовное существо, преобразующее мир природы (*Welt*), и созидующее свои «миры» – материальной, социальной и духовной культуры (*Umwelt*), общества и общественных отношений (*Mitwelt*). Все перечисленные «миры» в процессе практической деятельности интериоризируются и формируют внутренний мир человека (*Innerlichkeit*, *Eigenwelt*). Поэтому, как заключает автор статьи, следуя философской антропологии Маркса, человек должен рассматриваться не только как «практическое» существо, но и как страдающее, переживающее свое бытие-в-мире в форме равнодушных, экзистенциальных отношений-к-миру и самому себе.

Ключевые слова: родовая сущность человека, праксис, универсальность, орудийность, предметность, историчность, общественные отношения, экзистенциальные отношения к миру.

Кондрашов Петр Николаевич – доктор философских наук, старший научный сотрудник Института философии и права Уральского отделения РАН.

pnk060776@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0975-4418>

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*In the memory of
Waltraut Schälike*

*Светлой памяти
Вальтраут Фрицевны Шелике
посвящается*

Objectivity, intersubjectivity, sociality

In the process of practical transformation of the natural world (*Welt*) in order to satisfy his needs, man creates from natural ma-

terial (wood, stone, metal, etc.) an artificial world of *objectivity* (*Gegenständlichkeit*), or culture (*Umwelt*). Because of this, praxis is “a universal-creative self-creative activity, activity by which man transforms and creates his world and himself” [Petrović 1967, 78–79]. However, the meaning of objectivity in Marx’s philosophy is not limited to this.

Using objects created by people, other people in the structures of their physical and mental activity reproduce (de-objectify) the goal-setting, projects, and needs implemented earlier. That is, reproducing the objective logic of these things, they thereby constitute the *intersubjectivity* of praxis, i.e., people internalize schemes and mechanisms of joint and individual object-tool activity, to form identical structures of consciousness. The object turns out to be a “carrier of consciousness” from one man to another: “an object processed by man is, thus, a knot of relations between the individual and the social” [Mozheeva 1978, 269].

The subject acts as a mediator between people. It is in the phenomenon of *intersubjectivity* that objective activity turns out to be a joint activity, for it connects not only consciousness, not only man with the external world but, first of all, one man with another man: “the object [*Gegenstand*] as being [*Sein*] for man, as the objective being of man, is at the same time the existence [*Dasein*] of man for other men, his human relation to other men, the social behaviour of man to man” [Marx & Engels 1975b, 43]. Essentially, this means that in the form of an object, one man deals with another man, for, as Marx notes, “the object, being the direct manifestation of his individuality, is simultaneously his [man’s] own existence for the other man, the existence of the other man, and that existence for him” [Marx & Engels 1975a, 298].

It is only in this intersubjective dialectic of objectification/de-objectification that there arises the collectiveness of human existence – *society* – not as a mechanical conglomerate of individuals of the *Homo sapiens* species but as specific forms of their joint objective activity aimed at production and reproduction of their current existence. “What is society, irrespective of its form? The product of man’s interaction upon man” [Marx 1982, 96]. Thus, as a result of joint objective activity, an intersubjective cohesion of people is ordered into an interconnected integrity of a living social organism – sociality (*Gesellschaftlichkeit*)¹.

¹ Depending on context, *Gesellschaftlichkeit* may be also translated “sociality,” “social character.”

Social Relations Ensemble

Satisfying their vital needs through practical transformation of nature, “in the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production” [Marx 1987, 263]. Thus, in the process of *joint activity* (*Zusammenwirken*), people create various connections, relationships, forms, institutions, and regulatory authorities necessary for the normal course of this activity. Marx called this system of essentially and functionally necessary structures a metabolically reproduced “organic integrity,” by which he understood a unity (created or mediated by human activity) of natural, objective, technical, social, spiritual, existential, symbolic, and other phenomena, relations, institutions, and norms, which represent a coherent unity (“holistic organism”) in which man (society) exists as its fundamental active element (subject).

Since human activity always takes place in specific natural, social, cultural, historical conditions and structures, which, in turn, are constantly transformed in praxis, then its content is “filled,” on the one hand, with the objective interaction of the acting subject (man and society) with the object world, drawn into the realm of praxis; and on the other hand, all those relationships that arise in the process of joint activities. And this means that the human essence is simultaneously both activity and the unity of all those social relations in which this activity unfolds and which it generates. In this sense, objective activity not only constitutes sociality but itself always turns out to be social. Therefore, Marx defines the essence of man in two ways: both as praxis and as an *ensemble* of social relations: “But the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations” [Marx 1975, 7].

Only in interaction with objects that embody man’s needs, does man enter into relations with others, relations that animals are essentially deprived of, i.e., into social relations (*gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse*). There are interactions (1) with the world of nature (*Welt*), because nature is the external sensory world, the material on which human activity is carried out; (2) with the objective world of material, social, and spiritual culture (*Umwelt*), which is the result of practical transformation of nature by social individuals; (3) with other people (*Mitwelt*)²;

² Marx calls such interpersonal relations “social” (*soziale*), in contrast to the “societal” (*gesellschaftliche*) relations that are unpersonified and independent of our will. Of course, analyzing the integral system of relations, it is necessary

(4) with oneself (“I” is always social; “I,” self-awareness is a moment of sociality, i.e., generic existence).

