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## John Elliott's Contributions to an Understanding of the Inquiry into the "Wealth of Human Potential"

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The value inherent in the work of John Elliott lies in the overall sense that he was a social scientist concerned with being both a historical scientist and a revolutionary. A revolutionary because, for Elliott, the study of economics was practical, rooted in practice--the study of comparative economic systems. The importance of the empirical study of the distribution of income and patterns of property ownership were just as paramount as the efficiency questions presented in standard economics courses. Until he recently passed away, in 2001, he was the director of the Political Economy and Public Policy (PEPP) Program at the University of Southern California. He held a Masters in Political Science and a Ph.D. in Economics from Harvard University. As a historical scientist, Elliott believed that the history of economic ideas had a special significance. In fact, Elliott felt that history is an interpretation and expression of human nature. He attributed this idea to Marx. It is the study of human nature, what human beings do, and are capable of doing, that holds the solution to the global problems of this new century. Elliott is unique and his understanding of political economy, as communicated by his many publications, and his teaching, should not go unexamined.

This paper supports the view, held by Elliott, that classical political economy suggests a comprehensive context for understanding all of the issues of the modern world. Elliott's conviction was that the greatest of all classical political economists was Karl Marx, and that Marx's economic model, with its sociologically defined categories, provides insights to the transition of capitalism into a more humanistic social order. The problem of bringing the ideas of Marx into the social science classroom, are worth the effort, if we follow Elliott's teachings. There is the problem of dispelling the popular, pre-conceptions of those who equate the ideas and writings of Marx with the ideology and "religion" of Marxism. Elliott clearly distinguished between Marxism—an ideological dogma, as distinct from the actual study of Marx's own vision of a post-capitalist society, which was his life-long concern. His attention to the history of economic thought and the importance of Marx in understanding contemporary comparative economic systems, helps one understand the exercise of political power, educational philosophy, and modern thought in sociology.

It is, indeed, a paradox that modern schools of economics train legions of students in economics, without ever reading about the history of economic thought, or the ideas of Karl Marx. Perhaps this is because developing such "habits of mind" would lead to radical critical thinking in the social sciences. First, and foremost, Marx was a revolutionary. However, Elliott always expected the modern reader of Marx to understand these ideas in the context of the history of economic inquiry, starting with classical economics and extending to this day. Elliott was convinced, like his teacher Joseph Schumpeter, that "capitalism can not survive." Thus, he was preoccupied in much of his writing with Marx's own conception of a "future society." What will be the characteristics of that future society?

Given a quick glance at the seemingly insurmountable problems of globalization of markets, and the recent "failure of consensus" at the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development (attended, in September, 2002, by dignitaries from almost every nation and thousands of famous scholars from around the world, gathered in South Africa), it is best to take on the optimism expressed by Elliott. He recognized that the systemic problems of the market-oriented, developed countries went beyond the bounds of orthodox economic theory. The solutions go beyond the realm of traditional economics, to a revolution in the social and political spheres. The idea that a future social system holds improved solutions to the economic crises of the global economic system is not new. What is important, according to Elliott is that we understand that in Marx we see, not only a revolutionary, but a scientist. That is, we need to know that Marx is not a "Utopian." Rather, his theory is empirical in a historically evaluative sense. His method of analysis is economics, directly addressing and following in the tradition of the great, classical economists, but it goes farther. Marx anticipates Keynes, according to Elliott. Marx anticipates, and outlines a business cycle theory, as well as a topology of economic systems (see Elliott 1978). All of this points to the deep conviction by Elliott that Marx's analysis holds the key, not only to understanding the contradictions of the modern economy, but also provides the solution in the form of endorsing the need for substantial changes in the patterns of ownership of productive resources, as well as changes in the distribution of political power and income around the globe. Modern social science, that rejects the consideration of such a premise, is reactionary and conservative in nature. The movements in educational theory today toward "critical literacy" and "critical thinking" should pay heed to the contributions of John E.

Elliott. Hopefully, social scientists will understand and appreciate Elliott's efforts. Elliott attempts to extend Marx, in much the same way as Schumpeter (1950). Elliott is aiming at a formulation of "the future society," one that addresses the current system's failures. This includes the concerns of the anti-globalization protests. While current media interpretations may view anti-globalization advocates as separate and distinctly different in interests, Elliott draws upon Marx's vision of the future society to link them together. He is drawing upon the history of thought and Marx's topology of economic systems (economic foundations) to construct a "robust vision of the future society."

