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## The Biological and the Social in Man

It might seem that there is no problem here worthy of serious discussion. It might seem that all is simple. On the one hand, a human being is a biological organism, a specimen of the species *Homo sapiens*. On the other, he always appears as a member of one or another social organism, as a representative of society at a definite stage of its development, and therefore as a representative of a definite class or occupation, of this or that social group. In order to understand this circumstance one does not need to be either a philosopher or a physician. It is as obvious as the fact that the Volga flows into the Caspian Sea.

Why then has this question arisen in science time and time again over the centuries? Why do disputes repeatedly flare up concerning the exact interrelation between these two aspects of the life activity of the human being? Is this not an artificial dispute, one that has nothing to do with the real problem in the tightening grip of which man finds himself?

Evidently, it is not. And the problem arises precisely because man is not an “on the one hand social and on the other biological being” who can be split, at least in thought, into these two aspects, but a *dialectical* being in the literal sense of the word.

This means that any social departure, any action, any manifestation of social life in man is made possible by biological mechanisms—above all,

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by mechanisms of the nervous system. On the other hand, all the biological functions of man's organism are subordinated to the performance of his social functions to such a degree that the whole of biology becomes here merely a *form of the manifestation* of a principle that is quite different in nature.

There is therefore always the possibility here of two polar interpretations of any particular or concrete case. Thus, we can regard the biological functions of the organism as a form of the manifestation of the historically determined social functions of the given individual. Or—just the reverse—we can regard social functions as a form of the manifestation of the natural inherited characteristics of the human organism, as merely the external form in which the functions organically built into this organism are revealed.

From the point of view of pure or formal logic, both approaches are equally correct. That is why we obtain two clashing, directly opposed logics for considering the same fact. And this possibility of thinking about the same fact from opposite directions creates the potential for a dispute that is not just formal.

*Value* is the concrete form of the manifestation of an abstraction; use value is merely a form in which exchange value is embodied. And *not* the other way around.

The question arises, as a rule, when people encounter one or another *anomaly*, with a more or less marked deviation from the usual, “normal” course of human life activity, and start to ponder the causes of this anomaly, of this violation of the norm. Where are we to seek this cause, which is altering the normal, usual course of life activity, in order to eliminate it? I speak, of course, not of single cases but of cases that for some reason have a tendency to become *typical*, widespread, and therefore demand some general solution. I have in mind, for example, such facts as a fall in the birthrate or a rise in mortality, a rise or fall in the prevalence of specific diseases, or, for instance, crime statistics. In general—any troubles of general significance.

Here there has always arisen the possibility of attributing phenomena of purely social origin to natural causes, of deriving, so to speak, the social from the biological or (more broadly) from the natural, of curing social diseases by medical means, and of treating organic diseases with social measures.

The guillotine is a physician and a pharmacist.

This line of thought, which becomes tempting under certain conditions and for certain types of people, is observed constantly in the history of theoretical culture and long ago crystallized into an entire worldview. It may be called the *naturalistic* view of man and his life activity.

A textbook example—we find it amusing, but it was by no means amusing in its time—is provided by the thesis of Aristotle according to which some individuals are slaves and others their masters by nature. And the most inter-

esting thing here is that this thesis arose precisely at a time when the classical ancient society was starting to enter the phase of its decline and dissolution. This thesis arose precisely as a theoretical justification for the defense and protection of the collapsing social organization, as a counter-thesis to the demands for some other means of organizing life that were already taking vague shape in many heads.

But naturalistic explanations of certain social phenomena may be not only *defensive* but also *destructive* in character and effect. In 1789, for example, the French bourgeoisie rose up in revolution in the name of the so-called nature of man, declaring the order of feudal estates “unnatural,” contrary to “nature,” to the natural organization of human life. Conversely, the right to private property and freedom of private property were declared natural.

Thus, the naturalistic illusion may conceal either a conservative and reactionary conception or a conception that is objectively progressive or even revolutionary. Nevertheless, in both cases this illusion remains an illusion, to which even very progressively minded people may be susceptible.

Materialist philosophy, being a principled adversary of all illusions, makes no exception for this one, which has a tendency to revive in the most unexpected forms.

Marxism had to confront the naturalistic illusion at its very birth, in the course of the polemic with the revolutionary-inclined Left Hegelians. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels demonstrated the whole cunning of this theoretical illusion, which in reality and unknown to themselves turned the radical Left Hegelians—the Bauers and Stirner—into theoretical apologists for the existing social order, despite all their sincere revolutionary inclinations and phrases (*Soch.*, vol. 3, pp. 424–26).

