MARX AND THE CONCEPT OF THE INDIVIDUAL
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[This paper was originally presented at Coppin State College in 1986. Minor changes have been made here to correct grammar and provide a gender-neutral exegesis.]

Introduction

The appropriate and important theme of the present conference is the concept of the individual in Western civilization. The project that has been assigned to me is to discuss the concept of the individual in the context of the works of the great German philosopher Karl Marx. This is not an easy task, for Marxist scholarship is sharply divided, with one main group claiming that the concept of the individual is a product of capitalism and bourgeois ideology, and another arguing that the individual plays a significant role in Marx's system.1

Before we take up these conflicting interpretations, however, we must first define what we mean by the individual. Once a working definition has been established, we will then proceed to investigate the two interpretations of Marx and try to discover if there is such a concept present in Marx's work. We will not, however, approach these two interpretations with a completely neutral frame of mind. Rather, we will argue that the interpretation of Marx which does find the presence of the individual within Marx's system is the one that most accurately represents Marx's own intentions and the spirit of Marx's work.2

We will conclude our paper with a more speculative discussion of the relation of the individual to the community as a whole. This discussion will involve some implications for moral theory.

The Concept of the Individual

How then are we to approach the concept of the individual? It seems that when most of us use this concept we imply more than just our separateness as individual bodies, as physical individuals. What is implied in the concept of the individual is a conscious awareness of ourselves as human persons, that is, we have some sense of our self as conscious, self-directed beings.

Thus in the pages that follow we will discuss the concept of the individual as the individual self. But first we must secure a more rigorous definition. How then are we going to define the individual self? This is not as simple as it first appears for it is difficult to define the self without being circular. There is, for instance, a great temptation to simply say that I am aware of myself. This is, of course, a circular definition. Yet all is not lost, for we can define the self by beginning with something that no one, not even Descartes would deny. We begin with experience. We would all admit that there is experience going on. Now within the framework of this experience most of us would also admit that there is an awareness that there is a being who is having the experience. The being having the experience is aware of itself as such. It is aware that the experience that is going on belongs to it, that the experience does not belong to someone or something else. As William James says: "the thoughts which we actually know to exist do not fly about loose, but seem each to belong to some one thinker and not another." 3

This awareness that we all have that we are beings who have experience is the beginning of self-awareness. This starts us well on our way in our effort to provide a more rigorous definition of the
individual self. There is another element that must be present, however, and without it the concept of self would be incomplete. The concept of self must also include the continuity of experience over time. That is to say, accompanying the awareness that I am the being who has a particular experience is the awareness that I am the same being who has many experiences over time. Part of what is involved in the awareness of self is the unity or continuity of experience, that first the awareness that it is the same being who had many experiences over time.

It is our awareness of our self and our awareness that we are the same being who has many experiences over time that lets us see that we are separate from others and our environment, that lets us realize that we are the center of ourselves, and that we can direct our individual body through space with some will of our own, some will emanating from ourselves and not from others or the environment. William James remarks, in fact, that what appears to be most our own, most emanating from and confirming our own self, are volitional acts. The willing of an act most confirms the sense of self, for we feel that we are directing our own actions; we feel that no other person or thing or past experience is directing us. We experience our self as self-directed. We can now see our definition of the sense of self taking on a more definite shape. The sense of self involves the awareness that we are the same being who has many experiences over time, who is aware of him or herself as separate from others and the environment, and who is capable of directing his or her own activities.

It will be useful, in our efforts to further define the concept of the individual self, to introduce here some widely accepted distinctions regarding the self-concept. The self as experiencer must be distinguished from the self as experienced object. We are able to reflect back and look at ourselves and our own experience and perceive them as objects, yet we do this from the point of view of an experiencing subject. We have on the one hand the self being viewed as an object and, on the other, the viewer or knower who is aware of his or her own experience, the viewer who is the one perceiving his or her own experience.

The self that is experienced as an object sociologists sometimes call the looking glass self. This is the self we present to others and it often involves social roles and the attempt of the individual to define him or herself in terms of the social group, in terms of his or her interaction with others. The sense of self as knower (or experiencer) is the self that is aware of the experience as an object. The self as knower or experiencer cannot itself be grasped as an object for as soon as we reflect on the knower there is always another knower who is doing the reflecting. For this reason, the reflecting self is sometimes posited as transcendent, as somehow outside of time and space and the flow of our contingent worldly experience. It is taken as the synthesizer of the flow of perspectives and experiences that experience could not do without.

