

The Concrete over Abstract: Marx's Humanism over Heidegger's (anti)Humanism

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ABSTRACT

The question of "how one should philosophize?" is driven not only out of the desire to have a glimpse of the ideas worthy to be regarded as true, but also to address the pressing problems of the time. Marx's humanism, as articulated mainly in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, suggests a certain thinking that addresses the latter. It is the humanism that discovers the concrete estrangement of workers from the abstraction of the political economy at the backdrop of human emancipation. Heidegger, however, in the *Letter on Humanism*, poses critical challenge against the humanism Marx suggested. He questions Marx's humanism (and the humanism in totality) to provide the human being direction to attain its essential humanity, and not just relegate man into inhumanity of *animalitas*. The paper critically examines the ideas given by Heidegger. Although Heidegger could be correct in his examination of the previous humanism, which includes Marx, how he understands the essence of man as "ek-sistence" is but a form of abstraction, an abstraction which is based in his inhuman concept of thinking. The paper does not entirely denounce Heidegger's thinking, but appeals to recognize the dangers containing in its ambiguity and abstractness. Marx's humanism, on the other hand, though has forgotten being, is more concrete. With this, the paper calls to repose the tasks and the questions of humanism, and directs thinking out from the dangers of abstraction to concrete understanding of human beings, their problems and solutions.

Keywords: Humanism, Estrangement, Manuscripts, Heidegger, Marx, Thinking

Introduction

Humanism, Heidegger carefully describes, is "meditating and caring that man be human and not inhumane 'inhuman.'"¹ With such goal to realize life proper for human being, to actualize the essential capacity of man, Marx presupposes a certain form of humanistic commitment. It is in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* where he articulates this kind of philosophy. In the background of societies' inhumanity—of estrangement of human life in labour, in thinking, in social relations, he holds that the human should realize the essential life worthy to be called as human, the "specie-being." The "specie-being" is not as abstract as one could think, but it reacts against the particular inhumanities of his time. As the economic system maintains the estranged work, Marx thinks that human should work as human, that is, passionately, creatively, and expressively. As the values of the human beings become egoistic and self-centered, humans should put into consideration communal interest over their individual desires.²

¹Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1977), 200.

²It should be noted that the concept of humanism that is being discussed here is the humanism limited in the early writings of Marx, especially as articulated in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. There is a good reason in limiting Marx's humanism in Manuscripts. Heidegger did not precisely delineate the later forms of Marx's humanism, which is the subject of the later discussion of Marx. Althusser, for instance, argues that there's a change

Heidegger, however, ponders that the humanism of Marx is not the way to “more” humane humanity. “The essence of man consists in his being more than merely human.”³ In the *Letter on Humanism*, Heidegger critically throws important points against Marx’s humanism. His overall critique against the “metaphysics that has forgotten Being” not only undermines the overall foundation of western thinking, for it also questions those forms of humanism, which is grounded on the metaphysics of beings. With such line of thinking, he doubts whether Marx’s humanism is a form of thinking that could recover what is essential humanity.

As alternative to Marx’s humanism, Heidegger calls for humanism, which is in a sense a form of (anti)humanism.⁴ Unlike the previous forms, which conceive human being as primary, the *Letter* suggests that human should be understood in its relation to Being, “man is the shepherd of Being.” This thinking is Heidegger’s alternative, and it intends to ponder another way from the previous forms of humanism, which is grounded on the metaphysics of beings, which Marx has followed. What is the essential human is not found in man in the society, but in pondering man’s relation to Being, “man’s essence is ek-sistence,” the ecstatic inherence to being.

Heidegger’s critique against Marx, however, needs to be examined. Although he could have correctly described the form of the previous humanism, grounded in certain metaphysics, it is contentious whether his thinking provides a better way out from the inhumanity of the times. Heidegger’s so called (anti)humanism merely expresses an abstraction on how he understands the essence of man as “ek-sistence,” an abstraction which is based on his inhuman concept of thinking. The thinking that he is opening does not assure any safe haven; worst, it leaves man in danger out of the ambiguity of its abstractions.

To articulate these points, the paper first discusses the humanism of Marx, with emphasis on how it becomes more concrete in relation to Feuerbach’s humanism. The second part articulates Heidegger’s critique against Marx’s humanism, and then followed by a critical examination of ideas posed by Heidegger, pointing to dangers arising from its abstraction and inhuman thinking.

