The Artful Animal

Human Nature in Retrospect and Prospect

Peter Brunette

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A work in progress.

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Note: Since the Prologue is the only portion of the work included in the present document, the remaining (and still provisional) contents are shown in grey.

PROLOGUE

Wanted: An Anthropology for the Anthropocene

It is, I'm afraid, a long and winding journey on which I invite you to accompany me, dear reader—and one, moreover, whose rewards must necessarily be proportionate to its challenges. There's no point insisting that these challenges are consequent upon the difficulty of the terrain we find ourselves obliged to traverse, for the justice of such a claim can be appreciated only in hindsight. I therefore owe you some preliminary account of our proposed itinerary and destination, something perhaps akin to a travel brochure—albeit, sadly, without the usual alluring illustrations. Such an account, the main gist of this Prologue, is provided in §§ 0.3 through 0.6.

I begin, however, with what is perhaps a still more pressing obligation: to explain what motivates the journey in the first place. What you have in hand is an inquiry, as comprehensive and systematic as my abilities permit, into the nature of Man, the nature of Nature, and the history of both. Why bother with such an inquiry? That is the question I propose to answer in § 0.1.

Another question addressed in the Prologue may perhaps be regarded as less substantive; it is, however, certainly no less vexed, and I therefore think it best to lay my cards on the table sooner rather than later. You may have been unpleasantly surprised, especially if you happen to be a woman, when I referred in the preceding paragraph to the nature of "Man" rather than to that of "humankind" or of "the

human being." Aren't the latter expressions more politically correct? Doesn't "Man," when used in such a context, exclude half the members of the human species? My confident and considered reply to both questions is no. But I'm well aware that, for many readers, that answer will stand in need of an explanation, which is provided in § 0.2.

§ 0.1. Two Questions for Man in the Age of Man

SOCRATES: What, then, is a man?
ALCIBIADES: I don't know what to say.[1]

In an epoch that many have taken to calling the Anthropocene, the "Age of Man," Socrates's query seems eminently timely. What is it about us human beings that has enabled *Homo sapiens*, uniquely among the millions of species of living beings currently inhabiting the Earth, to have an impact upon our planet's atmosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere comparable in scale only to the effects of supervolcanic eruptions, collisions with asteroids and comets, the assemblage and rending asunder of supercontinents, or the advance and retreat of continental ice sheets across the temperate zones? This would be a cogent question even if the changes we are busily working upon our only viable home in the otherwise inhospitable Solar System were wholly intentional and benign; the fact that many of them are neither makes it much more pressing still. For the principal hallmarks of the Anthropocene are global catastrophes, either impending or already underway: the homes and fields of a billion people threatened by rising sea levels, vast swaths of the planet's remaining land surface rendered too hot or too arid to support human life, more species of plants and animals driven to extinction than at any time in the past

[1] Plato, *Alcibiades* 129e, in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997 [-IV]), p. 588; Plato's authorship of the *Alcibiades* has been disputed by some modern scholars.

sixty-five million years. Paradoxically, although the causes of these apocalyptic phenomena are known, as are the measures required to reverse—or at least to contain—them, no action remotely commensurate with the challenge is ever taken.

This paradox resolves itself into the two contradictory questions one must pose to Man in the Age of Man:

(1) What makes you so powerful that you can alter the course of your planet's history?
(2) What makes you so impotent that you cannot desist from altering it drastically and irrevocably for the worse?

The first question is the more flattering, but the second is the more urgent. Any anthropology adequate to the times must be capable of answering both. Such is the brief of the present inquiry.

The intellectual milieu in which the inquiry is pursued, however, is inhospitable, to say the least. Never has the injunction of the Delphic oracle—"Know thyself!"—been more timely, yet never have the human studies stood in such pitiable disarray. For decades, the partisans of two warring ideologies have crisscrossed the field and trodden it into a mire: I refer to the neo-Darwinian evolutionists with their stridently reductive naturalism, on the one side, and to the postmodernists with their equally strident antinaturalism, on the other. The noisy conflict between the camps obscures what they share in common: both actively foreclose the study of human nature by denying that such a thing even exists.[2] For the evolutionists, Man has

[2] Cf. Marta Crivos: "To believe in the possibility of a science of the human being has been and still is a stigma that has hindered the career of many 'politically incorrect' anthropologists. There have been obstacles and criticisms systematically endured by those who supported this naturalist programme in the last decades. This enlarges the breach between naturalistic and humanistic anthropologists, and accounts for the high degree of specialisation and the absence of disciplinary integration in anthropology": "Bunge and Scientific Anthropology," in *Mario Bunge: A Centenary Festschrift*, ed. Michael R. Matthews, 389–396 (Cham: Springer, 2019), p. 389. Crivos, an Argentine ethnographer, refers specifically to

no nature apart from that which she shares with other animals—"our animal side is our only side."[3] Thus, a human being is essentially a "naked ape" or, somewhat more specifically, a third species of chimpanzee.[4] For the postmodernists, on the other hand, Man has no nature because natures themselves are fictitious: so-called natural kinds are contestable social constructions, and this emphatically includes the kind that goes by the name of *Homo sapiens*. In short, the one camp champions identity at the expense of difference, thus dissolving humanity into animality, while the other champions difference at the expense of identity, thus letting humanity evaporate into thin air.[5]

"A pox on both your houses!" cries the dialectical naturalist,[6] confident that such risibly extreme positions warrant a derisive response. For she knows that identity and difference are cosmic correlates, partners in the age-old tango whereby a world is made: you can't have one without the other, any more than you can have a North Pole without a South Pole.

As an initial move in steering a course between the Scylla of hyper-Darwinism and the Charybdis of postmodernism, and thus getting a

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the intellectual climate at her own academy, the Universidad Nacional de La Plata, but her remarks clearly have a much wider application.

[3] Owen Flanagan, *The Problem of the Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), pp. xiv–xv.

[4] Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape: A Zoologist's Study of the Human Animal* (New York: Dell, 1967); Jared Diamond, *The Third Chimpanzee* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992).

[5] For C. S. Lewis, "the abolition of man" was a fearsome prospect; see his little book of that title (New York: Harper Collins, 2001 [1944]). Michel Foucault, however, cheerfully contemplates a future in which the "human sciences" will have been abandoned, speculating that in that case "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand by the edge of the sea": *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994 [1966]), p. 387.

[6] An exposition of Dialectical Naturalism, the philosophical position adopted herein as the viable third way between reductive naturalism and antinaturalism, is provided in Book I.

handle on the two questions raised above, I propose to take a leaf from Karl Marx. In a footnote to *Capital*, Marx draws a distinction between "human nature in general" and "human nature as historically modified in each epoch."[7] The notion of the Anthropocene unfortunately occludes that distinction, which I take to be a crucial one.[8] For the advent of a geological epoch marked by anthropogenic changes to the physics, chemistry, biology, and ecology of our planet will differ radically in its implications depending precisely on whether these changes stem from human nature in general or only from the forms of human nature that happen to prevail during a particular historical period—specifically, to borrow Immanuel Wallerstein's term of art, the period of the Capitalist World-System.[9]

In Book III of this study, I argue that the latter is the case. At the moment, for transparency's sake, let me simply call a spade a spade. The monster that is devouring the planet has a proper name, and its name is Capital. Moreover, capitalism is not the inevitable result of human nature (in general), as its apologists would have us believe;

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[7] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes, Vol. 1 (London: Penguin Books, 1976 [1867]), chap. 24, sect. 5, p. 759. The contrast Marx draws here may well owe something to Hegel, who drew a similar distinction in his Philosophy of Mind, in which Subjective Mind corresponds roughly to Marx's "human nature in general" and Objective Mind to his "human nature as historically modified in each epoch": see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace, A. V. Miller, and Michael J. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1830]). While Marx's anthropology differs radically from Hegel's, as I shall explain in Chapter Two, they have this much in common: that both are dialectical and, consequently, both are able to comprehend human nature in its identity as well as in its differences.

[8] I'm by no means alone in criticizing the notion along this line: see the essays in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. Jason W. Moore (Oakland: PM Press, 2016).

[9] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols. (San Diego: Academic Press [vols. 1–3]; Berkeley: University of California Press [vol. 4]; 1974–2011).

instead, human nature (as historically modified during the present epoch) is the inevitable result of capitalism.

It's worth our while, therefore, to examine Marx's distinction in some detail. It occurs in a comment on the "principle of utility" as expounded by Jeremy Bentham, which holds that human beings are essentially pleasure seekers—and hence essentially consumers rather than producers, users rather than makers—whose rational decisions are based on the maximization of utility. Disputing this claim, Marx observes:

> To know what is useful for a dog, one must investigate the nature of dogs. This nature is not itself deducible from the principle of utility. Applying this to Man, he that would judge all human acts, movements, relations, etc., according to the principle of utility, would first have to deal with *human nature in general*, and then with *human nature as historically modified in each epoch*. Bentham does not trouble himself with this. With the driest naiveté he assumes that the modern petty bourgeois (*Spießbürger*), especially the English petty bourgeois, is the normal man. Whatever is useful to this peculiar kind of normal man, and to his world, is useful in and for itself. He applies this yardstick to the past, the present, and the future.[10]

It's a witty remark, dripping with the signature irony Marx often employs when discussing theoretical positions he regards as ideological or self-serving. But one's amusement is tempered by three unhappy facts: (1) that the global triumph of capitalism has made the form of social individuality once peculiar to the "English petty bourgeois" a world-historical phenomenon, (2) that mainstream economists remain to the present day committed to the Benthamist view of human nature and continue to apply the utilitarian yardstick in their analyses of contemporary society, and (3) that modern nation-

[10] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 758-759, emphases added.

states are typically governed *by* Bentham's "normal men" and *in accordance with* the prescriptions of the utilitarian economists.[11]

Note that Marx does not exclude the possibility that the "modern petty bourgeois," replete with the competitive, acquisitive, individualistic mentality characteristic of that type, may indeed instantiate a form of human nature. But he adds the crucial proviso that, if so, the form of human nature thus instantiated would be a historically modified form, and therefore—or so, at least, one is entitled to hope—a transitory one.