And since the subject-subject and subject-object objective connections constitute human subjectivity, this means that each specific person represents the unity of his objective-practical relationships with those objects of the surrounding world that are drawn into his activity.

Human relations to the world

But “the ensemble of social relations” is only one side of the whole system of human relations generated by praxis as a way of human existence, fixing *relations-with* and *relations-between*. Due to the fact that, from the point of view of Marx’s doctrine of man, the internal mental characteristics exist in an indissoluble dialectical-constitutive connection with the practical, activity-related relationship of man with his external world, i.e., “it is not the consciousness of men that determines [*bestimmt*] their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness” [Marx 1987, 263], for “consciousness [*das Bewusstsein*] can never be anything else than conscious being [*das bewusste Sein*], and the being of men is their actual life-process... It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” [Marx & Engels 1975a, 36–37]. Then, accordingly, any internal states (experiences) are the result of interaction between a subject and an object.

The point is that the relationships that develop in direct physical interaction with the natural world (*Welt*), and in the joint activity itself (*Zusammenwirken*), in co-existence (*Mitwelt*), and in the world of culture (*Umwelt*), in one way or another are represented in the human psyche, on the one hand, in the form of various forms of consciousness (“ideas” about the world and our life in this world) and, on the other, in the form of human relations to this world. And since Marx comprehends man dynamically, as a suffering being, not indifferent, passionate, then in the case of man’s relationship with the world we certainly mean emotional, empathic, existential relationships.

That is, ontic and ontological “worlds” (*Welt* – nature, *Umwelt* – material culture, and *Mitwelt* – sociality), in which man exists, through the dialectics of objectification/deobjectification are internalized in the psyche of the individual and form his own inner world (*Innerlichkeit*,

to clearly separate the spheres of the societal (*gesellschaftliche*), the social/interpersonal (*soziale*), and the existential/human (*menschliche*), but this lies outside the present study.

Eigenwelt) – existence – a unique internal reflexive-intentional human existence, including a caring (empathic) perception of the world, a conscious experience of this perception and emotional, evaluative relationships of man to the world (*die menschlichen Verhältnisse zur Welt*) and his existence in it, determined by these perceptions and experiences. Thus, existence is both an ontological and an ontic “structure,” which defines, in the form of a relation-*to*, how man exists and with what / with whom and among-what/whom he exists as a being.

Although K. Marx himself used the word *Existenz* in the sense traditional for his time (as *being*), nevertheless, in his texts we find concepts that designate or describe what we call existence here: (1) not indifferent (empathic) perception of the world, i.e., human sensibility (*die menschliche Sinnlichkeit*); (2) conscious experience of this perception, i.e., suffering (*Leiden*); (3) emotional, evaluative relationship of a person man to the world and his existence in it, i.e., human (inhumane or humane) relationship-to-the-world (*menschlichen Verhältnisse zur Welt*).

In this sense, man *as man* can exist only through his caring connection with the world, and therefore the world is an expression (*Äußerung*) of human reality, a manifestation of his life (*seine Lebensäußerung*), in which he implements his own reality: the productive activity of man. Marx writes, “the productive activity of human beings in general, by which they promote the interchange with Nature” is “an expression and confirmation of life” [Marx 1998, 802].

Since, from the point of view of Karl Marx, human activity is infinitely diverse, and the content of relations-to is formed precisely through these various forms of activity, this means that the types of such relations themselves are infinite. However, for the purpose of the current research, among this infinite variety of human relations to the world, it is necessary to highlight the most significant ones. If we turn to the *Manuscripts of 1844*, then it seems possible to distinguish the following forms of human relationship to the world (*relationships-to*): (a) attitude to nature, (b) attitude to products of one’s labor (material and spiritual), (c) attitude to their own work, (d) attitude towards other people, (e) man’s attitude to himself.

As a matter of fact, all these five elements, to which man relates in one way or another, constitute what can be called the world (*Welt*) as a whole. From this it becomes clear that one of the central problems of Marx’s philosophy is an integral man in the diversity of his external and internal relations with the world (nature, culture, material objects, other people, and himself). In other words, Marx talks about a *man-in-*

the-world, and not about any part of human existence, be it actions or thinking, cognitive ability, aesthetic or ethical attitudes, consciousness or unconsciousness, knowledge of one's own death, language, corporeality or "text." In this case, man is considered by Marx as "totality of human manifestation of life" [Marx & Engels 1975a, 299].

Human (existential – inhumane or humane) relations to the world (*menschlichen Verhältnisse zur Welt*) represent the specifically human way of existence *par excellence*, along with social relations (*gesellschaftliche Verhältnisse*), relations-with and relations-between (*soziale Beziehungen*), which in their "ensemble" make this existence actually being-in-the-world.