Indeed, it is unfortunate that the word "communism" has a meaning that Marx, himself, may not have conceived of, or intended. This is of primary concern to Elliott. In particular, it is Heilbroner's (1995) contention that the new "science of economics" find "stabilizing" and dependable relations in the sphere of the economy. Heilbroner's acceptance of the perennial dichotomy between the public and the private spheres of human activity, is precisely the point of departure, and the reason for optimism in Elliott's writings.

This concern is, indeed, one which possesses great merit. Socialism is almost entirely a label attached to political upheaval in low-income developing countries. This is unfortunate, according to Elliott, because Marx's revolution could only take place the most technically competent, and economically advanced countries of the world. In addition, Elliott emphasized that Marx's Revolution (and one can only assume, Elliott's own conviction as well) was a revolution that was, at once, economic, political and social, involving all three spheres of social being. It is self-evident that this interpretation of a "socialist revolution" has never occurred in modern times. Thus, undoubtedly the world as we know it, has not yet realized the potential that Marx, and his modern

student, John Elliott foresaw. This is a truly refreshing and revolutionary idea. The next society is only now beginning, and being born within the womb of the current breakdown of the capitalist system.

Only in Marx's system, does the recent disappearance of almost two trillion dollars of corporate wealth, reveal more than the thin veil of "corporate mismanagement and lies." Keynes, himself, agreed with Marx in a deep-seated distrust of those empowered to make investment decisions that affect the rest of society. But it seems that the Post-Keynesian thesis, for all its mathematical elegance might seem to have synthesized Keynes out of existence. Elliott writes with authority in encompassing Post-Keynesian and classical economic thought. Elliott is much more than a fossil who knows his classical economists. His understanding of the role of the history of thought in modern social theory is echoed in education theory by the need to develop "critical thinking," utilizing certain habits of mind, from social thinkers that have come before us.

In discussing the role of politics, or outlining the role of government in a market economy, we often tend to insert a dichotomy between the private and the public sector. We tend to assert that the market works in the public sphere, and that government acts in the public interest if, and when the market fails. Seldom do we consider the critic of capitalism itself. The prominent scholars of education theory, and Feirre (1970) emphasize elements of Marx's theory of capitalist development, they do little to stimulate readers to study Marx, or to read about socialism. While there is increasing attention to the virtues of service learning, there is a neglect of the "inquiry to the wealth of human potential."

A core thesis of this paper is that educators need to appreciate a modern interpretation of Karl Marx to

uncover the importance of Freirean pedagogy. Many educators and social scientists embrace the Freirean pedagogy, but do not understand it in terms of its ultimate determination. Concepts of empowerment, exploitation and alienation, are deeply rooted in Elliott's portrayal of the transformation of capitalism into a radically different, and more humanistic society. Elliott's many articles may bridge the understanding of Freire's concepts and those of Marx. It is important to Elliott that we see capitalism as a transitional form of society. This is something that has been missed by current commentators, such as Heilbroner (1995, 320):

The distinctive properties of all capitalisms are the drive for capital, the guidance and constraints of a market system and the blessings—admittedly, often mixed—of a bifurcation of power into two interpenetrative but still independent sectors. To this, however, must be added a capacity for adaptation and innovation that results in a spectrum of capitalist performances, a spectrum that is visible in the intensity of the drive for capital, the degree of freedom accorded to market dispensations, and the boundary between the public and the private realms.

There is no denying that the drive for profit has accelerated innovation and cost cutting innovations. Elliott's (1987) commentary on Marx is revealing in its insistence that "history may be described as the process of the movement toward human emancipation [from exploitation] and the supersession of alienation." Inherent in this approach to social theory is a rejection of neoclassical economic theory, a view of humans as atomistic consumers, maximizing individual utility. Marxian theory, parallel to the approach to education of Freire, perceives human beings as creators and

developers of talents and abilities, as needing bonds of community, and as potentially and primarily cooperative in nature.