A question naturally arises, then. If Bentham did not trouble himself "to deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as historically modified in each epoch," did Marx himself carry out the research program adumbrated in these terse phrases? Is there such a thing as an anthropology that bears Marx's signature? My answer to that question is a qualified yes. It is indisputable that Marx maintained an interest in both of the major branches of anthropology, the theoretical and the empirical, throughout his adult life: from the age of nineteen, when he enrolled in an anthropology course at the

[11] A comment penned by one of the early readers of *Das Kapital* already presages these developments. Four years after Marx's chef-d'œuvre came off the presses, Henry Sidgwick, perhaps the ablest utilitarian philosopher of the Victorian era, found occasion to gloss the passage cited above (interestingly, he did so in a letter to Alfred Marshall, perhaps the most influential of the Victorian economists): "I am quite sure I do not agree with Karl Marx. The Spiessburger is after all only our old friend the "Bourgeois" for whose wicked selfishness Political Economy is supposed to have been invented: when I first read Socialistic tracts I was much impressed with the breadth of view implied in this contemptuous term: but on reflection the Bourgeois after all appeared to me the heir of the ages, as far as he went: and so of Bentham's Normal Man." (Letter to Alfred Marshall, July or August 1871, quoted in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That Noble Science of Politics: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Intellectual History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], pp. 287–288.) Thus, while noting Marx's ironic tone, Sidgwick found himself unable, in the end, to abandon the Benthamite naivety Marx had lampooned, allowing the historical "breadth of view" to which he initially found himself attracted to collapse into the concept of a humanity whose nature remained uniform across "the ages."

University of Berlin, until the year before his death, when he produced a series of notebooks on several ethnological monographs he was studying at that time.[12] It is equally indisputable that most of Marx's writings may be regarded as anthropological in the broad sense of that term, which is the sense adopted in the present essay: that is to say, they are concerned with "human acts, movements, relations, etc."[13] Moreover, not only in his early writings but at every stage of his career, Marx peppers his work with explicit references to human nature. In the event, however, he completed only a small part of the monumental intellectual project on which he embarked in his youth and which he pursued for the remainder of his life. That unfinished project, which he described as a critique of political economy, can with equal justification be described as a dialectical anthropology.

For it is only within the compass of a dialectical anthropology that Marx's seemingly contradictory claim—to wit, that human nature is both singular and multiple, both fixed and variable, both synchronic and diachronic—can make any sense.[14] And therefore, if the argument I've been making so far holds any water, the development of just such a science ought to rank high among intellectual tasks on the horizon of the Anthropocene. Those of us who take it up need not begin where Marx left off, of course, for we have at our disposal the immense wealth of observation and interpretation that has been amassed in the natural and social sciences since his day.

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[12] Karl Marx, *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx*, 2nd ed., ed. Lawrence Krader (Assen: Van Gorkum, 1974 [1880–82]). For a detailed account of Marx's anthropological thought in general, see Thomas C. Patterson, *Karl Marx: Anthropologist* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2009).

[13] It goes without saying that in this general sense all of the human studies, including history, sociology, linguistics, economics, human psychology, and so forth, are branches of anthropology.

[14] I realize that "dialectical" is a moot term and that, without being glossed at greater length than I can afford in these introductory remarks, it is perhaps more likely to obscure my meaning than to elucidate it. The best I can do at this point is to assure the reader that she will find an ample discussion of Dialectic, which is indeed a pivotal concept for the present work, in Chapters One and Three.

In one respect, it is true, this circumstance may seem more a hindrance than an advantage, making the challenge we face all the more daunting. Considering, for instance, the ethnographic record alone, we find that the molehill of evidence a nineteenth-century scholar like Marx had at his disposal has since grown into a very sizeable mountain. And the same holds, of course, for every other department of knowledge. How on earth are we to sift through this Himalayan Range of data? On what grounds or principles shall we separate the relevant from the irrelevant, the essential from the inessential, the wheat from the chaff?

Well, that's what philosophy is for, after all—which is basically another way of saying there's no easy answer. The answer you will find in Book I is, I think, a good one, but it doesn't exactly make for light bedtime reading. Marx himself, when a French translation of *Das Kapital* was in the offing, worried that the opening chapters of his book would prove rather too long on theory to suit "the French public, always impatient to come to a conclusion, eager to know the connection between general principles and the immediate questions that have aroused their passions."[15] Just think what he might have written of a public reared on "tweets" and ten-second sound bites! For my part, while I certainly promise to write as clearly, accessibly, and engagingly as I know how, I cannot pretend to eliminate such difficulty as is inherent in my subject matter. On that score as on many others, one may as well leave the last word to Marx: "There is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steep paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits."[16]

[15] Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, "Preface to the French Edition," p. 104.

[16] Ibid.

§ 0.2. Men, Women, and Waymen: What's in a Name?

Our inquiry, then, falls under the rubric of anthropology. Lest the reader be seriously misled, I hasten to add that it will turn out to encompass a great deal more than what that term ordinarily signifies (for reasons I shall explain momentarily, in § 0.3). But I must first address a terminological issue of another kind. Whoever would discuss human nature in contemporary English faces a couple of odd and rather embarrassing linguistic hurdles. My efforts to surmount them result in some unconventional or novel forms of diction, and hence may seem to some readers daring, to others merely foolhardy; in either event, forewarned is forearmed, and I therefore advert to the considerations that motivate my use of such nonconforming language.

Both of the aforementioned obstacles involve defects of contemporary English vocabulary and usage. The first is this: despite boasting the richest lexicon of any natural language, English at the present day lacks a native word that can be used unproblematically to refer either to the species *Homo sapiens* or to an individual of that species whose sex is left unspecified. This deficiency is the outcome of feminist criticism, which in the late-twentieth century rendered the gender-neutral use of the words "Man" and "Mankind" politically suspect, at first among certain circles of the liberal intelligentsia but later among a broad section of the general public. To say "Man" today when one means the human species—or, perhaps worse still, to say "men" when one means "men, women, and children"—is to risk being branded a sexist (and perhaps an ageist as well).

This situation is not without a certain irony, since "man" did not acquire its gender-specific sense until the end of the tenth century or thereabouts,[17] nearly half a millennium after making its first recorded appearance in Old English. Thus, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter, the *OED*), the original and primary meaning of

[17] *Online Etymology Dictionary*, https://www.etymonline.com.

"man" is "a human being, irrespective of sex or age."[18] The dictionary, however, immediately glosses this definition: "'man' was considered until the twentieth century to include women by implication. [However,] it is now frequently understood to exclude women, and is therefore avoided by many people."

Such avoidance is in my view unfortunate, since it is a significant impediment both to good writing and to clear thinking. For none of the alternatives to "man" available in contemporary English is entirely satisfactory. Greeks have the gender-neutral *anthropos* as well as the gender-specific *andras*, Germans the gender-neutral *Mensch* and well as the gender-specific *Mann*, but we Anglophones are less fortunate. In current usage, "human being" is perhaps the most common substitute for "man" in its original sense, but it's an obvious makeshift—more like a definition than a term in want of one. Scientific nomenclature aside, we do not normally resort to binomial expressions to refer to other common creatures—imagine having to speak of equine beings and bovine beings rather than horses and cows!—and it would be bizarre if we were constrained to do so when referring to ourselves.

If one looks up "human being" in a thesaurus, the list of alternatives will be something like this: "human, person, mortal, member of the human race, individual, soul, living soul, *Homo sapiens*, earthling." Some of these are phrases and therefore may be ruled out on the same ground as "human being." Others—"mortal," "individual," "earthling"—fail to distinguish human beings from various other kinds of beings. "Soul" must be ruled out for the converse reason, for the distinction it makes is an invidious one: to hold that souls are possessed exclusively by members of the species *Homo sapiens* is to espouse a philosophical or theological doctrine that is eminently contestable—one that Aristotle would certainly have contested (and that I too, following his lead, shall contest in Chapters Ten and Eleven). "Person," even putting aside the derogatory overtones it

[18] *OED*. This and all subsequent citations refer to the online edition, available by subscription at https://www.oed.com.

carries for many users of English, has connotations of a legal or psychological nature that one may not always wish to convey. This leaves us with "human" as the best of a bad lot. Still, even though its use as a noun goes back at least to the sixteenth century, to employ "human" as the primary term for our species or for an individual thereof commits one to composing sentences that can't avoid sounding stilted and contrived. "Man is the artful animal" has a certain ring to it; "the human is the artful animal" is a palpably flat-footed substitute. Besides, perhaps because I read too much science fiction in my youth, I can't quite get past a lingering sense that the word "humans" implies a contrast with space aliens.

In my reluctance, consequent upon these considerations, to drop the generic "man" from my vocabulary, I am pleased to find myself in illustrious company. The *American Heritage Dictionary* periodically surveys a group of about two hundred leading "scholars, creative writers, journalists, diplomats, and others in occupations requiring mastery of language," which it calls its Usage Panel, with a view to keeping abreast of "the acceptability of particular usages and grammatical constructions."[19] In a note accompanying the entry for "man," the dictionary admits that "the generic use" of that word is often considered objectionable, yet finds that "a solid majority of the Usage Panel still approves of it."[20] Thus, when surveyed in 2004, seventy-nine percent of panel members approved the sentence "If early man suffered from a lack of information, modern man is tyrannized by an excess of it." A still larger majority, eighty-seven percent, found "The Great Wall is the only manmade structure visible from space" acceptable. Using "man" as a verb, the dictionary notes, "can be considered sexist when the subject includes or is limited to women." Nevertheless, the sentence "Members of the League of

[19] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 2018, https://ahdictionary.com/word/usagepanel.html (accessed July 28, 2018).

[20] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2011), Usage Note to the entry for "man."

Women Voters will be manning the registration desk" was accepted by seventy-four percent of panelists in the 2004 survey, a dramatic increase over the forty-four percent who approved it in 1988. It would thus appear, according to the dictionary's anonymous commentator, "that for many people the issue of the generic use of 'man' is not as salient as it once was."

My intention in citing these findings is by no means to suggest that feminist criticism of linguistic usage is impertinent or unjustified. I merely submit that, in the case of "man," it is misdirected. What is truly objectionable and ought to be abandoned, in my view, is not the gender-neutral use of that word but its gender-specific use. To use "man" for "human being irrespective of sex or age" as well as for "adult male human being" and, meanwhile, to use "woman" exclusively for "adult female human being" is to suggest that the humanity of a man is unqualified while that of a woman is somehow qualified.[21] Dropping the gender-neutral use of "man" is not a satisfactory solution, however, since that sexist implication remains baked into the words themselves: anyone can see that "woman" is a compound word and that "man" is one of the roots from which it is derived.

