

# Humanism = Speciesism

## Marx on Humans and Animals

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper<sup>1</sup> is intended to form part of a more extended exploration of some key texts of Marx from the standpoint of the so-called 'new' social movements (though some of these pre-date the Marxist tradition itself!). Here, I shall be focussing on the early work of Marx – especially the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 – and with the concerns of two closely related recent radical movements in mind.

These movements are modern environmentalism and a spectrum of groupings which share concern about human mistreatment of (other) animals – animal welfare, rights and liberation groups, as well as the more specialist campaigns against vivisection, factory farming, the fur trade and so on. The value-orientation which underlies both movements, and which informs their critique of modern industrial societies, is radically at odds with a merely utilitarian, or instrumental relation to the rest of nature. Other animals may be sufficiently like human beings to be properly considered as moral subjects, and as the bearers of biographies. Ethical considerations must therefore enter into our dealings with them. It is evil to continue to treat them merely as instruments or resources to be exploited for specifically human purposes.

In the perspective of 'deep' ecology,<sup>2</sup> this argument can be extended to the whole of nature, which is regarded as having an intrinsic value, independent of human purposes and requirements. Concern for the environment, on this view, is properly rooted not in a 'speciesist' enlightened self-interest (i.e. the recognition that short-term benefits from ruthless exploitation of the environment will be paid for in the longer term by the destruction of our own 'life-support systems') but rather in a respect for the independent value of the other species with which we share our planet, and, indeed, for the whole complex of physical and chemical conditions for their existence and well-being.

At first thought, it seems that there is much in common between this view of our relationship to the rest of nature and that of the early Marx. Both perspectives share a vision of humans as *part* of nature, and as dependent for their well-being on unceasing interaction with nature. Consider, for example, Marx's striking metaphor for nature as man's 'inorganic body':

Nature is man's *inorganic body* – nature, that is in so far as it is not itself human body. Man *lives* on nature – means that nature is his *body*, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.<sup>3</sup>

And Marx is by no means stating merely a shallow-ecological,

enlightened self-interest of the species. The view of communism which structures the whole of the *Manuscripts* gives a central place to a proper ethical, aesthetic and cognitive relationship to nature as inseparable from true human fulfilment.

In his later works it sometimes seems as if Marx has retreated into a view of the overcoming of the opposition between humanity and nature as merely the main historical *means* by which humans are enabled to achieve fulfilment. This is very much the kind of picture of Marx's argument presented in Gerry Cohen's very influential defence of Marx's theory of history.<sup>4</sup> But the Marx of the *Manuscripts* is by contrast clear in his recognition that a transformation of our relation to nature is a key *aspect* and *content* of the process of human emancipation itself.

This indeed is something I would like to hold onto as a fundamental insight which Marx reached in the *Manuscripts*. But – and this is the topic of the rest of this paper – it also seems to me that there are fundamental ambiguities and conceptual tensions in the overall philosophical position adopted by the early Marx as it bears on this range of problems. These ambiguities and tensions threaten to undermine what is of value in Marx's achievement and have sustained readings of Marx which have been deeply inimical to environmental values. A serious effort of critical restructuring and revaluation of the most basic philosophical ideas and arguments of the early Marx is necessary if their 'rational kernel' is to be extracted. At best, I can accomplish only a tiny fragment of that task in this paper, but, as I shall try to show, this tiny fragment does have very far-reaching implications.

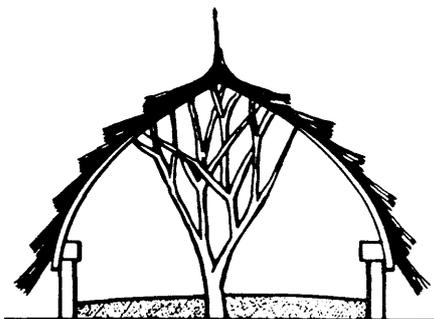
There are two elements in the argument of the *Manuscripts* which seem to me to sit very uncomfortably alongside the naturalism of the above-quoted passage and its possible 'deep-ecological' reading. These elements are, first, the use of the human/animal contrast as Marx's central device in the ethical critique of the estrangement of labour under regimes of private property, and, second, the specific content Marx gives to his vision of human emancipation as involving the 'humanisation of nature'. I shall say most about the first of these elements, leaving what I have to say about the second rather underdeveloped.

With regard to the human/animal opposition the argument is, very roughly, as follows. The estrangement of labour is supposed by Marx to have disastrous effects on human beings, their relations to one another, and their relationships to their external, material world. These disastrous effects can be summed up by saying that the estrangement of labour reduces human life to the condition appropriate to that of animals, and, within human life, inverts the relation between the human and the animal. The overcoming of estrangement means restoring to human beings their properly human status, and relationships to one another and to the rest of nature. But what *is* the rest of nature? Does it include other animals? Marx's use of the metaphor 'inorganic body'

## HUMANITY AS 'SPECIES BEING'

suggests not. On the other hand, nothing Marx says in connection with that metaphor can be sustained unless animals *are* included. A human life dependent upon the forces and mechanisms of inorganic nature, unmediated by other forms of life, is impossible. There is no reason to think Marx actually thought it possible. And, notwithstanding the arguments of some that the *possibility* now exists of a satisfactory human life which does not rely on the consumption or exploitation of other animals, the phrase 'man lives on Nature', written in 1844, must have included within its reference a whole range of uses of animals as a source of energy in agricultural and industrial labour processes, as well as for food, entertainment and companionship.

Now, if, for Marx, human emancipation involves a qualitative transformation of our relationship with the rest of nature, a 'humanisation' of nature, and if nature includes other species of animals, then human emancipation must involve a transformation in our relations to other animals. But what could this transformation be? A literal 'humanisation' of them in the sense of 'rendering them human' by selective breeding (or, for us, genetic engineering?)? Or, as with the rest of nature, a deliberate alteration of their character so that they better fulfil human purposes (i.e. a continuation of those breeding and 'husbandry' practices whereby farm animals have been rendered more productive and docile, pets more 'domesticated', companionable, child-like in appearance, and so on)? If either of these were intended by Marx, his critique of the estrangement of humanity from nature would lose all its force: the 'humanisation' of animals (as part of nature) in either of these senses would be a continuation and augmentation, not a transcendence of the treatment of animals under capitalism, and indeed, in pre-capitalist societies too. Moreover, Marx draws on an absolute and universal, not a provisional and historically transcendable opposition between the human and the animal in grounding his ethical critique of the capitalist mode of life. If what is wrong with these societies is that humans are reduced to the condition of animals, then the transcendence of capitalism, in restoring humanity to the human, simultaneously restores the differentiation between the human and the animal. If what is wrong with capitalism is, essentially, that it does not differentiate the human and the animal, then the antidote to capitalism must offer to restore the proper differential. But this is precisely what the notion of 'humanisation' seems to deny. The ontological basis of the ethical critique of capitalism (embedded in the notion of estrangement) appears to be inconsistent with the coherent formulation of its transcendence (in particular, the notion of 'humanisation' in relation to animals as part of nature). As I shall suggest later, this dilemma can be resolved by a revision of the ontology of the *Manuscripts* which nevertheless leaves intact a good deal of the ethical critique of capitalist society. However, before I move on to that task it is worth spending some time investigating in rather more depth the sources of the dilemma, and, in particular, looking at some of the implications of the way Marx draws his contrasts between the human and the animal.



Central to Marx's account of human nature is the claim that man is a 'species being'. The term is derived from Feuerbach, but Marx gives it a new and richer philosophical meaning:

Man is a species-being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species (his own as well as those of other things) as his object, but – and this is only another way of expressing it – also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being.<sup>5</sup>

This 'universality' of human theoretical and practical activity distinguishes humans from (other) animals. The sensory, cognitive and transformative powers of other animals are exercised 'under the dominion of immediate physical need'. They produce 'in accordance with the standard and the need' of their species. Humans, by contrast, who know how to produce in accordance with the standard of *every* species, only *truly* produce in freedom from immediate physical need, and take the *whole* world of nature as the object of their practical, aesthetic and cognitive powers.

Whereas animals produce to meet the needs of themselves, or their young, the activity of individual human beings is, at least potentially, a part of the activity of the species as a whole. Not only, then, is human activity 'universal' in the sense that it takes the whole world of nature as its object, but it is also universal in the sense that it is a species-wide activity. The activity of each individual is not a mere *instance* of its type, but, rather, a living *part* of an interconnected whole – the activity, or 'life' of the species.

In his exposition of the concept of the estrangement of labour, Marx lays great emphasis on this aspect:

In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labour estranges the *species* from man. It changes for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. First, it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form.<sup>6</sup>

In separating individual life from the life of the species, and inverting their proper relationship to one another, the estrangement of labour imposes upon humanity a mode of existence in which its distinctive species attributes cannot be manifested. Human potential remains unactualised, development is stunted, powers are exercised in a distorted or inverted way.