But it is not necessary to posit the knower as a transcendental synthesizer. Again, we can follow the work of William James here, for he argues explicitly that we do not need a transcendental self as an organizing principle for the flow of experience. James quite correctly insists that there is a knower or experiencer that accompanies each moment of experience, but it is a slightly different knower because it is changed and affected by each moment of experience; it is not a self-identical knower which is the ever-present container or synthesizer of the different moments of experience. James accounts for the unity of experience without reference to a transcendental knower by claiming that the knower in each moment of lived experience remembers the previous moment of experience and also remembers that
the present moment and the previous moment share a common past. It is in this way that the continuity of experience is produced without an appeal to an absolutely self-identical transcendent container.5

This, then, is the concept of the individual self that we will be operating with. I can now state without fear of circularity that I am aware of my own experience as belonging to me, and I am aware of the continuity of my experience over time. The "I" of the present shares a common background with the preceding "I"s" This reflecting self or the self as knower or experiencer is not transcendental but is intimately bound to the flow of temporal experience. The reflecting self does not passively view the flow of experience from some detached or privileged standpoint. It is in this flow; it is not separate from it. Furthermore, our most intimate and definite sense of self is attained not passively but actively, by doing, by the act of willing. Thus I am most aware of myself by being the director of my own actions. Consequently, I am aware of myself as being separate from the world and others, yet I am also aware that I am always in the flow of temporal experience and that my sense of self is defined through my interaction with the world and with others.

Interpretations of Marx

We are now in a position to ask whether Marx operates with a concept of the individual self. We will do so by investigating the two fundamentally different interpretations of Marxism, one claiming that Marx is a scientific materialist while the other argues that he is a philosophical humanist. As we stated earlier, we will side with the humanistic interpretation.

Scientific Marxism

Let us take up the scientific Marxist first. Stated in its most general terms scientific materialism, both Marxist and non-Marxist alike, asserts that what is real is matter extended in space, that change occurs by direct linear contact of one physical thing on another, and that truth is attained when our ideas copy the world. Ideas, perceptions, and conscious experience are taken to be a result of physical and physiological processes. Thus consciousness, if it is recognized at all, is seen as an epiphenomenon. It has no causal influence and is merely the passive product of prior material events.6

It appears, then, that this interpretation has no significant concept of self or of the subjective side of experience. In fact, what we find is a conscious effort to remove subjectivity and the individual from the lexicon of Marxism. We see this within the areas of epistemology, ontology, and social theory.

In epistemology, all ideas and conscious experience are reduced to physical and physiological events. A strenuous attempt is made to describe and explain conscious experience by references to objective material processes only.7 Furthermore, in the scientific process of observation itself, the scientist makes every effort to remove any projection of his or her own subjectivity (if he or she even admits that he or she has any) into the object of study. There is a forceful attempt to arrive at the object as it is in-itself, apart from any subjective contributions. In addition, even when the object of scientific study is humanity itself, there is an equal effort to purge all reference to subjectivity. The extreme of this kind of view is found in Soviet psychology, which has a great affinity to psychological behaviorism. Here we find the object of study, i.e., human beings, being treated only as objects. B.F. Skinner, for example, makes a concerted effort to remove the "ghost in the machine." He wants to try to explain human behavior without making any reference to the introspective states and conscious intentions or the experiencing subject. The human person is de-personalized. He or she is made into an object.
In ontology we see the same reduction of consciousness and all levels of nature to matter extended in space. Again, the works of Lenin and Cornforth provide a clear illustration of this interpretation of Marx. What is real is matter extended in space. Consciousness and perception are a by-product of material events and can be explained in terms of them. And even if consciousness is recognized at all, it is seen merely as an epiphenomenon with no causal influence of its own.

