THE ROLE OF ATHEISM IN MARXIAN PHILOSOPHY

Throughout the historical development of homo sapiens, man has become more and more aware of himself as fragmented and alienated in a variety of modes. This fragmentation of man results from civilization (division of labor, exploitation, mechanization, technology) and culture (religious and secular ideologies and compulsory education). The free man or what is often called the romantic rebelled against this compulsory political, economic, religious and social compartmentalization, fragmentation and alienation. He dreamt of a whole, unalienated and unfragmented man in freedom and abundance. Even great revolts were staged in the name of man’s liberty and independence (French and American). These freemen or romantics regarded religion (theistic) as one of the vehicles of alienation and fragmentation. Atheism, on the other hand, is a vehicle that would liberate man by annihilating the illusion of the beyond by bringing the human spirit back into the world of concrete human activity. Marx, amongst others, followed this line of thinking and argued not only that atheism was necessary for the reappropriation of human consciousness, but also, that Communism was necessary for the reappropriation of human activity, alienated in exploited labor.

I. HUMAN REALITY

A. Vision of the Whole Man: the Creative Human

Marx was not interested in seeing man become atheist or Communist. These were just other forms of human fragmentation and alienation. He was concerned with the whole man, the reality of being or of becoming human. Just as theistic religion begins with God, as Hegel began with the state, so Marx began with man and aspired to end in man, but man as human, not as atheist or Communist. “Man does not exist for law’s sake, law exists for man’s sake; it is human existence whereas (for) the others man is legal existence.”

Since, by force of historical and existential circumstances man does not...
live alone – he must live in community (ecclesia) – Marx saw human freedom as a free social interrelationship between man and man. Man creates society and society creates man. “As society itself produces man as man, so it is produced by him. Activity and mind are social in their content as well as in their origin; they are social activity and social mind.” Consequently, personal existence and personal reality, consciousness of self and humanity, the wholeness and reality of man is the realization of man and society. The wholeness of man, i.e., humanity, is conceived as the harmonious relation between man and society. “Though man is a unique individual – and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really individual communal being – he is equally the whole, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists in reality as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestations of life.”

In this view lies the danger of depersonalization. Human personal existence is threatened by the presupposition that man is solely a social creation. Although Marx later says that man is the creator of his own self and self’s destiny, he conceives man as social, and therefore, man’s self and self’s destiny are social and socially created. He identifies man and society, the personal and the social. It appears to be utopian from the perspective of concrete human activity and human history.

According to Marx, man attains to concrete and positive human wholeness and reality through creative appropriation.

Man appropriates his manifold being in an all-inclusive way, and thus as a whole man. All his human relations to the world - seeing, hearing, smelling, desiring, tasting, touching, thinking, observing, feeling, acting, loving – in short, all the organs of his individuality, like the organs which are directly communal in form, are in their objective action (their action in relation to the object) the appropriation of this object, the appropriation of human reality. The way in which they react to the object is the confirmation of human reality.

Marx’s position was that if man is not the appropriator and creator of self and self’s destiny, and especially if he is not even aware and conscious of himself as the creator of self and self’s destiny, then he is non-existent. Until man arrives at such a consciousness of self, he is alienated and fragmented. According to Marx, religion is the greatest culprit for instilling into man’s consciousness the idea of creation by another – above all by God. Thus through religion man is dispossessed of his creative con-