The aim to ponder on the question of “how one should philosophize?” is what internally drives the paper. Both Marx and Heidegger directed a certain form of thinking, and a certain form of humanism, which they think is effective to address the problems of their times. Weighing in on the two forms of thinking, Marx’s humanism provides a concrete direction in thinking about the inhumanities of our time. This assertion does not denounce Heidegger’s thinking entirely, for Heidegger’s thinking could be limited a certain perspective, but it appeals to recognize the inadequacies and also dangers containing in his (anti)humanism.

i. The Humanism of Marx

Like any other expressions of humanism, Marx’s version also takes the human being as his paramount concern. For him, the human being, which is a social being, should live what is essential to one’s humanity, one’s life should be an expression of human’s “specie-being.” This specie-being refers to the essential humanity. As Marx uses it, the concept could refer to an unalienated work, where one’s activity is an authentic expression of one’s passion and creative spirit—of oneself—than imposed by an alien economic force. Or, as *On the Jewish Question* more clearly articulates, it refers to the human as a communal being, where the activity of man is no longer driven by egoistic desires but for the interest of the society.⁵

in Marx’s treatment of humanism in his later writings in comparison to what he calls as the Young Marx. For him, where the early Marx treats humanism as the guiding point of his philosophy, the later Marx treats the philosophical humanism as an ideology, and will found a new ground for thinking, which is no longer based from the previous philosophical humanism but in a theoretical-antihumanism. Heidegger, contrary to Althusser, treats Marx’s humanism without considering the question of “epistemic break” in Marx’s thinking, and this humanism is derived, quoted in his footnotes, from the Manuscripts of 1844. See, Louis Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism” in *Louis Althusser For Marx*, Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Verso 2005), 219-248.

³Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,”... 221.

⁴ I would like to use the term “(anti)humanism” to suggest a certain ambivalence in Heidegger’s position. On one hand, he still recognizes the human being as his “concern,” yet ironically, the concern that the man to be human will be achieved by man stepping back, to let the Being be, a certain form of anti-humanism.

⁵ Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” in *Karl Marx Early Writings*, London: Penguin Books 1992, 220.

Such articulation of “specie-being” shall not be treated as a kind of absolute essence but a realization of the human being out of socio-economic and historical situations. Without focusing much on how Marx justifies the pursuit to realize the specie-being, one could suppose that it is in part the result of Marx’s concrete thinking, which is influenced by Feuerbach.⁶ His humanism, like Feuerbach, is not simply an ethical call, but in part epistemological, the “naturalism and humanism” are identical and intertwined for Marx. The concern over the genuine development of man necessitates a criticism, which not only favors natural explanation over supernatural, but more precisely, it is a criticism, in view of human emancipation, that aims to articulate the concrete condition of the man in the society than yield into abstraction. Marx’s so called “positive humanistic and naturalistic criticism,” which he traced from Feuerbach, moves further, concretely, as it sees and reacts against the dehumanization occurring not in the supernatural realm but in the economic system and its science of the political economy.

Taking the humanist standpoint, Marx underscores the anti-human inclination of the economic system and the political economy. The political economy, although an advanced science, neglects the dehumanization happening in the system of private property. Its concept of labour is “abstract” and it fails to capture the concrete miserable lives of the workers, who are seen as the real source of the wealth of nations. In its projection as an objective science, the political economy merely articulates the laws and movement of the categories of private property, not in view of realizing the human life, but in view of serving the private property and its further accumulation. The political economy does not only yield “into contradictory results,”⁷ but more importantly, its categories such the abstract labour is “anti-human.”⁸ With political economists’ concern for private property, the workers are seen as less human, a “beast of burden... reduced to the minimum bodily needs,” “the same as any horse, must get as much as will enable him to work.”⁹ They are seen as a commodity, a thing to be bought and sold.¹⁰

Against the political economists’ concept of abstract labour, Marx develops the concept of “estranged labour.” This concept highlights what the political economy concealed in their concept of labour, here, labour is understood not as a mere process of production but also a process of dehumanization.¹¹ Against the abstract labour that only sees the labourer as a mere category in the whole system, the estranged labour shows the reality of labour and production—the irony of producing value while the true producers are being devalued. Estranged labour depicts the workers as engage in a “life depriving activity,” and such real deduction of life is absent from the logical deductions the abstractions of the political economy.

⁶Marx could be said to follow the Humanism of Feuerbach, but it does not mean that his ideas are completely identical with him. He traces this from Feuerbach, who for him provides a great contribution in thought, so important that in Marx’s impression “they are the only writings since Hegel’s *Phenomenology* and *Logic* to contain a real theoretical revolution.” “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts” in *Karl Marx Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books 1992), 281.

⁷ Political economy only thinks of labour as moment in the whole system of private property, which results into both various contradictions. In political economy, the workers who supposed to get the whole of the product also become the one who receive the “smallest part of the product,” only necessary for him live and propagate the “slave class of the workers.” The labour which is supposed to be a means to buy everything produces a worker, the person who majority of his life work, who ironically “far from position to buy everything,” in fact, the worker must sell himself and his humanity. The labour is the “means” where man can enhance the “value of natural products,” it is the active property of man.” Oddly, these same political economists say that the landowners and the capitalists, who are “idle gods,” are much superior to the workers, they are the one who establish the law for the workers. Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts”..., 287.

