

RESEARCH BRIEF

The Quality of Mind of the Young Marx: Extensions and Expansions

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There is a challenge posed by the discipline to seek what is worthy of immortalization from the founding fathers of sociology. Following the idea of Charles Wright Mills (cited in Connell, 1997, p. 1539) that the classics is “not a period” but “a style of work”, what need beseeching and appreciation by a self-respecting student of sociology are the thought habits exemplified by the canons other than the prestige jargon they offer. For the latter provides only instant lexicon for sociologists to deploy in describing social phenomena whereas the former, functional beyond descriptive explication, serves as heuristic toolkits to guide us in discovering manifold layers of social realities.

The “symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1989), which the vocabulary of sociological concepts affords us, cannot dwarf the cultural capital that is far more valuable as a resource for any interpreter of society. The lexical resource, tapped for our scholarly work and for our claim for affiliation with the epistemic community, is secondary to the theoretical wherewithal afforded to us by that cultural capital. These are the qualities of the mind, the vehicles of cerebration that render us intellectually indebted to the canons, a kind of which that we owe them in celebratory terms. This means that as inheritors of the classical wisdom, we ought not to blindly fit their arsenal of concepts into our analysis

of the web of societal phenomena just so to reflect the same social conditions that their theories dealt with. Rather, the received wisdom calls forth a creative usage as they are possessive of heuristic prowess to guide us in more theoretical innovations and to sensitize us to other representations of realities, which the concepts might have failed to capture but that the thinking styles admirably proffer.

The paper is structured in three sections. The first part is a demonstration of Karl Marx’s timeless signature thinking styles—the radical and the dialectical—through a revisit of the competing notions of human nature and accounts of alienation from various traditions—mostly economic and philosophic. His engagements of these dominant narratives did not only usher him to propose his own theory but more saliently the young Marx, an interlocutor in this skirmish of ideas, exhibited his cerebral styles to attenuate these monolithic knowledge structures and to justify why a new episteme of human nature is warranted. The radical and dialectical imaginations of Marx will be intentionally magnified for the immortalization project. The second part showcases another warrant for celebrating his cerebration and it also offers a humble means of immortalizing his signature thought processes. This is done in twain

ways, first, by deploying his very modes of cerebration in extending his concept of species being and secondly, emanating from the extension is a categorical proposal of a specific human nature, one that is not new but one that is construed in a newly different manner. This claim, reasonably jumped into through the aid of his cerebral styles, is offered as a simple token of intellectual debt to the young Marx. But this means of immortalization is also nuanced as an enrichment of his concept by virtue of the concept's heuristic potency. Moreover, ambitious as it may sound, this project aims to extirpate the false dichotomy that permeated the debate about human nature between idealism and materialism. What is proffered to resolve this deadlock is the elevation of Marx's notion of species being in order to arrive at a point of convergence between these two incongruent schools of thought. The third part of the paper provides an exhibit of some accounts about educational practices that demonstrate what I propose to be a noble way of approaching alienation in school settings. The paper concludes with some reflections on the question of what is to be immortalized from the canons, on learning as a specific human nature and its implications, and it equally reflects on the nexus between the immortalization project and learning.

Before we celebrate his cerebration, a demonstration of his unique and timeless ways of thinking is in order. To accomplish this, what ensues are accounts of human nature from dominant economic and philosophical traditions upon which the young Marx found himself conversing with.

Economic Rationality Model of Human Nature

Based from my readings of the works of Thomas Wartenberg (1982) and Sean Sayers (2005), I have identified two streams of thought that fall under this economic model—the hedonistic and consumptive views on human nature. Although Sayers (2005) classified hedonism as a philosophical theory, the re-classification I have made is not a rejection of the idea that hedonism falls within the ambit of moral philosophy. I do not also suggest that philosophy can be understood to be encompassed by economics. Its reclassification is meant to underscore its theoretical

association with the consumptive model of man. This means that the theory of hedonism is both equally moral and economically rational. The reclassification is done to appreciate what are mutually constitutive of these two notions of human nature even if they emanate from diverse intellectual traditions.

The notion of economic rationality competes with the theory of human nature of Marx. This model hinges on the idea of self-interest that aims for “the maximization of the satisfaction of one's desires” (Wartenberg, 1982, pp. 80–81). The hedonistic conception of man purports that we always beseech what satiates us. There is maximization of pleasure and we veer away from what is painful, disadvantageous, and not pleasurable given our sound economic mindset. In Sayers' (2005) explanation of the hedonistic model, humans are “pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding creatures” (p. 608).

This sybaritic way of conceiving man is in theoretical nexus with the consumptive model of human nature. As Wartenberg (1982) aptly put, “the notion of satisfaction is essentially modeled on a notion of consumption” (p. 81). The entire model of economic rationality “treats all human activities as consumptive, pleasure-producing activities” (Wartenberg, 1982, pp. 80-81). From this idealization of human beings, it can be interpreted that consumption is the realization of satisfaction for it is in the very act of consuming that human beings are able to respond to their myriad needs.

