

Ideology: What is Human Nature?

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From The Rising Tide

An article in the June 9, 1972 issue of Peking Review entitled "The Struggle between the Theory of Classes and the Theory of Human Nature in Literature and Art," attempts to prove that the idea of "men with human nature" is merely a bourgeois concept having no foundation in reality.

The report states that in artistic expression, "the proletariat advocates that efforts should be made to depict worker, peasant and soldier heroes, whereas the bourgeoisie advocates the "quest for true man with human nature."

Humanitarians -- Traitors or Exploiters

Who are these people who aspire to the realization of "true human nature?" The article goes on to describe that there are actually two different kinds. "One is the devil in 'human' skin who gives himself up to the enemy," (Can apparent attack on Liu Shao-Chi, Lin Piao and company.) The other type are those whose "clothes are of the workers, peasants, and soldiers but the souls are those of the landlords and capitalists." Evidently, in this narrow definition, those who "oppose the theory of classes and substitute humanitarianism for communism" must be either "traitors" or "exploiters."

One Western reporter quoted a Chinese professor as saying: "I worked in my father's old mine," where he was sent for "corrective labor" after the Cultural Revolution. "It was at that point" he said, "that I realized there was no such thing as human nature. There is only class nature."

No Human Nature in the Abstract

Concerning this subject, Chairman Mao pointed out: "Is there such a thing as human nature? Of course there is. But there is only human nature in the concrete, no human nature in the abstract. In class society there is only human nature of class character; there is no human nature above classes."

This concept that man's nature is totally dependent on this class background is the crux of Marxist philosophy. Marx himself claims: "Productive life is, however, species life," and, "The object of labor is therefore the objectification of man's species-life," meaning that his human nature is created through the act of producing.

What Marx and Mao are trying to say is that man's nature has no real innate qualities but his "human essence" is formed as a result of the production relationship, i.e., relationships between capitalist and worker.

A Shallow Understanding

To limit man's only true life activity, that which creates his "species-being," to the act of labor ignores the broader potential of human nature. The fact is that before man becomes a being of labor he is first an ethical being. From the time we are born until we become an adult or a worker, our lives are a maturation process in ethical relationships and personification of certain moral values. During this time our whole existence is primarily centered on Love relationships in our family and among our peers. If we interpret Marx literally, we can conclude that before actually becoming workers, our lives from childhood to

maturity have little value in terms of developing our human essence. In fact, most modern psychologists admit that the first seven years of a person's life are the most crucial in terms of developing one's character and personality.

"Take 'love' for instance," the article continues. "Men of different classes love entirely different things because their thoughts and feelings are different." In a superficial sense this may be true in that a wealthy man may buy caviar and Mozart while a poorer man may love chewing tobacco and Johnny Cash. However, each shares the same intensity in loving their wives, children, or a beautiful sunset.

Class relationship is the essence

Why do the Communists emphasize class nature so much? It is because they believe in the contradictions between classes and want to intensify class struggle. "The so-called theory of 'influence of human feelings' preached by the revisionists eliminates class contradictions and class struggle. Class relationship is the essence of relationship between man and of all the complex contradictions, while struggles, whatever form they may take, are in the final analysis class struggle."

To imply that man's nature is basically similar, regardless of his class, would be a heresy in strict Marxist doctrine. The Communists want to emphatically deny that any real contradiction is between good and evil men or between good and evil within each man. Rather they want to propagate the childish idea that the bad guys in black hats are the capitalists whereas the good guys in white hats are the peasants and workers. They have carried this idea into practice to such an extent that today it is nearly impossible for the child of a former capitalist, land-owner or so-called reactionary (Christian, Moslem, nationalist, Jew, etc.) to ever hope to get a higher education or advance in the Party in many Communist countries.

It is quite evident that today many within Communist countries are beginning to realize or have always realized the fallacy of this view of human nature. Fortunately man's longing to realize his true human nature is an irresistible desire -- a desire that will inevitably overcome the oppression propagated by Marxist falsehoods.