⁸ Ibid., 343; Similarly, Erich Fromm points that Marx’s concept of labour and capital are not mere objective but “anthropological categories” endowed with “value judgment which is rooted in his humanistic position.” Erich Fromm, *Marx’s Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co 1961), 40.

⁹ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 290, 288.

¹⁰ “Political economy regards labour abstractly as a thing; labour is a commodity; if price is high, the commodity is much in demand; if it is low, then it is much in supply; ‘the price of labour as a commodity must fall lower and lower.’ This is brought about partly by the competition between capitalist and worker and partly by the competition of the worker themselves.” Ibid., 293.

¹¹ Marx points the concept of abstract labour if seen sufficient, even “conceals the estrangement in the nature of labour.” Ibid., 325.

...in theory, ground rent and profit on capital are *deductions* made from wages. But in reality wages are deduction which land and capital grant the worker, an allowance made from the product of labour to the worker, to labour.¹²

In the end, labour rather than being productive according to the thoughts of the political economists, is in real “harmful and destructive” to human being.¹³ Whereas in theory the progress of the society through workers’ labour is for the interest of the workers, in reality, the more the society produces the more the workers are being deducted of their human lives.

Marx’s humanism, expressed in his analysis of the political economy, applied into concrete subject than the concerns where Feuerbach applied it.¹⁴ Marx’s humanism pushed further from the religious and theological concerns to humanize political economy and private property and show their forms of dehumanizations. By taking the economic dehumanization as primary, Marx depicts the human beings not just as part of nature, a natural being “corporeal, living, real, sensuous objects,” but as part of the society. “The human essence of nature exists only for a *social* man.”¹⁵ When Marx aims to realize the human’s specie-being, what he aims to realize is the human being engaged in an activity in a certain social order, and that such activity must be an expression of oneself and community than alienated and egoistic. Such human is part of the society, and who could be a living worker, with needs, aims, and desires, and who could be oppressed and miserable, but not because of God and the supernatural world, but of the same human realm, with its society and economy that have been transformed into a less human world.

ii. Marx’s Humanism as a Forgetfulness of Being

As Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism* criticizes the various forms of humanism, one part of it is an attempt to criticize the core of Marx’s humanism. The text itself is historically situated after the two violent wars, and with that, there are claims that the *Letter* is Heidegger’s post-Nazi confession.¹⁶ It could be also construed as expressing post war sentiment, of how the old forms of thinking did not bring the idealized progress for humanity, and instead it unconsciously worked as the culprit of the dangers and inhumanity that the modern society is born with.

Heidegger discloses that such inhumanity essentially founds in a certain metaphysical thinking. Man experiences homelessness from Being, and it consists of “abandonment of Being by beings,” “a symptom of oblivion of Being” because the “truth of the Being remains unthought” given the condition that “man always observes and handles only beings.”¹⁷ The dehumanization of man, a term that is articulated in various forms by the philosophers, does not arise from the Capitalism, or from the violence of politics of power, or from existentialist inauthentic mass society, or from the forgetfulness of God, but in the metaphysics that has forgotten Being. There are various forms of dehumanization, but on its ground, primordially, there is homelessness from Being. The estrangement that human experiences, which Hegel and Marx have pointed out, for Heidegger, “has its roots in the homelessness of the modern man.”¹⁸

Given the inhumanity, there’s a need to rethink and rediscover the essence of man, the ground of humanism. Heidegger acknowledges that the task of rekindling human essence, like the other humanism, implies a “concern about man.”¹⁹ Heidegger thinks that the rekindling of the lost essence of man (and as such also of Being), and realizing it, builds way out from the human being’s homelessness and from the dangers of modern technology.

¹² Ibid., 288

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ It is an interesting interpretative note that this application of Marx naturalism and humanism to the political economy is not taken by Althusser as a supersession of Hegel. a movement of continuity. For Althusser, it is “pre-Hegelian” the discovery of the economy and history is a “retreat” to the theoretical products of “English and French eighteenth century. Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” 77.

¹⁵ Marx, “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts,” 349

¹⁶Rabinbach, Anson, *Heidegger’s Letter on Humanism as Text and Event*, New German Critique, No. 62 (Spring – Summer, 1994), pp. 3-38.

¹⁷Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,”... 218-219

¹⁸ Ibid., 219.

¹⁹Ibid., 200.