The Contemplative Model

Philosophic traditions dating back to Plato to Kant have celebrated human beings as rational animals (Sayers, 2005, p. 608; Wartenberg, 1982, p. 78). Our rationality or our capacity for thought is what distinguishes us from other animals. This tradition's view of “appropriate life to lead is the contemplative, the one that is most fitting for human beings” (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 78). What this implies is that it is within the ideal realm that human beings become fully humanized. This sort of conception regards the physical and the material aspects of existence as lacking human essence because the “physical nature is lower and merely animal aspect of our being” as argued by Kant (Sayers, 2005, p. 608). This disregard for the

significance of practical-critical activity is also evident in the work of Ludwig Feuerbach, from whom Marx has borrowed the term “species being” (Held, 2009, p. 139). Feuerbach only considered “theoretic activity to be authentically human” (Held, 2009, p. 141).

The Restless Modes of Cognizing of the Young Marx

Karl Marx engaged these dominant treatises of human nature by using his modes of cognizing—the radical and the dialectical. This led him to propose his own version of the essence of man. When Wartenberg (1982) characterized Marx’s reconceptualization of the idea of human essence to be radical, he meant that Marx’s proposed view is not only a refutation of the dominant treatises but it is also a significant departure. His radical philosophizing is manifested in his extreme position and his attack on dominant institutions like the church (Hammen, 1970, p. 110) and capitalism. Since these scholars did not explicitly define the radical nature of his ideating styles, his radical thinking will be treated more specifically in this paper as something that captures the spirit of his engagement of these dominant idea systems about the nature of human beings. Based from the way Marx responded to these treatises, I propose that a radical imagination is one that refutes by pointing out that a fundamental aspect has been dismissed or relegated to the margins, which render an understanding limited or concealing. Marx (1844/1994) himself best articulated this: “To be radical is to grasp matters at the root. But for man the root is man himself” (p. 64).

The key to a better construal of things is to refer back to foundations or what is fundamental. This will be shown further as I exhibit how Marx used this radical thinking in responding to economic and philosophic theories.

The dialectical method is said to be one of the most popular terms associated with Marx. I reckon that this popularity is also suggestive of the fact that it is one of those Marxist terms that are misused. “This scientific method has been misunderstood as the so-called materialist interpretation of history,” Oishi (2001, p. 48) argued. Oishi (2001) provided an example worth considering:

In the dialectical sense Marx is critical of Proudhon from the beginning to end. On the one hand, he admits the scientific advance in Proudhon’s work, but on the other, Marx does not completely agree with Proudhon. Marx supports Proudhon against others because Proudhon’s work has made the “essence of private property” the vital question of political economy. On the other hand, Marx criticizes Proudhon because Proudhon’s critique of political economy is still influenced by the standpoint of political economy. (p. 7)

Following Oishi’s convincing explication, the dialectical thinking is more than a materialist perspective. It can be treated as something that is reasonably nuanced. What I mean by this is that to have a dialectical imagination is to recognize common grounds, middle points, where two seemingly incongruous entities can converge. Moreover, the dialectical method lies on the “centrality of contradictions, and these contradictions are not to be treated as mistakes but the development of these contradictions is an appropriate way of studying reality” (Ritzer, 2010, p. 45). From this definition, it can be said that the dialectical is always on the lookout for diametrical relations, that there are always two sides of a coin, and that one way to appreciate seemingly mutually exclusive entities is to re-imagine them to be actually constitutive of each other and not only to construe the other as a mistake because it stands in opposition relative to the other. Morrison (1995, p. 113) clearly stated that “the central principle of dialectical thinking is to be found in the concept of relation or interconnection”. In addition, it was demonstrated that “one of the ways the dialectic explains a key principle of social and historical change, that in the process of change and development there is an interconnection between the historical, political and social spheres” (Morrison, 1995, p. 113).

I will demonstrate these brands of imaginations of Marx by showcasing how he managed to deal with monolithic ideas on human nature. Before plunging into his rebuttals, it is pivotal to situate him well in the debate by looking at the concessions he has made with these treatises. This shows that Marx had a nuanced view, that his radical and dialectical thinking

is extreme not in the sense that he utterly dismissed these competing ideas but he also recognized shared common grounds. The points of divergence will be highlighted after identifying the common denominators of these incongruous theories.

Marx viewed human beings as productive and creative beings engaged in “free conscious activity” (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 88). This view is “not unique to Marx but one that he shares with the contemplative model of human nature, a tradition that started from Plato to Kant” (Sayers, 2005, pp. 610–611). On the other hand, “both the Marxian and economic models adopt a pluralist conception of the distinctively human life in contradistinction to the contemplative notion” that stands as the paladin of the single model (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 81). What this means is that free conscious activity and economically rational activity can take many forms—not exclusively constitutive of one form as championed by the contemplative view of man that the only distinctively human is thought. But where does the Marxian model diverge from the view of economic rationality? The model, both involving the hedonistic and the consumptive paradigms, is reductive, that is, it avers “that man is a simple pleasure-seeking machine” (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 81). For Marx, there is more to man than just being a consumer, man is also a producer. Using his radical imagination, Marx pointed out production as fundamental aspect of reality, which I argue is neglected, an aspect so foundational at the heart of the economic model. This is premised on the idea that “consumption is dependent on production. Thus, a theory of human fulfillment which treats consumption as the primary mode of human life is substantively flawed” (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 81). What this suggests is that there is more fundamental to consumption and that is production.

