

[CN] Jianqi Wu**Contact Information**

Address: President Room of Hebei University of Economics and Business, No. 47
Xuefu Road, Shijiazhuang, Hebei Telephone: 0311-87655503(office) 87665186(family)

Fax:

Mobile: 13832111057

Email Address: wujianqi126@126.com wjq@heuet.edu.cn

Zip code : 050061

Homepage:

Wu Jianqi—professor and vice-president of Hebei University of Economics and Business, --has mainly area of research has been “Capital”, property right theory and other related topics. At the same time, his concern has been for academic standards and college theory. He published two papers in “Economic Research Journal” independently and taken charge of issues of the National Education Ministry “inter-provincial competitive study”. One paper, “Raising Problem During Tutoring, Obtaining Solutions in Scientific Research,” was once granted the First Prize of Excellent Teaching Achievement of Hebei Province; his textbook, “Economics,” was granted the Eminent Textbook Award. Professor Wu has received the Second Award of Excellent Achievement of Hebei Social Science three times independently, and his opinions have been reprinted, cited, commented, consulted, and copied by many times. “Hebei Daily” once reported the academic activities of Professor Wu under the title of "Wu Jianqi Phenomenon ".

Class-Affiliated Man: The Assumption Of Human Nature in Marxism Economics

[CN] Jianqi Wu

Abstract: “Economic theory has suffered in the past from a failure to state clearly its assumptions. (Coase)” The assumption of human nature is a basic assumption in economics. What the assumption is, however, determines what the economic theory and policies are. The assumption of human nature made in Marxism economics has hierarchy: human beings are an ensemble of all social relationships on a philosophical level; human beings are the personifications of economic categories on an economical level; human beings are a “class-affiliated man” on an economical level in a class society. It is the differences between the “Economic man” and “class-affiliated man” that leads to the divergent views between Marxism economics and bourgeoisie economics.

1 . The important role of the assumption of human nature

The assumption of human nature is the precondition of economics. R. H. Coase said: “Economic theory has suffered in the past from a failure to state clearly its assumptions. Economists in building up a theory have often omitted to examine the foundations on which it was erected.” The assumption of human nature is one of “the foundations on which it was erected”¹. Economics studies the relationship among people engaging in economic activity;

1 R. H. Coase. The Nature of the Firm.

it is a science about how humans make decisions. So, economists must first make assumptions concerning human nature in order to build an economics system. Only after making such assumptions about human nature, are economists able to explore the behaviors and laws of human beings.

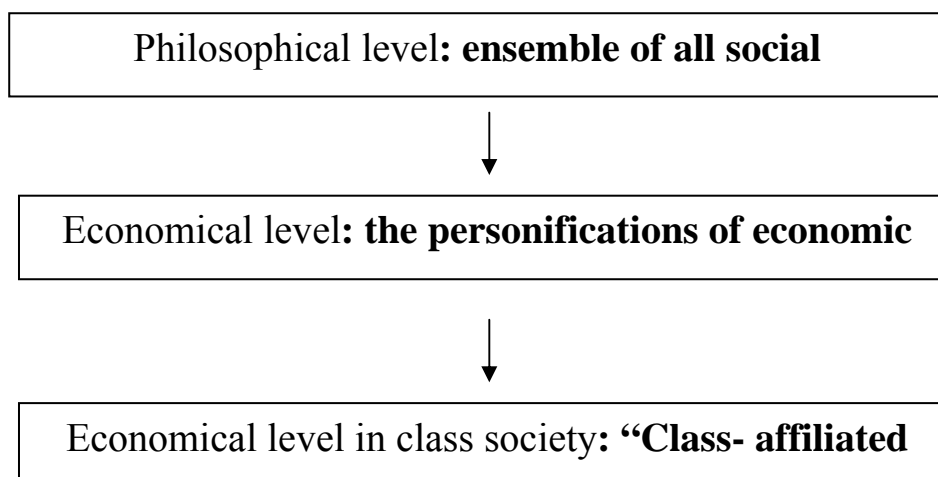
On one hand, one particular assumption of human nature determines the human “property style” which this particular economic theory researches. Drawing from the diversity of people in real life, the assumption of one particular nature is helpful for the study of economic theory. It is because of differing assumptions about human nature that different economic theories were developed.

On the other hand, one particular assumption of human nature excludes the assumptions about human nature. This assumption enriched the study of human behavior under one particular assumption, while also losing the diversity resident in human nature. A particular assumption about human nature restricts the ability to interpret different economic behaviors. In fact, it fails to interpret some behaviors outside of the particular assumption.