Thus, to Juliette's innocent question, "What's in a name?" one must sometimes reply, "Rather a lot." The example she offers is, of

[21] This is a position explicitly adopted by Aristotle, whose anthropology notoriously argues that a woman is defective in precisely that quality which he holds (mistakenly, according to the view adopted herein) to be definitive of the human being, her capacity for rational discourse being inferior to that of a man, and whose zoology claims that in the act of conception the male contributes the form or essence of an animal (or human being) while the female contributes only the matter. Today, of course, we know that the human ovum, while it does indeed contain the "matter" (in its fatty yolk) that will feed the initial growth of the embryo, also contains at least as much genetic information (or "form" in Aristotelian terminology) as does the sperm; indeed, should the fertilized ovum develop into a boy, the mother's genetic contribution will somewhat outstrip the father's, given that the Y chromosome, which occurs only in males, is abnormally small in comparison to all the others. *Pace* Aristotle, then, if the human "form," in the sense of the informational content of the germ cells, is defective in either sex, that sex has turned out to be the male.

course, botanical: "that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet."[22] But flowers do not owe any part of their scent to ideology, whereas systems of social control, such as patriarchy, do derive some of their power from the discourses they foster. We are thus entitled to doubt that *that which we call a man* would, by any other name, dominate as effectively.

A further motivation for retaining the generic "man" while dropping the gendered "man" is, I suggest, that we all naturally and rightly privilege our humanity over our sex. A simple thought experiment will serve to substantiate this claim. I, for example, happen to be a male human being; if it were my fate, however, to be transmuted into some other sort of being, I should certainly wish to hold on to my humanness rather than my maleness: to become a female human being rather than a male baboon, lizard, or scorpion. Similarly, therefore, I should prefer being called by the name of "man" in reference to my humanity over being so called in reference to my sex; for, as the thought experiment shows, my identity is far more heavily invested in the former than in the latter.

Yet, leaving aside colloquialisms such as "guy," "bloke," and "dude," we Anglophones currently have no word for "adult male human being" other than "man." A coinage is called for, and I suggest that we consult the history of our language in search of an appropriate choice. In addition to "man," whose primary meaning was, as we have seen, gender-neutral, Old English had the gender-specific words *wyf*, meaning "female human being" or "wife," and *were*, meaning "male human being" or "husband." *Wyfman* was also used, perhaps in order to stress the humanity of the human female as opposed to her wifeliness, and "woman" is the direct descendent of *wyfman*. *Were*, on the other hand, began to fall out of use in the late thirteenth century, its place being taken up by *man* in the gender-specific sense; it survives only in a few compound words, the most familiar being "werewolf" (although this etymology is not universally accepted). Words, however, can be

[22] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliette*, act 2, scene 2, lines 43–44.

rescued from oblivion, and it seems to me that if, in the interest of linguistic gender equity, we seek an exact etymological counterpart of *woman*, the clear choice is *wereman*. Admittedly, this compound does not seem to be well-attested in surviving texts,[23] but never mind. To paraphrase Voltaire, if it didn't exist, there is nothing to stop us from inventing it. Let us then do so, and while so occupied we might as well go whole hog and invent a history for the word too. Thus, had *wereman* indeed coexisted with *wyfman*, as it certainly should have done had nonsexist linguistic protocols been observed, and had it survived to the present day, we might very reasonably expect that with the passage of the centuries its pronunciation might have undergone an evolution parallel to that of its feminine equivalent. That is to say, our ancestors would surely have dropped one of its consonant sounds—four in the space of two syllables being clearly excessive for a word in such common use—and altered its spelling accordingly. This would leave us with "wayman"—pronounced "*way*-m'n"—as the ideal, politically correct analogue of "woman." Again in parallel with "woman," its plural, "waymen," would no doubt be distinguished in speech by varying the vowel sound of the first syllable rather than that of the second, hence "*why*-m'n" (but without the *h* sound sometimes heard in the English word "why," since that would land us with four consonant sounds once again).

I henceforth presume this admittedly fanciful word history as the basis of sound usage. Thus, I shall employ "man" for "human being irrespective of sex or age," but never for "adult male human being." When referring to the human species collectively, I shall use "Man" (or, alternatively, "Mankind"), spelt with an initial capital. I shall use "woman" in the sense conveyed by its etymology, "adult female man"; and I shall use "wayman" for "adult male man."

Should the feminist reader remain unconvinced of the wisdom of rehabilitating the generic "man," I beg her indulgence, hoping that my

[23] The *OED* does list the hyphenated form *were-man* (under "were-, *comb. form*") but unfortunately does not provide an example of its use.

next terminological decision—that which is intended to overcome the second of the hurdles mentioned above—may serve to quell her reservations, at least in some slight measure. For, regardless of whether one adopts "man" or some less felicitous alternative as the anthropologist's preferred term of art, one still faces the conundrum of settling upon a corresponding personal pronoun. In current usage, "he" is gender-specific and hence liable to the aforementioned feminist censure, while the disjunctions "he or she," "him or her," and so forth, quickly wear out their welcome. English does have the gender-neutral third-person pronoun "it," but "it" sounds decidedly strange when applied to a human being, except perhaps an infant. "They" is fine in the plural and is increasingly employed in the singular for want of a nonsexist alternative. But the latter application remains ungrammatical, and, as a lifelong admirer of the elegant employment of my mother tongue, I just can't bring myself to adopt it.

In light of these considerations, I've elected to follow the current practice of a great many contemporary Anglophone writers and settled on letting "she," "her," "hers," and "herself" serve a dual purpose in the manner that "he," "him," "his," and "himself" used to do, thus functioning not only as feminine pronouns but as gender-neutral pronouns too. I endorse this practice as a linguistic form of what the Amerikans call "affirmative action,"[24] and propose that it be adopted for the balance of the present millennium, or at least until such time as a set of exclusively gender-neutral, singular personal pronouns applicable to human beings comes into general use.[25]

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[24] The spellings "Amerika" and "Amerikan" are adopted herein as shorthand for "the United States," "inhabitant of the United States," and "having to do with the United States"; as distinguished from "America" and "American" whose reference extends to all of the Americas, North, Central, and South.

[25] In quoting from translated texts, I therefore take the liberty of amending masculine pronouns wherever their intention isn't clearly gender-specific. While leaving quotations from English-language texts unaltered, I invite the reader to effect the same amendment mentally.

Taken together, these two terminological choices will occasionally lead me to write a phrase some readers may find a bit jarring at first glance, such as "Man and her world" or "a man and her companions." My hope is that they will find this slight verbal dissonance more refreshing than annoying.

§ 0.3. Anthropology: The Grandest Narrative

Man is the artful animal. Such is the thesis of the present work, as its title and subtitle plainly indicate. You have, therefore, every right to expect my subject to be human nature and my field of inquiry to be some kind of anthropology—perhaps the kind that is mainly theoretical or philosophical; or perhaps the kind that is mainly empirical, historical, or descriptive. I have no intention of disappointing that expectation, and in fact my book combines those two approaches. Its program is to explain the concept of Man as *Animalis artifex*; to justify it philosophically; to contrast it with other, more familiar concepts; to elucidate its historical sources; and to work out its ramifications in the spheres of society, culture, history, and politics, on the grounds that none of the human studies can fail to be radically transformed by a change in the definition of humanity it employs.

A glance at the table of contents, however, may give the impression that I have strayed widely and persistently from this theme. For it will suggest that Chapters One, Three, Four, Five, and Six deal with philosophical topics other than human nature *per se*, while Chapters Seven through Eleven discuss questions more commonly associated with the natural than with the social sciences. What could possibly motivate or justify so seemingly digressive an approach?

The answer is that I take seriously—much more seriously than did Immanuel Kant himself—a claim put forward by that author on more than one occasion. To wit, that the entire range of philosophical inquiry falls under the aegis of anthropology, broadly enough construed:

> The field of philosophy in the cosmopolitan sense can be brought down to the following questions:
>
> 1. What can I know?
> 2. What ought I to do?
> 3. What may I hope?
> 4. What is Man?
>
> Metaphysics answers the first question, morals the second, religion the third, and anthropology the fourth. Fundamentally, however, we could reckon all of this as anthropology, because the first three questions refer to the last one.[26]

It's a striking observation, yet Kant never came close to carrying out the comprehensive program of anthropological investigation it evidently implied.[27] As Martin Buber complains, his extensive lectures on Anthropology, while replete with fascinating insights, don't quite get round to *asking* question number 4,[28] let alone answering it and showing how its answer is supposed to include the answers to questions 1, 2, and 3. That, however, is the task I attempt to accomplish in Book I of the present work.

Indeed, my program amounts to rather *more* than that, for whereas Kant listed only ontology (or "metaphysics," which in his usage

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[26] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Logic*, trans. Michael J. Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1770s–1790s), p. 538. The same assertion is advanced, in much the same words, in Kant's *Lectures on Metaphysics*, trans. Karl Ameriks and Steve Naragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1762–1795]), p. 301.

[27] Cf. Robert Spaemann: "Kant begins by making 'What is a human being?' the central question of philosophy, [but] he simply leaves it there. So the theoretical status of anthropology, its place within the wider system of philosophical thought, remains unclear": Spaemann, *Essays in Anthropology: Variations on a Theme*, trans. Guido de Graaff and James Mumford (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010 [1987]), pp. 1–2.

[28] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith and Maurice Friedman (New York: Macmillan, 1965 [1929–1939]) pp. 119–120; cf. Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Anthropology*, ed. Allen W. Wood and Robert B. Louden, trans. Robert R. Clewis, Robert B. Louden, G. Felicitas Munzel, and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge University Press, 2012 [1772–1789]).

included epistemology), ethics, and theology as philosophical domains to be included in the science of Man, the progress of the natural sciences since his day has demonstrated that anthropology can and must venture to encompass cosmology as well. For Kant, of course, despite his pathbreaking theoretical work on the formation of the Solar System,[29] did not know what we know today: that our Sun and Solar System could not have formed until long after the Milky Way galaxy had done so, and not until that galaxy had witnessed the births and deaths of several previous generations of stars, in a history stretching across billions of years; that Man could not have emerged on the Earth until countless previous generations of organisms had been born and died, in an evolutionary process spanning further billions of years; that every human action, however trivial or momentous, thus presupposes the entire history of the Universe, stretching across unimaginable aeons of time; and that, indeed, we artful animals carry that history around with us at every moment of our lives, inscribed in our very blood, flesh, and bone. In a nutshell, Anthropos implies Cosmos.[30] For it was in the process of cosmic evolution that *Nature found her humanity*. The aforementioned imperative of the oracle at Delphi—"Know thyself!"—therefore includes within it "Know thy world!" If, as a more recent but no less oracular exclamation has it, "the proper study of Mankind is Man,"[31] whoever takes that study seriously must include therein the study of every other broad class of natural beings, from atoms to galaxies and from microbes to mammals. For human nature has, so to speak—and

[29] Immanuel Kant, *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens*, trans. W. Hastie (Ann Arbor: University of Michegan Press, 1962 [1755]).