In social theory we likewise see that the individual is conveniently absorbed into social structure. Here again the human person (in this case the individual, in the previous paragraph, subjectivity) is merely a passive product of the material and social environment. Louis Althusser claims, for example, that the individual is nothing but the intersection of various social forces and roles. This corresponds to the Soviet claim that “individuality” is a fictional product of capitalist ideology, that the true essence of the human is to be a social being. The individual is thus absorbed into the community. The individual's will becomes the will of the community.

The preceding points allow us to assert unequivocally that this interpretation and development of Marx's work systematically denies any way of forming a notion of personal identity. We see this with both the Soviet psychology of behaviorism and with Althusser's approach. One eliminates the subjective, which is a necessary requirement for the experience of personal identity (or self), and the other absorbs the individual into social structure, thus removing any reference to the individual as a self-directed being. Furthermore, even where we do have some reference to the subjective, it is seen only as an inconsequential by-product with no causal efficacy. Ideas, subjective intentions, and conscious awareness of oneself as an individual are only a product of material and social conditions. They do not act in any way to influence these conditions.

Intervening Comments

At this point we should add that the rejection of a narrow form of science and materialistic reductionism does not entail a complete rejection of the empirical and materialist approach. Nor does it imply the acceptance of some form of idealism or mind/body dualism. With reference to epistemology, we can certainly maintain an empirical approach without pushing it to the extreme of positivism, which must directly observe some particular object. We can insist, for instance, that all knowledge claims are verified by experience, but this experience can be taken in a broader sense than perception of sense particulars. Charles Taylor argues that we can appeal to experience when asserting the claim that human beings can direct their actions by means of conscious intentions. For verification of this claim we appeal to the experience of all human beings. Does this claim correspond to their experience or does it not? Abraham Maslow likewise argues that, as well as the obvious material needs for food and shelter, human beings also have needs for love and meaningfulness. We cannot see meaningfulness like we can see a particular sense object, but we can certainly ask people if they find these needs in their experience. Maslow made a conscious attempt to set up his claims and propositions in a way that could be empirically verified, that is, verified by a general appeal to experience. We might also add here that we do not believe that Marx would accept the reduction of subjective experience to physical and physiological events, even though we would certainly maintain that for Marx the subjective is made manifest only through man's natural capacities and powers. We will cite only a few statements as confirmation of this point, although many such statements can be found throughout Marx's work. In Theses on Feuerbach we find Marx saying:
“The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the active side was developed by idealism.”

And in *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* we find Marx claiming that:

“...from a subjective point of view, as music alone awakens man's musical sense and the most beautiful music has no meaning for the unmusical ear -- is no object for it, because my object can only be so for me insofar as my essential capacity exists explicitly as a subjective capacity... -- for this reason the senses of the social man differ from those of the unsocial.” [See *Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society*, trans. and ed. by Loyd D. Easton and Kurt H. Guddat (Garden City, Doubleday, 1967), p. 309.]

In Marx's writings it is clear that the subjective unfolds through man's natural capacities, that subjectivity is the "other side" of the material, but it is equally clear, as the above quotes show, that for Marx there is a significant subjective dimension to human experience. Appreciating music is not reducible to the physiology of the ear drum. Aesthetic appreciation is not merely a material event.

In other passages we also find Marx claiming that the sciences should be based on sense and human sensuous need, and in *The German Ideology* he states that Feuerbach sees the world only as a sense object and not as the "total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it.

It is clear from all of the above cited quotations that Marx does not want to reduce consciousness and subjectivity to mere physical and physiological processes, even though it is rooted in them. We also see the additional epistemological claim that science does not proceed by sense experience alone. The human and subjective side of experience is not repressed or eliminated; it is here being made a part of the scientific process of investigation. There is no bare sense datum. Rather, humans observe the world through a framework of interlocking human and social needs. Marx's scientist does not perceive the natural and social worlds as pure objects, nor is the process of observation itself devoid of human intention.

If this is true, if Marx does integrate subjective human intentions into the process of scientific investigation, then what does this do to the universality and supposed objectivity of science? It is our contention that Marx is able to maintain the universality of scientific claims by asserting that the interests through which the observations are made are the interests of the working class, yet, for Marx, this is the universal class. It is the class that no longer seeks to dominate and exploit another group or social class. The interests through which this class sees society are the interests of all men equally. Thus Marx's science is empirical and maintains universality, while allowing for subjective intentions and interests. This universality is not attained by the elimination of the subjective, by focusing on the object in itself apart from any subjective contribution. Rather, it is a universality attained by a universalization of human intentions.