Thus *humanitas* really does remain the concern of such thinking. For this is humanism: meditating and caring that man be human and not inhumane “inhuman,” that is outside his essence. But what does the humanity of man consist? It lies in his essence.²⁰

How one understands and thinks what is essential to human being direct the values and even actions. When one thinks, for instance, that the essence of man is being God’s creation, which is held by the Christian humanism, then the morality and the actions will be directed in fulfilling God’s divine order. Although Heidegger suspends the inquiry about the relation between ontology and ethics, he still indicates that there’s certain relation that exists between them, which what made Heidegger limit himself in clarifying the ontology—the search for the essence of man—before dealing with the question of ethics.²¹

With the question on “whether Marx has essentially thought what human being is?” Heidegger is disposed to think that his humanism failed to. Marx understands man as limited only as *animalitas*, as a social animal, which is only man’s “totality of natural needs”, as “natural,” “social,” “practical,” and “conscious species-existence.”²² Heidegger acknowledges that Marx’s humanism is rich on its own account and not utterly wrong (the understanding of the human being as the social man is correct in its own right), the *Letter*, however, points that human being, understood as a social animal is based on the metaphysics of beings that conceals Being. He points that Marx’s humanism is fundamentally the same with other humanism—Christian, existentialists, and even of the Romans. They are based on the western grammar and logic that treat Being as entities, and where existence is thought as actualities, and wherein the essential understanding of man, the fundamental relation of man to Being, is forgotten.²³ The *Letter* complains that the humanism of Marx same with the other forms, define the human being basically, as *animalitas*, metaphysically it does not suggest anything new in the Roman humanism of “animal rationale.”²⁴

In defining the humanity of man humanism not only does not ask about the relation of Being to the essence of man; because of its metaphysical origin humanism even impedes even impedes the question by neither recognizing nor understanding it.²⁵

For Heidegger, the more primordial understanding of man is that which remembers Being, which is in a sense the home of man. Instead of *animalitas*, Heidegger understood the human’s humanity as essentially related to Being. Human being’s essence is “ek-sistence” which is the ecstatic inherence man to Being. “Man stands out into the Truth of Being and so exceptional from other beings.”

... man essentially occurs only in his essence, where he is claimed by Being. Only from that claim “has” he found that wherein his essence dwells. Only from this dwelling “has” he “language: as the home that preserves the ecstatic for his essence. Such standing in the lighting of Being I call the “ek-sistence” of man. This way of Being is proper only to man. “Ek-sistence” so understood is not only the ground of the possibility of reason, *ratio*, but is also that in which the essence of man preserves the source that determines him.²⁶

Despite Heidegger’s recognition that the humanisms are not wrong but only conditioned by certain metaphysics, the *Letter* still suggests dangerous consequence shown in humanity’s homelessness. Man, out of homelessness, is misdirected from its essential *humanitas* to its *animalitas*. The *Letter* recognizes that the “essential provenance ... is essential future for historical mankind.”²⁷ The understanding of man as fundamentally *animalitas* is the root of homelessness of man. And such forgetfulness of Being is what also at the grounds of modern technological thinking, which Heidegger conceives to contain danger to humanity.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Heidegger provides a brief discussion on the relation between ethics and ontology. See, Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,” 235-237.

²²Ibid., 200.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.,202.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 204.

²⁷Ibid., 203-204.

The essence of modern technology is *Gestell*, a mode “enframing” where both nature and man are “ordered” and “set,” reduced to be available and manipulated for expansion, or a for certain end. Heidegger sees Marx’s humanism in this line of thinking. Communism is not a mere political movement,²⁸ but primordially it grounds the forgetfulness of being, and one of movements in “technological frenzy.”²⁹

The two dystopian novels of George Orwell, *1984* and *Animal Farm*, echoes those technological dangers contained in the totalitarian movements. Both depict human beings, though might have a materially stable life, lose their individuality and transformed into anonymous, unthinking automatons and uniform robots all for the attainment of a socialist paradise. “Beings themselves appear as actualities in a calculative business-like way,” the human beings are enframed, available to be manipulated for a certain end.³⁰

Being thoughtful that the human being’s essence is ek-sistence, Heidegger calls to open for the new way from the previous forms of metaphysics of beings. The goal is to understand human in view of Being. “Humanism [which for Heidegger also a form of anti-humanism] now means... that the essence of man is essential for the truth of Being, specifically in such a way that the word does not pertain to man simply as such.”³¹ The *Letter* expresses anti-humanism not because it is illogical, or against human values, but because it ponders that the human will find their home again by way of de-centering himself, to let the Being-be: “[T]hinking is of Being insofar as thinking, belonging to Being, listens to Being.”³² Man should not enframe, control, or impose, but instead should “step back,” “enable” and “let Being—be.” There’s a certain passivity involved as it lets the revelation of the destiny of Being be. Heidegger recognizes the old forms of thinking and its conceptual categories, logic, and grammar are concealing. As such, for Heidegger, there’s a need to learn to exist in the “nameless” to “find his way once again to the nearness of Being” and “let himself be claimed again by Being, taking the risk that under this claim he will seldom have much to say” Man must recognize one’s poverty in the face of Being, for man is not the master controller of Being, because “Man is the shepherd of Being.”³³

Man is rather “thrown” from Being itself into the truth of Being, so that ek-sisting in this fashion he might guard the truth of Being, in order that beings might appear in the light of Being as the beings they are. Man does not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the lighting of Being, come to presence and depart. The advent of beings lies in the destiny of Being...in accord with this destiny man as ek-sisting has to guard the truth of Being. Man is the shepherd of Being.³⁴ (210)

²⁸ As Heidegger writes, “Whoever takes ‘communism’ only as ‘party’ or a ‘Weltanschauung’ is thinking too shallowly, just as those who by the term ‘Americanism’ mean, and mean derogatorily, nothing more than a particular lifestyle.” *Ibid.*, 220.