The character of 'man' as a species-being, then, is not a manifest, empirically detectable feature in contemporary societies. It is, rather, an as yet unachieved potential. The achievement of this potential is the work of the human historical process. So, implicit in the idea of humanity as a 'species being' is also the idea of humanity as a *historical* being. And by this is meant, not simply a being whose activities and forms of association change through time. In addition, these changes of manifest activity and forms of association have a cumulative and directional character, an overlying pattern in terms of which we can make sense of each successive phase or period. To say that the human species is historical in this sense is to say that the species as a whole undergoes, in the historical process, something analogous to the development undergone by both individual human beings and other animals in their transition from embryo through infancy to childhood. Only in the adult are the potentials of the infant fully actualised. The development of the individual is the process of its self-realisation. So, in the case of the human species, communist

society is the form under which what was merely potential in earlier historical phases becomes actual. The historical process is the 'developmental' process of humankind, through which its species-powers are fully developed, its distinctive species-character is realised.

The analysis of the estrangement of labour shows that there is no necessary or universal connection between the 'developmental' process of the species and the developmental process of the individual. Where labour is estranged, the 'development' of the species occurs at the cost of individual development:

It is true that labour produces wonderful things for the rich – but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces – but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty – but for the worker, deformity... It produces intelligence – but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, the historical 'development' of the species is a precondition for the development of the distinctively human powers of individuals:

Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man's essential being is the richness of subjective *human* sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form – in short, *senses* capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of *man*) either cultivated or brought into being. The *forming* of the five senses is the labour of the entire history of the World down to the present.<sup>8</sup>

Humans are different from other animals, then, in that they undergo 'development' at the level of the species (*historical* development) as well as at the level of the individual. In the human species, the 'development' of the species may take place at the cost of stunting or distorting the development of individuals, but, in the long run, full development of the individual with respect to the most distinctively human characteristics is only possible on the basis of a high level of 'development' of the species. None of these considerations apply to other animals, which, for Marx, have a fixed, species-characteristic relationship between need, instinct and transformative powers, each producing 'in accordance with the standard and need of the species to which it belongs'.<sup>9</sup>

What makes possible this supra-individual 'development' in the human case is the distinctive character of human activity as 'free, conscious activity':

Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species – its species-character – is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species-character.<sup>10</sup>

A being who freely and consciously engages in a practice is able to reflect critically upon that practice, to change it in line with its existing, or newly formulated purposes. Free, self-conscious transformative practice, then, has within it a potential for change and development which the direct and instinctual need-meeting activity of (other) animals does not have. And since this 'productive life' is the life of the species, to characterise its 'development' – the development of human productive powers – is to characterise what is essential to the formative process of humanity itself:

It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*. This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species-*

*life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created.<sup>11</sup>

And, again:

But since for the socialist man the *entire so-called history of the world* is nothing but the creation of man through human labour, nothing but the emergence of nature for man, so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his *birth* through himself, of his *genesis*.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, this self-creation through labour, through the augmentation of human transformative powers, should not be confused with self-creation through mere economic, or industrial activity – an 'economistic' view of history. Certainly Marx recognises in industrial production 'the *exoteric* revelation of man's *essential powers*',<sup>13</sup> but full human historical 'development' will involve a transcendence of the prevailing fragmentation of human activities –

The positive transcendence of *private property*, as the appropriation of *human* life, is therefore the positive transcendence of all estrangement – that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his *human*, i.e. *social*, existence.<sup>14</sup>

The historical 'developmental' process, then, is to be understood as a multi-faceted and progressive augmentation of human transformative powers vis-a-vis nature. This process can be understood as one of human *self-creation*, or *self-realisation*, in that the *bearer* of these powers is transformed along with the object of their exercise (nature). In particular, human cognitive powers ('science') underly the development of productive powers, and are themselves developed through reflection upon the outcomes of productive activity. Human sensory powers are likewise (see above quotation) developed along with the transformation of the *objects* of human perception: the power to create beautiful objects and the growth of aesthetic sensibility in the human subject are internally related to one another. And, finally, the *purpose* of transformative activity is itself historically transformed as humans acquire new needs in the course of their historical self-development:

We have seen what significance, given socialism, the *wealth* of human needs acquires, and what significance, therefore, both a *new mode of production* and a *new object* of production obtain: a new manifestation of the forces of *human nature* and a new enrichment of *human nature*.<sup>15</sup>

Central to Marx's notion of this historical transformation of need is the idea that self-realisation comes *itself* to be the object of need:

It will be seen how in place of the *wealth* and *property* of political economy come the *rich human being* and the *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*.<sup>16</sup>

The historical self-creation of humanity, then, is a process in which human transformative, sensory, aesthetic and cognitive powers and liabilities are transformed and augmented, along with a transformation of the structure of human need itself. But this process is not one which takes place 'in vacuo', so to speak. It would make no sense to speak of these powers, liabilities and needs without some notion of their object: 'nature' (including human nature).

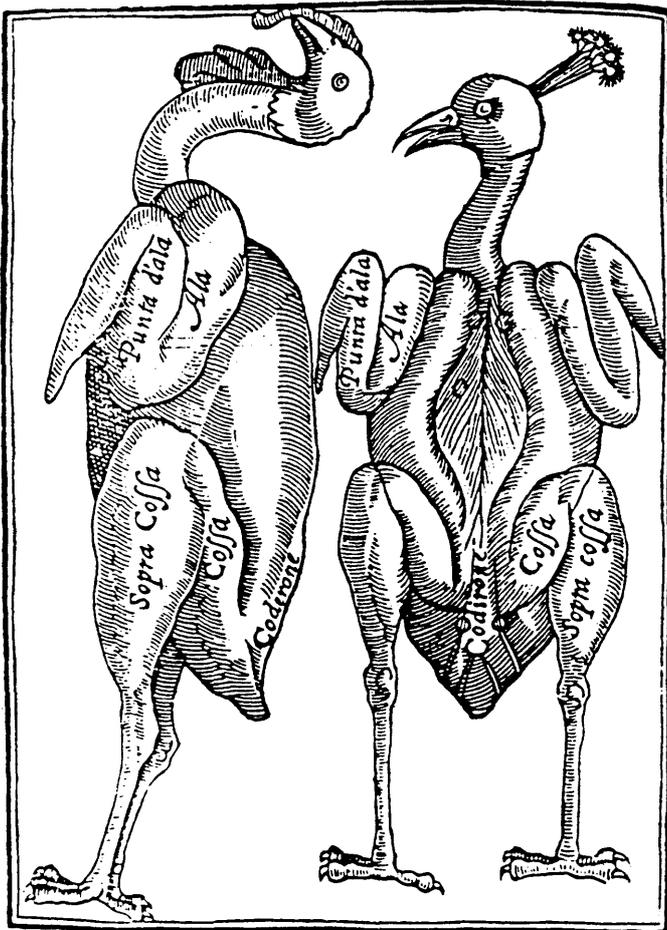
## HISTORY AND THE 'HUMANISATION OF NATURE'

The species-wide and communal project through which humanity creates itself is summed up by Marx as the 'humanisation of nature'. Nature as an external, threatening and constraining power is to be overcome in the course of a long-drawn-out historical process of collective transformation. The world thoroughly transformed by human activity will be a world upon which human identity itself has been impressed, and so no longer a world which is experienced as external or estranged:

On the one hand, therefore, it is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man's essential powers – human reality and for that reason the reality of his *own* essential powers – that all *objects* become for him the *objectification* of himself, become objects which confirm and realise his individuality, become *his* objects.<sup>17</sup>

And this applies not merely to the objects of human practical, transformative powers, but also to the world as object of human sensory and cognitive powers:

The *manner* in which they become *his* depends on the *nature of the objects* and on the nature of the essential power corresponding to *it*; for it is precisely the *determinate nature* of this relationship which shapes the particular,



*real* mode of affirmation. To the *eye* an object comes to be other than it is to the *ear*, and the object of the *eye* is another object than the object of the *ear*... Thus man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with *all* his senses.<sup>18</sup>

These quotations, and others like them, suggest a certain view of the transformation wrought by human history in the relationship between human beings and their natural environment. An external, limiting, conditioned relation between the two is transformed in favour of an internal, unlimited, unconditioned (i.e. 'universal') relation which amounts to a fusion of identities. The 'conflict' between humans and nature is overcome in favour of an incorporation of the natural into the domain of the human without residue. Only when the *whole* world is appropriated cognitively, aesthetically and practically can humanity itself be fully realised:

This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be the solution.<sup>19</sup>

This historical vision is clearly incompatible with the content of Marx's metaphor, elsewhere in the same text, of nature as 'man's inorganic body', the insistence upon the *permanent* necessity of the 'metabolism' between humans and their natural environment as a condition of survival. The reality of nature as a complex causal order, independent of human activity, forever sets the conditions and limits within which human beings, as natural beings, may shape and direct their activities. These materialist theses about the relationship of humanity to nature, which are elsewhere, and more especially in later works, also assented to by Marx, are absent from this utopian and idealist vision of human emancipation.