Through our creative and productive powers, we are able to consume, hence we satisfy our needs and desires. In here, we can see a justification of catapulting productive activity as human essence through the deployment of his radical way of thinking which offers us the idea that the physical, material, sensuous, and productive dimension of human life is fundamental and even foundational to other forms of activities like consumption and satisfaction. Following the

generalized notion of human nature of Marx as free conscious activity, if consumption and satisfaction are deemed as distinguishing features of man yet they are contingent on production, then creative and material labor deserves to be elevated to the status of human dignity.

Using his dialectical way of thinking, satisfaction does not only have a consumptive side. “We also get satisfaction from actively exercising our powers, from overcoming obstacles and being productive. Human beings are producers as well as consumers” (Sayers, 2005, p. 610). What this puts into question is the specious dichotomy that the hedonist view creates. As argued by Sayers (2005), the hedonist view holds that “work is against the nature of man as a being in search for satisfaction. Under this view, work is viewed as toil which means that work is not satisfying” (p. 614). But this dichotomy misses the dialectical character of satisfaction, that it can be attained through both production and consumption. Characterizing consumption as the sole feature of satisfaction is a parochial perspective. Even though the economic rationality model shares a pluralist proclivity with Marxist theory of human nature, the latter is more inclusive because free conscious activity also includes consumption, following the ratiocination of Marx’s radical thinking presented previously while the former does not factor in labor as economically rational. Dialectical imagination ushers us to rethink seemingly exclusive entities like work and satisfaction. What results is an appreciation that they can also be reinforcing.

So the notion of species being by Marx does not only give us a “more illuminating and satisfactory alternative view of man” as argued by Sayers (2005, p. 609), but the concept of species being alerts us to Marx’s dialectical way of thinking, which offers us a more holistic view of human nature.

On the philosophical front, both the contemplative model and the Marxist notion of species being regard productivity and creativity as authentically human. However, the former tends to stress out that these traits are occurring in the realm of reason (Sayers, 2005, p. 610). Whereas, the latter stresses that these traits are also within the material sphere (Hodges, 1965, p. 183; Sayers, 2005, p. 611). Following his dialectical

style of cognizing, productivity and creativity cannot only be realized in the ideal realm. As Held (2009) pointed out, Marx's concept of species being is a "materialist appropriation of the German idealist notion of selfhood" (p. 137). Although the idea emanates from Hegel that man produces objectively, Paul Santilli (1973) argued that Marx "operates from a perspective which places more emphasis on man as corporeal, sensuous and practical being" (p. 76). Arguably, it can be best realized when there is a material and concrete manifestation. Human fulfillment comes full circle when there is both internalization and externalization. There is a more profound and more panoptic view of productivity if both ideal and material dimensions are recognized. The dominance of the single model of human nature best articulated by the contemplative tradition dismisses other free conscious activities that are not only theoretic but are also practical. Since the contemplative model is operative under a singular model, it suffers from bifurcation. It dismisses other manifestations of humaneness. Resonant with this is the articulation of Hodges that "a life of feeling and action has seldom claimed the dignity accorded to life of reason" (Hodges, 1965, p. 175). The dialectical imagination of Marx challenges more strongly this intellectual tradition, especially that of the Kantian depiction of physical, material, and concrete activity as lower and animalistic. The limitation of that Kantian pronouncement is that it fails to capture the mutual constitution of the ideal and the material as both expressions of our human essence.

Dialectically, the notion of human nature by Feuerbach is also held suspect of being "ahistorical and asocial" (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 83). By exclusively situating humanity in the realm of the ideal, productivity is "abstracted from any actual practical expression" depriving it of its historical character and "by abstracting the connection individuals have, it is deprived of its social manifestation" (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 83; see also Held, 2009, pp. 141–142).

Another fundamental flaw of the contemplative model is its emphasis on a specific and particular configuration of human nature to take the form of thought alone. Using the radical style of imagination, Marx generalized the notion of human nature from its particular and singular form as advocated by

the contemplative tradition. As demonstrated by Wartenberg (1982, p. 88), Marx did not accept a particular form of activity as the distinctively human. By no longer singling out one form of activity that most fit for human beings (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 80), a general notion of human nature, which is free conscious activity as claimed by Marx, is more encapsulating. Marx (1959) further elucidated this in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*: "Man is a species being...because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being" (p. 31).

This generalization is radical in the sense that it is fundamentally overarching to include both the intellectual and the practical, the consumptive and the productive facets of human satisfaction. This way of imagining human nature is expanding and not limiting because it suggests that we are capable of doing a myriad of things that can express our species character.

Consequently, what this generates is a notion of human nature that is general in character, lending itself an ability to embroil dimensions that both include the ideal and the material. From this, Marx proposed his own theory of human nature, one that is specific to that of free conscious activity. What this suggests is that Marx identified labor because it shares a resemblance with the encapsulating element of the general view of human nature. In Marx's (1959) words, "the productive life is life-engendering life" (p. 31). Radically speaking, labor or material productive activity is more fundamental than consumption and satisfaction as these two latter activities are contingent on the former. Free conscious activity also bears the character of being mutually constitutive or being egalitarian, embracing a plethora of activities that can be regarded as distinctively human. Dialectically, labor is congruent with the general image of human nature because labor involves both acts of internalization and externalization. This new imagination of a general and specific human nature, for Marx, is a more realistic and panoptic account. For Wartenberg (1982, p. 80), "Marx achieves a democratization of theory" by pluralizing the gamut of activities that can be reckoned as human distinctiveness. Moreover, labor or practical activity deserves to be factored in as specific human nature because it even encompasses the other specific

manifestations of human nature such as contemplation, consumption, and satisfaction.