It is important to note that the next historical epoch, to which Freirean Pedagogy is leading the way, is not some utopian fantasy. Inherent in the work of Marx is the assumption that capitalism is necessary for a transition to a society which expresses the "termination of the condition where the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of others." Elliott's writing emphasizes that as long as it is not possible to provide, simultaneously the "necessities of life" for all members of society and an economic surplus for capital accumulation, there must always be a ruling class disposing of the productive forces of society, and a poor, oppressed class (Marx and Engels 1976, 6, 349). In this event the "needs of some," i.e., society's need for accumulation (and the luxury needs of the capitalist and propertied rich) can be satisfied only at the expense of others. Some segment of society will sacrifice the "necessities of life" for the rest of society. Conversely, when it is possible to provide an economic surplus for accumulation and the 'necessities of life' for all, then a capitalist-worker class division is no longer an economic necessity. It is the productive zeal in capitalism that provides the material possibility for the dissolution of the capital-labor relation, and consequently, provides the objective possibility of ending exploitation and alienation of human beings from living in a society which supports human development to its true potential.

According to Elliott, classic statements of the future society are to be found in Marx's writing from the 1840's, notably *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* (Marx, 1975). It is undoubtedly this future society Freire's theory supports and endorses. Marx postulates a "commonwealth embodying "man's communist essence" within contemporary society. This

realm of labor and material production, however, has been divorced from the state, or public life. Consequently, society and humans are bifurcated into a private realm of atomized and isolated individuals and a public, civic realm of alien state power, dominated by the wealthy, capitalist class and its attendant state bureaucracy.

What sets Freire apart is his reconstruction of Marxian concepts in terms of addressing the current dehumanization of people of color and marginalized groups. Thus, Freire attempts to bring together problems of race and class, which appeals to the concerns within the contemporary movement, broadly characterized as “critical literacy.” Such a movement is moving toward Marx’s ideal, as characterized in the writings of John Elliott. Both the movement toward “critical literacy” and the growing literature surrounding the seminal work of Freire, run parallel to the characterizations of the “future communist society” which is characterized and defined by Elliott.

Such parallels are apparent in Elliott’s interpretation of Marx’s “robust vision of the future communist society. Going against the interpretation of the leftist American economist R. Heilbroner, Elliott seems to adhere to the convergence of the private realm of the market and the public realm of the state. To integrate these two realms and overcome this alienation requires the establishment of a “true democracy” constituting the essence of all forms of social constitutions and of socialized man. Elliott points to the U.S. trend toward universal suffrage, extended to a potential dissolution of both the political state and civil society. Again, Elliott is tracing an evolution through different socio-economic forms of society. He recreates themes in Hegel and Marx’s critique of Hegel. Here, Marx distinguishes between mere “political emancipation,” progressive though it was relative to earlier forms of feudal despotism, and genuine

human emancipation. This emancipation is shaped by the radical reconstruction of socio-economic life and the supersession of the separation between the private and public realms of society and among humans based on an egoistic pursuit of strictly individual gain. “Political emancipation,” by dissolving the direct political and theocratic rule of feudalism and by establishing rights—of liberty, property, equality before the law, and security—was a big step forward toward human emancipation, even though its benefits disproportionately accrued to the bourgeoisie. On the other hand, “throwing off the political yoke meant at the same time throwing off the bonds which restrained the egoistic spirit of civil society.” (Elliott 1987, 3)

This requires that human beings recognize and cooperatively organize their own powers as “social forces” and no longer separate social power, as distinct from themselves, in the shape of political power (as in the power of political parties as shaped by campaign contributions, as opposed to genuine, and universal, democratic political participation).

To further elucidate history’s direction, Elliott cites Marx’s commentary in *Notes on James Mill*. According to Elliott, Marx indicts both the self-estrangement and the mutual estrangement, which is rooted in private property, the separation of labor and capital, and market exchange relations. Under these conditions, the aim of labor and production is not the cultivation and creative exercise of human powers and talents, but the immediate, selfish aspiration of possession, of having. “Because individuals use others as mere means to the realization of their own ends, society is not a genuine community, but a mere shadow of what it has the potential to become. It is a “mere semblance, based on mutual plundering.” (Elliott 1987, 6)

What Freire shares with Elliott is the vision of a future in which:

people conduct production as human beings. In these circumstances, work would be a free manifestation of life and an expression of individuality, and objects produced would be a visible objectification of individual human powers. Each individual would be directly and consciously aware of, and obtain enjoyment from, fulfilling the needs of others. Each person would serve as a mediator between other individuals and the human species, thereby serving (and being recognized as serving) to complete the essential nature of others and thus being linked to others in bonds of thought and love. Finally, each person, by directly contributing to the expression of the life of others, would thereby directly confirm and realize his/her "true," "human," "communal nature" (Elliott 1987, 4).