The important value-content of this early view of history is also put at risk by its residual idealism. Marx insists that the proper relation between the human species and its natural environment is not reducible to instrumental, need-meeting activity (important though this of course is). A properly human relationship with nature is a many-faceted relationship in which aesthetic, cognitive, practical and identity-forming aspects are communally realised. This multi-faceted, properly human relationship to nature is one which not only meets need, but has itself *become* the prime human need.

These ideas are powerful, persuasive, and very much in line with modern environmentalism. But when we turn to Marx's specification of the *kind* of relationship to nature which would realise these values their critical potential is vitiated. If we can be at home in the world, be properly, humanly, connected with the world only on the basis of a thorough-going transformation of it in line with our intentions, then what space is left for a valuing of nature in virtue of its *intrinsic* qualities? If we can 'see ourselves' in, or identify only with a world which *we* have created, then what is left of our status as *part* of nature? Nature, it seems, is an acceptable partner for humanity only insofar as it has been divested of all that constitutes its otherness, insofar, in other words, as it has become, itself, human. This view of a properly human relationship to nature is certainly far removed from a utilitarian, instrumental one, but its value-content is no less anthropocentric. It is, indeed, a quite fantastic species-narcissism.

## THE OPPOSITION BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND THE ANIMAL

I shall here leave aside the question of how far what is acceptable in the value-content of Marx's view of a fully human relationship to nature as a whole can be supported on the basis of a critical revision of his ontology. Instead, I shall return to the rather narrower question of the human/animal contrast. We have seen that for Marx, (other) animals are characterised by a certain standardised fixity in their mode of life. In so far as they are able to act transformatively upon external nature they do so in accordance with a definite 'standard', characteristic of their species, and their activity is oriented to the meeting of their individual needs (also fixed, and characteristic for each species) and those of their offspring. By contrast, human beings act upon the external world in a way which is free, self-conscious, and socially coordinated. Because of these distinctive features of human life-activity, their forms of association and modes of practical engagement with the world are subject to directional historical transformations. Only an account of the human mode of life which took into account the place of any specific phase of activity in the overall historical 'development' would be capable of adequately specifying what was, in the full sense, 'human'. What distinguishes humans from animals, in other words, is something which only becomes manifest in the course of human history itself. As we saw, this historical-developmental process, peculiar to the human species, consists in an augmentation of our transformative powers *vis-à-vis* nature, amounting to a residueless 'humanisation' of nature; an associated augmentation of our knowledge both of ourselves and of nature (towards a synthesis of the two); a transformation of our sensory powers, equivalent to the 'humanisation of the senses'; and a transformation in the structure of need.

The contrast between the human and the animal is then, a contrast both between humans and other animals, and between fully developed humanity and undeveloped humanity:

History itself is a *real* part of *natural history* – of nature developing into man.<sup>20</sup>

The process of historical development is a movement from animal-like origins to a fully human realisation, and this is so with respect not only to our powers and liabilities, but also with respect to need. Even when human transformative powers are well-developed but the estrangement of labour has not been overcome, truly human needs are not manifested. The worker experiences need, and is constrained to meet need in a manner which belies his true human potential, resembling, rather, the animal mode of experiencing and satisfying need.

Underlying both Marx's concept of historical development and his critique of estrangement, then, is a contrast between what he variously calls 'crude', 'physical' or 'animal' need, on the one hand, and 'human' need, on the other:

It (the animal) produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.<sup>21</sup>

And again:

The *sense* caught up in crude practical need has only a *restricted* sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food. It could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of animals.<sup>22</sup>

Speaking of estranged labour, Marx says:

It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it.<sup>23</sup>

Needs, in this sense, determine the worker's share of the product of labour.

... as much, only, as is necessary for his existence, not as a human being, but as a worker, and for the propagation, not of humanity, but of a slave class of workers.<sup>24</sup>

Marx's attempt, in passages such as these, to provide an account of human nature in terms of a thorough-going opposition between the human and the animal is very much in line with the mainstream of modern Western philosophy and such more recent disciplines as cultural anthropology and sociology. The conceptual oppositions nature/culture; animal/human; body/mind play a foundational, structuring role in the theoretical edifices which dominate these disciplines.

For each of these disciplinary matrices, an opposition between the animal and the human implies also an opposition *within* the human between what is animal(-like) and what is 'truly' human. In the paradigm dualist philosophy of Descartes, for example, the contrast between persons and animals implies a contrast within the person between a spatially extended bodily mechanism and a self-conscious 'thinking' substance. What is distinctive and valued in human nature is emphasised and its unsullied autonomy preserved, but at the cost of rendering unintelligible the *connections* between humans and the rest of nature and, within persons, between those aspects which are and those which are not distinctively human.

Now, Marx's utopian vision of an eventual reunification of humanity with itself and with nature seems, at first encounter, to promise a way out of the dilemmas posed by such dualist ways of thinking. However, the systematic use of human/animal contrasts in his early work tells against this. These contrasts are not presented as historically transcendable. On the contrary, the human potential for historical transcendence is precisely what *differentiates* us from animals. Whatever changes take place in our human relationship to nature, animals are, and will remain, mere animals.

Many of my readers, of course, will be now saying 'well, so much the better for Marx'. The main historical alternatives to philosophical dualism – materialist and idealist 'monisms' – are the object of well-rehearsed and seemingly decisive objections. Idealisms have great difficulty in sustaining plausible or even coherent accounts of those aspects of our experience in which the mind-independent reality of our world is manifested. Materialisms have a symmetrical difficulty in accounting coherently or plausibly for the existence and nature of human consciousness and experience itself. Materialisms have, more often than not, begun with the aim of explaining some supposedly distinctive and highly valued human characteristic or potential, and ended with explaining it away. In our day, biological reductionist accounts of human nature are the best known culprits.<sup>30</sup>

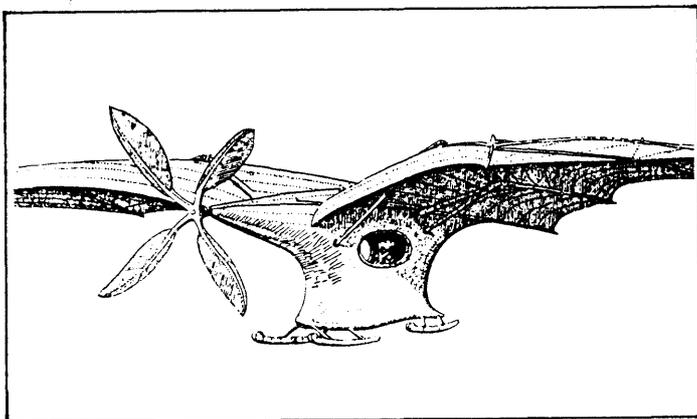
If these were, indeed, the only available options, then the case for dualism could be made to appear relatively strong. But they are *not* the only available options. The philosophical and ethical difficulties of the dualist aspects of Marx's early writings are quite formidable, not only in their own right, but also in terms of other aspects of Marx's overall intellectual and practical project.

### AGAINST MARX'S HUMAN/ANIMAL DUALISM

Consider, first, Marx's 'external' dualism of the animal and the human. I'll deal, in turn, with each of the characteristics through which Marx elaborates the opposition:

1. Animals are mere 'instances' of their species, whereas humans

relate also as 'part to whole' to theirs. This is Marx's reference to the open-ended capacity of humans for social cooperation. For Marx this is potentially, though not yet actually, a species-wide cooperation in a common species-specific project. But the very cultural diversity which Marx's notion of 'free creativity' also recognises must render implausible his historical projection. What grounds are there for expecting a spontaneous merging of geographically discrete and culturally diverse lines of historical 'development' and visions of the future? What reasons are there



for supposing that humans have the potential to evolve non-coercive forms of social coordination on the gigantic scale required?

On the animal side of Marx's contrast, subsequent ethological study has revealed a wealth and complexity of social life in other species. In the case of such animals as dogs, cats, and herd-animals such as sheep and cattle, their very sociability was a necessary initial requirement for their distinctive human uses. So also was a degree of malleability, and 'openness' in their forms of sociability. If we leave aside, then, what is merely speculative in Marx's contrast – his as yet unfulfilled historical projection – the picture is one of highly differentiated and species-specific capacities for and forms of sociability as between animal species. The extent and form of human sociability is, indeed, distinctive, but this is no less true of any other social species. The capacity for and disposition to social coordination of activity *as such* is not a distinctive feature of our species.