So Marx proposed his version of the human being but he did so with a captious engagement of dominant treatises from various intellectual traditions. This was done using his thinking styles in order to justify a new imagination of human nature both in general and specific terms.

Clashing Notions on Alienation

The “concept of alienation is a fundamental basis of Marx’s critique of capitalist society” (Sayers, 2005, p. 615; see also Held, 2009, p. 137). Presented from a developmental perspective, Lanny Ace Thompson (1979) argued that “Marx’s later ideas grew out from earlier ones” (p. 23). She also pointed out that “when Marx presented the four dimensional concept of alienation in the Paris Manuscripts, it included a concept of human nature” (Thompson, 1979, p. 36). Since “Marx viewed alienation as a problem throughout his entire career, it suggests that he always maintained a theory of human essence” (Held, 2009, p. 140). What is clarion is that his theory of human nature and his account of alienation should be treated concomitantly because alienation as an “ethical problem betrays commitment to a concept of human well-being grounded in a conception of human essence” (Held, 2009, p. 139). In a similar vein, Waternberg (1982, p. 77) pointed out that “Marx’s account on human alienation is contingent on his notion of human species being.” Yet, Marx is not the sole thinker of alienation. His own construal is, in fact, incongruent with others. This part of the article aims to revisit accounts of alienation that are contradictory to Marx’s and to demonstrate his cerebral styles as he made contrapuntal responses towards these discourses on alienation.

Optimistic Views on Alienation

The ensuing accounts of alienation are characterized to be optimistic not in the sense that they deny its existence or deny it per se. A positive view of alienation communicates both a cognizance of its existence and an emphasis on its functionality.

According to Williamson and Cullingford (1997), Hegel has regarded the “human condition” as a pendulum that gravitates towards bipolar points, thus, “an inevitable tension between universality and particularity or individuality” (p. 265). So when it swings toward universality, the nature of alienation is “distressing but necessary for mature development” (Williamson & Cullingford, 1997, p. 265).

For social contract theorists like Hobbes and others, “alienation is a positive phenomenon, through which the human yields some of his/her freedom, rights and individuality for the benefit of the formation of a civilized community” (Williamson & Cullingford, 1997, p. 264). To alienate is to surrender to a common power so that “a life of peace will be ensured” (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 91).

Since the notion of alienation serves to be at the core of Marx’s impugment of capitalism as noted previously, his dialectical imagination is cognizant of the other nature of alienation in contrast with optimistic views. That is, it “a problem” as noted by Held (2009), which means that it cannot only be construed in positive lens but the other side of the fence must be recognized too. Williamson and Cullingford (1997) best elucidated Marx’s position on alienation:

Marx was concerned with alienation in three aspects of life. He writes at some length of religious alienation and political alienation where humans project their own power onto illusions (namely God and state) and in effect, disempower themselves. However, both these forms of alienation are secondary to the most fundamental dimension, namely the alienation of labor....Central to Marx’s work is the notion that capitalistic production leads to human objectification, a state in which a man or a woman is removed from his/her work and product and therefore denied insight into their own creativity and ultimately true nature (i.e. alienation). (p. 266)

In contrast to the religious alienation of Feuerbach, Marx employed his dialectical and radical thinking to depart from that of his predecessor’s intellectual tradition. Dialectically, Marx insisted that Feuerbach’s account is abstract because the act of overcoming

alienation is limited in the ideal realm or in the sphere of consciousness. For Marx, it is within the material life of man that he is able to transcend his alienation. As Hodges (1965) noted, “self-fulfillment implies the overcoming of man’s traditional self-alienation from his bodily functions and practical existence” (p. 183). Even though Marx recognized the other characteristics of alienation such as those of political and religious ones, employing his radical way of thinking, Marx grasped the matter at its root. These two kinds of alienation “are secondary to the most fundamental dimension, namely the alienation of labor. Marx wrote that work provided human with his/her most important activity and the very key to human praxis” (Williamson & Cullingford, 1997, p. 266).

To sum up his account on alienation, his dialectical imagination informs us that alienation is a problem and cannot only be construed in functional terms. In addition, alienation is not only speculative as Hegel suggested but it also has a material incarnation. Marx dissented with Feuerbach who underscored that the transcendence of alienation is achieved through the act of consciousness. Instead, he proposed dialectically that it is within the life activity that men experience that disempowerment or alienation and thus it is within the same platform that they ought to pursue its transcendence. His radical thinking is also exhibited when he tried to characterize that the fundamental dimension of alienation is in the productive, practical, and material arena of life and not within the ambit of the religious and the political. Following the premise from Wartenberg (1982) that his account of alienation is contingent on his theory of human nature, since his view of human nature has been established earlier as very fundamental, its alienation is conversely fundamental as well. If a free conscious activity is the general essence of man, then its alienation is also a general infraction. Guided by Marx’s radical thinking as grasping the matter at its root, alienated labor is a fundamental perversion on human dignity. Following Wartenberg (1982, p. 78) who aptly mapped the locus of Marx’s notion of species being in philosophical theorizing to serve as “basis in viewing the ideal life,” it is worth laying stress on the idea that the reason for Marx’s fundamental regard for alienation of labor is that it is an infraction of the ideal life.