[30] John D. Barrow and Frank J. Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Errol E. Harris, *Cosmos and Anthropos: A Philosophical Interpretation of the Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Atlantic Highlands and London: Humanities Press International, 1991).

[31] Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Man," second epistle, line 2, in *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt (London and New York: Routledge, 1963 [1700–44]), p. 516.

so, indeed, I *shall* speak—the entire range of logically and temporally prior natures *enfolded within it*.

To anticipate the results of Book II, I thus argue that Man does not have a onefold nature, like that of an oxygen atom; nor does she have a twofold nature, like that of a block of granite; a threefold nature, like that of a Douglas fir; or even a fourfold nature, like that of an octopus or an orangutan. Uniquely, at least in her little corner of the Universe, Man has a fivefold nature. In the terminology I shall introduce and gloss below, her specifically human nature, her Humanity, is a self-enfoldment of Animality; which is in turn a self-enfoldment of Organism; which is a self-enfoldment of Substance; which, finally, is a self-enfoldment of Entity.[32] This is to say that human nature encompasses all five of the generic natures to which Nature has given rise during her fourteen billion years of perseverance in self-fulfillment.[33]

Another way of expressing the point in question is to note that the binomial definition of a species, and hence of the human species as "artful animal"—or, for that matter, as *Homo sapiens*—is a kind of shorthand. It is a definition in the classic form handed down to us by Aristotle and Porphyry, a definition in terms of "genus" and "specific difference." In other words, it first assigns Man to a broader class of beings—the genus *Homo* in the standard biological taxonomy, or the genus *Animalis* in the dialectical-naturalist cosmology expounded herein—and then identifies the characteristic—intelligence or

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[32] I note in passing that Entity too, while the most elemental form of being known to Man, may be regarded as a self-enfoldment of the nameless and formless Dao, the *je ne sais quoi* from which, according to the current consensus of astrophysical cosmology, the Cosmos sprang at the moment of its birth; for further discussion, see Chapter Eight.

[33] "Perseverance in self-fulfillment" is my translation of a philosophical term of art coined by Aristotle: *viz*., *entelecheia*; it is defined in the Glossary and the concept it represents will be discussed below (see esp. Chapters One and Three). The distinction between "natures" and "Nature" (spelt with an initial capital) is also explained in the Glossary, as well as in Chapters One and Six.

artfulness, respectively—that is supposed to distinguish the human species from other members of that genus.

In calling binomial definition shorthand, I mean, of course, that it is an abbreviated form of definition. To appreciate why this should be so, we have to recognize that the concepts of a *genus* and a *species*—like those of *identity* and *difference* (to which, indeed, they are closely related)—are correlative, and that their application varies according to context. Animals, for example, are regarded as comprising a *genus* for the purpose of defining Man. But when our purpose is to define Animal, we shift our taxonomic nomenclature up a notch and consider Animal as a *species* belonging to a broader genus, the genus Organism, and as having a specific difference of its own that sets it apart from other members of that genus. Hence, one's definition of Animal will also be binomial. In Chapter Eleven, I shall explain and defend the definition of an animal as a mindful organism. Recall, however, that I have defined Man as an artful *animal*: it follows that the definition of Animal is, properly speaking, part of the definition of Man. According to a somewhat fuller definition, therefore, a man is a mindful, artful organism. Nor can we halt the process of conceptual development there, for we now see that Organism too belongs to the definition of Man and hence requires a definition of its own. And so on. To cut to the chase, I define an organism as a soulful substance (see Chapter Ten), a substance as a composite entity (see Chapter Nine), and an entity as an operative being (see Chapter Eight). There are thus a total of five natural powers, or what I shall call *forms of agency*—Operation, Composition, Soul, Mind, and Art—the possession of one or more of which makes a thing the kind of thing it is. Each form of agency endows its possessor with a corresponding *degree of freedom*. On our planet at the present time, I argue, Man is unique in possessing all five forms of agency and hence all five degrees of freedom.

I thus arrive at what I take to be the fully expanded definition of Man: Man is the operative, composite, soulful, mindful, artful being.

The reader may forgive my shorthand, then, if she agrees that this would have made an unwieldy title for my book—to say nothing of the fact that adopting it would have meant forfeiting the alliterative effect with which the abbreviated definition is so happily graced.

If anthropology is the study of Man, and if we allow Man her fully expanded definition, it follows that anthropology is precisely what Kant declared it to be: that comprehensive field of inquiry of which the various philosophical sciences are component parts. Its concern is the fivefold nature of Man, and hence not only of Man *qua* Man but also of Man *qua* Animal, *qua* Organism, *qua* Substance, and *qua* Entity. One cannot, therefore, examine the *whole* nature of Man without addressing the concerns of all the philosophical, natural, and social sciences taken together. Such are the deliberations that have obliged me to depart from what began as a project in philosophical anthropology in the narrower sense—already a somewhat disreputable undertaking in the current world of scholarly discourse—and to embark instead on that least modish of intellectual enterprises, an essay in systematic philosophy.

A distrust of "grand narratives," we have been told, is a central theme—even *the* central theme—of our allegedly postmodern age.[34] Now, there is no narrative grander than that told by the philosopher who purports to provide a comprehensive account of thinking and being, of God and Nature, of Man and her world. In point of fact, however, the ill repute in which philosophical systems are held today is nothing new, but has been around for well over a hundred years. They are scarcely less anathema to the phenomenologists, existentialists, structuralists, and poststructuralists of the Continent than to the analytical philosophers of the Anglophone world. Amidst such general skepticism, a claim like Hegel's, to the effect that a system of philosophy is the one form in which Truth can find adequate

[34] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984 [1979]), Introduction.

expression,[35] is more apt to evoke suspicion or bemusement than serious interest, let alone assent. The longstanding vogue has been to favour analysis over synthesis, deconstruction over construction: it has been to chop off bits and pieces of the human experience and subject them to more or less intensive scrutiny without taking the bother to fit them together again.

The principle of fashion, however, or the valorization of novelty for its own sake, is among the least defensible of bourgeois prejudices. It serves the interest of Capital brilliantly, but by the same token it serves the interest of Mankind badly and the interest of Truth not at all. Let us therefore set fashion aside and pause to consider on its merits Hegel's audacious claim that "the True is the Whole."[36] There is, I submit, one condition on which that claim would prove to be justified: namely, that the various goings-on which comprise the world we inhabit should turn out to be interconnected. The goings-on I have in mind include the aforementioned processes of cosmic evolution that generate planets like the Earth and species like *Animalis artifex*, but also the processes of social and cultural evolution that produce anthropic orders like the Capitalist World-System—and then, within that order, such ongoing processes as the accumulation of capital on a global scale; the unprecedented concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few monopolist corporations and the multibillionaires who own controlling shares in them; the propagation of liberal and neoliberal ideologies; the manufacture of consent through totalitarian thought control in the guise of advertising, entertainment, and "news"; the formation of self-centred, consumerist personalities like that of "Bentham's normal man"; the decline of moral, intellectual, aesthetic, and religious values; the endless

[35] "The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth . . . , and only the systematic exposition of philosophy itself provides it": Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977 [1807]), Preface, p. 3.

[36] Ibid., p. 11.

recrudescence of political corruption, racism, imperialism, fascism, and war; the intensified exploitation of labour and natural resources; and the geometrically accellerating catastrophes of global heating and mass extinction. Should these phenomena prove to be interrelated, interactive, and interdependent—a truth I shall venture to establish—then only within a narrative grand enough to encompass all of them can Man hope to comprehend her present impasse. And only the sublime radiance of comprehension can light her way out of it.

It's worth recalling that the original meaning of "apocalypse" is "revelation."

§ 0.4. The Artful Animal, Her Fall from Grace, and Her Hope of Redemption

A few words on the intent of my essay's title and subtitle might not be out of place here.

In calling Man "the artful animal," I do not mean, of course, that her nature is properly on display only when she is painting a still life or playing a Chopin étude. It is true, as the *OED* admits, that "the most usual modern sense of 'art' when used without any qualification [is] the expression or application of creative skill and imagination [in] producing works to be appreciated primarily for their beauty or emotional power." This definition, however, ranks eighth in the *OED*'s order of presentation, and the entry goes on to remark that it "has not been found in English dictionaries until the nineteenth century." In prior centuries, therefore, when the ordinary English speaker used the word "art," she had in mind something different from—something in fact much broader than—what her modern counterpart typically has in mind.[37]

[37] One may note in passing that the subsequent constriction of the word's meaning to embrace only what used to be known as "fine art" is largely due to the Romantic movement, which, with its cult of genius, elevated the popular conception of art to a lofty height inaccessible to ordinary mortals; and that Romanticism was in turn a reaction against the "dark Satanic mills" (to use Blake's

Herein I revert to that older, more expansive definition, whereby "art" refers not only to the fine arts but to the useful arts as well.[38] The latter include agriculture, carpentry, pottery, metallurgy, and so forth—the list lends itself to endless expansion. Perhaps less obviously, but no less importantly, they include the arts of speaking and writing, to say nothing of homemaking and childrearing. And, finally, this antique—though not, indeed, entirely antiquated—concept covered a range of pursuits we moderns scarcely think of as arts at all: namely, the philosophical, mathematical, and empirical sciences—for a science, at bottom, is "an art of inquiry," as Ernest Nagel says.[39] Thus, for the Greek physician Galen, the arts (*technai*) included "medicine, rhetoric, music, geometry, arithmetic, philosophy, astronomy, literature, and jurisprudence."[40]

At this point, an impatient reader might throw up her hands and protest that I've stretched the definition of a common English noun to its breaking point. As Alice said to Humpty Dumpty, "That's a great deal to make one word mean."[41] Humpty Dumpty, however, wanted "impenetrability" to mean a number of things it had never meant before, whereas all I require is that "art" mean once again what it meant to Shakespeare—which, for that matter, is no more and no less than *techne* meant to Sophocles, *ars* meant to Ovid, and *Kunst* meant to

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famous expression) of industrial capitalism, which had largely eliminated craft work and replaced it with a degrading drudgery stripped of any creative element.

[38] Indeed, as late as 1835, a factory could be described as a place where "a number of people co-operate towards a common purpose of art": Andrew Ure, *The Philosophy of Manufactures, or, An Exposition of the Scientific, Moral, and Commercial Economy of the Factory System of Great Britain* (London: Charles Knight, 1835), p. 13.

[39] Ernst Nagel, *The Structure of Science: Problems in the Logic of Scientific Explanation* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961), p. vii.

[40] "Exhortation to the Study of the Arts," quoted in Eric Schatzberg, *Technology: Critical History of a Concept* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[41] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1917 [1871]), p. 100.

