

Erich Fromm

marx's
concept
of
man

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MILESTONES OF THOUGHT

A provocative new
view of Marx stressing
his humanist philosophy
and challenging both
Soviet distortion and
Western ignorance of his basic
thinking.

WITH AFTERWORD BY ERICH FROMM

Sonos

MILESTONES OF THOUGHT

Erich Fromm

MARX'S
CONCEPT
OF MAN

With a translation from Marx's
ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL
MANUSCRIPTS

by T. B. Bottomore
*London School of Economics and
Political Science*

With an Afterword by Erich Fromm

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CONCEPT
OF MAN**

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PREFACE

The bulk of this volume contains an English translation of Karl Marx's main philosophical work, published for the first time in the United States¹. Obviously, this publication is of importance, if for no other reason than that it will acquaint the American public with one of the major works of post-Hegelian philosophy, hitherto unknown in the English-speaking world.

Marx's philosophy, like much of existentialist thinking, represents a protest against man's alienation, his loss of himself and his transformation into a thing; it is a movement against the dehumanization and automatization of man inherent in the development of Western industrialism. It is ruthlessly critical of all "answers" to the problem of human existence which try to present solutions by negating or camouflaging the dichotomies inherent in man's existence. Marx's philosophy is rooted in the humanist Western philosophical tradition, which reaches from Spinoza through the French and German enlightenment philosophers of the eighteenth century to Goethe and Hegel, and the very essence of which is concern for man and the realization of his potentialities.

For Marx's philosophy, which has found its most articulate expression in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the central issue is that of the existence of the real individual man, who *is* what he *does*, and whose "nature" unfolds and reveals itself in history. But in contrast to Kierkegaard and others, Marx sees man in his

¹ An earlier translation into English, made in Russia, has been on sale in England since 1959. In Raya Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*, Bookman Associates, New York, 1958, some parts of the *Philosophical Manuscripts* (a little less than one half of what is published here) were for the first time translated and published in the United States.

full concreteness as a member of a given society and of a given class, aided in his development by society, and at the same time its captive. The full realization of man's humanity and his emancipation from the social forces that imprison him is bound up, for Marx, with the recognition of these forces, and with social change based on this recognition.

Marx's philosophy is one of protest; it is a protest imbued with faith in man, in his capacity to liberate himself, and to realize his potentialities. This faith is a trait of Marx's thinking that was characteristic of the Western mood from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, and which is so rare today. For this very reason, to many readers who are infected with the contemporary spirit of resignation and the revival of the concept of original sin (in Niebuhrian or Freudian terms), Marx's philosophy will sound dated, old-fashioned, utopian—and for this reason, if not for others, they will reject the voice of faith in man's possibilities, and of hope in his capacity to become what he potentially is. To others, however, Marx's philosophy will be a source of new insight and hope.

I believe that hope and new insight transcending the narrow limits of the positivistic-mechanistic thinking of social science today are needed, if the West is to emerge alive from this century of trial. Indeed while Western thought from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century (or, perhaps, to be exact, up to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914) was one of hope, a hope rooted in Prophetic and Greek-Roman thought, the last forty years have been years of increasing pessimism and hopelessness. The average person runs for shelter; he tries to escape from freedom and he seeks for security in the lap of the big state and the big corporation. If we are not

able to emerge from this hopelessness, we may still go on for a time on the basis of our material strength, but in the long historical perspective the West will be condemned to physical or spiritual extinction.