Grounds for Immortalization

The previous section demonstrates Marx’s radical and dialectical ways of ideating by his engagements of other theoretical frames on human nature and alienation. These ways of thinking also led him to propose his own views. It is for these reasons that celebration of cerebration is in order. As Wartenberg (1982, p. 77) quipped, “species being is a genuine theoretical innovation” that is located at the very core of Marx’s indictment of capitalism. This is not because of the concept of species being per se but as Hodges and Sayers conclude that the unique contribution of this theoretical innovation by Marx is the recognition and elevation of sensuous, creative, material activity to the status of human distinctiveness (Hodges, 1965, p. 185; Sayers, 2005, p. 612). What is being appreciated are the means by which Marx’s conclusions are made. These include the ways of imagination that Marx used to arrive at his claims. An important insight from Wilde (n.d.) is noteworthy in underscoring this point:

Social theorists tend to be remembered for their conclusions rather than the way in which they conducted their inquiries, but if we neglect to study the latter it is quite likely that we will misunderstand or misconstrue the former. (par. 1)

This is the premise upon which this immortalization project is hinged on. For without a good grasp of thought processes that spawn conclusions, the gist of the entire argument is missed or the concluding propositions are not fathomed properly or holistically. Consequently, it is not only what is imagined that matters our consideration but also equal salience or stronger emphasis must be given to how it is imagined. The Aristotelian pronouncement becomes loud and clear, “imagination is better than knowledge.” This is because “imagination must be summoned in order to give life to knowledge” (Hibben, 1910, p. 203).

Extending Marx’s Species Being: A Means of Immortalizing

Since it has already been proven that Marx’s restless thinking styles are worth perpetuating, it behooves

then to show how these ways of conceiving can be immortalized. Needless to enumerate, there are of course many scholarly works that have successfully tried to appreciate Marx and his ideas. I cannot confidently emblazon that this work is the sole one in celebrating his cerebral idiosyncrasies. What I will try to prove is the heuristic potency of his radical and dialectical imaginations by deploying them to extend his concept of species being. This extension is characterized as an enrichment and a way to bridge more explicitly the relationship of Marxist Humanism and education. Consequently, the enrichment is hoped to resolve the deadlock between materialist and idealist schools of thought regarding their view of human nature. Moreover, the expansion also aims to show that using these ways of cognizance better informs analysis about alienation experienced in school settings.

So how will I enrich his concept of species being using his idiosyncratic modes of cognizing? The first thing to say is to offer the claim of the paper, that is, learning, broadly conceived, is a specific human nature. Although the more important question is how this can be said so, what must be asked too is whether or not this inference has been made before. Paulo Freire is the closest scholar I have read so far to have articulated this in explicit tone. In his explicatory account of problem-posing education, he basically treats “human beings to be engaged in the process of becoming, unfinished and incomplete beings. Their incompleteness and awareness of it lie at the very root of education as exclusively human manifestation” (Freire, 1970, p. 84). I do not endeavor, however, to refute this claim as it resembles mine. What I see as a lacuna to be filled in is to include a set of justifications to this claim not in the sense that Freire did not do so but it is of great import to note that he jumpstarted with the premise that human beings are unfinished and are therefore in the process of completion through education. Freire can be appreciated because the logical consequence of his thinking is reflective of Marx’s dialectical imagination. This is because by recognizing that human beings are both incomplete and learning beings, there is a deconstruction of the bifurcation between nature and nurture. For Freire, humans are incomplete but can become complete through a dialogical encounter with the world or through problem-posing education. In

Marx’s dialectical thinking, the subtext is that learning is construed to fall both under nature and nurture. Learning is one’s nature but it also becomes the one that nurtures a person to become whole. Thus, that mutual exclusivity is not necessarily true all the time because there can be an interconnection. Learning has become a template of that mutual constitution. This is where I become a hierophant of Freire.

But the radical thinking of Marx makes me captious of this line of thought from Freire. Because when pushed furthest to its logical extent, his thinking implies that when one has attained completion, learning as both nature and nurture also ceases. This is because learning as human nature is contingent on the assumption that we are incomplete. That incompleteness is what necessarily drives human beings to undergo the project of becoming whole. In radical conception, this must be abjured because learning is as fundamental as being incomplete. The former cannot be thought to be dependent on the latter. Another reason to buttress the independent fundamental nature of learning vis-à-vis incompleteness is that there is no such thing as total socialization. Our incompleteness means that we are yet to learn in view of becoming whole. But assuming we attain completion, learning will still be taking place because it should not be forgotten that learning is a life-long process and that it will never be complete. In other words, learning leads us to completion but our completion does not lead to complete learning. Learning remains ongoing because it happens as long as life allows. So if we are to juxtapose learning and incompleteness as human natures, what is more fundamental to me, based from the dialectical and radical ways of thinking of Marx, is that we are learning beings both in our states of incompleteness and completion. It should not confuse us that when learning cannot attain completion, it should not be regarded as human nature. Following Marx’s radical habit of thought, learning transcends the project of completion in the sense that learning takes place even after the achievement of completion. This is the first level of divergence from Freire. Secondly, I will make use of the theoretic arsenal of Marx to catapult learning to the status of human dignity in the same vein as contemplation, consumption, human delectation, and labor. Through these, the nexus between Marxist humanism and education is made more clear.