The point that is obviously important for the theme of our paper is that Marx does not eliminate the subjective, nor does he merely explain it in terms of physical or physiological events. Subjectivity, that is, the reflective awareness that the individual has of his or her own experience, maintains a significant role in Marx's philosophy.
In response to reductionistic materialism, it is certainly possible to maintain a materialist position without committing ourselves to radical reductionism. This alternative position is sometimes referred to as naturalism and it resists reductionism by arguing that various levels exist in nature. There is a level of life which emerges out of the lower level of matter, which is continuous with it, but which requires a different method of understanding. And of course, there is the level of consciousness which emerges or evolves out of life and matter. Consciousness is not a separate substance, it is continuous with life and matter, yet it displays a new structure and requires a new method. Thus a significant and plausible alternative to reductionism exists without the implication of a dualism or an idealism which posits consciousness and life as separate forces.

With reference to social theory, we may certainly admit that the individual is affected by his or her past and by the social forces that prevail in his or her society, but this certainly does not mean that is all the individual is. The individual always exists in a natural and social situation, yet he or she lives it as a self-conscious subject with some degree of freedom.

Thus, it is quite possible for us to reject narrow empiricism and reductionistic materialism without committing ourselves to the philosophical extreme of idealism or mind/body dualism. Many thinkers, including the so-called naturalist, have provided us with alternatives that very plausibly come between these extremes. This is of some importance for our interpretation of Marx for it allows us to claim that Marx does recognize the subjective side of experience without committing him to a form of idealism or dualism.

**Humanistic Marxism**

With these comments in mind, let us now turn to the second interpretation of Marx's work, the interpretation that we think is the most accurate. The interpretation that makes Marx out to be a philosophical humanist generally focuses on his early work, specifically on *The 1844 Manuscripts*. Few commentators would deny Marx's humanistic concern for the individual in this document. However, many interpreters of Marx argue that Marx makes a sharp break with his early work and comes to embrace the method of a strict empirical science such as the one we have characterized above. We have dealt with this supposed epistemological break in detail in another article and the limitations of time and space do not allow us to take up this issue here. Let us simply say that the relatively recent release of the text entitled *The Grundrisse* which are the working notes for Marx's landmark study of capital, *Das Capital* [Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I; published in German 1867, English edition first published in 1887, Progress Publishers, Moscow, USSR; Translated: Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels; available online.] reveal without a doubt that the same philosophical and humanistic themes were present in Marx's mind while he was writing these supposedly purely scientific studies. Thus we can claim that the humanistic concern for the experiencing individual that is found so clearly in Marx's early work are themes that never leave his mind.

Let us now focus on these themes, for it is in this way that we will discover the concept of self in Marx's philosophy that we have developed and defined above. In *The 1844 Manuscripts* we find Marx developing his now well-known theory of alienation. Marx argues that within the capitalist societies that we find that the worker is alienated from the product of his or her labor from his or her own actions and intentions, from his or her own essential nature, and from other members of the human species. It will be appropriate if we now take a moment to discuss each of these features of alienation and how we may find the concept of self present in them.
1. What does Marx mean when he says that human beings are alienated from the products of their labor? He means that the worker does not feel any genuine connectedness with the object of his or her labor. The worker does not see him or herself, does not see his or her own intentions reflected in what he or she has produced. When he or she looks at the objects it does not represent a joyful expression of his or her labor. It does not represent his or her own design and subjective form. This is so because the worker acts according to the intentions of others. The worker acts according to the intentions of the capitalist, who now owns the workers labor.