Great as is the importance of Marx's philosophy as a source of philosophical insight and as an antidote against the current—veiled or open—mood of resignation, there is another reason, hardly less important, for its publication in the United States at this time. The world is torn today between two rival ideologies—that of "Marxism" and that of "Capitalism." While in the United States "Socialism" is a word on the Devil's tongue and not one that recommends itself, the opposite is true in the rest of the world. Not only do Russia and China use the term "socialism" to make their systems attractive, but most Asian and African countries are deeply attracted by the ideas of Marxist socialism. To them socialism and Marxism are appealing not only because of the economic achievements of Russia and China, but because of the spiritual elements of justice, equality and universality which are inherent in Marxist socialism (rooted in the Western spiritual tradition). While the truth is that the Soviet Union is a system of a conservative state capitalism and not the realization of Marxian socialism, and while China negates, by the means she employs, that emancipation of the individual person which is the very aim of socialism, they both use the attraction of Marxist thought to recommend themselves to the peoples of Asia and Africa. And how do American public opinion and official policy react? We do everything to support the Russian-Chinese claim by heralding that their system is "Marxist," and by identifying Marxism and socialism with Soviet state capitalism and Chinese totalitarianism. By confronting the uncommitted masses of the world with the alterna-

tive between "Marxism" and "socialism" on the one hand, and "capitalism" on the other, (or, as we usually put it, between "slavery" and "freedom" or free enterprise) we give the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists as much support as we possibly can in the battle for the minds of men.

The alternatives for the underdeveloped countries, whose political development will be decisive for the next hundred years, are not capitalism and socialism, but totalitarian socialism and Marxist humanist socialism, as it tends to develop in various different forms in Poland, Yugoslavia, Egypt, Burma, Indonesia, etc. The West has much to offer as a leader of such a development for the former colonial nations; not only capital and technical advice, but also the Western humanist tradition of which Marxist socialism is the upshot; the tradition of man's freedom, not only *from*, but his freedom *to*—to develop his own human potentialities, the tradition of human dignity and brotherhood. But clearly, in order to exercise this influence and in order to understand the Russian and Chinese claims, we must understand Marx's thought and must discard the ignorant and distorted picture of Marxism which is current in American thinking today. It is my hope that this volume will be a step in that direction.

I have tried in my introduction to present Marx's concept of man in a simple (not, I trust, oversimplified) way, because his style makes his writings not always easy to understand, and I hope that the introduction will be helpful to most readers for an understanding of Marx's text. I have refrained from presenting my disagreements with Marx's thinking, because there are few as far as his humanist existentialism is concerned. A number of disagreements do exist concerning his sociological and economic theories, some of which I have expressed in previous

works.² They refer mainly to the fact that Marx failed to see the degree to which capitalism was capable of modifying itself and thus satisfying the economic needs of industrialized nations, his failure to see clearly enough the dangers of bureaucratization and centralization, and to envisage the authoritarian systems which could emerge as alternatives to socialism. But since this book deals only with Marx's philosophical and historical thought, it is not the place to discuss the controversial points of his economic and political theory.

However, criticism of Marx is something quite different from the customary fanatical or condescending judgment so characteristic of present-day utterances about him. I am convinced that only if we understand the real meaning of Marxist thought, and hence can differentiate it from Russian and Chinese pseudo-Marxism, will we be able to understand the realities of the present-day world and be prepared to deal realistically and constructively with their challenge. I hope that this volume will contribute not only to a greater understanding of Marx's humanist philosophy, but also that it will help to diminish the irrational and paranoid attitude that sees in Marx a devil and in socialism a realm of the devil.

While the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* constitute the main part of this volume, I have included also small sections of other philosophical writings by Marx to round out the picture. The only larger section I have added comprises various statements dealing with the person of Marx, and which also have never before been published in the United States. I have added this section because Marx's person, like his ideas, has been slandered and vilified by many authors; I believe that

² Cf., for example, *The Sane Society*, Rinehart & Co., Inc., New York, 1955.

a more adequate picture of Marx, the man, will help to destroy some prejudices with regard to his ideas.³

It remains only for me to express my warm appreciation to Mr. T. B. Bottomore of the London School of Economics for his permission to use his excellent new translation of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*,^{4,5} and also to thank him for a number of important critical suggestions he made after reading the manuscript of my introduction.