Historicity of the human essence

Since human activity is always objective and transformative in its fundamental essence, it turns out that the content of praxis itself depends on those specific objective conditions in which it proceeds. Therefore, changes in these conditions necessarily determine corresponding changes in the subject area, and these, in turn, determine changes in the activity itself. Object-social reality exists in constant change because for various reasons, in the course of human existence, new situations arise continuously and new needs appear and require new ways of satisfaction and therefore new forms of objective activity. These new forms will to constitute corresponding novel forms of social life. But a certain continuity is always preserved (tradition, in the broader sense of the word) between the various stages of social process: every new objectivity grows out of the foundation of older objectivity. Therefore, people introduce changes in reality, but these retain in a compressed form the results of all previous development, and this continuous process of change and subsequent preservation turns out to be internally interconnected and coherent.

This united temporal coherent process of development is historicity (*Geschichtlichkeit*) – a process during which each new generation of people receives a certain universe created by all previous generations, changes it in its own transformative practice, and then transfers the changed world to the next generation. In other words, historicity is a process through which people perform praxis (in order to satisfy new needs arising as a result of previous changes in objectivity) and transform the existing social-object world (the present, factuality), create something new, where "traces" of the previous states of being (the past) are preserved; further, through practical inclusion of the new in

the system of immanent interconnections of the present world, humans generate previously non-existent relationships, structures, objects, properties, forms of activity, ideas, needs, and situations (future).

The whole point is that Marx takes both man and praxis not only in the formally abstract, but, first and foremost, in the dialectically substantive aspect. That is why in *Capital* (1867) Marx singles out invariant activity “in general” and its variable kinds: “applying this to man, he... must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as historically modified in each epoch” [Marx 1996, 605, fn. 2]. What is this “human nature in general”? We find the answer here, in the first volume of *Capital*. Marx wrote: “The labour-process, resolved as above into its simple elementary factors, is human action with a view to the production of use values, appropriation of natural substances to human requirements; it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature; it is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase” [Marx 1996, 194]. The same idea can be found in his work of 1859: “As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society” [Marx 1987, 274].

Thus, historicity acts as a fundamental property not only of human existence, but also of the human essence, for the moment of transformation permeates all aspects of human existence – from objectivity and social institutions to social relations and forms of consciousness, including the very foundation of this reality – human activity. As G. Lukács notes, the young Marx drew attention to the fact that “historicity is the main characteristic of all existence” [Lukács 1984, 94].

Due to the fact that praxis is the generic essence of man, taken in its ontological aspect, a strange situation arises: the essence is something unchanging (from the point of view of classical philosophy), but in Marx it turns out to be historical. Thus, in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), Marx radically declares: “all history is nothing but a continuous transformation of human nature” [Marx 1976, 192]. He develops this point in the *Grundriße* (1857–1858), writing that man “does not seek to remain something he has already become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming” [Marx 1986, 421], besides, human nature is seen “not as something evolving in the course of history, but posited by nature” [Marx 1986, 18].

Thus, according to Marx, “human nature in general” is praxis. And it is precisely this invariant activity-oriented human nature in general (*Wesen*) that changes and is modified in each specific historical epoch, i.e., in its specific content it depends on the social conditions in which man lives. “Marx refers to ‘human nature’ both in the ‘historically modified’ and in the ‘in general’ sense because he conceives human nature as the dialectical unity of both” [Tabak 2012, 23].

This distinction between the essence (activity) proper and its concrete historical modifications is connected with the fact that praxis is always carried out in concrete historical conditions, i.e. among concrete things, their interconnections, among people and their interactions, and among social structures determined by these interactions. In other words, activity (as creative activity inherent in a human being) always manifests in the structure of specific social relations, which are a result of the development of this activity and outside of which it simply does not exist. And if this is true, then there are different types of relationships and types of activity that are different in their content, and therefore different types of people. Those engaged in different activities (say, peasants and intellectuals), existing in different systems of activity (in the Neolithic era or under capitalism) are different people, but with all their differences, they remain people because they have an essence inherent in all people, a generic human essence.

Conclusion

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that:

- (1) man (as an individual) is a living, uniquely generic (socially individual) whole-integral being;
- (2) the essence and the way of human existence (in anthropological terms) is social conscious purposeful transforming objectal-instrumental material and spiritual activity (praxis);
- (3) man is a being that exists according to a non-natural artificial universal program;
- (4) man is (from ontological perspective) a concrete historical unity of the inner-subjective being (body and individual consciousness, psyche);
- (5) man is initially dialectically connected with the external-object “worlds” of nature (*Welt*), culture (*Umwelt*), society (*Mitwelt*), symbols, and social consciousness;
- (6) man develops and realizes himself in the intersubjectivity of social relations;

(7) and also, man is a suffering being, experiencing its being-in-the-world in the form of an indifferent, existential relationship-to-the-world and to oneself (*Eigenwelt*).

In forthcoming articles, based on this definition, we will consider the concepts of humane/inhumane and humanism, and on this basis we will then analyze various forms of neo-humanism.

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