Goethe. In this, its original connotation, art is the "human ability to make things; creativity of man as distinguished from the world of nature; skill."[42]

Now, what distinguishes the creativity of man from that of nature is that the former involves imagination and forethought. This is why Kant calls art "production through freedom." As he goes on to explain in his customarily dry, abstract style, "We recognize an art in everything formed in such a way that its actuality must have been preceded by a representation of the thing in its cause."[43] In plain English, the artist had a vision or a concept of the work before she executed it in her chosen medium. I accept Kant's definition of art as production through freedom, with one important qualification. As I've already suggested (in § 0.3), freedom isn't an all-or-nothing affair but a matter of degree. All beings, from atoms to apes, possess freedom in the degrees that typify their species. The freedom of art is the novel, fivefold freedom specific to the human kind.

Remarkably, Kant's definition of art (*Kunst*) coincides exactly with Marx's definition of work (*Arbeit*)—or, more specifically, of "work in a form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic."[44] Before turning to that definition, we should recall that Marx was by no means the first philosopher to take up the question of a form of work specific to human beings. In a famous passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1097b–1098a), Aristotle insists that there must be some work which is proper to Man,[45] that it must differ in some fundamental way from

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[42] *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language*, 2nd college ed.

[43] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith and Nicholas Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 [1790]), § 43, pp. 132–133.

[44] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, pp. 283–284. I'm not the first to have noted this convergence of thinking between Kant and Marx: see, e.g., Kate Soper, "Nature, Art and Artfulness," *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 11, no. 3 (2000): 81–86.

[45] The Greek word for "work," *ergon*, is misleadingly rendered as "function" by many of Aristotle's translators. As Joe Sachs points out: "A function suggests something subordinate: a stomach has a function because it contributes something

the forms of work proper to other species of animals, and that this difference must be what sets Mankind apart from those other species. It is safe to say that Marx shares these convictions with Aristotle.

Where the two thinkers part company is in their respective conceptions of the proper work of Man, and hence in their conceptions of human nature. For Aristotle, "the work of a human being is an activity of the soul in accordance with reason (*logos*)."[46] Now, Marx does not by any means deny that such an intellectual activity, the thinking and imagining that occur within the soul (or, as he would have preferred to say, within the mind), is a necessary condition of that "exclusively human" work which is the subject of his investigation in *Capital*. But he does not consider it a sufficient condition. It is not by thinking and imagining *per se* that Man distinguishes herself from the rest of the animal kingdom. She does so by *making* the things she thinks and imagines, by bringing them into existence in the physical world, by "effecting a change of form in the Natural" (*eine Formveränderung des Natürlichen*). Thus, "At the end of every work process, a result emerges which had already existed in the worker's imagination at the beginning, hence already existed ideally."[47]

I shall have a good deal more to say about the Aristotelian and Marxian concepts of Man in Chapter Two. Here I wish only to remark that the difference between them is far from being of interest to

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necessary to the life of an animal, but what is the animal 'for'?" Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Joe Sachs (Indianapolis: Focus, 2002 [-IV]), "Preface to This Translation," p. vii. It's worth noting that the Greek *ergon* and the English "work" both derive from the same Proto-Indo-European root, -**werg*, meaning "to do," whereas "function" comes from **bhung-*, meaning "to be of use." Surely Aristotle's point was that Man has something specifically human to do, not that she has some specifically human way of being useful.

[46] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1098a, trans. Joe Sachs (Indianapolis: Focus, 2002 [-IV]), p. 11.

[47] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 284. The resonance of Marx's formulation with Kant's "representation of the thing in its cause" is hard to miss.

philosophical anthropologists alone. Rather, it is decisive for our understanding of the existential crises facing Mankind today, the crises of the Anthropocene. To appreciate this we need only compare Man with another species of highly intelligent mammals. As is well known, dolphins possess brains roughly as large and complex as those of human beings; moreover, they produce vocalizations which, upon acoustical analysis, turn out to be scarcely less elaborate or variable than our own. While these facts, in and of themselves, do not prove that dolphins possess cognitive and communicative powers equivalent to those of human beings, they lend that thought at least a modicum of plausibility. Now suppose, for the sake of the argument, that we grant its correctness and, at the same time, grant the correctness of Aristotle's definition of Man as the *zoon logon echon*, the animal that possesses reason and speech (for the Greek word *logos* conveys both those meanings). Combining these two assumptions, we should be obliged to admit that dolphins are human beings. Why, then, has no one thought of characterizing the present epoch as the Delphinocene? Why should it be the case that we humans, together with our livestock, currently account for about ninety-six percent of the mammalian biomass on the planet, while about half of the three dozen or so known species of dolphins are currently endangered, and one seems already to have gone extinct? Surely, the answer is that dolphins are not artful animals, though they may well be rational animals. They may indeed engage in "an activity of the soul in accordance with reason," but they do not thereby "effect a change of form in the Natural." On this little difference hangs the fate of the Earth.

In the present work, I adopt and defend the Marxian concept of Man, although, in place of the clumsy phrase "work in the form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic" (*die Arbeit in einer Form, worin sie dem Menschen ausschließlich angehört*), I revert to the good old English word "art." My thesis is that everything done by a human being *qua* human being is an instance of art, which I define in Marxian terms as the realization in a material medium of an image or concept

that had previously existed ideally in the mind of the artist, or in Kantian terms as production through freedom (with the proviso stated above); that artfulness is therefore the form of agency that distinguishes Man from other natural beings; and that the entire domain in which men have effected various changes of form in the Natural—what is commonly called the domain of "culture," but which I shall prefer to call the Anthroposphere—is constituted of works of art so defined.

Not everything a man does, of course, amounts to production through freedom. When she involuntarily withdraws her hand from a flame, she does so *qua* animal. When she digests her supper, her behavior does not even rise to the animal level, being uninformed by either perception or thought. When she loses her footing and falls to the ground, she interacts gravitationally with the Earth in essentially the same manner as does an inanimate object. But when she performs any action *qua* human being she does so in an artful manner. The action in question may be the sculpting of a statue or the composition of a symphony, but it may equally be the tying of a shoelace, the tending of a garden, the baking of a pie, the building of a house, or the casting of a vote. It may be a speech act, such as ordering a cup of coffee, arguing a case at law, or whispering sweet nothings in a lover's ear. An action need not be beautiful, or honourable, or even lawful in order to qualify as art. Murder, after all, is defined precisely in terms of forethought ("premeditation"): the intent to kill must precede the act of killing. In the case of murder "in the first degree," a design for the accomplishment of the deed must also be formulated in advance. The artless—which is to say unplanned and unintentional—killing of a man is not murder but manslaughter, and the one who executes that act does so not in her *specific capacity* as a man but rather in her *generic capacity* as an aggravated animal; or, in the case of what is known as involuntary manslaughter, in her still more generic capacity as a mere physical thing.

Is artfulness, then, a blessing or a curse? Is its true emblem Prometheus's gift of fire, or Pandora's jar of woes? No sane witness of modern life can any longer doubt that technology—that strange hybrid of *techne* and *logos*, of art and instrumental rationality—is a two-edged sword. The figure which the name Prometheus calls to mind these days is more apt to be Mary Shelley's mad scientist Dr. Frankenstein than Aeschylus's Titanic benefactor of mankind. If we are artful animals, perhaps we ought to be ashamed of ourselves on that score; perhaps human nature is more deserving of blame than praise. This is a question I shall consider in Chapter Two and return to, in greater detail, in Book III.

Briefly, my answer will be as follows. Art was an unmixed blessing, a free gift of the philanthropic Titan, as long as it remained production through freedom for all parties concerned. This condition likely persisted for the entire time that men lived in communities of mobile hunter–gatherers and for a good while thereafter—hence for by far the greater part of Man's sojourn on Earth to date, which is currently reckoned at somewhere between 300,000 and 2,000,000 years, depending on whether one acknowledges the humanity of our species alone or broadens its scope to include earlier representatives of the genus *Homo*.[48] Perhaps ten or twenty thousand years ago, however, by which time only *Homo sapiens* remained extant, some men discovered and began to practice a demonic and self-contradictory artform—namely, the art of exploitation—thus splitting human nature squarely down the middle and setting the dismembered fragments at war with one another. For the essence of that black art was that some men used their artfulness to capture, domesticate, and harness the artfulness of other men, thereby turning those others from ends in themselves into

[48] The imprecision in such estimates derives from the fact that none of the traits commonly regarded as definitive of humanity—rationality, language use, artfulness—is such as to leave direct evidence in the fossil record. Indirect evidence is available, of course, in the form of artifacts found in caves, discovered in archaeological digs, and so forth; however, as a rule of thumb, the greater its age, the greater its ambiguity and the less certain its date.

means for ends that were no longer their own. In so doing, the former often sought to monopolize the ideal moment of art for themselves and their lieutenants while relegating its material moment to those whom they henceforth claimed as their instruments. Thus, in a word, *Man lost her nature*. Thus was she obliged to give up her production through freedom and take up production through slavery in its place. Thus was established that profound rent in the fabric of society which Marx calls "the social division of work," upon which follows "the antithesis between physical and intellectual work."[49] Thus was set in motion the dialectic of lordship and bondage so lucidly described by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Though never without vigorous opposition, it has run its monstrous and inexorable course ever since, piling crime upon crime, indignity upon indignity, outrage upon outrage.

Its ultimate result, realized only around the turn of the present century, is the domination of almost the whole of Mankind by Capital. For Capital is no more and no less than the alienated product of Man's own creative power, rearing itself up on its hind legs to become a power over Man; no more and no less than "dead work that, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living work";[50] no more and no less than the artifact pitting itself against the artist, inexorably draining off her vital energies into its inanimate yet ever-expanding body.

Yet, precisely because the capitalist world-system is the *ultimate* product of the dialectic of divided art, so is that system also its terminus, the end of the line. Having paradoxically unified the globe under its black banner of disunity, Capital has set the stage for its own supersession, the stage on which the ancient Stoic ideal of world citizenship becomes for the first time a realistic political program—on which the red banner of community can finally be raised on behalf of

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[49] "Critique of the Gotha Programme," in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* (hereafter, *MECW*), digital ed., 50 vols. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010 [1835–95]), vol. 24, p. 87.

[50] Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, ch. 10: "The Working Day," p. 342.

all Mankind. Therefore, dear reader, we need not—must not—end our journey at this present midnight, this nadir of the human adventure. Let us instead regard the gloom in which we find ourselves enveloped as the darkness that portends the dawn.