2. We can understand what this alienation involves if we consider the second aspect of Marx's theory of alienation, the estrangement of one's own activity. It is here that we begin to see quite clearly that Marx does indeed save an important place in his conceptual system for a concept of the individual person, for Marx claims that the product of labor is an ensemble of the individuals actions. The product of labor is alienated from the individual because his or her own actions are alienated. Marx indicates here that under favorable conditions the worker is able to externalize his or her subjective intention in the product of his or her labor. The individual is able to get in touch with his or her own desires and intentions and to express them with some degree of free will. The individual worker is able to imprint or impress his or her subjective forms on the objects of their labor. And of course, the world outside of the worker is also internalized. It is a world that resists some subjective intention while accepting others. Marx states that the subjective intentions of the individual must be externalized to be real to be actual, to be actualized. For Marx consciousness and subjectivity are in the body and in the world. They are made real only through acts in the world. Thus, the subjective and the subjective intentions are made real by the individual first being in touch with his or her own intentions, his or her own will, and not someone else's, and secondly by actually expressing or externalizing these intentions through some act into the material world.

It is quite clear here that Marx is using the notion of an individual self. What Marx is saying is that under favorable condition the individual can freely express his or her own desires, intentions and will. In other words, when the individual is a self-aware, self-directed subject, when he or she acts into the world according to his or her own intentions, rather than being directed by the owner of his or her labor, then, and only then, will he or she be developing and be in touch with him or herself. This corresponds perfectly with part of our definition of the self. We have here an individual aware of him or herself as the center of his or her own experience and as feeling that his or her actions stem from him or herself and not from someone or something else.

3. The third aspect of Marx's theory of alienation, alienation from one's species being, is equally revealing. For Marx man's species being or our human essence, what distinguishes us from other species, is our ability to be a self-conscious actor. The human species is the only species that is aware of itself as a species. It is because of the ability to reflect on our own experience that the members of human species can separate themselves from the immediate moment and from immediate needs. Marx's way of saying this is that because human beings are conscious beings we are also a universal being; we are able to separate ourselves from the animal action of trying to fulfill immediate needs and are able to produce according to the universal structures of the object and the universal needs of humanity. What distinguishes humans from animals, then, is consciousness, is the ability to reflect on one's self and one's experience, the ability to see one's self as separate from the environment and as the free subject of one's own activity.
From this it clearly follows that this consciousness is not transcendental; it is not outside of nature in some separate realm of spirit. This is the point of saying that the human essence is to be a conscious actor. Consciousness and subjectivity are the consciousness and subjective of real human individuals. In addition, consciousness and subjectivity must be externalized, they must be actualized in the world through some bodily action. Consciousness and subjectivity are, so to speak, the other side of our material being. The gourmet can eat to cultivate the subjective and aesthetic aspect of his or her experience, but this subjective element would not exist without the food or the physiology of the palate. Marx is not a reductionist in the sense that we can somehow properly understand the gourmet's experience by simply appealing to the food, the palate, and the tongue. On the other hand, the conscious, subjective experience he or she develops is not outside of the body or nature.

We can now clearly see that within Marx's system to be a human being, to be a part of the human species is to have the capacity to act into the world in a self-conscious way. For human beings to act according to their species life, i.e., to act in a self-conscious way, would be to act according to their own designs, according to designs which are freely and consciously chosen, but chosen, of course, within the context of the limitation of the natural and social world. Again, this fits perfectly with our notion of the individual self as we have defined it. The individual, we said, is aware of him or herself as a separate individual, consciously directing his or her own actions. This consciousness is not transcendental, for it is situated in a body and in the world.

4. We are now able to grasp the last sense in which Marx says that workers are alienated within a capitalist society. The human worker is alienated from other people. Marx claims that if a worker is alienated from his or her own human nature, from his or her own species being, then he or she will also be alienated from others. If a worker does not see him or herself as a self-conscious actor who is the center of his or her own self-directed activity, if he or she sees him or herself as empty, then this is the way he or she will perceive others. Other workers will be seen as empty objects, not as whole beings who are capable of human self-fulfillment.