E. F.

³ A crude example of what has been done in this respect is the recent American publication of a pamphlet by Marx under the title *The World Without Jews*. This title, which makes it appear as if it were given to the pamphlet by Marx himself (the real title is *On the Jewish Problem*), seems to confirm the claim made in publicity for the book that Marx was the founder of Nazi and Soviet anti-Semitism. Anyone who reads the book and who knows Marx's philosophy and literary style will recognize that this claim is absurd and false. It misuses some critical remarks on the Jews, which were made polemically in a brilliant essay dealing with the problem of bourgeois emancipation, in order to make this fantastic accusation against Marx.

⁴ Watts & Co., London, will publish at a later date the whole of Mr. Bottomore's translation of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (including the mainly economic parts which have been omitted in this volume), together with his own introduction.

⁵ Note: All page references to *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* are to the Bottomore translation in this volume.

CONTENTS

MARX'S CONCEPT OF MAN, *Erich Fromm*

1. The Falsification of Marx's Concepts	1
2. Marx's Historical Materialism	8
3. The Problem of Consciousness, Social Structure and the Use of Force	19
4. The Nature of Man	24
5. Alienation	43
6. Marx's Concept of Socialism	58
7. The Continuity in Marx's Thought	69
8. Marx the Man	80

ECONOMIC AND PHILOSOPHICAL MANUSCRIPTS, *Karl Marx*

Translated by T. B. Bottomore

Translator's Note	87
Preface	90
<i>First Manuscript:</i> Alienated Labor	93
<i>Second Manuscript:</i> The Relationship of Private Property	110

<i>Third Manuscript:</i>	Private Property and Labor	119
	Private Property and Communism	123
	Needs, Production and Division of Labor	140
	Money	163
	Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy	169
<i>From German Ideology, Karl Marx</i>		197
Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, <i>Karl Marx</i>		217
Introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philo- sophy of Law. Critique of Religion, <i>Karl Marx</i>		220
Reminiscences of Marx, <i>Paul Lafargue</i>		221
Jenny Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer		242
Karl Marx, <i>Eleanor Marx-Aveling</i>		248
Confession, <i>Karl Marx</i>		257
Karl Marx's Funeral, <i>Frederick Engels</i>		258
AFTERWORD, <i>Erich Fromm</i>		261

I

THE FALSIFICATION OF MARX'S CONCEPTS

It is one of the peculiar ironies of history that there are no limits to the misunderstanding and distortion of theories, even in an age when there is unlimited access to the sources; there is no more drastic example of this phenomenon than what has happened to the theory of Karl Marx in the last few decades. There is continuous reference to Marx and to Marxism in the press, in the speeches of politicians, in books and articles written by respectable social scientists and philosophers; yet with few exceptions, it seems that the politicians and newspapermen have never as much as glanced at a line written by Marx, and that the social scientists are satisfied with a minimal knowledge of Marx. Apparently they feel safe in acting as experts in this field, since nobody with power and status in the social-research empire challenges their ignorant statements.¹

¹ It is a sad comment, yet one which cannot be avoided, that this ignorance and distortion of Marx are to be found more in the United States than in any other Western country. It must be mentioned especially that in the last fifteen years there has been an extraordinary renaissance of discussions on Marx in Germany and France, centered especially around the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* published in this volume. In Germany the participants in this discussion are mainly Protestant theologians. I mention first the extraordinary *Marxismusstudien*, ed. by I. Fetscher, 2 vols. J.C.B. Mohr (Tübingen, 1954 and 1957). Further, the excellent introduc-

Among all the misunderstandings there is probably none more widespread than the idea of Marx's "materialism." Marx is supposed to have believed that the paramount psychological motive in man is his wish for monetary gain and comfort, and that this striving for maximum profit constitutes the main incentive in his personal life and in the life of the human race. Complementary to this idea is the equally widespread assumption that Marx neglected the importance of the individual; that he had neither respect nor understanding for the spiritual needs of man, and that his "ideal" was the well-fed and well-clad, but "soulless" person. Marx's criticism of religion was held to be identical with the denial of all spiritual values, and this seemed all the more apparent to those who assume that belief in God is the condition for a spiritual orientation.