This brings us to the work's subtitle, "Human Nature in Retrospect and Prospect," which might likewise do with an explanatory word or two. In the first place, as should be evident by now, "human nature" is intended in full earnest, without the slightest admixture of postmodernist irony. Resolutely, unapologetically, I affirm and defend the position that natural kinds are real, not socially constructed; that their definitions are a matter of scientific research, not of anybody's preference or convenience, whether individual or collective; that the real (as opposed to nominal) definition of a natural kind is that which states its true nature or essence; and that Man is a natural kind whose real definition, "the artful animal," is the true statement of her nature or essence.

In the second place, the phrase "in retrospect and prospect" has a dual sense. Read programmatically, it promises a treatment of human nature that takes account of both its past and its future. The retrospective study presented herein takes us as far back as today's scientific cosmology can reach, which is approximately fourteen billion years: to the emergence of onefold being and the first degree of freedom, which is the freedom of operation; the prospective, as far forward as the philosophy of Dialectical Naturalism can venture: to the consummation of the Anthropic Revolution in the Egalitarian World-Community, antechamber to the divine Realm of Love.

But the subtitle can also be read in another sense, as a gloss on the title. For it belongs to the very nature of the artful animal to engage in retrospection and prospection, to exercise hindsight and foresight, the former in virtue of her animality and the latter in virtue of her artfulness. Like other animals, Man is endowed with Mind and thus enjoys the fourth degree of freedom, which confers on her, among other things, the ability to perceive present realities and to remember

past ones. Unlike other animals, however, she also enjoys freedom in the fifth degree, the freedom of Art: she is able to imagine future realities and bring them into being. Unlike the merely animal life, therefore, her life becomes a series of projects consciously and deliberately pursued—projects which, as she perseveres in her self-fulfillment, she increasingly seeks to integrate into a single project. All animals live in a present informed by their past; men alone live in the light of a future they envision, hope for, and strive to realize. And the same is true of Mankind as a whole, whose wisdom traditions, both Eastern and Western, both theistic and non-theistic, commonly include narratives of loss and redemption.

Hegel famously denied that philosophy can have anything meaningful to say about the future: "The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the coming of dusk."[51] But he, like Aristotle, was content to define Man as a thinking animal, whereas the definition adopted herein implies that Man not only thinks but thinks ahead. Significantly, the name Prometheus, which the Greeks gave to the god whose gift of art rescued the newly created human race from certain death by hunger and exposure, means "forethought" (*promethes*). Man is by nature a future-oriented being, and I therefore hold that no philosophy of Man and her world which lacks an eschatology can claim to be comprehensive or systematic. Moreover, since the artful animal is a prospective animal, the human prospect can never be entirely bleak. If Mankind is currently divided against herself, she may yet reclaim her integrity—indeed, may yet achieve a wholeness surpassing any she has enjoyed heretofore. If Man has lost her nature, *she can find it again*.

[51] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen W. Wood, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 [1821]), Preface, p. 23.

§ 0.5. The Inquiry's Guiding Lights and Method of Procedure

I have argued that systematic philosophy is necessary; it remains to show that it is also possible. The construction of a comprehensive philosophical system is no doubt an ambitious enterprise. If it were an enterprise one were obliged to undertake singlehanded, as a lone inquirer starting from scratch, it would indeed be a hopeless one. I for one, however, see no point in rejecting the wisdom of the ages in order to attempt a fresh start—unless perhaps the point were a rather infantile show of contempt for authority. Indeed, I count it a stroke of luck to be an amateur in philosophy—my formal academic training was in history—and thus exempt from the pressures that induce so many professional philosophers endlessly to reinvent the wheel. But this avant-gardist disposition attended modern philosophy at its birth and hence long predates the current institutional imperative to publish or perish. It was, in my estimation, a dark day when thinkers like Descartes and Bacon resolved to turn their backs on Aristotle and the Scholastics, dismissing out of hand the teachings that had nourished the best minds of two civilizations, the Islamic and the Christian, for centuries on end. Consider, for example, what the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce has to say on the subject:

> The most striking characteristic of medieval thought is the importance attributed to authority. It was held that authority and reason were two coördinate methods of arriving at truth, and far from holding that authority was secondary to reason, the scholastics were much more apt to place it quite above reason. . . . It follows naturally that originality of thought was not greatly admired, but that on the contrary the admirable mind was his who succeeded in interpreting consistently the dicta of Aristotle, Porphyry, and Boethius. Vanity, therefore, the vanity of cleverness, was a vice from which the schoolmen were remarkably free. . . . [Consequently, they] remind us less of the philosophers of our day than of the men of science. I do not hesitate to say that scientific men now think much

> more of authority than do metaphysicians; for in science a question is not regarded as settled or its solution as certain until all intelligent and informed doubt has ceased and all competent persons have come to a catholic agreement, whereas [modern] metaphysicians . . . have what seems an absurd disregard for others' opinions.[52]

In short, too much of what passes for philosophy in our time evinces not so much a love of wisdom as an infatuation with cleverness; and the low esteem in which philosophers, as compared to natural scientists, are now held, may in large measure be chalked up to the intellectual swagger and oneupmanship which that infatuation tends to encourage. To my dismay, the Anglophone academy seems especially prone to this disease. Its productions too often tend to innovate to no apparent end, to introduce concepts and distinctions so subtle as to be scarcely intelligible, to arrive at outlandish conclusions apparently *pour épater les bourgeois*, to display an adolescent predilection for horror-movie imagery, to bristle with technical terms and symbols inscrutable to the layman, and to distance themselves as remotely as possible from the concerns of everyday life. Frankly, they bore me to tears.

I freely confess that I am neither equipped nor inclined to construct a novel or ingenious "philosophy" (so called, though "ideology" would be the more accurate term). Neither have I any need to do so, however, for my aims are at once more serious and more plebeian. Like Aristotle, I believe that "all men desire and reach out for knowledge." We are all lovers of wisdom at heart, and if mundane concerns necessarily prevent the common man from pursuing her beloved as ardently and persistently as does the professional philosopher, her goal is nonetheless the same: to comprehend herself and her world well enough that she may lead a meaningful, purposive, benevolent, and happy life. It isn't a special, mysterious, or esoteric doctrine that she seeks but rather the cumulative wisdom of Mankind,

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[52] Charles Sanders Peirce, "The Spirit of Scholasticism," in *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, vol. 1, §§ 30–32, *Past Masters* (online database), n.d.

as this has been disclosed, refined, and passed down to us from the sages of every era and every continent.

I thus take up the task at hand with some measure of confidence, knowing that most of the heavy lifting which might otherwise be incumbent upon me was accomplished long before my time. Moreover, the complaint I have just registered against modern scholars notwithstanding, their industriousness, combined with today's information technology, has placed nearly the entire wisdom of the West, along with a good deal of the wisdom of the East and the South, at my disposal (albeit, in view of my personal limitations, almost wholly in translation). A glance at the Bibliography will document the extensive use I have made of philosophical and scientific literature both ancient and modern. But I have leaned most heavily upon the work of three illustrious predecessors, who thus deserve the honour of being acknowledged in these introductory remarks. The first two, Aristotle and G. W. F. Hegel, I take to be the greatest thinkers of ancient and modern Europe, respectively. Each constructed a comprehensive philosophy that stands as a timeless model of coherence, balance, and profundity, and one could do worse than devote one's life to the study of either, as the careers of hundreds of living scholars attest. My third chief mentor, Karl Marx, was by no means as encyclopedic a thinker as those two, but what he lacked in breadth he made up in the depth and detail of his investigation of the subject which I too have made my central concern—that is, human nature.[53]

[53] Having acknowledged these intellectual debts, I must at once add that I lay no claim to professional expertise in the study of Aristotle, Hegel, or Marx—nor, for that matter, of any other of the numerous authorities, ancient, medieval, and modern, whom I cite herein. Fortunately, no such expertise is required for the task at hand, since my purpose throughout is constructive rather than exegetical. Where exegesis may be wanted, I provide references to the secondary works I've found most useful, nearly all of them produced by scholars better qualified for that enterprise than I pretend to be.

If I thus confess to drawing my inspiration chiefly from the Western tradition, or rather from certain strands of that tradition, this is not because I think the West uniquely graced with knowledge or wisdom. Very shortly, in fact, in Chapter One, the reader will find me enlisting the aid of a number of ancient and medieval Chinese sages in expounding what is undoubtedly the central ontological concept of this work: that of dialectical self-development. The fact remains, however, that the West is my home, and hence the Western tradition, derived ultimately from the ancient Greeks and Hebrews, happens to be the one in which I was brought up, which is most readily accessible to me, and with which, therefore, I am most intimately and extensively acquainted. Some degree of cultural provincialism seems inescapable so long as the human condition remains what it is; whoever claims to be entirely free of it is probably fooling herself. To be sure, the consequences of ethnocentricity have frequently been underestimated, insofar as they have been admitted at all. Thus, Aristotle saw fit to dismiss barbarians—which is to say, non-Greeks—as generally slavish and ignorant, while Hegel found it convenient to class Asia and Africa as intellectual backwaters which the *Weltgeist* (World Spirit), on its westward journey, had long since left behind.

These days, however, the educated public is perhaps as likely to exaggerate the effect of cultural bias as to downplay it. From the fact that men of various ethnicities seek truth along different lines, it does not necessarily follow that they arrive at different truths; lines of inquiry may, after all, converge. As the Chinese philosopher Cheng Yi put it, "There are thousands of paths and tracks that lead to the capital, yet one can enter it if she has found just one way."[54] Thus, while I differ from Aristotle or Hegel in that I regard the cultural circumscription of my knowledge as a shortcoming rather than an advantage, this does not prevent me from advancing claims intended

[54] "Selected Sayings," in Wing-Tsit Chan, ed. and trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 557.

to be universally applicable—as, indeed, any truth claim must do in order to avoid undermining itself (as we shall see in Chapter Four). To the extent that what I write proves adequate to the reality it undertakes to describe or explain, it ought to be as true for a student of Confucius as for a student of Socrates, as true for a Muslim or a Buddhist as for a Christian or a Jew. Conversely, should it turn out that what I say cannot equally be expressed in an Asian, African, or Aboriginal idiom, then I am the first to admit that it is subject to revision or qualification on that score alone (if not, indeed, on others as well).