In addition, if the workers species life is alienated, if conscious activity is used to maintain his or her existence in the workplace and not as a free expression of his or her own life, if his or her conscious activity is not self-directed, then it must be directed by another. It is, according to Marx, directed by the capitalist who has purchased the workers labor. “Through alienated labor man thus not only produces his relationship to the object and to the act of production... He also creates the relation in which other men stand to his production and product, and the relation in which he stands to these other men...As he alienates his own activity from himself, he confers upon the stranger an activity not his own." We can now grasp more clearly what Marx means when he says that "the relation of man to himself is objective and actual to him only through his relationship to other men". By recasting these negative statements in a positive form we can see more clearly what Marx means. For Marx the individual is made real by externalizing his or her interiority, his or her subjectivity, by placing his or her subjective intentions and purposes on the object. Humans needs the object and externalization to develop our natural and subjective potentialities. This process of externalization allows the subjective intentions to be expressed in an area that is now open to view, that is now perceivable by others. Nature and the products of labor thus act as a mediation between the individual and others. The individual's interior, his or her own lived and felt intentions, are made real by the process of externalization in the objects of nature and by the recognition of them by other people. This is what allows the individual to feel a genuine connectedness with nature and others. One should be in touch with their own intentions and
purposes and express them in the world. These are then accepted or rejected by both nature and others. Thus, Marx claims, the object of labor is the individual's existence for him or herself, his or her existence for others, and the other's existence for him or her.

For Marx, then, our sense of self is based on our own experience as an experiencer and on what others think of the outward manifestation of our intentions. For Marx there is no isolated subject or self. The self is born of an interplay between the individual's own intentions and the intentions of others. There is no sense here of an isolated individual nor of the individual totally absorbed into social relations. Isolation is impossible because the individual must act into the world and must act with others. On the other hand, even if the individual is working with others toward some shared goal, at least it is a shared goal. The goal is in part still chosen and affirmed by the individual. There is no sense here that Marx wants to give up the individual's power of choice to anyone else, be it the capitalist, the State, or any group as a whole. In fact, we see just the opposite. We see Marx maintaining the individuals' capacity to confirm or reject various goals. Even when arriving at a consensus, even when sharing a goal with the social group, there is still the sense that the individual is making some free choice, is making some contribution.

Thus, Marx's sense of self is based on the self as experiencer and the self as experienced social object. Marx maintains the capacity of the individual to consciously direct his or her own activity according to his or her own intentions, yet he or she does this in the context of a natural and social milieu. For these intentions to become real they must be externalized and they must be confirmed by others. Thus, with great psychological insight, we find Marx developing a concept of the individual within the social group. By their very nature, human beings are aware of themselves as separate individuals and as members of the same species. All the members of this species are capable of consciously directing their own actions according to their own will and intentions. These intentions, however, must be made manifest in the natural and social world. Consciousness does not transcend the natural world, and the human subject is not an isolated individual. The human subject defines him or herself in the interplay between him or herself with the world, and others.

In the preceding section we have focused on the humanistic interpretation of Marx and revealed that Marx does indeed develop a sophisticated concept of the individual. This individual is really a product of Western Civilization because industrial development has created the material and social milieu that are necessary for the all sided and nonalienated development of human beings as human beings. But what exactly does it mean to be a human being? Basically, we have seen that it means two things: 1) We have seen that for Marx being human means having the capacity to act in a self-conscious way; it means being able to act according to one's own desires and intentions; it means the ability to make one's own actions the self-conscious product of one's own will. And 2) being human means being a social being. We saw that for Marx an individual is actual for him or herself only through his or her relationships to the world and others. The individual as conscious subjective intention is not made real until this interiority is externalized through action and expression. The individual as individual is actual to him or herself only insofar as his or her expressed and externalized intentions are recognized by others. Thus, for Marx being human means being a self-conscious individual who is aware of him or herself as the center of his or her own actions and who defines him or herself by acting into the world with others. This perfectly corresponds to our earlier definition of the self as experiencer and as experienced object.
Furthermore, the fact that our humanistic interpretation is drawn directly from Marx's own text seriously weakens the claims of the orthodox, strictly scientific interpretation of his works. Especially since the appearance of the *Grundrisse*, we can no longer take seriously an interpretation that reduces the individual to a passive collection of forces or consciousness to the exclusive workings of material cause and effect.