At this point we have established that Elliott draws on Marx to present a "robust" vision of capitalism's transformation into a future communist society. This is a postulated historical trend that many social scientists will not endorse. This is probably because of the fact that, unlike Marx's vision, the socialist revolutions of the last century have not delivered continual material progress; they have been tightly controlled, bureaucratic, and highly authoritarian in nature. Elliott maintained that none of these "socialist" regimes bear semblance to Marx's revolution. First, they do not occur in the highly industrialized nations. Secondly, they are not simultaneously political (change in governance structure), economic (rapid advance in technology and relative plenty), and social (return to "species being" and cooperative consciousness) in character. Elliott maintained that Marx's revolution can occur in a country like the United States.

Finally, it is important to point out that the revolution that Elliott draws out from Marx's vision, is forged inside the crucible of a highly advanced technical and materially proficient capitalist society. It brings on a truly democratic society, not like a representative democracy in which one can witness an Electoral College, distinct from a more truly democratic, and technically possible form of real democracy. It is at this juncture that we come back to Freire and his observations that the "critical consciousness" of minorities and other groups who are "marginalized" by the "dominant culture" gives hope to Elliott's vision of transformation.

Elliott recognized a common thread running through both Marx, and (we can infer) Freire. Freire was, undoubtedly, influenced by Marx. But, more specifically, both presuppose considerable confidence in human potentialities. This shared vision is more than merely a new form of society. It is a characterization of the substance of human potential, of the quality of life for authentic human beings in a genuinely human community. It is important that both Elliott and Freire differentiate between the familiar socio-institutional form, and the quality of life and markedly distinct social relations (i.e., socialism as an institutional form of society in which the self-interest and the profit motive, the egotistical and corporate ethos of greed, are no longer the driving motive of the system). Elliott refers to the institutional characteristics, such as the end of the capital labor relation, wage-labor, and private ownership of the means of production as Communism-F (the institutional form). It is plausible that both Elliott and Freire are more interested in supporting a second aspect of Marx's vision of the future "communist" society. This aspect, Elliott calls Communism-S and refers to the expected changes in the quality of life and the character of human relations under the auspices of the new society.

This robust vision of communism embodies the type of qualities that will be most important if the global capitalist system is to survive the stresses and strains of ecological dangers, the difficult challenges of ethnic, racial, and religious hatreds, not to mention the tensions inherent in the alarming spread of weapons of mass destruction. It is this conception of Communism-S that is echoed in the works of Freire, as a prominent figure in the "politics of education." What is common in these visions of the future society is a radical reconstruction of the human condition and the quality of human life. This Communism-S is the expressed Freire's concept of "creative alienation," it is the condition necessary for the negation of that alienation. Liberatory education is about empowerment, by means of acting from the standpoint of "critical consciousness." This is all about reconstructing the human content of social perception. What are the intellectual sources of such a vision of human as well as social reconstruction? Below is a popular quote from Marx which embodies the ideality of human potential under the new society:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; self as a social (i.e., human being -- a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism, equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man – the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species.

Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. (Marx 1974, 297)

Presumably, the integration of individual and society should unleash human creative powers (and reduce social impediments thereto) and, simultaneously, stimulate high productivity and material abundance. In contrast to a system bounded by private property, the aim is to cultivate the inner wealth of individuals and their self-realization the cultivation and exercise of human productive powers as an inner need in a life of social expression, not labor and production as a mere means of acquisition and possession in a life of "having."

One can postulate that it is possible to work toward what Elliott calls communism-S, within the boundaries of a capitalist society—that is, without dissolving private ownership of the means of production, still working toward an inclusive multi-ethnic and multi-racial society. The writings of Freire and the movement in education, termed "critical literacy," are based on a vision that incorporates a large component of ideality and one that presupposes considerable confidence in human potentialities. This is not merely what Elliott calls Communism-S, as a form of human society. It is also a characterization of human substance, of human potentials, of the quality of life for authentic human beings in a genuine human community.

One final consideration, worth noting, is that the sources of Marx, Freire, and the movement toward "critical literacy" are rooted in two fundamental intellectual currents. In modern, idealist political rhetoric, Martin Luther King's immortal "I have a dream" speech, echoes the same vision of a society embodying certain human, and indeed, moral qualities, with the same roots. These two currents in Western culture as identified by Elliott are:

- (1) the Hellenic tradition, notably Aristotle,
- (2) the Judeo-Christian tradition(s).