2. Humans take the whole world as the object of their activity, whereas animals appropriate the world only partially, and according to the fixed standard of their species. Again, the human side of this opposition is misleading. Certainly it is a plausible extrapolation from the past expansion of the geographical scope of human activity to suppose that one day the whole surface of the globe may bear the imprint of human intentional activity – the last of the rainforests and wildwoods destroyed or cultivated, the poles populated and industrialised, the oceans farmed or rendered sterile by accumulation of toxic wastes, and so on. But what is now supposed to be true of the large-scale, immensely complex and interacting mechanisms of chemical and physical cycling and energy transfer in the biosphere suggests that our species would destroy itself (and many others) by the unintended consequences of its own activity long before such a 'utopian' possibility were actualised. All transformative activity presupposes a distinction

between those attributes of its objects which undergo alteration and other attributes of the objects, conditions and agents of the activity whose persistence, unaltered throughout the process, is indispensable to it. Because of this, even if we suppose a limitless increase in human technical powers in any imaginable direction, the notion of a residueless subordination of the world intensively or extensively to human purposes is incoherent.

On the animal side of this contrast, again, ethological studies reveal great diversity among other animal species with respect to the extent, nature and intra-species variability of their interaction with their environments. As Marx notes, birds build nests which are to a considerable extent species-specific in the materials used, site chosen, and 'design'. Nevertheless many species show considerable adaptability in all respects, especially if confronted with non-standard environmental conditions. Inventing, making, using, and inter-generational teaching of the use of tools are now well recognised as powers of non-human primates, notably chimpanzees.<sup>26</sup> That there are profound *differences* in these capacities between humans and other species is clear, but it remains true that such profound differences also separate non-human animal species from one another. For his intellectual purposes, Marx exaggerates both the fixity and limitedness of scope in the activity of other animals, and the flexibility and universality of scope of human activity upon the environment. At the same time he abstracts from diversity among non-human animal species, and obscures human ecological diversity by way of a global historical extrapolation. Each of these 'intellectual tactics' contributes to the formation of a dualistic categorical opposition instead of a recognition of complex patterns of species-specific diversity.

3. Humans possess historical potential, whereas animals exhibit fixed standardised modes of activity, from generation to generation. This contrast presupposes the first two, but goes beyond them in important respects. To get clear about how the contrast works, and to see the difficulties in the way of sustaining it in this form it is first necessary to 'unpack' the notion of 'historical potential' and that of 'historical development' with which it is closely connected in Marx. First, it is important to distinguish between powers, or capacities, on the one hand, and potentials on the other. To attribute a power of a capacity to, say, an organism, is to say that it is *able* to do something (even though it may not be *in fact* doing it – it may never have done it). To attribute a *potential* is to say that it has the capacity to acquire some future capacity or power which it presently does not have. We may distinguish different kinds of potential on the basis of the natures of the processes in virtue of which they are progressively acquired, on the basis of the natures of the external conditions which enable their acquisition, and on the basis of the natures of the bearers of the capacities concerned.

In its infancy an animal, human or non-human, can be said to have capacities, or powers, specific to its stage of development. A child of one year old may be able to crawl but not stand, a little later to stand but not walk, and so on. The infants of most mammal species are less helpless when born than the human infant, and they tend to acquire the species-specific capacities of adults more quickly, but basically the same considerations apply. If we know what capacities are characteristic of adults of the species then we can say of normal infants which have not yet developed these capacities that they have the potential to do so. The nature of the organism is such that given satisfaction of minimal external conditions it will undergo development resulting in the acquisition of the characteristic capacities of adults of its species. Such potentials of infants may be termed 'developmental potentials'.

Again, at any stage in its development, an organism may be said to lack certain capacities – 'skills' are the paradigm here – not

because it lacks the necessary organic constitution, nor because it is insufficiently mature, but because it has lacked appropriate learning experience. Of such an organism we can say it lacks the capacity (to, for example, catch its own prey, fly long distances, understand long words, do simple arithmetic, depending on the species) concerned, but has the *potential* to acquire it. Such a potential might be termed a 'learning potential'.

Both developmental and learning potentials are potentials of individual organisms. Within the whole range of potentials of individuals we may distinguish between those potentials the fulfilment of which constitutes a species-wide characteristic, and those potentials which are fulfilled only in virtue of the exposure of (a sub-population of) the organisms to a distinctive set of environmental conditions. The former I shall call 'individual species-potentials', the latter 'individual context-potentials'. In the human



case, the potential (in small infants) for language-acquisition is an individual species-potential, whereas the potential to acquire the French language would be an individual context-potential for infants reared in French-speaking cultural environments. Pet dogs can learn to respond to human commands; captive chimps can acquire a degree of competence at learning sign-language.<sup>38</sup> The potentials to do this in the animals acquired for the appropriate training are, in my sense, individual context-potentials.

But Marx's notion of an historical potential includes at least the idea of potentials as possessed by associated groups of individual organisms. Humans characteristically produce means of subsistence, for example, through some form of more-or-less stable pattern of combination of the activities of more-or-less numerous individuals. The productive powers of the group are certainly different in degree, and might indeed be argued to be different in kind from those possessed by individuals. This distinction between individual and group-capacities can also be sustained for other social species of animals. Social bees and wasps, beavers, predators such as lions, hyaenas and others are all species in which sub-populations form more-or-less stable groupings which possess capacities not possessed by individuals independently of their grouping.

But can we speak of group-potentials as distinct from mere group-capacities? Are there, for groups, analogues of the processes of development and learning at the level of individuals which might serve as the foundation for a cumulative acquisition of powers through time? Do groups augment their powers of co-ordination of their own activity, or of transforming their environments? To the extent to which they do we may speak of 'collective potentials'. In fact, collective potentials are probably possessed in any significant degree only in some mammalian social animals, and to a high degree only in the human case.

Where the acquired capacities (the fulfilled potentials) of groups can be transmitted from generation to generation in such a way as to enable a continued augmentation of powers of the associated group which is independent of preservation of the

identities of the *members* of the group I shall speak of collective historical potentials. The acquisition of a written language, for example, can retrospectively be recognised to have been a collective historical potential of some pre-literate civilizations. Literacy, like the wheel, does not have to be re-invented in each generation, but, unlike spoken language, it is not a collective possession in all cultures, or in all historical periods. I think that the notion of collective historical potentials is required if we are to adequately understand historical processes, but I also recognise that there are serious difficulties in the way of coherently specifying the concept. Not the least of these is the problem of securing identity of reference to the 'bearers' or possessors of such potentials. In the case of simple collective potentials this is relatively unproblematic. As long as the group stays together, and continues to interact, it can be identified and re-identified as 'the same' group. Identifying and re-identifying 'the same' collectivity of human beings through prolonged expanses of historical time is another matter.

However, for (the early) Marx, the problem is compounded, since he attributes to the human species alone yet another type of collective potential: the potential for species-wide coordination of activity. The potential is not, here, attributable to any empirically delimitable socially combined *population* of human beings, but to the species as a whole. For Marx, then, over and above simple collective potentials, and collective historical potentials, there are also what we might call 'species historical potentials'.

Finally, for any species capable of historical potentials of either of the two kinds so far distinguished ('collective' or 'species') the conditions exist for a further kind of *individual* potential to be distinguished. To the extent that *collective* (or *species*) historical potentials are fulfilled, the environmental contexts in which individuals realise their individual developmental and or learning potentials are transformed. In other words, for species susceptible of collective historical 'development' (cumulative acquisition of collective powers across generations) we can distinguish *within* the category of individual context-potentials a sub-class of individual *historical* potentials. Individual historical potentials are capacities which individuals are able to acquire in virtue of their membership of a collective in which cognate *collective* historical potentials have been fulfilled. The individual potential for reading or writing, for example, is an individual historical potential in this sense. It is a potential which can be realised only by individuals who belong to a culture which possesses the institution of a written language. The importance of the idea of collective historical potentials is that it is necessary if we are to understand the extent to which the possibilities for *individual* development and fulfilment are dependent upon the historical achievements of the culture in which they find themselves.

Clearly, a good deal needs to be said by way of elaborating and defending these distinctions. But enough has been said to enable me to at least state my case against Marx's use of the concept of historical potential in sustaining his opposition between humans and animals. On the human side of the opposition, it seems to me that the attribution of *species* historical potentials to humans is, to say the least, highly speculative. Certainly this is so if we try to follow Marx in saying which potentials these are (humanisation of nature, and so on). Further, the normative connotation which the notion of potential generally carried in Marx does not seem obviously to carry over into historical potentials, whether individual or collective. The individual historical potential to deliver 'megadeaths' at the press of a button is dependent upon the realisation of the collective historical potential to construct hi-tech. weaponry. But how do we value this historical achievement? Do we recognise in it just one aspect of the historical unfolding of

human nature, a dimension of human fulfilment, along with our increased capacities for curing the sick, making the deserts bloom and so on? If we take this option, then it entails recognising that humans have, as part of their nature, a potential for destructiveness, for evil. In this event, human well-being, the pursuit of happiness may require us to find ways of suppressing, or blocking off some of our potentials. Well-being, the 'good life' cannot be identified straightforwardly with the fulfilment of our human potential.