**The Individual and Society**

We would now like to conclude our project with a few comments about the relationship between the individual self and society. This relationship is very important for Marx, since he does claim that to be a human being is to be a social being. We have seen that there is no isolated individual who determines his or her life in reflective solitude. On the other hand, the individual is not given over to or absorbed into the social group (or matter). Even though he or she must act with others, and in the presence of others, or by sharing a goal with others, he or she does so as an individual who must also self-consciously affirm all social goals. Thus the individual is necessarily within society and is affected by its projects, yet society is not some material thing or force which the non-conscious individual reacts passively to. The individual takes up, consciously lives through, and develops these social forces.30 Furthermore, Marx remarks emphatically that we must not make society an abstraction over and above the individual. It is the individual who is the social being.31 Society is the interaction of these conscious social beings. Marx claims that within the capitalist society that class and general interests get separated from the individual and act as a force over against the individual, that this is one of the products of alienation and private property. Marx believes, however, that within a truly communist society that the individual and the general interest will become one.32

An excellent way for us to think about individual and general interests becoming one is to use a model that we can thank John Rawls for developing.33 Rawls believes that the spirit of the so-called "original position" (exemplified, for instance by Locke's social contract theory) can be summarized in the following way. Beginning with a question we may ask: what would be a social structure or system that all rational people would accept? What would all people accept as a reasonable society? A stipulation that is necessarily added to this question is that when choosing a society the individual would not know beforehand what social position he or she would come to occupy. If, for instance, we were to choose a society with a class structure or with racial prejudice, we would not know if we would be in the class at the bottom or the class prejudiced against. Thus, Rawls argues, most people would choose the society in which the worst possible outcome would still be all right for them. A person would choose a situation in which the least harm would come to him or her, even if he or she ended up in the worst possible situation. Thus, Rawls continues to argue, a person would choose a society in which all people are free and equal, a society in which the worst possible position is still very good.

What Rawls has postulated here is a hypothesis (an intellectual device which he believes is in the spirit of the social contract theory) to get us to abstract from any special social advantage or class interest. If we are able to eliminate this advantage or special interest, then we may be able to see how a society could be based on universal interest, based on the self-interest of all -- because we could be in any position. And this, we believe, is what Marx has in mind when he discusses the proletarian revolution. The proletarian's view of society is the correct (true) one because it abstracts from class interest, from seeing the society from the point of view of some narrow class. Marx held the view that as history progressed (and he believed that it had) each revolution or major change in forms of
government and society had appealed to greater and greater numbers of people for its success. The bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th century involved the elimination of a smaller, privileged class by a more numerous middle class. It was a revolution that destroyed privilege and rights for only a few and disseminated them to a greater number of people. These bourgeois revolutions were successful, in fact, because the bourgeois class appealed to certain universal as accepted claims. They called for freedom for all, and they called for equality and a democracy in which each and every person has a right to vote. Marx claims, however that once these revolutions where successful, the lower classes were disenfranchised. Since the capitalist society allowed for a great accumulation of wealth by one class, this class could easily influence social policy and government. Thus, there was no true, concrete democracy where each and every individual would truly affect the social structures that influence his or her life. Marx thought that the proletarian class would be the last class in history, that the proletarian revolution would truly remove all class distinctions, that the proletarian revolution would truly appeal and be applicable to all people.

Thus, even though the proletariat sees the world from the point of view of the proletarian class, this is the point of view of a classless society. It sees the society from the point of view of, from the interest of, all members of the society. This view does not abstract from self-interest in terms of getting rid of it, in the way that the purely objective sciences do, but universalizes the interests of humanity. This is precisely what the "original position" attempts to do. It does not abstract from self-interest but takes up the interest of any person in that society. Thus, it universalizes self-interest. And, of course, Marx realizes that it is with a situation like this that the individual and the universal are the same. Marx is doing something very similar to Rawls, for he imagines a situation (the proletarian revolution) in which all the individuals act according to their interests, and this interest will be similar for all. Marx claims that what be good for me will be good for any and all individuals, just as Rawls claims that I will choose a society in which the interest of all would be fulfilled, for I might end up being any one of them.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between Rawls and Marx. Where Rawls, on the one hand, uses an abstract thought experiment to deal with bias in ethics, Marx, on the other, follows an historical approach and develops a theory of the human species that unites the ethical with epistemology and the scientific method. 34 In The 1844 Manuscripts, Marx explicitly states that the science of man [of human beings] will become the science of nature and the science of nature will become the science of man. Marx is here referring to his claim that science must be built on sensation, on observations of the empirical world, but also on human sense need; the empirical world is touched by humanity; human needs and purposes are worked into it, and when we perceive the empirical world we find this human meaning already present. Furthermore, we always perceive the world through the framework of our present needs and intentions. Thus, humans and nature must always be taken together. This, in fact, is how we can see that Marx's science or the social35 has a human and ethical dimension. Marx is trying to see the social world, he is trying to do his empirical study of the social world, from the perspective of all humans, from the interest of all human beings equally. He refuses to view the world from the narrow self-interest of just a few, as the capitalist does. Marx perceives the world from the proletariat's perspective but this is the correct, the scientific perspective. Why? Because it is from the perspective of what is good and fair for all. Thus, Marx's science has a human, ethical dimension, and his ethics, as well, has a scientific dimension. The ethical, what is good and fair for all, what is in the interest of all, has a scientific dimension because 1) we can perceive in the social realm
what is good or harmful and 2) we *perceive* through the interest of all, not just a few -- just as the observations of one scientist should be able to be corroborated by all observers.