It is necessary to point out here that the assumption of human nature is very significant for the development of economic theories. But this significance is only methodological; it is not epistemological or normative. An assumption about the human situation is the jumping-off point of logic, but it is not “positive”; it only emphasizes what human nature is. It does not explain why it is so, nor to give value to the judgment. The human assumption does not explore what is the nature of the reality that people should have, nor does it advocate or rebuild one particular view of human nature.

2 . Human nature in general: “Human being is the ensemble of all social relationships ”

Marx argued to his human assumption after he criticized the human assumption of bourgeoisie. The Marxism assumption of human nature has the logic levels of below:



The Marxism human assumption is completely different than the “Economic man” human assumption of the bourgeoisie philosophy. The different assumptions have differing theoretical economic bases, and lead to differing economic policies.

Mr. Yu Zuyao has mentioned Marx’s denial of the “economic man” hypothesis, but he does not point out what hypothesis Marx did argue. He said: “Inheriting the labor theory of value created by classical economics, being guided by historical materialism, Marx created the proletarian economics. He opposed the “Economic man” hypothesis. He explored the laws of human being in society”¹

Marx criticized the “Selfish Man” and “Economic Man” assumptions made by bourgeoisie philosophers and economists. These criticisms were focused on the “Single Individual” and “immutability of selfishness”.

In an allusion to “single individual”, Marx said: “... man is, if not as Aristotle contends, a political, at all events a social animal.”². He also said in “A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy”: “The solitary and isolated hunter or fisherman, who serves Adam Smith and Ricardo as a starting point, is one of the unimaginative fantasies of eighteenth-century... The further back we trace the course of history, the more does the individual, and accordingly also the producing individual, appear to be dependent and to belong to a larger whole.” In capitalism society, “The individual in this society of free competition seems to be rid of natural ties, etc.” It seemed that every individual was single, “But the epoch which produces this standpoint, namely that of the solitary individual, is precisely the epoch of the (as yet) most highly developed social (according to this standpoint, general) relations. Man is a Zoon politikon [political animal] in the most literal

1 <http://economy.guoxue.com/article.php/8851>.

2 Marx. Capital. Vol.1. People Press. 1975.p363.

sense: he is not only a social animal, but an animal that can be individualized only within society— a rare event, which might occur when a civilized person who has already absorbed the dynamic social forces is accidentally cast into the wilderness – is just as preposterous as the development of speech without individuals who live together and talk to one another. ¹”

In an allusion to “immutability of selfishness”, Marx thought the concept was a “delusion”. “They saw this individual not as an historical result, but as the starting point of history; not as something evolving in the course of history, but posited by nature, because for them this individual was in conformity with nature, in keeping with their idea of human nature. This delusion has been characteristic of every new epoch hitherto. ²” In addition, “Marx looked individualism as a product of history development. Individualism is only a special result of private market economy...Marx proclaimed the human nature is altering, it is the economic relationship and economic condition that determined the nature of human beings. We can’t look the nature of human beings as granted and invariable³”

Marx wrote in “Theses on Feuerbach”: “Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.” ⁴

Of course, “the ensemble of the social relations” Marx put forward here is only a surrogate expression at a philosophy level. It can’t be looked as a substitute concept of the “Economic man” in economics. But, “the ensemble of the social relations” gave a new notion in order to make hypotheses based on human nature.

1 Marx. A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy. Marx/Engles Slected Works. Volume 2. People Press. 1995. 1-2.

2 Marx. A Contribution to Critique of Political Economy. Marx/Engles Slected Works. Volume 2. People Press. 1995. 2.

3 Cheng enfu. Zhang jianwei. The Philosophy View of Western Property Theory. Economic Survey.1999.2.

4 Marx. Theses on Feuerbach. Marx/Engles Slected Works. Volume 1. People Press.1972.p18

3 . Economical level: Human beings are only “the personifications of economic categories”

As an economic precondition, the assumption of human nature should be different from “the ensemble of the social relations” at a philosophy level. However, this must be this assumptions’ basis in economic theory.

Shigeto Tsum wrote in his book “Institutional Economics Revisited”: “The greatest characteristic in Marxism political economy is to distinguish and integrate the real and value. The physical side of social reality is eternal; the value side reflects the particular production pattern, it’s social.”¹

Marx wrote in the preface to the first edition of “Capital”: “I paint the capitalist and the landlord in no sense couleur de rose [i.e., seen through rose-tinted glasses]. But here individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests. My standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history, can less than any other make the individual responsible for relations whose creature he socially remains, however much he may subjectively raise himself above them.”²

Marx pointed out in his book “The Poverty of Philosophy”: “Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production”³. In

1 Shigeto Tsum. Institutional Economics Revisited. Press of Southwest University of Finance and Economics.2004. p1-2

2 Marx. Capital. Marx/Engles Slected Works. Volume 2. People Press.1972. p207-208

3 Marx. The Poverty of Philosophy. Marx/Engles Slected Works. Volume 1. People Press.

“Chapter 2 Exchange” of “Capital”, Marx wrote: “The persons exist for one another merely as representatives of, and, therefore, as owners of, commodities. In the course of our investigation we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economic relations that exist between them.”¹

In a word, human nature in general can be exhibited in society and economy. It is only “the personifications of economic categories.”

