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Introduction (Draft) to Adam Schaff *Marxism and the Human Individual*

Erich Fromm
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The following paragraphs were a first draft written by Erich Fromm in 1966 to introduce in the English translation of Adam Schaff's *Marxism and the Human Individual*, which was finally published in 1970 (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company). Some paragraphs are identical with the publication of 1970. First published in: *Fromm Forum* (English version) No. 12 (2008), Tuebingen (Selbstverlag) 2008, pp. 42-44. [Cf. E. Fromm, 1970I.]

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It is no exaggeration to say that the publication of this book constitutes an important event. It was an event first of all within Poland itself, where the original version was published over a year ago. One of the most outstanding Polish philosophers, who has at the same time been a prominent political figure for many years, speaks out; he criticizes some of the weaknesses of his own system and gives credit to some personal traits to be found in the generally accepted model of democracy. More important than that, he raises questions about man, individualism, alienation, the meaning of life, norms for living, which had for many years been neglected in Marxist literature.

But the publication of this book also constitutes an event for the non-Communist world, and especially for the United States. Some people may like the book because of its critical attitude toward some features of the actual situation in the socialist countries and because it could be used as an argument in the propaganda for Western democracy; but I believe that only a minority of readers will react in this way. The vast majority of serious readers will be impressed in the very opposite sense; first of all they will be impressed by the fact that such an objective book, completely lacking in fanaticism and propaganda has been published today, in Poland, by a man of the academic and political prominence of Professor Schaff. This fact does not fit into the cold war clichés about the monopolistic character of Communism, the concept of the „international criminal conspiracy“, the thought regimentation allegedly characteristic of all socialist countries. This book would be important even if it demonstrated only the degree of independent and critical thought that exists and finds expression in Poland today. But its significance goes far beyond this. One of the clichés in American thinking has been to believe that Marxism is „materialistic“, that it subordinates the individual to the state (or society) and that thus it is the antithesis to the values of humanism on which Western society was founded.

Schaff demonstrates in this book that this picture of Marxism is wrong; as wrong I would say, as if during the years of the counter-Reformation someone had believed that the deeds of the Inquisition represented the teachings of Christ. By this analogy I refer



specifically to the distortion of „Marxism“ which was taught in the Soviet Union under Stalin, during what is called in the socialist countries the years of „the cult of personality“. The same distortion, in a slightly different version, is to be found among most people in the non-socialist world, even among most of those who consider themselves „experts“ of Marxism.

In the United States the certainty of what constitutes „Marxism“ was, and largely still is, matched only by the ignorance about Marx’s writings and ideas. What is believed to be Marxism is essentially a conglomeration of clichés which one writer copies from another, usually without bothering to read or study the Marxist texts. The distortion of Marxism was much more severe in the United States than in Europe, largely due to the fact that one of Marx’s most important philosophical texts, the „Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts“ of 1844 had never been translated into English until a few years ago. In Germany and France, where these manuscripts were well known, there has been a lively concern with them during the last decades among philosophers, and especially among Protestant and Catholic theologians.

Professor Schaff’s book will surprise most American readers because he emphasizes some of the fundamental aspects of Marxism which had been ignored both in the East and in the West. In his introductory chapter, ‘Old Contents of Marxism Newly Discovered’, he makes it very clear that his description of Marxist ideas in no way deals with ideas not to be found already in Marx’s writings, and yet that the return to the original Marx is in some respects a new discovery.

This book deals all the more effectively with Marx’s ideas because historical development has proven how dangerous the neglect of certain aspects of Marx’s philosophy has turned out to be. Marx was one among the great humanist philosophers who, like the humanists from the Renaissance up to those of our day, have stressed the idea that all social arrangements must serve the growth and the unfolding of man; that man must always be an end and never a means; that each individual carries within himself all of humanity; that human progress in science and in art depends on freedom; that man has the capacity to perfect himself in the process of history. The main difference between Marx and his great humanistic predecessors does not lie in their concept of man and the goals for his life, but in the idea that these aims cannot be realized only by teaching, but that necessary economic and social changes are required which will permit and further the fullest development of man.

It is an ironical fact that the main accusation against Marxism in the capitalist countries has been his „materialism;“ this is ironical because it was precisely Marx’s aim to fight the materialism engendered in bourgeois life, and to create a society in which man—the creative, ‘self-active’ human being—is the *summum bonum*, where the rich man is the one, as Marx put it, who *is* much, and not the one who *has* much.

Our industrial civilization, both in the socialist and in the capitalist areas of the industrialized world, has led to an ever-increasing neglect of man. Man has become alienated from his work, from his fellowman, and from himself: he transforms himself into a thing, occupied with production and consumption. Unconsciously he feels anxious, lonely and confused, because he has lost the sense of the meaning of life and the conviction of who he is and what he lives for.



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By emphasizing the vital necessity of raising these questions, Professor Schaff has a message which is important not only for his own country, but equally so for us. For in spite of all political and ideological differences between the two opposing camps, the need to find a new and authentic frame of orientation and devotion is equally great throughout all of industrial civilization.

This book is one of the first works of a humanist Marxist philosopher from a country belonging to the Soviet bloc to be published in the United States. But it gains in significance through the fact that Professor Schaff is by no means the only Marxist philosopher who stresses Marx's humanism as the basis without which Marxism cannot live. This renaissance of Marxist humanism is occurring with such force and intensity in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Hungary, that one can truly speak of a movement in which the great majority of the philosophers of these countries are participating. They have published many books and articles in which they have expressed their humanist convictions. But little of this has become known in the English-speaking world. (An international symposium on *Socialist Humanism* (ed. by E. Fromm, pub. by Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York, 1965) contains a large number of papers (including one by Prof. Schaff) of which approximately one third were written by authors in Poland, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia; it thus gives a picture of the scope and aliveness of humanist socialist thought today.)

This renaissance of humanism among socialists is part of an even larger movement, the significance of which has not been sufficiently recognized: the renaissance of humanism all over the world, and within different ideological camps. We find this movement among representatives of Christianity as well as among socialists and scientists. It will suffice to mention here only the names of Pope John XXIII, Teilhard du Chardin, Albert Schweitzer, Albert Einstein, and Bertrand Russell, as representatives of this movement.

This humanist movement of today stresses the same principles that have been characteristic of humanism since the Renaissance, and even earlier. It has arisen as a reaction to the ever increasing threat to man--the threat of nuclear extinction and the threat to all that is specifically human: independence, aliveness, creativity, and most of all, to man's being an end in himself and not the means for institutions or purposes outside of himself.

The humanists in various ideological camps do not ignore the important differences that exist among themselves, and they do not want to minimize them. Yet their common concern for peace and reason as the basis for the full unfolding of man constitutes a common element of great importance, and the basis for an ever-increasing dialogue taking place among the various groups of humanists.

Professor Schaff's book represents one significant expression of Marxist humanism. It is not, and does not claim to be, a dogmatic expression of „the“ true Marxist humanism. There are considerable differences among humanist socialists themselves; this writer, for instance, would go much further in establishing objectively valid criteria for happiness and the meaning of life. But these differences only testify to the genuine and undogmatic character of the new humanism among socialists.

One last word about the author and his book. There are books which reflect the personality of the author in their content and style; there are others which hide it. This



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book belongs to the first group. It reflects the courage, honesty, modesty and humanity of the author. It does not shy away from expressing unpopular ideas, and it does not pretend to have solutions which have not been thought through or which are purely ideological. It is permeated by a spirit of genuine concern for man, for the writer is true to himself, never hiding his doubts, and yet full of hope that mankind can take the next step toward a more human and a happier form of existence.