²⁹ “This Europe, in its unholy blindness always on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in great pincers between Russia on the one side and America on the other. Russia and America, seen metaphysically are both the same: the same hopeless frenzy of unchained technology and of the rootless organization of the average man. Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt, (London: Yale University Press 2000), 40. Cf. Anson Rabinbach, *Heidegger’s Letter on Humanism as Text and Event*, *New German Critique*, No. 62 (Spring – Summer, 1994), 13.

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” in *Martin Heidegger Basic Writings* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1977), 199.

³¹ Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism,”... 224.

³² *Ibid.*, 196.

³³ *Ibid.*, 199, 210.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

iii. Heidegger and Abstraction

Both Marx and Heidegger aim to build a way out from the problems of the modern society, whether it is articulated in form of estrangement or homelessness. Both of them perceive the critical role of understanding the human being, because understanding what a human being is, is essential in directing the way out from the ills of the times. The understanding of the human being is standard where humanity will be recovered from inhuman condition. It is the standard where “how human reality is” will be understood and evaluated.

Heidegger is correct in emphasizing that Marx essentially understood man as a social animal; he could be also correct in disclosing that, at the root of the humanism of Marx is the understanding of man as *animalitas rationale*—man as beings or entities. However, what is contentious in Heidegger is his depiction that his (anti)humanism provides a better way to address what he characterized as homelessness of man and even the dangers of modern technology. Heidegger’s thinking, or that which he is supposed to open in his pondering, is in form of abstraction, and thus inadequate to address the problems of society. Marx aims to articulate man as concrete to the address the issue concretely, where man is conditioned by the society and who concretely experiences estrangement specifically in the realm of production. Heidegger, however, depicts man as outside of such social conditions. His aim to articulate what is primordial lead him not discovering the essence of the modern man, but positing human being in abstraction,

Heidegger’s definition that human being’s essence as “ek-sistence,” where the man is seen in relation to the revelation of Being, is but a form of abstraction. It is a generic characterization of man, and does not provide any illumination and even direction to the pressing problems. What is the ecstatic inherence of man to Being than the idea that the “dynamic reality” reveals to the human being in various ways. Or that man experiences reality dynamically. Or that a dynamic reality opens to human being. Such understanding of humanity lacks important contents that make man as man in the society. It has a similar abstract sense of an abstract labour, which simply asserts that “human produces,” and similarly its abstractness does not incorporate the concrete condition—one’s estrangement—under the whole labour process.

The humanism of Marx relative to Feuerbach and Hegel, aims to articulate as much as possible the human being in concrete. The human “specie-being” is depicted as a historical essence reacting against the social, economic, and political estrangements of his times.³⁵ For Marx, the human being could be either in class or in practice, but certainly s/he is not an abstract consciousness, of an asocial and apolitical human being of his predecessors. Marx advances a more concrete understanding of man than Dasein in “homelessness” realizing his “ek-sistence.” He instead sees man in the society, with varying senses—bodily senses, intellectual, and spiritual—engaged practically, factually experiencing an oppressive condition under a certain economic system. It is in such concreteness where Marx sees how senses and intellect become crude and how labour becomes estranged, both brought private property. With such condition, he poses the human emancipation from those forms of estrangement, the genuine human development as opposed to mere possession of things and accumulation of wealth, which is the direction the economic system where he is reacting against. This emancipation is the realization of human “specie-being.”

Marx opposes the abstraction of man not because it is wrong, but because it fails to address the real estrangement, and practically oppose those estrangements like what he sees from Hegel and Feuerbach. Worst, the abstraction, as it is blinded to the real estranged conditions, is employed to maintain the dehumanization, operating as “anti-human concept,” and hindering the genuine human development. The danger lies not only in the modern technology but also in abstractions, for these kinds of concept could serve for anti-human interests. The science of political economy for instance, with its employment of abstract labour, though intends to be objective in reality serves the private property, which is driven solely by accumulation of wealth, and causes dehumanization. Without introducing the concrete estrangement of the workers—estranged labour—political economists misconceive the real condition and the genuine development for humanity.