Marx and Engels always spoke out categorically against all variations of the naturalistic conception of human life activity, even when it was combined with politically progressive intentions. They understood that this illusion, by virtue of its being precisely an illusion and not a scientific-materialist explanation, sooner or later would lead these people to politically incorrect and harmful decisions, that sooner or later, despite all their subjectively revolutionary inclinations, they would take up defensive positions vis-à-vis the existing social order—that very order which seemed to them abnormal. This is indeed what happened to the majority of the Left Hegelians.

A naturalistic explanation of the main large-scale calamities and abnormalities of our century always and everywhere proves to be a very suitable form of thinking for *anticommunism*. As an extreme, limiting case of this kind, in which the cunning of naturalistic explanation is especially striking, we may consider the conception of Arthur Koestler—a theorist who enjoys great popularity in the West.

The general position of true materialism, as formulated by Marx, Engels, and Lenin, may be characterized briefly as follows:

*All that is human in man*—that is, all that specifically distinguishes man from the animals—is 100 percent (not 90 percent or even 99 percent) the result of the social development of human society, and any ability of the individual is an individually exercised function of the social and not of the natural organism, although, of course, it is always exercised by the natural, biologically innate organs of the human body—in particular, the brain.

This position seems to many people somewhat extreme, accentuated in an exaggerated fashion. Some comrades are afraid that such a theoretical position may lead in practice to underestimation of the special biological-genetic innate characteristics of individuals, or even to leveling and standardization. These fears, it seems to me, are groundless. It seems to me that, on the contrary, any concession—even the smallest—to the naturalistic illusion in explaining the human mind and human life activity will sooner or later lead the theorist who makes this concession to the surrender of all materialist positions, to complete capitulation to theories of the Koestlerian type. Here it is a question of: “Remove the claws and the whole bird perishes.” For initial arguments concerning the genetic (i.e., natural) origin of individual variations in one or another human ability always lead to the conclusion that these abilities are themselves natural and innate, and indirectly—through naturalistic explanation of these abilities—to the perpetuation (at first in the imagination, but later also in practice) of the existing, historically shaped and inherited mode of the division of human labor.

This is the result whenever a theorist makes purely physical indicators of the human organism (for instance: height, color of hair, or color of eyes) into a “model” in accordance with which he also starts to understand mental indicators such as degree of intellectual giftedness or of artistic talent.

This logic implacably leads to a view of talent (and of its opposite—idiocy) as a deviation from the norm, a rare exception, and of the “norm” as *mediocrity*, the lack of any capacity for creativity, an inclination toward uncreative, passive, and often routine work.

And here it seems to me that it is the duty of a Marxist to object categorically to this kind of explanation of mental differences. It seems to me much truer—both in theory and in practice—to assert that the “norm” for man is precisely *talent* and that by declaring talent a rarity, a deviation from the norm we simply dump onto Mother Nature our own guilt, our own inability to create for each medically normal individual all the external conditions for his development to the highest level of talent.

For this reason it seems to me not only absurd but also harmful to speak of a person’s mental abilities as genetically predetermined. For the practical

consequence of this view is always a faulty strategy for establishing the collaboration between pedagogue and physician that is so essential to the task of ensuring the all-around development of each person—that is, to the main task of communist transformation.

For once we dump onto Mother Nature, onto the organics of the human body the blame for the fact that our schools produce quite a large percentage of ungifted people and too few talented people, the task of reconstructing the education system and all the other conditions of human development is automatically replaced by the task of reconstructing organics, the brains and nervous systems of individuals. Hence people start to see the task of medicine and of the physician not in the protection and restoration of the biological *norm* of the functioning of the human organism, but in the utopian undertaking of *reconstructing* this norm. Or else the physician will be pushed into the unworthy role of apologist for all the deficiencies in our education system and in the way we bring up our children. First we shall turn the child into a neurotic or even a psychopath, and then we shall send him to a neurologist, who, naturally, will diagnose a neurosis. And we shall end up with a vicious circle, in which it will always be easy to pass off the *cause* as the *consequence*.

Thus, the problem of the relationship between the biological and the social in human life activity and in the human mind is not an artificial problem but a vital one, and the physician, just as the pedagogue, must be familiar with the general theoretical solution to this problem in the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, so that he will make fewer mistakes in the particular concrete cases that he encounters.