

The Last Train Has Left the Station...

Le Garcon Dupont

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The last train has left the station...

Herein is suggested that: there is no hope of change; no hope of revolution; no hope whatsoever...

What kind of fools are we to believe that anything can be salvaged of our human/animal status? What kind of fools are we to believe, even, that we still actually live on planet earth?

Benjamin Franklin famously defined humans as 'the tool-making animal.' However, this has been proved to need some elaboration. Karl Marx wrote:

“It is true that animals also produce. They build nests and dwellings, like the bee, the beaver, the ant, etc. But they produce only their own immediate needs or those of their young; they produce only when immediate physical need compels them to do so, while man produces even when he is free from physical need and truly produces only in freedom from such need; they produce only themselves, while man reproduces the whole of nature; their products belong immediately to their physical bodies, while man freely confronts his own product. Animals produce only according to the standards and needs of the species to which they belong, while man is capable of producing according to the standards of every species and of applying to each object its inherent standard; hence, man also produces in accordance with the laws of beauty.”¹

He continues:

“The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It is not distinct from that activity; it is that activity. Man makes his life activity itself an object of his will and consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity directly distinguishes man from animal life activity. Only because of that is he a species-being. Or, rather, he is a conscious being – i.e., his own life is an object for him, only because he is a species-being. Only

¹ From: Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (also referred to as The Paris Manuscripts), a series of notes written between April and August 1844 by Karl Marx. Found on www.marxists.org Also to be found at: “Marx’s theory of human nature.” Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. 1 Mar 2009

because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labour reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means for his existence.”²

Later, in *Capital*, he writes:

“A spider conducts operations that resemble those of the weaver, and a bee would put many a human architect to shame by the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax, At the end of every labour-process, a result emerges which had already been conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally. Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises his own purpose in those materials. And this is a purpose he is conscious of, it determines the mode of his activity with the rigidity of a law, and he must subordinate his will to it. This subordination is no mere momentary act. Apart from the exertion of the working organs, a purposeful will is required for the entire duration of the work.”³

Humans are conscious beings, they are able to treat their own lives as an object, something they can consciously change and affect; they are therefore able to imagine possible futures and strive to achieve them. Their consciousness of the possibilities of their own existence gives them a practical freedom. Humans are able to decide to live differently. They are able to decide to live alone. They have a capacity for individualism. A human being could decide to live alone in a cave on a mountain top, thereby going against the tendency for humans to live in a social organization. A human could decide to live with another animal group and endeavour to be accepted by them.

This freedom, however, is determined and restricted by material circumstances. In the present day the activity of humans is bound within the parameters set by the way the economy is organized and the way that humans must secure a means of living. The activity of humans in the present day is, therefore, not free activity. Karl Marx suggested that it would only be in a society organized communistically, where technology was Industrial or post-Industrial, that humans would be able to create freely. In order to get to this possibility, however, history had to go through Capitalism and the Industrial Revolution.

In pre-civilisation societies humans were also restricted in their ability to pursue free activity. They made their own history, their own lives, but within a certain framework.

Karl Marx said:

“People make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”⁴

Ernest Mandel elaborated on this idea. He devised the term ‘parametric determinism’ [From: *How To Make No Sense of Marx*, Ernest Mandel, 1989, found at www.marxists.org] to describe how history was made by humans, not some inevitable force, and how their actions are contained

² From: as above

³ *Capital* Volume 1, Karl Marx, London 1867, Penguin Books, London 1976, page 284

⁴ From: *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. Karl Marx 1852, found at www.marxists.org

within particular parameters. So, humans do have free will, but their will is constrained by their material circumstances and the ideology that grows from that. They are constrained by their perceptions, their experiences and their emotions. We can understand the truth of this if we look at any society of humans; we can see that certain things are likely to happen and certain things are not.

The human mind is a victim of the material circumstances it finds itself in.

Since humans are conscious of their activity and life (even if they are often misguided about what is really happening) they are able to stand apart from it. Unlike animals, which are defined largely by their activities, human activity is not what defines them. It is the consciousness of their activity which defines them. This is a useful and useable definition of what it is to be human.

Humans are constrained in so many ways by their material circumstances.

The chances they have to change their way of living are not to be found in their ideas because their ideas are always bound by the parameters determined by material circumstance. Thus, workers struggles tend to produce democracy, or a welfare state; revolt generally helps expand markets or create new ones; thus religious adventures will reflect the current mode of living; thus plans for the new world, as drawn up by the 'revolutionaries', will reflect current economic modes. The 'revolution' is more likely to be a self-managed counter-revolution than anything else. [See, for example, the remarkable text: Lip and the self-managed counter-revolution, Negation, translated and reprinted by Black and Red, Detroit, 1975] If the central hero and victim in the romance of revolutionary thought is the working class and the first aim of the revolution should be to destroy the working class then there are a host of dilemmas to be faced right at the outset for revolutionaries. We have seen self-managed counter revolutions and the re-subjugation of the working class in the name of the working class in so many instances of interesting or calamitous times.

At every point in human history and existence the possibilities we think we are faced with are conditioned by our material circumstances. What many of us have now, in this era of capitalist civilisation, are possibilities based on our recent history, our experiences, our ideologies, our emotions – all shaped by our existence, our material circumstance. This existence is dominated by the way in which each of us needs to live in order to survive. We have to do things in order to be paid money so that we can buy our survival.

What people had in pre-civilisation societies was, on this level, no different. The possibilities they thought they were faced with were conditioned by their material circumstance. The possibilities open to them were based on their recent history, their experiences, their ideologies, their emotions.

Both types of society, therefore, lack that individualist freedom that is so apparently valued in modern civilised society.

What pre-civilisation societies had, though, was a connection to the land that made their existence closer to that of animals. This connection to the land has been described as one of being owned by the land rather than owning it. [See, for example, the work of Bob Randall, a descendent of the Yankunytjatjara people of Uluru] The parameters of thought and idea were constrained by an intimate knowledge of the land. Humans existed as part of something, whereas today humans exist in isolation from any reference points apart from those given by the economic system. We can no longer feel and know the earth, even as it falls through our fingers. We do no longer look around us and know the trees and the hills as our real home, our real parent.

“... Charles Darwin, who met both Aborigines and Feugians in the 1830’s, classed the ‘shivering tribes’ of Fuegians as ‘the most abject and miserable creatures I anywhere beheld... The Australian, in the simplicity of the arts of life, comes nearest the Fuegian’. From these views came the concept that these societies in ‘the uttermost parts of the earth’ were living representatives of the oldest phase of human development.”⁵

Being human was a risky business. We became divorced from the animal state in the process of becoming aware of our lives as an object and we went on to totally kill the animal inside us by leaving the land and letting it, and ourselves, be sold.

And, because our ideas are governed by the material circumstances of our existence, every opposition that we throw against the social and economic organization of our lives only feeds into that structure and makes it stronger.

You’ve gotta laugh...

⁵ From: *The Original Australians*, Josephine Flood, 2006, Allen and Unwin, NSW, Australia, p 15. The development of Darwin’s ideas, and how they have been interpreted, is very interesting. Darwin is now often accused, by leftists and those who wish to discredit the issue of evolution, as a racist because of the ways he described those people across the world with whom he came into contact. However, this is unfair; he was trying to evaluate his experiences of other groups of people in terms of the dominant views of historical progression and in the terms he had devised regarding biology, where living things evolve progressively from simple to complex organisms. This led to problems when he attempted to address what it is to be human in political and social terms. Basically speaking, Natural Selection cannot explain society.

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