For Marx, then, the individual exists with other individuals in various social structures that we call society. These social structures can and should be created by self-conscious individuals interacting with one another in a way that could fulfill the needs and interests of all individuals equally. When I act with others, I do not repress my own individuality. On the other hand, when I act, I do not act only for myself. Since I am aware of myself as a member of a species, when I fulfill myself, I fulfill myself as a human being, as a social being. When I act in a way that fulfills my intentions, I do so by also taking others into account. I always act and define myself by interacting with others. It is at this moment of realization, a moment brought about by various historical developments, that I grasp that I will be acting in my own interests if I act in a way that guarantees interests and rights of all. It is in this way that Marx is able to work out a brilliant compromise between the interests of the individual and the interests of the community. It is in this way that he is able to work out a concept of the individual within the community. When I act socially, and when I act to choose social structures that are fair for me, that will help me fulfill my intentions, I act to choose social structures that are fair for anyone and everyone, because I know that I could end up being in anyone else's position.

**NOTES**


2. Speculative in the sense that we depart from a careful analysis of Marx's text and interpret his writings more freely.


4. Ibid., p. 43.

5. Ibid., pp. 48-49.


16. We will develop this theme in the closing pages.

17. See, for example, the works of Samuel Alexander (Gifford Lectures, *Space, Time, and Deity*, 1920) and Roger Sperry (*Science and Moral Priority: merging mind, brain and human values*, 1982). See also, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963).


20. Ibid., p. 291-293.

21. Ibid., p. 294. "Man makes his life activity itself into an object of will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity."

22. Ibid., pp. 293-295.

23. Ibid., pp. 307-10. Again, a model that we can appeal to in order to make sense out of this ontology is the one which describes emergent levels of nature. Life and consciousness are rooted in matter but must be understood as higher levels of expression. We cannot understand life and consciousness by reducing them to matter, yet we need not appeal to life and consciousness as a separate force or a separate realm, they are higher and more complex expressions of matter.

24. Ibid., p. 296.
25. Ibid., p. 297.
27. Loc. cit.
28. Marx, *The German Ideology*, p. 85. Marx claims that the revolutionary proletarians participate in the community as individuals, "which puts the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals under their control--conditions which were previously abandoned to chance..." See also pp. 104-5 where Marx states that within a truly communist society the general interest is created by individuals. The general interest is not, or should not be, something over against the individual.
30. Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, p. 121. Marx says here that "the materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men and that it is essential to educate the educator. This doctrine must, therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society."
34. I am indebted to Professor David Rodier for valuable suggestions regarding this point.
35. As well as his science of nature.
36. As we stated earlier, these social structures are not, of course, created *ex nihilo*. Marx states that history makes men but also that men make history, not any way they please but according to the material and social conditions they find present in their society. In other words, men are born into certain material and social conditions that are not of their making, yet these conditions are not just passively received by the individuals composing the society. They take them up and live through them as conscious subjects. In the truly communist society these conditions are not perceived as accidents of nature or history to which men must submit. They come under the democratic control of the individuals who make up this society. These individuals, recognizing the universality of their interests, control, for the benefit of all, the structures that condition and influence them.