The danger could not be merely attributed to technological thinking, and of the forgetfulness of being. The error of abstraction could be said to plague the soviet “communist totalitarianism” which Marxist theoreticians, such as Fromm and Althusser, clearly oppose. The dehumanization that is committed by the political movements cannot be attributed to the humanistic philosophy of Marx, which main goal is to underscore concrete human estrangement, and let those estrangements be

³⁵Marx indicates how the concept of what is “natural” changes, from feudal concept to liberal “egoism.” Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” in *Karl Marx Early Writings*, London: Penguin Books 1992, 220, 233-234.

incorporated in the understanding of the social reality.³⁶ Althusser even regards that such violence arises from the failure of the political movements to have concrete understanding of the social reality, which requires the recognition of the ideological (mythical sense for the practical purposes) aspect of the socialist slogan. It is a simplistic idea that it is the essence of modern technology, which is the sole cause of such danger committed by those political movements. Perhaps, it is not solely the modern technology, but more precisely, it is the misrecognition of the concrete human being as it exists in those political movements.

The same error of abstraction could be said in Heidegger's discussion of human's primordial essence. The idea that man as ek-sistence does not illuminate the concrete problems human being faces in the social reality. The estrangement is understood not in the concrete labour, or in problem of identity, religion, politics, or economics, but in an abstract homelessness of man due to the "forgetfulness of Being." Heidegger's thinking of the ground of man is an inadequate concept that could only provide ambiguous solutions. It is no wonder why Heidegger's suggestion, his alternative humanism to Marx, is vague. The call to "step back," "letting go," "letting the Being be, or to "exist in the nameless" lack any content than its main goal, that is, to ponder and build the return of man to Being, all are inadequate ways to address the important issues of the times.

Contrary to Heidegger, Marx's concrete depiction of human estrangement leads to a tangible direction of fighting for worker's rights and engagement in struggle. The point is not to claim that Marx is correct about his suggested solution, since Marx still recognizes that the solutions should develop to able to address the genuinely the human being, as the development of "crude communism" to "higher communism." The critical point, however, is to show how Heidegger's new thinking leads to intangible and unclear direction.

Heidegger's abstract call to return to Being can be appropriated in varying ways without losing its core idea. For instance, the *Letter's* idea could be seen in support of the Nazi movement. The Nazism could be construed as the one that returns to the essential revelation of Being, uplifting the humanities and arts, which is in contrast with the "technological frenzied" movement of Communism and Liberalism. This reading of Letter on Humanism in view of the circumstances that occurred in Germany is in fact Rabinbach's historical interpretation of the Letter's claims. It claims that the *Letter* is a post-Nazi confession of Heidegger, who in his silence of the political violence of his times, pardons himself from any responsibility of them. Rabinbach's reading asserts that the *Letter* is:

...a conflation of self-exoneration and political defiance in the face of catastrophe that ultimately defines Heidegger's relation text and its relation to the event that is at its center. Heidegger's effort to philosophically excuse and explain his complicity with Nazism circumscribes and informs several strands of its argument....³⁷

Rabinbach reads Heidegger's *Letter* in the background of the prominent ideas of the intellectuals of the Nazism held, for instance, the idea of the return to the Greeks. He does not immunize Heidegger from the stains of violence of National Socialist movement, for he sees that Heidegger, an official member, was influenced by the prominent ideology of the Nazis.

Rabinbach reading could be wrong, but that is a minor point. What is made evident by his reading is the abstraction of Heidegger. The call to return to being, because of its abstraction, could be appropriated by any politician and charismatic leader. Communism could be sense as a returning to Being, as Hitler could be returning to being, even the ISIS could be construed as returning to Being, because the only requirement is to be open to the revelation of the destiny of Being, which could be in any form.

At the root of Heidegger's error is his professed way and understanding of thinking. Heidegger's idea of thinking that "lets the Being—be" removes any human limitation or any human factors that affect it. As the *Letter* comments:

But now in what relation does the thinking of Being stand to theoretical and practical behavior? It exceeds all contemplation because it cares for the light in which a seeing, as *theoria*, can first live and move. Thinking attends to the lighting of Being in that it puts its saying of Being into language as the home of *eksistence*. Thus thinking is a deed. But a deed that also surpasses all *praxis*. Thinking towers above action and production, not thought the grandeur

³⁶Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co 1961), 54.

³⁷Rabinbach, *Heidegger's Letter on Humanism as Text and Event* ..., 7.

of its achievement and not as a consequence of its effect, but through the humbleness of its inconsequential accomplishment.³⁸

It is a form of inhuman thinking. Heidegger places thinking above action and production on the purpose of recovering “thinking” outside of the common distinction of theory and practice, where thinking’s main purpose is on its application in the reality. However, in distancing thinking from such frame, he also misconceives the limitation that human thinking have. (Perhaps, this is the reason why he misconceives how much his Nazi involvement, or the general political climate, has conditioned and affected his thinking.) Whether it is the human body and its affects, or language and metaphors, or constitution of the consciousness itself, or the historicity, or the society, or the realm of the unconscious, the philosopher’s self-examination has brought into the idea that thinking is limited by various factors, and this is the most human and modest way of understanding thinking.