The alternative option would be to keep the positive normative connotations of the notion of 'potential', refusing to recognise as potentials those historical possibilities whose realisation would be undesirable - evil, destructive, and, ultimately, self-destructive. This option strikes me as a particularly indefensible form of 'speciesist' special-pleading. The temptation towards utopian blindness to the causal importance of those individual and collective historical possibilities denied the status of 'potentials' is both strong and dangerous. As Mary Midgley has eloquently shown, the human/animal opposition has served as a convenient symbolic device whereby we have attributed to animals the dispositions we have not been able to contemplate in ourselves.<sup>25</sup> The point of these considerations is to suggest that if Marx turns out to have been right in supposing that only humans have historical potentials, it does not follow directly from this that any great gulf stands between the animal and the human with respect to their moral status.

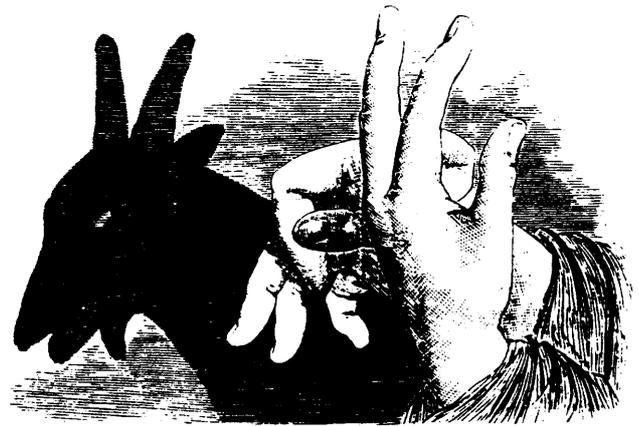
The significance of this point becomes clearer if we look at Marx's contrast from the animal side of the divide. As we have seen, many animal species display a complexity, diversity and adaptability in their behaviour which is denied in Marx's view of them as rigidly stereotypical in their species-characteristic modes of life. For many non-human animal species it is possible to speak defensibly of developmental and learning potentials, of simple collective powers, and even to a limited extent of collective potentials. Some evidence exists of cultural transmission of learned skills in the cases of some species of primates but not (as yet, at least) of any generation-by-generation cumulative direction in these collective skills.<sup>26</sup> This *does* seem to be a distinctive feature of humans by contrast with all other animal species currently inhabiting the earth. It is, however, worth noting that this is a purely contingent matter. There is no *a priori* reason for supposing that some other species might not evolve these potentials in the future, and there are good empirical grounds for thinking that our planet has *previously* been inhabited by other primate species which *did* have historical potentials.

Now, the moral contrast which Marx draws between the *historical potential* of humanity and its estranged, distorted, stunted, *merely animal* mode of existence under the dominion of estranged labour is only effective on two conditions. First, it is necessary to equate the fulfilment of human historical potential with the well-being, the flourishing, of humans in their forms of association with one another and their material environment. I have just suggested that this equation is not justified.<sup>27</sup> Second, it is necessary to attribute to human beings the capacity to exist in two contrasting states: as merely existing, or surviving, as beings whose 'crude, physical', or 'merely animal' needs are met (as mere bearers of the capacity to work, and to physically reproduce that capacity), or, by contrast, as flourishing, as fulfilled, as 'fully human'.

But the place of the reference to 'animal needs', here, and the associated use of the human/animal contrast to sustain the ethical critique of human estrangement requires a *denial* of this capacity in the animal case. Animals, we must suppose, merely exist. As animals they have merely animal needs and the satisfaction of these needs is both necessary and sufficient for the existence and

reproduction of the life of the individual and its species. But if, as we have seen, (some) animals, too, have developmental, learning, species, context, and collective capacities and potentials then here, also, it must be possible to distinguish between mere existence, on the one hand, and flourishing, well-being, and the fulfilment of diverse potentials, on the other. The mere fact of distinctively human *historical* potentials does not obliterate *either* the ethical distinction between flourishing and merely existing for other animals, or its ontological presupposition.

The point here is not just that Marx was simply wrong about animals.<sup>28</sup> It is rather that he was wrong in ways which undermine his own view of the desirability of a changed relationship between humanity and nature in the future communist society. Connectedly, he is also wrong about animals in ways which cut him off from a powerful extension and deepening of his own ethical critique of prevailing (capitalist) modes of appropriation of nature.



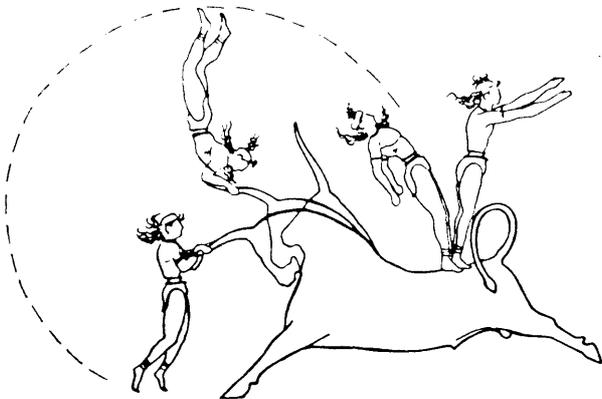
Let us adopt a 'weak' interpretation of 'humanisation of nature' and allow that it may include, not the literal 'humanisation' of animals, but, rather, an alteration of our relationship to animals - perhaps a rendering of that relationship more consistent with our 'humanity', a more *humane* relationship. This is the very least that would be required to make Marx's notion consistent with his own professed naturalism. Now, whatever content is given to 'a more humane relationship', it presupposes that 'crude, physical need' and the needs of animals are not equivalent. Only if there is a difference between mere existence of animals at a level which minimally satisfies *human* utility, on the one hand, and thriving or well-being, on the other, can we distinguish between 'inhumane' and 'humane' ways of treating those animals whose conditions of life are dependent upon the exercise of our powers.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, the pathological distortions from the properly human mode of life which Marx attempts to capture in his concept of 'estrangement', or 'alienation', are in important respects paralleled in the modes of life imposed upon animals by precisely the same structures of social action. The treatment of animals as mere means to external purposes, the forcible fragmentation of their life-activity, and the dissolution of their social bonds with one another are, for example, features of commercial agriculture which have become progressively intensified since Marx's day with each technical reorganisation of agricultural production. The ethical critique of such practices should not be seen as an *alternative* to a Marxian critique of modern capitalist forms of labour-discipline, but, rather, an extension and a deepening of it. But Marx's contrast between the human and the animal cuts away the ontological basis for such a critical analysis of forms of suffering shared by both animals and humans who are caught up in a common causal network.

4. Marx's attribution to animals of a fixed and standardised mode of activity in relation to nature, and his apparent failure to recognise in any significant way the social life of non-human animals are both at work in his use of the phrases 'physical need' and 'animal need' as if they were equivalent. This suggests a denial of the complexity and diversity of the emotional, psychological and social lives of other animals. Such a denial renders merely rhetorical Marx's characterisation of history as 'nature developing into man', and cuts off two significant sources of insight into human nature and history. The first, which would require giving serious theoretical content to the idea of 'nature developing into man', would be an inquiry into the prehistorical origins of the human species, and the processes of our differentiation from other primate lineages. The second, in part dependent for its rational justification on the first (i.e. a recognition of the *kinship* of humans and other animals), would be a comparative psychology and ethology in which what is genuinely distinctive about human beings could be viewed in the light of what is shared between human and non-human animals. That these lines of enquiry have a long post-Darwinian history of political tendentious and methodologically suspect misuses<sup>30</sup> is not a sufficient reason for a wholesale abandonment of the enterprise. Whilst there is certainly plenty of room for legitimate controversy within modern evolutionary theory it is no longer reasonable to deny the main claims of the evolutionary perspectives in relation to human ancestry in some primate stock, and our kinship with contemporary primates. Unless social scientists wish to stand with the flat earthers, the Inquisitors and the bible-belt creationists they have no choice but to engage with the questions posed by our animal origins and nature. Marx and Engels themselves enthusiastically embraced this perspective after 1859.<sup>31</sup>

#### AGAINST MARX'S DUALIST VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

Perhaps, however, the most telling arguments against the dualist aspects of Marx's early work relate to the dualism *within* human nature which follows from the external dualism of the animal and the human. It is characteristic of dualistic approaches, baulking at the prospect of a comprehensively idealist view of our nature, to recognise an animal component, layer, or aspect, within the human. The human *is* an animal, but an animal with a special 'something' extra which makes all the difference – soul, mind, will, self, reason, and so on. Marx's early writings, as we have seen, still fall within this tradition.



In so far as humans work only to meet their subsistence needs, and do not experience their work as a need in itself, their activity is mere animal activity. In so far as their leisure activities, their eating and drinking, their 'dressing up' and so on are ends in themselves, segregated from the wider species-project, they are mere 'animal functions'. When the starving man is fed 'it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of animals'.<sup>32</sup> This reproduction of the animal/human opposition within the domain of the human involves a sequestering of certain of our needs, powers, functions and activities as animal, or animal-like, from others (generally more highly valued and assigned a more fundamental ontological status) which are designated 'human'.