The underlying roots of the educational movement toward critical literacy are an outgrowth of Marx and modern followers, like Freire. But the roots of this tradition go back as far as Aristotle's methodology. Indeed, Aristotle devotes much thought to the moral qualities embodied in Communism-S, and it is still worthy of great interest today. For Aristotle, to determine what is the "good society" or the "good life" for man, it is necessary to establish what is "natural" for humans. That which is in accord with human nature is (morally and ethically) "good." Similarly, for Marx, the moral qualities embodied in Communism-S are derived from his theory of what is natural to humans, what is concordant with human nature. Marx insists that we must deal with human nature in general, and then with human nature as modified in each historical epoch.

It is the Hellenistic tradition that portends the making of the "good person" within the "good society" or "communitas." Following Aristotle, Marx situates humans within nature, but differentiates the human species from other animal species. What makes us "human?" He postulates that labor is consonant with the essential nature of all human beings (as distinct from other animals) as it is free, conscious, rational, creative, purposeful, and social. Genuinely human labor occurs within the framework of an authentic community, a community whose members treat each other as ends rather than means and have the power and the need to mutually recognize and respect each others' labor as embodied in the greater society. Torrez (2002) has detailed a concept for bringing forward this type of community by advocating "cultural consonance" in the development of classroom curriculum.

Culturally consonant curriculum advances self-determination (free and conscious shaping of one's own destiny) and self-actualization (free and conscious shaping of one's own development) as part of "natural" human life. Without supporting and cultivating (in classrooms and in labor) such human experiences human beings are:

- (1) powerfully constrained in the development of specific capacities and human needs; and
- (2) subject to the caprice of conditions of others.

In other words, without liberating experiences they exist (following Freire), in what would presumably be a realm of *alienation* from truly authentic human potential, and *exploitation* of their labor for purposes not of their "free" choosing. There are moral themes undeniably at work here.

If the Hellenistic ideal of building the "good society" is one current that is necessary for human development to its "true potential," the other intellectual roots of human or moral elements of that vision belong to the Judeo-Christian tradition(s). Elliott makes his case by drawing parallels between Marx's vision of the future society, humanity, and community and that of the Judeo-Christian tradition(s). In liberation theology, as well as in the movements associated with the work of Freire, there is a distinct flavor of the liberating power of education. Four scriptural dimensions will be used here, cited by Elliott. First, God acts through and as history to bring liberation to the oppressed (as in the Exodus out of Egypt). Second, God identifies with the poor and the oppressed, and demands justice, not just charity. Third, Jesus proclaimed a forthcoming Kingdom of God which would bring a total revolution in existing socio-political structures and the creation of a new, qualitatively different, and irreversible form of community. Fourth,

Jesus condemned wealth—both relative to poverty and as the love of money—and attacked money as the very foundation of injustice and exploitation, the disintegration of community. The Book of Acts (Book of Acts, 4: 32, 34-35) in the New Testament, described the early Christian community as a kind of communist society. The early Church Fathers viewed the early Christian community at Jerusalem as an example of God's plan for property relations. Put in reverse, it is precisely these elements of the Judeo-Christian tradition(s) which find secular analogues in Marx's historical argument, as identified by John Elliott, and are also the roots of the current movement for "critical literacy."

It is important to Elliott that we see this emerging future society as the unraveling of socio-historical trends and tendencies, not as a Utopian fantasy. He carefully lays out a historical explanation of the processes whereby capitalism brings forward the new society. Given the movements for "critical literacy," the popularity of the ideas of Freire concerning the development of "critical consciousness," the associated notions of "empowerment" and "praxis," it is possible to discern a growing secular trend toward Communism-S as fashioned by Elliott. While we see no clear global trend toward Communism-F, it is interesting that the developing nations that gravitated towards "pro-market" reforms, are having so much economic turmoil. Also, the resolution of current international tensions would seem to have a resolution in the ideals of Communism-S, as opposed to a resolution based on armed, military intervention. Certainly, those who oppose war speak of a "community of nations" and warn against unilateral action and its attendant problems of instability. Of course, only time will tell if the ideas of "critical literacy" are the magnet that manages to hold us together as a world currently on the brink of environmental disaster,

and embroiled in geopolitical, ethnic, and religious divisions.

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