I am well aware, however, given the uncharitable, often cynical intellectual climate of our time, that nothing is so apt to raise hackles as the truth claims of dead white waymen like Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx. Let's take a moment, therefore, to consider the viewpoint of the dead white wayman whose writings most faithfully reflect, as well as inform, that climate: I refer to Michel Foucault. The context of the remark I shall cite was Foucault's famous debate with Noam Chomsky, held in the Netherlands in 1971, on the topics of human nature and the prospects for radical social change. Chomsky had argued that "any serious social science or theory of social change must be founded on some concept of human nature."[55] Here is Foucault's reply:

> Notions of human nature, of justice, of the realization of the essence of human beings, are all notions and concepts which have been formed within our civilization, within our type of knowledge and our form of philosophy, and that as a result form part of our class system; and . . . one can't, however regrettable it may be, put forward these

[55] Quoted in Peter Wilkin, "Chomsky and Foucault on Human Nature and Politics: An Essential Difference?" *Social Theory and Practice* 25, no. 2 (1999): 177–210, p. 177.

> notions to describe or justify a fight which should—and shall in principle—overthrow the very fundaments of our society.[56]

I can't fault the premises of this little argument, which belong to the ABC of Marxian epistemology. Ideas arise within specific social contexts; and, when those contexts exhibit the stigmata of class division, the ideas that arise are likely to bear the same stigmata. From such sober premises, however, Foucault derives a conclusion whose dizzying radicality is perhaps best understood in its historical context, the latter being comprised of two dramatic events. First, the student-worker revolt of May 1968 in Paris, accompanied by like-minded protests and uprisings in capitals around the world, had opened prospects many leftists understandably found enticing; secondly, Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution, then in full swing, proved still more bewitching to the radical intelligentsia, since it seemed to promise them an important, even decisive role in the globe-girdling social revolution many thought imminent at the time.

Clearly, the revolution contemplated by Foucault (or by Mao, for that matter) wasn't intended so much to resolve the contradictions of the existing social order as to extirpate that order altogether, presumably—though Foucault is silent on this point—in the expectation that something better might then fill the resultant void. To ensure that the void would be as complete as possible, the revolutionaries were to empty their heads of "our type of knowledge"; whether they might avail themselves of some other type of knowledge (and, if so, how they might set about attaining it) Foucault didn't say. The little question of who was to educate the educators, broached by Marx in his Theses on Feuerbach, apparently didn't trouble him overmuch.

The choice Foucault offers us is stark. With respect to the intellectual fruits of "our civilization," we seem to have but two options: abstain entirely or devour the whole enchilada. The

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[56] Arnold I. Davidson, ed., *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 140.

possibility that the Western tradition might have virtues as well as vices, that "our form of philosophy" might yield insights as well as distortions and misconceptions, is not entertained. Like Marx, Foucault seems to believe that the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas; unlike Marx, however, he seems to believe also that the ideas of the ruling class are the *only* ideas. More specifically, he seems to regard Western "notions of human nature, of justice, of the realization of the essence of human beings" as much of a muchness, all equally tainted by "our class system" and thus equally useless to those who would oppose that system.

In Chapter Two below, I take exception to that view. I there argue that the concept of human nature most widely held by Western intellectuals since the time of Plato and Aristotle, that of Man as the rational animal, is indeed flawed; that its flaw is a distortion inherent in the perspective its authors, which is in turn a consequence of their comparatively privileged class position; and that this distorted concept, in our own day as much as in theirs, owes much of its currency to the fact that it lends credence to an inegalitarian system of class rule. So far, so Foucauldian. However, I then go on to argue that an alternative concept, that of Man as the artful animal, is no less a product of the Western tradition; that it is, if anything, more deeply embedded in that tradition than is the rationalist concept, at least in a temporal sense, since it was known to Plato and Aristotle and rejected by them; that this other concept of human nature, however, neither reflects the biases nor serves the interests of any ruling class; and that, *pace* Foucault, it may therefore provide the basis of what Chomsky rather innocuously calls a "theory of social change."

For a perspective on the value of the philosophical tradition which is more balanced than Foucault's, one might in fact turn to that most levelheaded of Greek thinkers, Aristotle himself, his defective anthropology notwithstanding:

> No one is able to attain the truth adequately, while, on the other hand, no one fails entirely, but everyone says something true about

> the nature of things, and while individually they contribute little or nothing to the truth, by the union of all a considerable amount is amassed. [Moreover,] it is right that we should be grateful, not only to those with whose views we may agree, but also to those who have expressed more superficial views; for these also contributed something, by developing before us the powers of thought.[57]

True to his word, Aristotle begins his treatment of just about any philosophical problem on which he fixes his attention by considering what his predecessors had to say about it. And his own contribution—which, false modesty aside, seldom if ever amounts to "little or nothing"—is more often a refinement of their ideas than a wholesale repudiation of them. As Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, it was Aristotle who initiated this scholarly approach to the philosophical enterprise:

> Aristotle was the first philosopher to cherish books and reading. He believed that all genuine philosophy is commentary—on the texts of the "wise" and on the data of our ordinary speech. Throughout his career, he defended commentary against the claims of those who insisted that the philosopher ought to seek a mystical revelation that would set him apart from the common man.[58]

As Nussbaum suggests, we do well to follow Aristotle's lead in this regard.

When a writer fails to acknowledge the sources of her ideas to her readers, she commits the familiar sin of plagiarism. Less familiar but more damaging, however, is the sin of failing to acknowledge them to herself, for this places her at the mercy of sources that necessarily escape her scrutiny or criticism altogether. If our aim is, in Aristotle's

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[57] *Metaphysics*, 993a–b, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984 [-IV]), vol. 2, p. 1569.

[58] Aristotle and Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium: Text with Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978 [-IV]), p. xvi.

words, to attain a more adequate truth than that which we have inherited from our predecessors, then our best bet is to engage with them in a critical yet constructive dialogue, recognizing that in their efforts "to say something true about the nature of things" they have, in all likelihood, not "failed entirely." Indeed, "constructive criticism" is not a bad definition of the Aristotelian dialectic, or of the philosophical project as practiced by Aristotle; whereas, on the other hand, a one-sidedly destructive criticism—or, worse still, "an absurd disregard for others' opinions" (Peirce)—is necessarily self-defeating. The man who would see through everything must end up seeing nothing at all.

Which brings me to my second comment on Foucault's reply to Chomsky: I would like to know the standpoint from which he contrives to formulate his critique. Upon what ladder has Foucault climbed up to that high vantage where he stands aloof from "our type of knowledge and our form of philosophy"? It is surely incoherent to argue, on the one hand, that realist and essentialist positions are rooted in Western traditions of thought and hence tainted by their association with the hierarchical structure of Western civilization, and, on the other hand, that nominalist and antiessentialist positions remain free of any such unwholesome connection. To sustain such a distinction would require some further argument that Foucault neglects to provide, perhaps to the effect that the intellectual efforts of essentialists like Aristotle, Hegel, and Marx somehow lend support to "our class system" whereas those of nominalists like Ockham, Hume, and Quine are better suited to the purposes of men wishing to "overthrow the very fundaments of our society."[59] But such a claim would of course be patently absurd. Not only would it implausibly place Marx on the side of the establishment and Hume on the side of

[59] Readers who are surprised to find Foucault labeled a nominalist and lumped together with Hume and Quine are invited to consult Carrie Hull's persuasive argument in *The Ontology of Sex: A Critical Inquiry into the Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Categories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 23–53.

revolution, it would fly in the face of the entire intellectual history of the modern era, during which nominalism and empiricism have been in the ascendant while realism and essentialism have been obliged to file the minority report.

None of this, of course, is to deny Foucault his grain of truth, which bears repeating: ideas do arise within given social contexts, and the stamp of their origin remains indelibly fixed upon them. Now, Aristotle happens to have been a slave-owning courtier, Hegel a bourgeois professor. Progressives in philosophy, they were moderate conservatives in politics, for each seems to have regarded the social order obtaining in his own time and place as the best—or, at any rate, as a tolerably close approximation to the best—to which men might ever aspire. For Aristotle, the Greek city-state was the mature, completed form of human association, the final product of its natural development through the prior stages of household and village.[60] For Hegel, *mutatis mutandis*, the advent of the modern republic or constitutional monarchy marked Man's arrival at the endpoint of her "progress in the consciousness of freedom," history's inner meaning and ultimate goal.[61] In short, each of these privileged waymen was at pains to vindicate the social system that had allowed him to thrive and prosper. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that elements of their respective philosophies may appropriately be described as apologetics for the status quo—although, to give them their due, these apologetics were nuanced and critical. Thus, unusually for his time, Aristotle held that slavery resulting from conquest was unjust, although this did not prevent him from arguing that another form of slavery resulted from natural inequalities between men and was therefore not merely acceptable but beneficial for all parties concerned. Similarly, while Hegel mounted an insightful critique of

[60] *Politics*, book 1, chap. 2.

[61] Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History. Introduction: Reason in History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975 [1822–1830]), p. 54.

modern "civil society" for fostering poverty and inequality, he nonetheless claimed that these contradictions were (at least in principle) resolved in the liberal republic or constitutional monarchy, where citizens, rich and poor alike, supposedly recognized each other as free and equal.[62]

In the case of Marx, however, we encounter a beast of a different colour. In his view, history was not only not over, it had barely begun. The modern (which is to say, capitalist) social order was at best a point of departure, while Man's point of arrival, her self-fulfillment in the form of "free individuality," lay as yet in the future. Hence, unlike Hegel or Aristotle, Marx consciously opted to throw in his lot with the underdogs, lending his very considerable intellectual powers to the struggle of the working class against its oppressors. And yet the same Marx—who abominated every form of slavery, vigorously championing the cause of the North in the American Civil War,[63] and who dismissed Hegel's political philosophy as "pantheistic mysticism"[64]—this same Marx paid homage to Aristotle as "the great thinker who was the first to analyse so many forms . . . of thought,

[62] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*. Marx counters Hegel's argument in his "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State (1843)," in *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (London: Penguin Books, 1975 [1843–44]).

[63] August H. Nimtz, Jr., *Marx, Toqueville, and Race in America: The "Absolute Democracy" or "Defiled Republic"* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003).

[64] Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State (1843)," in *Early Writings*, p. 61.

society, and Nature,"[65] and to Hegel as another "mighty thinker" whose tutelage Marx "openly avowed."[66]

To my endorsement of Aristotle and Hegel, I thus append the following caveat. While I firmly believe that we have much to gain from the mentorship of these two deep and powerful thinkers, I do not argue that we should adopt either of their philosophical systems uncritically. Each stands in need of extensive revision, not only for the ideological reason I have just mentioned but for two still more obvious reasons. Firstly, no individual, however wise or perceptive, can wholly transcend the perspectival limitations of her time and place; nor, secondly, can she be expected to anticipate the results of research conducted in subsequent times. The way to make progress in systematic philosophy, however, is not to reject Aristotelianism and Hegelianism root and branch, but rather to think further what Aristotle and Hegel already thought so well—just as they, indeed, were quite explicit in working through and carrying further the ideas of their own intellectual forebears.