The main objections to this broad strategy for understanding what humans are can be usefully placed into three groups.

1. Those powers, needs, activities, functions (etc.) which fall on the human side of the divide, are represented as a self-sufficient, *sui generis*, autonomous complex which is thus rendered unintelligible in relation to the rest (the animal side) of human life. But what sense could be made of, for example, human powers of reasoning in abstraction from the bodily needs and activities in which they are exercised? In Marx's own case, the ethical ideal for humanity is a mode of being which integrates the diverse activities of persons within a coherent communal project. This notion of integral self-realisation remains incompatible with the residual dualism of the *Manuscripts*.

2. Those powers, activities, needs, functions (etc.) which fall on the 'animal' side of the division are correspondingly profaned as, perhaps, rather shameful residual features. Their continued, uncomfortably insistent presence, eruptions and interruptions are demeaning and rob us of the full sense of self-respect to which we feel entitled. A combined dread and contempt for bodily existence and function is barely disguised in much philosophical dualism. It provides grounding and sustenance for the valuation of mental over manual labour, of masculinity ('cultured') over femininity ('natural'), or reason over sentiment, of 'mind over matter', and of the 'civilized' over the 'savage'. It makes for a culture that is guilt-ridden, fearful and confused over such fundamental features of the shared human and animal condition as sexuality and death.

3. The dualist philosophical heritage is at work in many of our most problematic contemporary institutional forms and practices. The development of modern 'health-care' as a form of organised, hi-tech 'body mechanics', (at its best) detecting, diagnosing and correcting defects in the bodily machine, has an unmistakable Cartesian legacy about it. The pertinence of the psychological, emotional, cultural and socio-economic aspects and contexts of the person to both the causation of and recovery from disease has been widely understood only in recent years.<sup>33</sup> It has yet to gain the central place it deserves in policy disputes and health-care reform. In other areas of public policy, too, a segregation of 'basic' (= physical) needs from 'higher' (emotional, cultural, self-realising) needs underlies priorities of welfare state provision in such areas as housing, the setting of nutritional standards and even in education.<sup>34</sup> A great deal of overseas aid policy, too, neglects the cultural, socio-economic, and environmental contexts within which such 'basic' needs as food and shelter are met. The sequestering of classes of need from one another, often well-motivated, equally often is disastrous in its consequences. Needs which are inseparably interconnected both in the way they are experienced and in the interweaving of their causal conditions of satisfaction are all too often abstractly 'targeted' in single-priority interventions which bring extended chains of unintended consequences in their wake. The environmental and social cost of the

export of 'green revolution' technologies to large parts of Asia and Latin America is a case in point.<sup>35</sup>

I have tried to show that much of Marx's thinking in the early *Manuscripts* is governed by two closely related dualistic oppositions: between humans and animals, and between the human and the animal *within* the human. I have advanced some considerations which I believe tell against these dualisms, both as they appear in Marx, and as they are present more widely as a constitutive dimension of Western cultures. I have also suggested that human/animal dualisms are incompatible also with key features of Marx's own intellectual and practical project. But if this is so, then it follows that there are other elements or aspects of Marx's thinking, even in his pre-Darwinian days, which cut against the dualist aspects upon which my proffered reading has so far been based.

### NATURALISM WITHOUT REDUCTIONISM OR 'SPECIESISM'?

In what remains of this paper, I shall offer a sketch for an alternative reading and re-construction of Marx's early *Manuscripts*, centred on those elements which tell against both philosophical dualism and idealism, and which favour, rather, a naturalistic, but still not reductionist view of human nature. A view, that is, which gives due place to the specificity and distinctiveness of the human species, but does so without compromising what remains defensible in Marx's assertion that 'man is part of nature'.

Some of the most promising textual materials for his alternative approach are to be found, not surprisingly, perhaps, in the manuscript entitled 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole'.

*Man is directly a natural being. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand endowed with natural powers, vital powers – he is an active natural being. These forces exist in him as tendencies and abilities – as instincts. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous, objective being he is a suffering, conditioned and limited creature, like animals and plants. That is to say, the objects of his instincts exist outside him, objects independent of him; yet these objects are objects that he needs – essential objects, indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers... Hunger is a natural need; it therefore needs a nature outside itself, an object outside itself, in order to satisfy itself, to be stilled.*<sup>36</sup>

In this passage, Marx is asserting the status of humans as 'natural beings', a status they share with (other) animals and with plants. As natural beings there are three interconnected features which humans share with other living beings. First, they have natural needs whose objects lie outside themselves, independent of them. All living things, for example, have nutritional needs. The objects of these needs – foodstuffs – exist independently of them. Second, all living beings have natural powers which enable them to satisfy these needs, and natural tendencies ('instincts') to exercise them. Third, this need-satisfying activity in relation to external objects is essential to the 'confirmation' or 'manifestation' of the essential powers of the species.

In other words, interaction with external nature is necessary for the survival of all natural beings. Each *species* of natural being has its own distinctive mode or pattern of interaction with nature – its own 'species-life'. And finally, (a member of) each species only fully manifests its essential nature – only becomes what it has the potential to be – in virtue of its participation in this distinctive species-life.

'But,' Marx goes on to say, 'Man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself.'<sup>37</sup> Having begun to speak of human nature in a thoroughly naturalistic way, Marx appears, again, to pull back and re-establish a dualistic opposition, this time between the 'human' and the 'natural'. However, there is no necessity for such a reading. The 'human' here can be understood as a qualification, a specification, or subdivision *within* the natural, rather than its opposite. This remains a form of naturalism, in that what humans share with other 'natural beings' is regarded as ontologically fundamental, and is accordingly given priority for purposes of understanding and explaining what humans are and how they act. But it is not a reductionist naturalism in the sense that it allows for a full recognition of the specificity and distinctiveness of humans, their forms of sociability and their potentials within the order of nature. Whereas dualist and idealist accounts of human nature fix upon features which are held to distinguish us from (other) animals and elaborate their views of human nature upon that basis, a naturalistic approach begins with the common predicament of natural beings and moves from that basis to render intelligible their specific differences in constitution, structure and modes of life.

In Marx's account all living beings have needs whose objects are external and independent. The satisfaction of need, therefore, requires interaction with and appropriation of the environment of the organism. The particular content of need, the mechanisms which mediate between needs and forms of activity, and the nature of need-meeting activities themselves are, of course, almost unimaginably diverse – from the chemistry of photosynthesis through the hunting of the tiger to the 'biting' of the mosquito. The point, however, is that the common framework of analysis enables us to recognise the *significance* of all these detailed specificities of biochemical, neuro-physiological, anatomical, ethological and ecological facts and processes within the overall 'mode of life' of the species concerned.

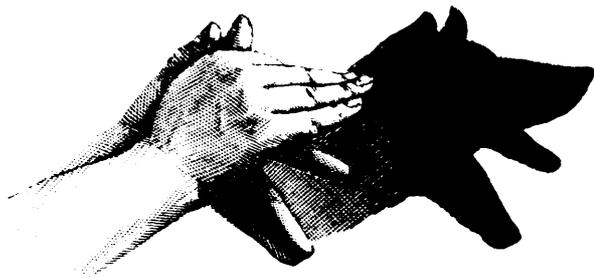
Each species has its own characteristic species-life. Organisms can 'confirm' or 'manifest' their essential powers only within the context of their species-life, and so can be said to flourish only when the conditions for the living of the mode of life characteristic of their species are met. For each species, then, we can distinguish conditions for mere organic survival – the meeting of minimal nutritional requirements, protection from predators, and so on – from conditions for flourishing, for the living of the species-life. But *how* this distinction is made, the specific survival-conditions and flourishing-conditions which are identified, will vary from species to species. The empirical determination of such conditions is at least part of the content of the sciences of ethology and ecology.

So far, then, my alternative, non-dualistic reading of Marx's early *Manuscripts* has yielded a significant shift in the conceptual means for dealing with Marx's central theme in this text: the estrangement of labour. Under regimes of private property, conditions which enable the survival of workers are provided but the conditions for them to confirm their powers and potentials in the living of their characteristic 'species-life' are denied to them. A distorted and pathological mode of life is the consequence. This theme can be further specified and elaborated with little if any loss of the ethical power of Marx's critique, but with the double gain that precisely the same framework of analysis can be applied in the critique of the mode of life imposed upon many of the other living species caught up in this distorted mode of human life, and that Marx's highly speculative notion of a distinctively human 'species historical' potential is rendered redundant.

I will conclude with some brief indications as to how the form of naturalism I am advocating might offer a preferable way of

understanding the relation between the 'human' and the 'animal' *within* the human, how it might, in other words, displace dualism without falling into reductionism.

