

MEANING AND VALUE OF WORK: A MARXIST PERSPECTIVE

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The thesis that there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and work—i.e., although man controls work, he may find in it either fulfillment or degradation—has its roots in the Marxist theory of alienation. This paper, therefore, tackles this problem from a Marxist perspective. It examines Marx and Engels's analysis of the history and causes of human alienation by presenting their views on human nature and how work is related to the individual's search for meaning and fulfillment. The two—man and work—cannot be separated, for doing so leads to alienated work (production alienation) and alienated worker (self-alienation). Hence, the problem of employee satisfaction has to be dealt with from the perspective of how employees experience their relation to their work.

INTRODUCTION

American workers' dissatisfaction at all occupational levels has been reported since the publication of *Work in America* (1972), which is the most comprehensive research on the state of the working conditions in the United States, funded by the Federal Government. William Shaw and Vincent Barry (2010, 493) say that "Studies since the 1970's have cited workers' feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement or depersonalization." In addition to financial and managerial factors, moral and psychological reasons are also identified as significant factors that influence job satisfaction since work affects the total well-being of employees (see "Americans' job satisfaction..." 2010). Today, fewer workers consider their jobs interesting. People's value about their work has changed substantially and "[s]ince the mid-1980s, teens have become less likely to see work as a central part of their lives" (Wray-Lake et al. 2009, 1). Devoid of any deep sense of meaning or value, any human activity becomes absurd, insignificant, inauthentic as a life pursuit, or even unbearable. "What gives 21st century work its distinctive flavour is the mixture of material and non-material motives and issues that shape it. There is evidence that what people want from work is to feel useful, fulfilled at least to some degree, to participate in a collective effort" (Overell 2009, 14). Businesses then, must have an interest in the question pertaining to the meaning of work if they want employees who

are productive and satisfied because they find their jobs existentially and humanly fulfilling.

The thesis that there is a reciprocal relationship between people and work—i.e., while man controls work, the latter also shapes and affects him to the extent that he many find in his work either his own fulfillment or degradation—has its roots in Karl Marx's theory of alienation. In the book *Humanism and business*, Aktouf and Holford (2009,113) argue:

Marx's theory of alienating work is a solid framework from which to start our reflections on the synergies required for real productivity within traditional industry. Restoring a sense of meaning to work, as well as permitting the appropriation-commitment sought by corporate culture and total quality depends on nothing less than putting an end to...alienated work.

In tackling the meaning and value of work from a Marxist perspective, the paper examines Marx and Engels' analysis of the history and causes of human alienation. It presents their views on human nature and how work is related to the individual's search for meaning and fulfillment.

MARXIST VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE

As for many contemporary philosophies, Marxism views human beings as a being-in-the-world. Rather than dealing with human reality abstractly, Marx and Engels (1973, 289) view it in a concrete, scientific, and historical way, "not in any fantastic isolation of abstract definition, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions." The human person is subject to the infinite process of development according to dialectical laws. Marx says that there is no universal nor static nature or essence which is essentially the same and shared by all individual human beings throughout history. Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no human essence. What he rejects is its abstract conception as fixed, stable, and ahistorical. The potentiality and perfectibility of human beings do not presuppose any nature that is already constituted.

To view man concretely is to analyze him according to the external factors that circumvent his being as he exists in a particular place and time. One's personality and character are dependent on what kind of environment he lives in and with what kind of people he associates with. Hence, "the essence of the human person is the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx and Engels 1972, 109). Marx (with Engels 1973, 299) elaborates his understanding of human essence in the following way:

This sum of productive forces, form of capital and social form of intercourse, which every individual and generation finds in existence as something given, is the real basis of what philosophers have conceived as "substance" or "essence" of man.

To say that an individual is an ensemble of social relations means that he or she is a being-in-relation to another being. The person is not an "abstract being squatting in an outside world. Man is the 'world of man', state, society" (Marx 1975, 244).

It is evident that Marx makes a distinction between human nature in general and human nature as historically modified. To illustrate the difference, he says that the need for food and nutrition belong to human nature in general, but the kind of food eaten and the manner in which it is prepared and consumed differ from one culture to another. There are constant drives that belong to our nature in general (e.g., hunger and sex) and there are relative ones that exist only in a certain historical period (e.g., the drive to acquire money). To deal with human nature in general is not to view human beings in abstraction. *Human nature* in general refers to human capabilities and qualities in themselves, as raw potentials to be actualized or perfected. It is that which makes humans recognizable as humans. On the other hand, to analyze human capacities and qualities as realized and perfected in every stage of human history is to view human nature as historically modified. Human nature in general and human nature as historically modified are related but distinct—the latter is the particular or specific expression of the former in a given sociohistorical period.