Marx shares such same spirit of humanizing the thinking and its concerns. Human intellectual sense is also conditioned by the society and practice. As he points, “Dispute over the actuality or nonactuality of any thinking that isolates itself from *praxis* is a purely *scholastic question*.”³⁹ Disregarding the dispute over what Marx exactly meant by the famous passage in the *Theses*, what is obvious is his acknowledgement of the impurity of human thinking. Practice here could refer to any human activity, especially those activities that aim to transform the material condition, that is, from simple labour, intellectual labour up to political movements. Thinking should not be thought as without context, it cannot think anything, rather its capacity—ideas and questions—is limited to the human condition where it arises.

Without recognizing the limitation of thinking, there’s a danger that humans will ask and think about subjects that it has no capacity to know, or worst merely invented by the human imagination. Kant has already warned the philosophers against such kind of meaningless pursuit, and Marx in the same sense acknowledges that such kind of pure thinking will produce “scholastic question.” A pure thinking is in the same sense of what Marx conceives as “abstract consciousness.” Consciousness, misconceiving its basis in practice, asks unanswerable question of searching for “*causa prima*.” Abstract consciousness leads to inhuman concern, where the questions and topics are outside of human capacity, and where, in some instances, instead of benefiting man could cause harm against humanity.

Heidegger fairly expresses such pure and abstract thinking, which is no wonder why the concrete and real concerns of the human beings become inessential to him, and what becomes more humane for him is a form of anti-humanism of surrendering to the destiny of Being. Heidegger’s call for the recovery of Being is a manifestation of an abstracted thinking, a product of thinking that is practically indifferent, a project to be objective and essential. His anti-humanism does not assure any advancement in thinking. Worst, it is a regression. It does not remove man from any danger, and worst it maintains the status quo. It is a thinking that is without action and could immunize man from any responsibility of the estranged condition of the society. For sure he wants to advance the essential cause of the human being, but it is uncertain whether the realization that the human being is in ecstatic inherence of being could provide such advance he foresees and anticipates.

Heidegger’s accusation that Marx has forgotten Being in favor of beings could be correct. But Marx has forgotten “Being” for he favors the utmost human experience of all, the experience of the concrete, which perhaps are beings. That is, human being as a social animal. Marx favors defining the concrete beings, because he favors the practical human being, with human varying characteristics than the general definition of it. He forgets the forgetfulness of being, because he defines the homelessness of man not through forgetfulness, but of the concrete experience of the social estrangements. Marx defines the human being socially and politically because that is the concrete experience of man. With this, Heidegger is anti-humanist neither because he is against the human realization of the human being, nor his understanding of man advances the humanity, but because of the abstractions he commit in redefining the human being. The idea that the human being is in ecstatic inherence with being is the most general definition of man, and it could encompass any definition, but it does not provide any illumination, and worst, it, too, hides danger.

iv. Marx’s Humanism: The Drive towards the Concrete

³⁸Heidegger, “Letter on Humanism” . . . , 239.

³⁹ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach” in *Karl Marx Early Writings* (London: Penguin Books 1992), 422.

The humanism of Marx provides a concrete direction for thinking and engaging today's inhumanity, relative to the previous forms of humanism of Hegel and Feuerbach. Marx aims to humanize the understanding of the social reality by moving into a more concrete understanding of man, through incorporating the concrete experience of social estrangements, the *estranged labour*. The direction is to concretize, that is, to incorporate essential factors, than yield into abstractions. Even Heidegger recognizes such great contribution of Marx, as he writes, "Marx by experiencing estrangement attains an essential dimension of history, and the Marxist view of history is superior to that of other historical accounts."⁴⁰

What Heidegger poses erroneously is to suggest that his (anti)humanism is the way to the essential human being, better than what Marx has directed. Given its abstractness, it is questionable whether it could direct man out of homelessness, and eventually to its estrangements. It is too simplistic to think that the forgetfulness of being yields to various technological and political violence that occurred is and occurring in the present society. Worst, by tracing the grounds of human homelessness from the past millennia of forgetfulness, this thinking lessens (or even removes) the responsibility of the human beings (or perhaps his responsibility precisely given his Nazi affiliation). It exculpates the real and concrete culprit of those various inhumanities.

The call for a certain "step back," to let the Being-be, does not assure the human beings of any solution to the urgent problem of our times. Heidegger tries to self-immunize his thinking from any practical implication, but it does not, in real, mean that his thinking lacks actual practical implications. In concrete human affairs one cannot separate thinking from practice, and Marx in 1844 has already recognized this important point. Heidegger's understanding of the concept of thinking highlights how he tries to purify this deed, taking out the various human impurities that affect it—in short, abstracting it. In its abstractness it misrecognizes human being, and like any form of abstraction it contains danger to humanity.

At best, the *Letter's* recognition that man's essence is ek-sistence should not be seen as going back to the essential. The "step back," such movement in thinking, merely provides a general understanding of the subject, in this case, human being and how he understands the dynamic reality in its evolving and differing revelations. It is a helpful perspective, a "top view" in a certain sense. Such "step back" tries to look into the general framework of ideas, not as a mere copy of the absolute static object of thought, but ideas dependent from forms of revealing and concealing reality. Abstract frameworks are helpful as they provide better overview, but the general understanding no way mean that it is the essence of the human being, and it no way removes being from the current estrangements and impending dangers.