Unpacking Learning

In this paper, learning is painted in broad strokes. Whether this refers to life-long learning or the one that takes place in formal school set-ups, which includes secondary and anticipatory socialization, learning is also construed to be both deliberate and non-deliberate, formal, non-formal, and informal. This can also include the process of enculturation. I argue that this broad conception of learning is tantamount to its centrality in sociological thinking especially in the discussion of structure and agency and in “nature-nurture debate” (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 209). The nature of the individual as a social being is also best understood when there is a compendious examination of the products of socialization that individuals embody, which include but not limited to their behavior, personality, attitude, status, and roles which they demonstrate and play in social interactions they participate in. The centrality of learning, therefore, is a sociological query.

Catapulting Learning as Human Nature

It is necessary to revisit one last time Marx’s specific view of human nature—that “man is *homo faber*—a working, laboring, productive and constructive being” (University of Amsterdam, 2015). Labor, for Marx, both involves internalization and externalization. It is the “objectification of man’s species-life for he duplicates himself not only, in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world he has created” (Marx, 1959, p. 32). But this duplication of the self in thought and in practice cannot be deemed given. Using Marx’s radical way of imagining, what is needed is to unravel what lies foundational to labor. That means that when one imagines before he erects it in reality, the acts of internalizing and externalizing need to be learned first. Human beings learn first the necessary skill sets needed for them to organize their ideas and come up with a coherent blueprint in just the same way that people learn the set of skills needed for them to put into concrete manifestations what they have planned in mind. Put playfully, it is “learning to labor” as Paul Willis (1977) titled his book although this does not capture the intentions of his work, the metaphor is

appropriated to illustrate my point. Radically speaking then, before human beings objectify, they learn first to plan and think as well as to create and produce as previously imagined.

The other specific forms of human nature as advocated by other intellectual traditions are argued to be contingent on learning. Theorizing does not come naturally to human beings because it requires some sort of socialization to a gamut of idea systems and how they operate. Consumption of commodities for satisfaction also needs knowledge, even attitude, so that one can fully benefit from manufactured or created objects. If other specific human natures are founded on learning, ergo, learning deserves to gain the status of human distinctiveness.

An ancillary to that, there is another reason why it is condign to be factored in as a specific human nature. Dialectically imagined, learning is intertwined with labor and even with distinctively human acts that are non-labor. This means that when people self-actualize through their productive life, there is still learning involved even if we say that a worker has already mastered the activity. This is based on the premise mentioned earlier that learning is a life-long process. That even if people are not engaged in their labor, they are still engaged in learning deliberately or non-deliberately. Thus, learning transcends labor. Learning has a dialectical character kindred with free conscious activity. It includes both acts of internalization and exteriorization. Learning can happen abstractly like contemplation and it can manifest itself in practical matters like concrete outcomes of learners. Learners are not limited to students but this social category includes also all of us because we are all engaged in this lifelong process we call learning.

Following the premises provided by Wartenberg (1982, p. 77) that “alienation is contingent on the notion of species being” and that “species being serve as basis in viewing the ideal life” (Wartenberg, 1982, p. 78), alienation of learning, whether it happens in school and non-school settings, whether justified using the rhetoric of societal control (Goering, 1968), alerts us that there is an infraction of the ideal view of life. When violated, it stifles untrammelled inquiry, “obviates thinking,” and “annuls creative powers” (Freire, 1970, pp. 71 & 73). Radically speaking, alienation experienced as

one engages in learning is a fundamental violation of human nature. Dialectically, even there is a functional basis for alienating learning in formal educational contexts, Williamson and Cullingford (1997) argued “that alienation is too powerful as an aspect of human socio-political and social-psychological experience to be bypassed” (p. 274).

Now that it has been substantiated that learning is a specific human nature, one that is fundamental as other expressions of humaneness, and one that is of dialectical character, it is necessary to go back to Wartenberg (1982) who makes us realize about the role of human nature in theorizing. It is a view of the ideal. How is the ideal judged? It must be evaluated based on the actual practices of human beings in relation to the ideal. The empirical and the normative must be put side by side.

For this paper, I will be showing some accounts of alienating experiences in the school settings. This is not to suggest that there is no alienation of learning beyond the portals of schools. In fact, following the logic of this paper’s argument, alienation in the workplace is also an alienation of learning. But the reason behind this focal concern on alienation in the school setting is hinged on the idea that schools are in the unique position for they both proclaim the primacy of learning yet schools are also sites of learning’s perversion. This may not suggest how grave the perversion is in non-school settings by grasping alienation in the school context, but having a look at where learning is best upheld and perverted is an important starting point.

The ensuing articulations are diverse since they come from various cultural contexts and experiences ranging from Latin America, in the US, and one in the Philippines. The observations of Freire (1970), Karen Sternheimer (2016), Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), and Maria Cynthia Bautista (Philippine Social Sciences Center, 2014) about the problems of the educational system bespeak about the nature of human beings as learners and how this human nature is stepped upon by practices and discourses in schools. This exhibit aims to show that using the frame of species being and alienation as concomitant episteme, coupled with the radical and dialectical ways of thinking embedded within, is a potent tool in the sociological examination of the schools.

Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In chapter two of his book, Freire exposed the problems of the educational system. If I am to sum up his account in one-liner, though taciturn this one is very illuminating: “There is no room for education; only for training” (Freire, 1970, as cited in Berthoff, 1997, p. 310).

Training though is not immanently a bad thing. But when human beings are only being told what to do, to speak when they are only asked to, to think when they are only told to do so, this is not an actualization of the self. It is an existence that is devoid of essence. For Freire (1970), “education is suffering from a narration sickness” (p. 71). This means that the format that best characterizes a classroom is one that is teacher-centered. This is when “the teacher is the narrating Subject while the students are listening Objects” (Freire, 1970, p. 71). The term that Freire used to describe this problematic pedagogical approach of the educational system is *banking concept*. For Freire, “education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Student activity is limited to “receiving, filling and storing the deposits” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). As Robert Currie (1972) playfully pointed out, students are “acted upon, for, in the name of, in the place of, but rarely with” (p. 163).

This narrative sickness of education is not dynamic as it is very essentialist in character. It is essentialist in the sense that the topics discussed by the teacher are determined by him/her; they are “motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable” (Freire, 1970, p. 71). Logically consequent to this educational set-up where students do not take an active role, the assessment of learning among students is done to reflect them into a numerical value, a grade. This runs counter to “Freire’s deep humanistic faith to man’s potentialities” (Mkandawire, 1975, p. 73) because the method of evaluation of learning aims for the quantification of the learner and their learning. This diminishes the value of learning as an end in itself. Students will be more motivated to incur high grades than to acquire meaningful takeaways from their learning experiences. It is better to regard evaluation as assessment *for* learning. Students’ learning is

measured to help them further learn and not to assign them numerical value.

Freire's work as reviewed by Mkandawire (1975) refers back to human beings as learners, active and not mere cups to be filled up. Their learning transforms into a more meaningful and useful one when they are treated to be capable of learning and not as mere recipients of learning. Freire has shown how the educational system has been very narrative in its indoctrination function. It is a one-way process. And this has alienated students from their human nature as learners.

Karen Sternheimer's *The Logic of Consumption: Education*

In this essay, Sternheimer (2016) challenged the consumer model applied in the sphere of education. This model "fails both student and faculty" (Sternheimer, 2016, par. 2). In her juxtaposition of the consumer model with student-centered learning, students are treated as consumers of the services provided by faculty, staff, and school administrators. In the pursuit of knowledge construction, students are passive participants. This is somewhat resonant with Freire's articulation of narration sickness. She also pointed out the increasing emphasis on profit-accumulation as end-goals of educational institutions. This does not only alienate students but also teachers who are engaged in scholarly works. Sternheimer (2016) made mention of Barbara King who described this phenomenon as "corporatization of the university" wherein faculty members are pressured to bring in to their institutions grants and awards. For Sternheimer, this takes a big chunk of their time and takes away their time for "reading and contemplation—which are central to being a good scholar" (Sternheimer, 2016, par. 11). Her essay's concluding thoughts capture the gist of her analysis: "An excitement for learning disappears if the only purpose of education is about developing a marketable resume. Yes, job skills are important, but so is the process of learning for learning's sake" (Sternheimer, 2016, par. 12).

Sternheimer's (2016) work is reflective of our effort to show that the consumptive model of human nature is substantially flawed when used to understand students as consumers and not learners because their quest for

knowledge and their spirit of untrammelled inquiry are at expense. This work also demonstrates the potency of learning as human nature. This is because when we always treat teachers, professors, and researchers as employers and not as learning beings, their quest for rumination, inquiry, and scholarly exchange will be relegated as secondary especially if profit is the singular bottom-line goal of educational institutions.

Bowles and Gintis' (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America*

This work does not operate under functionalist framework where "education supplies the necessary mental skills of students who will be bought by employers in the labor market" (Kampf & O'Neil, 1977, p. 43). Instead, it aims to expose the economic consequences of social structures of the educational system—that schools foster and reinforce "consciousness, interpersonal behavior and personality in students" (Kampf & O'Neil, 1977, p. 43). The title of the review made by Kampf and O'Neil (1997) is an apposite metaphor to capture what Bowles and Gintis (1976) wanted to put across—"At Work in School." This suggests "structural correspondence" between school and workplace (Kampf & O'Neil, 1977, p. 44). The school then serves to "acclimatize the young to the alienating experiences of the capitalist work process" (Kampf & O'Neil, 1977, p. 44).

The work of Bowles and Gintis (1976) reminds us that schools are agents of socialization. But what they emphasize is the hidden curriculum that is at work to ensure the anticipatory socialization of students towards the workplace. It is not only the cultural capital that is being developed among students but also the accompanying set of values, attitudes, and conduct for them to be obedient, respectful, and submissive to capitalists. Using an Althusserian frame (Althusser, 1971), the school functions as an "ideological state apparatus" to legitimize the capitalist system. This is where I will magnify again the radical imagination inherited from Marx. There is already an alienation that is more fundamental that transpires other than the alienation of labor. In the process of their becoming productive workers, in their professional trainings at that, human beings are already being alienated from

their being learners. This means that when they become full-fledge members of the work force, they are more likely to be alienated because they have been taught to be. This realization aims to suggest that what is as fundamental as alienated labor is the alienation of learning.