This view of Marx then goes on to discuss his socialist paradise as one of millions of people who submit to an all-powerful state bureaucracy, people who have surrendered their freedom, even though they might have

tion by Landshut to the Kroener edition of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Then, the works of Lukacs, Bloch, Popitz and others, quoted later. In the United States a slowly increasing interest in Marx's work has been observed recently. Unfortunately, it is in some part expressed in a number of biased and falsifying books like Schwarzschild's *The Red Prussian*, or in oversimplified and misleading books like the Overstreets' *The Meaning of Communism*. In contrast, Joseph A. Schumpeter, in his *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (Harper & Bros., 1947) offers an excellent presentation of Marxism. Cf. further on the problem of historical naturalism, John C. Bennett's *Christianity and Communism Today* (Association Press, New York). See also the excellent anthologies (and introductions) by Feuer (Anchor Books) and by Bottomore and Rubel, (Watts and Co., London). Specifically, on Marx's view of human nature I want to mention Venable's *Human Nature: The Marxist View*, which,

achieved equality; these materially satisfied "individuals" have lost their individuality and have been successfully transformed into millions of uniform robots and automatons, led by a small elite of better-fed leaders.

Suffice it to say at the outset that this popular picture of Marx's "materialism"—his anti-spiritual tendency, his wish for uniformity and subordination—is utterly false. Marx's aim was that of the spiritual emancipation of man, of his liberation from the chains of economic determination, of restituting him in his human wholeness, of enabling him to find unity and harmony with his fellow man and with nature. Marx's philosophy was, in secular, nontheistic language, a new and radical step forward in the tradition of prophetic Messianism; it was aimed at the full realization of individualism, the very aim which has guided Western thinking from the Renaissance and the Reformation far into the nineteenth century.

This picture undoubtedly must shock many readers because of its incompatibility with the ideas about Marx to which they have been exposed. But before proceed-

although knowledgeable and objective, suffers severely from the fact that the author could not make use of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*. Cf. also, for the philosophical basis of Marx's thought, H. Marcuse's brilliant and penetrating book, *Reason and Revolution* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1941), and the same author's discussion of Marx's theories vs. Soviet Marxism in *Soviet Marxism* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1958). Cf. also my discussion of Marx in *The Sane Society* (Rinehart & Co. Inc., New York, 1955) and my earlier discussion of Marx's theory in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Vol. I (Hirschfeld, Leipzig, 1932). In France, the discussion has been led partly by Catholic priests and partly by philosophers, most of them socialists. Among the former I refer especially to J. Y. Calvez' *La Pensée de Karl Marx*, ed. du Seuil, Paris 1956; among the latter, A. Kojève, Sartre, and especially the various works of H. Lefèbvre.

ing to substantiate it, I want to emphasize the irony which lies in the fact that the description given of the aim of Marx and of the content of his vision of socialism, fits almost exactly the reality of present-day Western capitalist society. The majority of people are motivated by a wish for greater material gain, for comfort and gadgets, and this wish is restricted only by the desire for security and the avoidance of risks. They are increasingly satisfied with a life regulated and manipulated, both in the sphere of production and of consumption, by the state and the big corporations and their respective bureaucracies; they have reached a degree of conformity which has wiped out individuality to a remarkable extent. They are, to use Marx's term, impotent "commodity men" serving virile machines. The very picture of mid-twentieth century capitalism is hardly distinguishable from the caricature of Marxist socialism as drawn by its opponents.

What is even more surprising is the fact that the people who accuse Marx most bitterly of "materialism" attack socialism for being unrealistic because it does *not* recognize that the only efficient incentive for man to work lies in his desire for material gain. Man's unbounded capacity for negating blatant contradictions by rationalizations, if it suits him, could hardly be better illustrated. The very same reasons which are said to be proof that Marx's ideas are incompatible with our religious and spiritual tradition and which are used to *defend* our present system *against* Marx, are at the same time employed by the same people to prove that capitalism corresponds to human nature and hence is far superior to an "unrealistic" socialism.

I shall try to demonstrate that this interpretation of Marx is completely false; that his theory does not assume that the main motive of man is one of material gain; that,