4. Economical level in class society: “Class- affiliated man” assumption

Marx’s “Economic categories” are concerned with social relations or production relations. But the production relations are mainly class relations. So just as Engels said: “economics is not concerned with things but with relations between persons, and in the final analysis between classes; these relations however are always bound to things and appear as things.”² So, in the capitalism economy, “Economic categories” are certain exhibited to new assumption of human nature: Class-affiliated man.

Of the so-called “class-affiliated” man, the meaning is that every single individual belongs to a certain class; he or she is one member of a certain class. His or her status is defined by that class. As “the personifications of economic categories”, a single worker in the capitalism society is only a small part of his entire class. Of course the character and function of one part lie in the character and function of the system. So, one worker is not only an individual, but also a class. He or she has the soul of his or her class.

1972.p108

1 Marx. Capital. Volume 1. People Press. 1975. p103

2 Engles. “Karl.Marx Critique of Political Economy”. Marx/Engles Slected Works. Volume 2. People Press.1972.p123

In “Capital”, Marx wrote: “...must first deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch.” “The ensemble of the social relations” refers to the human nature in general, and “class-affiliated man” refers to “human nature as modified in each historical epoch”.

5 . Class-affiliated Man and Economic Man: different theory direction from different human hypotheses

The difference between Marx’s assumptions of the “class-affiliated man” and his assumptions of “economic man” from bourgeoisie economics presupposes the two complete different economic theories. Economics is directly concerned with the relationship of economic interests. However economists are not alienated from theoretical conclusion and the ideas of economists are relevant to the researchers’ interest----its theory affects their interest. Considering their own benefit, researchers consciously “take an option” on other theories. Social persons, no matter how detached they may want to be, are the personification of the relationships of economic interest. And so it is with economists. Before economists “option” the assumption of human nature in their theory, they already expect to be manipulated by “benefit tendency”. The theory based on the assumption is just an “economics expression” of its “benefit tendency.” Marx’s economics with the hypothesis of “class-affiliated man” and the bourgeoisie economics with the hypothesis of “Economic man” are just such expressions, which prove sufficiently that different assumptions of human nature affect directly different economic theories.

For instance, the class-affiliated assumption of Marx emphasizes the social aspect of man and the integration and history of class, while the bourgeoisie economics puts an emphasis on the isolation and invariance of man. Both of these have distinctive theoretical directions. Marx attempts to classify social persons into a basic system structure by

applying the concept of class-affiliated man. He illustrates the reasons for different social positions and different distribution of wealth aided by class structure, or, more specifically, the ownership patterns of production materials. However, with the assumption of “economic man” and by referring to “individualism methodology,” the bourgeoisie economist makes an attempt to avoid class structure issues and to stress individual interest, individual behavior, and individual rationality with the fear of collectivity interest, collectivity behaviors, and collectivity rationality. The bourgeoisie economist makes an effort to “replace” any “organization” with “single individual,” holding the view that there exists no collectivity behavior with unified interest¹.

With the assumption of “class-affiliated man,” Marx mainly studies the relationships between people covered by thing relationships. The “Economic man,” in bourgeois economics, is not “a real person” with blood and emotion, but is an economic creature seeking to multiply capital and falls short of humanism. The bourgeoisie economist always proclaims no involvement in politics and no consciousness, and only studies pure economic technology issues. In this respect, they have paid great expense indulging themselves in thing relationships, ignoring the people relationships in economic activities. Only when they confront “externality” difficulties, do they “return” to pay passive attention to the relationships of people. Taking the stand on the owner of production material, they emphasize the role of things more than those of persons. Originally, they studied the “thing-thing” relationships and “thing-person” relationships, only regarding people as one “production factor”, equal to things. When dealing with the “externalities” problem, the social relationships among people cannot be avoided, laborers are treated as supervised “lazy” subjects. Thus, preventing laborers’ laziness or fighting against the exploitation of capitalists becomes the vital borderline between Marx economics and the bourgeois economics.

1 Mancur Olson. *Logic of Collective Action*. Shanghai People Press. 1995.