A naturalistic specification of 'human nature', I have suggested, would be a matter of differentiating out and then elaborating our specific features from an initial recognition of the common core of 'natural beinghood' which we share with other living creatures. But this process of differentiation, of saying what is specifically human, can all too easily fall into a dualistic mode. If it becomes centred on a specification of those powers, potentials, requirements etc. possessed by humans 'over and above' those they share with animals, the approach falls short of naturalism.



This is not to deny that there *are* things (reading, writing, talking,<sup>38</sup> composing symphonies, inventing weapons of mass destruction and so on) which humans and only humans can do. Rather, it is to say that those things which only humans can do are generally to be understood as rooted in the specifically human *ways* of doing things which other animals also do. It is this feature that I want to emphasise as the hallmark of a naturalistic approach.

What this approach might mean in practice can, perhaps, be illustrated by way of a study of Marx's treatment of the concept of 'need' in the *Manuscripts*. As we have seen, Marx speaks variously of 'crude', 'physical' or 'animal' needs, contrasting them with 'human needs'. In some passages it seems as though human needs constitute a separate, *sui generis* class of needs, set over and above our 'animal', subsistence needs, and peculiar to us as humans. We may distinguish two broad types of human need in this sense. First, what might be called 'self-realisation' needs:

The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human being in need of a totality of human manifestations of life – a man in whom his own realisation exists as an inner necessity, as *need*.<sup>39</sup>

Marx seems to suggest that such inner needs for self-realisation, for the fulfilment of potential, are possible only for self-conscious beings, and even then are only fully acquired on the basis of an extended process of historical 'development'.

The second class of distinctively human needs is similarly linked with our status as self-conscious beings, but not necessarily with our historicity. Marx speaks of the elements of our external environment ('plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc.')

<sup>40</sup> as constituting 'spiritual nourishment' in so far as they are objects of human science and art. Over and above the need (which they share with other animals) to physically appropriate nature, humans have spiritual needs to aesthetically and cognitively appropriate nature. This reading is strongly suggested by such passages

as this:

It (the animal) produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.<sup>41</sup>

There are, it seems, two possible kinds of human practice in relation to nature: one, physical-need satisfaction, which we share with animals, the other, spiritual (aesthetic, cognitive) need-satisfaction, which is special to us, and constitutes production in the 'true' sense. This distinction reappears in the later works as a distinction between the realms of 'necessity' and of 'freedom'.

However, an alternative, naturalistic reading of the passage is also possible. To qualify as properly human, it is necessary not that production have no relation to the satisfaction of physical need, but rather that it should not be performed under the *dominion* of *immediate* physical need. Leaving aside Marx's apparent equation of the animal with the 'not-properly-human', Marx can plausibly be read as making a distinction not so much between practices which satisfy different needs, as between different modes of satisfaction of common needs. The satisfaction of aesthetic and cognitive needs does not *require* the performance of further practice, over and above the practices through which physical needs are met. In a fully human, or 'true' practice of production, physical needs would be met in a way that was aesthetically and cognitively satisfying. For at least this sub-class of 'human' needs, then, we can say that they are not a *sui-generis* complex of requirements, over and above the physical needs, but that they are, rather, requirements which bear on the manner of *experiencing, identifying and satisfying* the physical needs. Let's take the physical need for nutrition as an example.<sup>42</sup> This need is common to both humans and other animals. Some non-human animals, but not all, have sufficient psychological and behavioural similarity to ourselves for us to speak non-metaphorically and unequivocally of them as experiencing hunger, searching for, and consuming food. For all such animals the objects and substances which can count as 'food' are a sub-set only of the total range of objects and substances which would satisfy their nutritional requirements. Moreover, only some modes of acquiring and consuming these objects and substances are characteristic of the 'mode of life' of the species concerned, or are activities in which their specific powers and potentials are exercised or fulfilled. The feeding activities actually engaged in by such animals are the overdetermined outcome of inherited predispositions, learning and environmental opportunity-structures.

All this is true of humans and many other species of animals, especially mammals and birds. So, in the passage quoted above Marx's parallel between the feeding activity of the 'starving man' and that of animals is undermined. Neither for humans nor for other species can we simply equate the mere satisfaction of nutritional requirements with the feeding activity characteristic of the species. The distorted, or pathological relation to food induced by starvation in humans is not an animal or animal-like relation to food, but a specific distortion or pathology of *human* feeding-activity. But, this mistaken equation of the pathologically human with the animal aside, Marx's comment is susceptible of an illuminating and naturalistic interpretation. What makes the relation of the starving man to food a pathological one is that the object of hunger exists *merely* as food, its sole significance is that its consumption will satisfy the hunger. Such feeding activity is performed under the 'domination' of 'immediate' need, to quote what Marx says elsewhere. This feeding activity is means/ends activity, not activity with its own intrinsic satisfaction. It is also activity in which the aesthetic, cognitive, and

'spiritual' dimensions of human activity are missing.

On this naturalistic reading, then, what makes the difference between a 'fully', or 'properly' human way of satisfying hunger, and a less than human, or pathological way of satisfying the same need, is the presence or absence of intrinsic cognitive and aesthetic satisfactions in the activity through which the need is satisfied. We can now get closer to answering the question, what are the enabling conditions for the satisfaction of hunger to take a properly human form? In addition to the availability of nutritional items in the environment and the technical powers on the part of persons to appropriate them, these enabling conditions must also include appropriate aesthetic and cognitive rules and resources.

But if we ask the further question, under what conditions can these aesthetic and cognitive rules and resources exist?, then the short answer is: Within the context of a human culture. That this reading is in line with Marx's thinking is indicated also by his use of the word 'immediate' to specify the non-human relation to physical need satisfaction. Properly human feeding-activity is symbolically, culturally *mediated* need satisfaction. All cultures contain classifications which define (well within the range of all possible means of meeting nutritional requirements) what are and what are not to be counted as food, often with severely sanctioned taboos against the consumption of some items. Similarly normative regulations govern the mode of appropriation of culturally recognised foodstuffs, their preparation for consumption, their distribution within the community, the order in which they are consumed and so on.<sup>43</sup>

To say that there is an aesthetic, cognitive, normative, 'spiritual' – in other words 'cultural' – dimension to the way in which humans meet their physical needs, and that this is indispensable to their meeting of these needs in a 'properly' human way might look like a covert return to dualism. But this is not so. The key point, here, is that the starting point for the analysis is the recognition of a need which is common to both humans and non-human animals. The specification of the distinctively human then proceeds not by identifying a further, supervenient class of needs possessed only by humans, but rather by identifying the species-specific *way in which* humans meet the needs they share with other species. This leaves open the door to making further illuminating contrasts and comparisons between humans and other species, and it avoids the effacement of the manifold differences *among* non-human animals in their ways of satisfying their physical needs.

But if this strategy can be defended from the charge of 'dualism at once remove', is it not susceptible to the contrary charge of reductionism? Surely not *all* of human cognitive and aesthetic activity is displayed in the practices through which physical needs are met, nor yet even in those practices through which we meet the whole range of needs which we share with (some) other animal species? What of those needs – self-realisation needs – which appear to be peculiar to self-conscious and historical beings? Again, it is not required by the form of naturalism I want to advocate that the reality of such needs should be denied. Rather, the commitment is to viewing them as *in some sense* consequential upon those needs which are common to natural beings, or upon the species-specific ways in which those common needs are met. Explanatory strategies in relation to such supervenient needs would be to make them intelligible in terms of the (ontologically) more fundamental common needs.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide the further elaboration and defence that these remarks clearly require. Suffice it, for the moment, to say that the broad naturalistic but non-reductionist approach advocated above would provide the beginnings of a methodological defence for some already-existing

explanatory strategies (*not*, of course, grounds for accepting as *true* any *specific* social-scientific explanation). Marx's attempt to explain the fragmentations and distortions of human personal and social life under capitalism as consequences of a pathological relationship to nature is clearly one such strategy that would be defended. An interesting and provocative comparison here would be with the genre of explicitly ethologically rooted social pathologies, of which Desmond Morris (1969) is perhaps the best-known example.

Such sociological/anthropological strategies might usefully be compared and complemented by psychoanalytical approaches which operate at the level of the human individual. What Freud does with the concept of 'sublimation' is a clear case of an attempt to explain in a non-reductionist way the rootedness of some distinctively human activities (aesthetic and scientific, for example) in needs and propensities (sexuality and affectivity) which we share with other species. Finally, at the level of phylogenetic explanations, S. J. Gould (1980) and others have shown how the concept of natural selection can be used in the explanation of human origins (as with other species) without in any way denying the specificity and distinctiveness of human powers and potentials. The notion that biological modifications which *are* adaptive may bring in their wake a train of consequences which are *non*-adaptive in evolutionary terms is an important concept for this strategy.