The greatest danger, perhaps, lies not in the humanism as Heidegger thought, but in the abstractions of these humanisms, which Heidegger too is guilty of. The goal is not to de-center man or to be anti-human. The goal is to cultivate humanism, by defining what is human concretely, by including important factors that made human lives in a social reality. The danger surfaces when humanism simplifies their understanding of man, which is the same abstraction of human being that centralizes those violent totalitarian movements. Even in religious movement, which projects to be centers of love, such dangers also exist, as when Christians simplify the essential humanity as Christ-believers, or as Muslims simplify the essential humanity as Muslim. There's also the same danger lurking when one simplifies those religious believers are mere expressions of primitive thought and superstitious thinking. It is still a form of abstraction as this idea only thought of man in the realm of the logical and the reasonable.

The goal for concrete thinking of human being does not suggest that one should merely incorporate any factor to be able to define what human is. With this line of reasoning, one would tolerate everything and incorporate even those qualities that express inhumanity. This just shows the difficulty of the task of humanism, yet one should never deny the necessity of reposing the question humanism tries to address. As Heidegger thinks, it serves as a guide for the humans that their humanity will not turn into inhumanity. Humanism is not dangerous in itself. Taking man as concern is paramount especially in the face of different forms of dehumanization. Even the East considers man as its paramount concern, as Judo while it does not attack protects man. Or, their traditional architectural designs, while blending with nature, still cater and nourish man. Marx, like Heidegger, reposed the question of "what is human?" in the background of the previous understanding of the concept. He precisely reposed the question from the background of the Enlightenment's understanding of man, and in view of the industrializations and expanding economy.

Unlike Heidegger, however, Marx's thinking moved to concretize man and not to depict him in abstraction. He understands that the abstraction of man is misrecognition of the real condition of man. He sees that estrangement does not only

⁴⁰Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism"... , 220.

happen in the realm of thought and religion, but in the realm of the workplace, situated in economic and technological factors. Marx directs us to concretize our thinking, especially of man. His humanism still makes the human as the paramount concern, but it is no longer the human who misconceives himself as a special being, a product of ethnocentrism and false enlightenment, a form of abstraction as it removes the human being from its varying limitations. Marx's humanism incorporates concrete estrangements, and the thinking "to come" must not "step back" but instead continue to include the interplay of various concepts and terms, for man, to use Marx words, is an "ensemble of social relations."

At this point, it is vague how such concrete thinking on human will take place. In fact such vagueness is reflective of the scholarly disputes on how Marx actually continued his project of concrete thinking, asking whether Marx continued to be philosophical or became scientific, or continued his philosophical humanism or turned into theoretical anti-humanism.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Schmitt, in his examination of the concept of alienation, provides an insight on how such concrete task could be realized. Schmitt, launching on Marx's idea of alienation, reacts against the abstract discussion of this concept, which instead of mitigating those alienating effects "only deepens self-estrangement." Reacting against this problem of abstraction, Schmitt collects the different "experience of alienation of persons in different situations."⁴² With this, what emerges is still a humble call for further study, because what emerges in their investigation is the complex picture of alienation (as in work, poverty, gender, race, disability, old age, nature), and these forms of alienation all raise different experience, different problems, and different questions.

The task at hand is to be mindful of redefining man. Like Marx, who reposed to the question of "what is man?" from the background of the certainties of enlightenment, it is an imperative to still repose the question, especially in view of these new experiences and realizations of man—colonization, environmental degradations, economic injustices, irrationalities and rationalities, the technological dehumanization, totalitarian violence, religious violence et. al. In parochial unit, the question of "what is human?" guides what laws, policies, decisions should be undertaken, and in whole, being mindful of this question could shelter humanity from inhumanity. There's always a necessity to rethink what is human not for the sake of merely thinking about it but for providing a depiction of what direction the humanity *is* striving and a reminder of what direction the humanity *should be* striving.

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⁴¹Althusser emphasizes how Marx in his later development realizes that philosophical humanism, with its concepts, are limited to provide a concrete depiction of the social reality. He sees later Marx's humanism as maintained, merely as an ideological guide, and instead develop a "theoretical anti-humanism" building on the Theses' remark that man is an "ensemble of social relations." Thus, Marx instead abandons the concept of estranged human being and instead uses the concept such as forces and relations of productions, ideologies, use value, exchange value, et. al, to provide a more scientific and concrete conception of social reality.

⁴² Richard Schmitt, "Why Is the Concept of Alienation Important?" in *Alienation of Social Criticism Key Concepts in Critical Theory* (New Jersey: Humanities Press International Inc. 1994), 16.

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