My mention of perspectival limitations will likely have put some readers on their guard, so I should perhaps pause a moment to expand upon what I have in mind. To apprehend the world from a particular, and therefore limited, perspective is at once the gift bestowed and the penalty imposed on every finite mind. Charity obliges us to recognize the equal validity of all perspectives, in the sense that every apprehension a man reports in good faith is no more and no less than any of us would apprehend in the event that we shared her perspective (among the ingredients of which, for the sake of the argument, I

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[65] *Capital*, vol. 1, "Afterword to the Second German Edition," in Marx and Engels, MECW, vol. 35, p. 19. Hegel, incidentally, had paid homage to Aristotle in similarly lavish terms: "Most of the philosophical sciences have to render thanks to him both for their characterization and first commencement." *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 [1805–1830]), vol. 2, p. 118.

[66] *Capital*, vol. 1, in Marx and Engels, MECW, vol. 35, the chapter on "Commodities," p. 69.

include her social position, her cultural and educational background, her perceptual and cognitive faculties, and her memories and other accumulated intellectual resources). It does not oblige us, however, to recognize the equality of perspectives in *every* sense. She who stands upon a mountaintop, which affords views in every direction, sees more of the surrounding countryside than she who stands upon the mountain's shoulder, which affords a view in one direction only. Analogously, she whose experience and education have acquainted her with a greater variety of ideas comprehends a broader swath of reality than she who has learned a lesser variety. Some perspectives, then, are more comprehensive than others; more properly speaking, perhaps, some perspectives are comprehensive *of* a number of other perspectives—and in exceptional cases, such as that of a major systematic philosopher, the number can be large and the breadth and depth of comprehension correspondingly great.

Now, it is possible, though not very easy, to imagine that the course of human development might have proceeded in a perfectly tranquil and equitable manner; that men might have broadened their perspectives in a similarly egalitarian fashion; that they might gradually have improved their skills and knowledge without entering into the agonistic social relations that made some the masters of others; that all might thus have enjoyed in roughly equal measure—albeit, undoubtedly, a very modest measure at first—the liberation from necessity that leisure and material security afford, rather than that the few should have attained that liberation all at once at the expense of the many. Such a speculative fancy is not altogether idle, and I shall have occasion to revisit it briefly in Chapters Twelve and Thirteen; we all recognize, however, that it is counterfactual. Throughout recorded history, the opportunity to devote any considerable portion of one's energies to philosophical argument, scientific research, or theological reflection has been the privilege of the few; and modern society, while it certainly possesses the technical capacity to remedy that injustice, has yet to muster the requisite

political will. The privileged position of the intelligentsia is, of course, no secret, and Aristotle and Hegel, for their parts, made no bones about it: the former observed that science (in particular, the science of mathematics) had arisen first in Egypt "because there the priestly caste was allowed to live in leisure";[67] and the latter spent decades jockeying for a professorship at a leading university, knowing that this would enable him to pursue his intellectual project relatively unencumbered by extraneous obligations.[68]

Here, then, is a question. Suppose that Man's goal is to develop her arts and sciences, and suppose that in approaching her goal she chooses to adopt the social division of work. That is to say, she chooses to allow a few men—almost exclusively waymen, as it happens (for reasons we shall address in Chapter Fifteen)—to specialize in intellectual work, while obliging a large majority of waymen and almost all women to specialize in manual work. Well, does this amount to a shortcut or a detour? Compared to the slow but steady progress offered by the egalitarian route, is it a more direct avenue to Man's self-fulfillment, or a more circuitous one? I can only reply that the either/or form of the question is misleading: the true answer is surely both/and. For if we combine a direct, linear approach with a circular, roundabout one, what do we get but the spiral or "vortex" that Hegel once offered up as the true figure of the Dialectic?[69] By adopting a dialectical perspective, then, we may decline the false alternative of regarding an epoch-making achievement in philosophy *either* as God's final truth *or* as mere elitist propaganda. We may justly regard a flawed rationality as better than a flawless irrationality,

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[67] *Metaphysics*, 981b, in *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 1553. In his Greater Logic, Hegel cites this passage from Aristotle, adding the comment, "Indeed, the need to occupy oneself with pure thoughts presupposes a long road that the human spirit must have traversed": *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010 [1831]), Preface to the Second Edition, p. 14.

[68] For an account of Hegel's life that is as engaging as it is scholarly, see Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[69] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, p. 346.

imperfect knowledge as preferable to perfect ignorance. If not a good place to finish, it's at least a good place to start. Indeed, since we do not inherit the egalitarian history imagined above, it's the only place.

§ 0.6. The Lay of the Land: An Overview

The reader who knows her Hegel may notice that my book is organized in a manner vaguely reminiscent of his tripartite *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.[70] Book I, Dialectical Naturalism, addresses several of the topics Hegel dealt with in the first part of the *Encyclopedia*, although it does not assume anything like the form of his inimitable *Science of Logic*.[71] Book II, Dialectical Cosmology, corresponds roughly in its subject matter to the *Encyclopedia's* second part, the *Philosophy of Nature*; and Book III, Dialectical Anthropology, covers much of the ground Hegel covered in his *Philosophy of Spirit*, which forms the third and final part of his *Encyclopedia*.

Like Hegel, I have no doubt sought to give my work as logical an order of presentation as lies within my power; unlike him, however, I

[70] First published in 1817, with revised editions issued in 1827 and 1830, the *Encyclopedia* is the only work in which Hegel presented his philosophical system in its entirety. Unfortunately, since the *Encyclopedia* was chiefly intended as a handbook for his students, it takes the form of a brief outline, condensed to the point of being highly esoteric, of the subject matter upon which he elaborated in his lectures. Following his death, Hegel's editors fleshed out the *Encyclopedia* by adding material from his lecture notes and from notes taken by his students, thus expanding each of the *Encyclopedia*'s three parts to book length. Each is now available in multiple English translations; those I have cited are listed in the Bibliography.

[71] *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*) was the name Hegel gave both to the first part of the *Encyclopedia* and to a separate work in which he treated the subject at greater length. Informally, the former is often called the Lesser Logic and the latter the Greater Logic, while the phrase "Hegel's Logic" refers indiscriminately to either or both. To date, no one has yet ventured to imitate the monumental task Hegel set himself in his Logic, even though he confessed to having accomplished it only very imperfectly.

do not pretend that the order is wholly and strictly necessitated by the material.

To make the architecture of the work as transparent as possible, I open each of my three Books with an introductory chapter in which I set out, in what is admittedly a rather dogmatic form, the subject matter of which the Book's remaining chapters will endeavour to provide a more detailed and comprehensive account. Note, however, that I speak here of an account rather than of an argument or a proof. As we shall see in Chapter One, the conclusions attained in a dialectical study do not admit of infallible demonstration. A nice, knockdown argument of the sort analytic thinkers find so irresistible must stand or fall on the strength of the premises that form its ground. For the dialectician, however, the ground floor of any science, like the ground level of the reality it investigates, is perhaps the least reliable and certainly the least interesting; for it is necessarily the level that has undergone the least dialectical development and is therefore at the farthest possible remove from the truth. A man at the moment of her conception, the moment when egg meets sperm, isn't really or truly a man; she's a potentially human being, but not yet an actually human one. Just so, the universe at its inception in the Big Bang is only a possible universe, not yet a real one. And so too, the foundational principles of a system of philosophy aren't the philosophy itself but only its abstract condition of possibility. Whether in the sphere of Nature or in the sphere of human thought and discourse, the actualization of potentiality is always a work in progress, never a *fait accompli*. That, in a nutshell, is what dialectical self-development is all about.

The reader will forgive me, therefore, if I don't proceed in the tidy, geometrical manner of a Euclid or a Descartes, grounding my investigation in some indubitable first principle or principles and claiming to derive an airtight argument from them methodically, step by step—if I don't begin at the beginning, as it were. Indeed, I freely admit that I begin my grand narrative somewhere *in medias res*, for that

is where I encounter my subject, Man. A man is, after all, a middling sort of creature: larger than an atom by about as many orders of magnitude as she is smaller than a galaxy. She lives on a middling planet, the Earth; which orbits a middling star, the Sun; which occupies a middling galaxy, the Milky Way. Turning from space to time, man finds herself once again in an intermediate position, for she has made her entrance onto the cosmic stage very nearly in the middle of the Sun's evolutionary lifetime (as a main-sequence star), which in turn falls somewhere in the middle of the Milky Way's evolutionary lifetime (as an actively star-forming galaxy).

Beginning in the middle is often frowned upon, of course. A story is supposed to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, and the teller is well advised to stick to that order. I, at any rate, confess to a strong preference for narratives that conform to the standard convention, finding little to recommend the contemporary habit of telling one's tale mainly in flashbacks and flashforwards. Yet I begin my own narrative, as I have said, in the middle. Book I is devoted to Man, the intermediate being *par excellence*—although it is, admittedly, the generic or essential Man, Man in the abstract, to whom our attention is there turned. In other words, these first six chapters investigate "human nature in general"—which is to say, artful animality in its synchronic aspect—and the windows artfulness opens on Reality, Truth, Value, and Nature. The upshot of the investigation is Dialectical Naturalism, a philosophical perspective in which Nature appears as the dynamic, creative process of her own self-fulfillment—and in which we humans appear as characters in that very drama, having roles to play that are partly scripted and partly open to improvisation.[72] Book II then flashes back some fourteen billion years to the drama's opening scene, proceeding to recount a dialectical-

[72] Cf. Marx's oft-quoted dictum: "Men make their own history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing." *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *MECW Collected Works*, digital ed., 50 vols. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2010 [1835–95]), vol. 11, p. 103.

naturalist history of the Cosmos from its earliest conceivable moment to the time when the first artful animals appeared on our planet. In other words, Book II is concerned, as its subtitle has it, with "How Nature Found Her Humanity"—the manner in which freedom in the fifth degree came to planet Earth. Finally, Book III takes up where Book II leaves off, recounting the history of Man from the Paleolithic to the present, its subject being "human nature as historically modified" during the major epochs of that history. If Book II views human nature in cosmological retrospect, then, the four middle chapters of Book III view it in historical retrospect, being concerned with how fifth-degree freedom undermined itself; how art became alienated from the artist; in a word, "How Man Lost Her Nature." Finally, Chapter Eighteen considers "How She Can Find It Again," opening a final window on human nature in prospect: on Man's perseverance in self-fulfillment, her escape from alienation, and her recovery of anthropic freedom—the freedom of art—this time on a global scale. For this last window is also a door, one that yields entrance to the Egalitarian World-Community, and thus to the only future worth hoping and striving for.