## NOTES

1. I would like to thank participants in the sociology seminar at Sussex University, the political philosophy seminar at the University of East Anglia, the third Conference on Realism and the Human Sciences, and the third year philosophy/sociology seminar at the University of Essex, as well as Jean Duncombe, Jean Grimshaw, Roy Edgley, Joe McCarney, Chris Arthur and Oriell Sullivan, for helpful criticisms of earlier drafts of this paper. Many of their comments have been incorporated into, or taken account of in this version of the argument. I would also like to thank S. Horigan for many stimulating conversations on issues related to the topic of this paper.
2. The distinction between 'deep' and 'shallow' ecology is generally attributed to Arne Naess. See A. Naess (1973) and also R. Sylvan (1985). Although I have treated the perspective of 'deep ecology' as an *extension* of moral concern about the well-being of (other) animals, the two positions are sometimes argued from different, and

conflicting premisses. There is an implicit anthropocentrism in those advocacies of 'animal rights', for example, which argue for the status of animals as moral subjects on the basis of, and to the extent that they share, certain 'human' attributes. A 'deep ecological' perspective attributes intrinsic value independently of any such likeness to humans. Although I avoid direct argumentation on these issues in the present paper it may prevent some misunderstandings if I briefly outline my position. It is that the beings and relations that constitute the system of nature are properly assigned a value in virtue of their intrinsic character, independently of their utility, aesthetic appeal, or likeness to humans. However, I differ from some 'deep ecologists' in holding that (contingently, of course) humans are the only kind of being capable of assigning value in this way. Having assigned value to the whole system of nature and its elements, the further questions as to what conduct is or is not morally acceptable with respect to particular beings or sub-systems may get a diversity of answers depending on the relations of those beings to human agents, and their diverse intrinsic characters. An animal which can feel pain and experience fear makes different moral demands upon us from a plant, which cannot. But this does not mean that the destruction of plants is a matter of absolute moral indifference, and nor does it mean that the moral value of (other) animals is equivalent to that of persons (as is held by some animal rights and liberation activists).

3. K. Marx and F. Engels (1975b), p. 276.
4. G. A. Cohen (1979), see especially pp. 201-07 and 322-25.
5. K. Marx and F. Engels (1975b), p. 275. The secondary literature on Marx's early writings is, of course, voluminous. I have included a small selection in the bibliography. See especially C. J. Arthur (1986), A. Cornu (1957), G. Markus (1978), R. Norman and S. Sayers (1980), B. Ollman (1971) and A. Wood (1981). N. Geras (1983) is an important source on Marx's later view of human nature. Almost all commentaries mention in passing Marx's contrast between the animal and the human, but few give it sustained critical attention. J. Elster (1985), Ch. 2, and G. Markus (1978) are exceptions.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 301-02.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 277.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 297.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 301.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 296-97.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 303-04.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 302.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
25. See for example M. Midgley (1980), Ch. 2.
26. Some of the most fascinating evidence of cultural transmission comes from the more than twenty-five years spent by Jane Goodall and her associates observing a wild chimpanzee colony at Gombe, in Tanzania (see J. Goodall (1974) and (1986)). Chimps are frequently observed using sticks as 'tools' to 'fish' termites from their mounds. They first strip off leaves to make the sticks suitable for the purpose, and juveniles learn the appropriate skills by observation and imitation of their seniors. See, however, S. J. Gould's interest-

ing discussion of Goodall's interpretations (S. J. Gould (1987)).

27. This is not, of course, to deny that there are *connections* between well-being and the fulfilment of potentials. Marx is, I think, right to argue that the opportunity to fulfil one's potential is, for humans, a need. It follows that the fulfilment of potential is a necessary constituent of well-being. But not all potentials can be actualised within the timespan of an individual human life, or within the context of any particular culture. Some potentials must simply remain unactualised. Moreover, as I have suggested above, the actualisation of some human potentials would be undesirable. In other cases, the simultaneous realisation of two contrasting potentials may be impossible or undesirable, even though there may be nothing problematic about either taken separately.
 

These considerations show that the concepts of human potential and species being are by themselves insufficient to establish a defensible view of human well-being. A good society would encourage the actualisation of some potentials and discourage others. Its institutional framework would include enabling conditions for the fulfilment of a diverse range of potentials amongst its citizens, but it would also set limits to this range and establish constraints on the actualisation of undesirable potentials. Further ethical principles and reasoning is required to establish and defend the outlines of such a society. A theory of human nature is an essential part of the rational grounding of any view of human well-being, but it cannot be *substituted* for an adequate moral theory.
28. Here, as elsewhere in this paper, I might be accused of anachronistically criticising Marx for lack of awareness of an ethological literature produced a century or more after his death. In fact, I am less interested in showing that Marx was empirically mistaken, than in exposing and making constructive uses of some of the conceptual tensions and contradictions in his text. However, Marx's writings of the early and mid 1840s contrast interestingly with Darwin's notebooks (unpublished, of course, at the time) on Man, Mind and Materialism. These were written in 1838 and 1839 and are studded with observations and speculations on intelligence, emotional expression and sociability in other animals, and also remarks on the striking analogies between humans and other animals in these respects. For example: 'Plato says in *Phaedo* that our "*imaginary ideas*" arise from the preexistence of the soul, are not derivable from experience — read monkeys for preexistence. 1. The young Orang in Zoological Gardens *pouts*. Partly out (of) displeasure... When pouting protrudes its lips into point. Man, though he does not pout, pushes out both lips in contempt, disgust and defiance' (Gruber (1974), p. 290). This contrasts very sharply with Marx's virtually contemporaneous position in his 1839 notebooks on Epicurean Philosophy: 'If a philosopher does not find it outrageous to consider man as an animal, he cannot be made to understand anything' (Marx and Engels (1975a), p. 453). It would be a worthwhile exercise to investigate the transition from this unequivocal anti-naturalism through the unstable 'humanist naturalism' of the *Manuscripts* to the unequivocal pro-Darwinian stance of 1859.
29. It may be argued that this point does not apply to controversies about, for example, cruel sports or inhumane methods of slaughter. In these cases, ethical concern is not founded on a distinction between mere survival and well-being, but upon the imposition of unnecessary suffering, or, indeed, in the human vice of taking actual pleasure in the causing of suffering to other beings. I think there is some force in this argument, though my main concern in the text is to work out a framework for thinking about the quality of life which is possible for those animals (domestic, agricultural, etc.) which are incorporated into human society.
30. A useful introduction to the debates surrounding biological determinism is A. L. Caplan (ed.) (1978). Trenchant critiques include M. Sahlin (1977) and S. Rose, L. J. Karmin and R. C. Lewontin (1984). Feminist perspectives on the issues are given in J. Sayers (1981) and L. Birke (1986).
31. I have commented elsewhere on Marx's, and, especially, Engels's later responses to Darwinism. See T. Benton (1979).
32. Marx and Engels (1975b), p. 302.

33. An important figure in the development of this new understanding was the late T. McKeown (see his (1976) *The Role of Medicine*). See also the essays by L. Rogers and G. Bignami in S. Rose (ed.) (1982) and L. Doyal (1979), esp. Ch. 1.
34. Somewhat paradoxically, an important source for such views of need has been the work of A. H. Maslow (see Maslow (1943) and (1970)). Though advocating a 'holistic' and anti-dualist view of human nature, Maslow's hierarchical classification of needs (physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualisation) has been open to interpretations which, in effect, restore a dualism of 'lower' and 'higher' order needs. Important recent discussions of the concept of need with a direct bearing on my argument in this paper are K. Soper (1981) and L. Doyal and I. Gough (1984).
35. A very useful introduction to the literature on this is M. Redclift (1984), pp. 107-10. See also W. H. Matthews (ed.) (1976).
36. K. Marx and F. Engels (1975b), p. 336.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
38. Recent studies have even called into question the distinctiveness of the human capacity for language. Although earlier attempts to train captive chimpanzees and other primates to speak were not successful, R. A. and B. T. Gardner did manage to teach the chimp 'Washoe' to use sign-language to some degree. E. Linden's experiments with plastic symbols have also been adduced as evidence of an intellectual capacity for language in some primates. Of course, language *can* be defined so as to exclude these as genuine cases of language-learning and all such experiments have methodological weaknesses. Nevertheless, it is hard to read this literature without being convinced of a much greater continuity between humans and other primates with respect to their reasoning and symbolising powers than has been widely assumed. See R. A. and B. T. Gardner (1975) and E. Linden (1976). A good, balanced account of the debate is given in S. Walker (1983), Chapters 9 and 10.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 276.
42. The use of this example might be misleading. In this case we are, indeed, dealing with a physical need which is common to humans and animals as 'natural beings'. However, as I hope the above discussion has made clear, I am *not* committed to the view that all needs common to humans and (other) animals are physical needs. On the contrary, my view would also include affective, sexual, reproductive (etc.) needs as common needs in this sense. They are needs which we share with other animals, but, at the same time, they are needs which we experience, identify and seek to satisfy in ways which are distinctively human (and, at a more concrete level of description, in ways which vary from one human culture, historical period and social grouping to another).
43. See C. Levi-Strauss (1970).

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