**“From Education to Life-long Learning:
A Paradigm Shift for the 21st Century” by
Maria Cynthia Bautista**

This talk from the then Philippine Commission on Higher Education Commissioner Maria Cynthia Bautista (Philippine Social Sciences Center, 2014) centers around “the shift to individual learners.” This has resulted in an emphasis on outcomes-based education which underscores learning competencies that are functional in the real world. The interesting point raised from this shift that Bautista alluded to is the stonewall that continues to occlude many institutions of learning, specifically in the Philippine context, to embrace this shift to learning from education. There is also a prevailing mindset among educators and school administrators who prefer the theoretic over that of the practical. Bautista translucently elucidates,

Our problem in the Philippines is that we are so theory-conscious. Theory is higher than practice. Lecture is higher than lab. Even our units reflect that... We are never taught to problem-solve. We are taught since childhood that we should solve problems after school. Learn all the theories in the classroom and you apply it outside. So, the connection between application and knowledge is severed. (Philippine Social Science Center, 2014, 1:57–2:57)

This makes us revert to the colloquy between contemplation and practical application. Learning has been parochially construed to be “intellectual nourishment” as observed by Bautista (Philippine Social Science Center, 2014). There is a lower regard for competencies that have concrete and actual accomplishments. In this talk, Bautista clarified that vocational education should not be treated as second-class or inferior to baccalaureate degrees. The

bifurcation between theoretic and applied is a popular discourse in universities and colleges around the country. And this has serious repercussions on learning as human nature. One, learning is tilted towards only one domain of growth-cognitive. Two, concretization of our learning by transmogrifying our ideas into useful products is relegated by favoring the ideal and contemplative. This is where internalization is given too much emphasis and externalization is taken for granted.

Chief among these negative ramifications of this imagery of learning is that there is compartmentalization of learning as exercise of the mind only. Our humaneness, our distinguishing feature as human beings, is when we leave footprints in the face of the world where we live in. This means that becoming full-circle is both unleashing that prowess to imagine and to construct.

Concluding Reflections

This scholarly piece is not a romanticization of what has been thought about but a celebration of how things are thought about. Indeed, what counts as classical is the prowess and promise that they offer in enabling us to peel off more layers of social realities rather than to settle with the same *problematiques* that classical sociologists have concerned themselves with. The kinds of imagination that they have bequeathed to the next generation of sociologists are the ones that ought to be emphasized and taught. This is because “the imagination is the mind’s contribution to the given fact... The light of a well-furnished mind must illuminate the fact before it will flash back its radiance” (Hibben, 1910, p. 202). What this work has proven is that Marx’s ways of thinking is condign to be immortalized. This then engenders a pedagogical practice. As theory classes in sociology delve with the seminal works and ideas of the canons, it is pivotal to complement these colloquies about the classics by stressing out their idiosyncratic ways of cerebration. As Wilde (n.d.) pointed out that it is not only the inference that ought to be remembered but also their means of arriving at these claims are equally salient to be imparted to and be familiarized by students. This is an important integration in our sociological

indoctrination. This piece then aptly paves the way for searching for many alternative ways of making the sociological canons relevant and for paving the ways for teaching sociology, especially classical sociology, that focus on ways of thinking. These imaginations are ways of disciplining our minds to think in peculiar and unique ways and to sustain our “pathos of wonder” as Hannah Arendt (1990, p. 100) appositely opined.

The defining imaginations of Marx that have been exhibited in this piece are not the only watershed of this work. The status accorded to learning by virtue of these thinking styles can also be said to be an innovation because it permits ways of understanding educational practices and it generates observations that are also equally insightful. This intellectual exercise has partly achieved to show that there is no mutual exclusivity between the competing schools of idealism and materialism. What has always been underscored are their divergent emphases but not their points of convergence. This paper has demonstrated that learning as human nature has included both ideal and material facets. Consequently, our humaneness is not singularly expressed. Learning shows that our self-actualization is a compendium of theoretic and practical, abstract and concrete, “cognitive and psychomotor,” as Bautista (Philippine Social Science Center, 2014) opined. Learning then embroils many manifestations of our human distinctiveness. The pitfalls of treating human beings as consumers, workers, and mere rational beings have serious negative ramifications when applied in educational contexts because the nature of human beings as learning beings is in a way or the other perverted.

As a final note, it is important to link the immortalization project with its intended outcome—the episteme of learning as human nature. For learning to be meaningful and useful for future and practical use, what behooves to be learned is the hows and whys and not only the whats. On a personal note, this piece for me has made me more appreciative of Marx, not only on his well-known ideas but the workings behind, the thought processes responsible for bringing these ideas about. More importantly, I have realized that Marx deserves his canonical status because of the power of his brands of imagination, the power to further the frontiers of knowledge. Through his thinking styles,

I have arrived at a claim that catapults learning to be included in the pantheon of features defining human dignity.

Lastly, learning is a dialectical process, one that is incessantly moving. Imagination is not only an end in itself; it is also a means to various ends. Learning to imagine, therefore, is endless, continuous, and emancipatory.

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