HUMAN NATURE IN GENERAL

From a general perspective, a human being is first and foremost, a natural being. He or she is a corporeal, living, sensuous, and a passionate organism like plants and animals, but possesses natural and vital powers such as emotions, instincts, desires, impulses, perception, and mental faculty. According to Marx, human consciousness is a product of evolution and an inevitable consequence of the dialectical process. The mind, which is the seat of human consciousness and mental powers, represents the leap or the nodal point in the evolution of life. From the very beginning, human beings are subject to natural laws and there is no way they can be independent from the latter.

A human person can be an objective being in so far as he is a natural being. To be an objective being means to have an object outside of oneself. A "non-objective being is unreal, nonsensical thing—something merely thought of...a creation of abstraction" (Marx and Engels 1972, 116). Nature is the human object, both in thought and action. This is so because, first, human actions are motivated by human needs. But man's needs must be connatural to himself. In other words, he needs a real, corporeal, sensuous object, i.e., a natural object. Hence, only nature can satisfy human needs. Nature is also the object and the source of human labor. "The worker," according to Marx (with Engels 1972, 72), "cannot create anything without nature, without the *sensuous external world*." Production is a collaboration between humans and nature.

Marx and Engels (1972, 73) say that nature is man's inorganic body. This means that since humans live on nature, they must continuously be in contact with nature in order to survive. Human beings are a part of the natural world; they are dependent on nature, not only for their material needs but

also for their creative needs. Man's relation to nature is both passive and active. As the object of his needs, his relation with it is passive, but as the object of his activity, his relation with it is active. Man is not an enemy of nature or nature an enemy of man.

[A]t every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature—but that we, with flesh, blood, and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly. (Engels 1972, 242)

“But man is not merely a natural being: he is a human natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore, he is a species-being, and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing” (Marx and Engels 1972, 75). The term species-being (*Gattungswesen*) was first developed by Ludwig Feuerbach. It expresses man's consciousness, not only of himself, but also of his oneness with his fellow humans. For Marx, man's species-being is something that he commonly shares with all individuals. His realization of his species-being is made possible by contemplating himself in a humanized world—the world created by his own actions. Man has the capacity to objectify himself freely and consciously and to set himself as an object of his thought. Through his work, man projects his nature. A part of the personality of the worker is manifested or transmitted through his work in such a way as all goods and services resulting from human labor bear a distinctly human imprint. When man produces something to satisfy his basic needs out of the raw materials which nature provides, the product appears not anymore as something distinct from him, but as his creation, his object, and his image. “The object of labor, therefore, is the *objectification of man's species life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually but also actively, in reality and therefore he contemplates himself in the world he has created” (Marx and Engels 1972, 76).

Marx defines objectification as the process in which human products become social human objects, relating people to one another. “Our objects in their relation to one another constitute the only intelligent language we use with one another” (Marx 1988, 38). This is made possible by the fact that, as has been mentioned, human personality is incorporated in the products of human labor. By contemplating the human personality embodied in these things, man encounters his fellow humans and realizes his species-being. “In other words, man becomes a real species-being, a real community when together with his fellowmen he can contemplate his works which have become embodied over and against himself in the objective communal world” (Hoeven 1976, 77). Man is a species-being not only because he has self-awareness, but also because he has the capacity to conceptualize others as members of his own species. He can realize not only himself but his fellow humans as well in the objectified world created by his own actions. As a species-being, man transcends his own individuality and becomes a universal being who considers himself as a part of a class possessing a common general nature.

Aside from universality, another characteristic of man as a species-being is his capacity for conscious activity. Because he is an objectifying or object-creating being, man can alter things and conditions according to his own design. He can express himself through a free and conscious act. As a free agent, he has mastery over his life-activities and can fashion his products according to his desire, taste, satisfaction, and needs, unlike animals whose activities are completely determined by their instinct and biological needs.

Finally, humans are also social beings. Man is insufficient to secure all by himself the totality of his needs (physical and nonphysical). Man needs another in order to live and be a fulfilled person. His essence is relational—not simply a personal relation of one individual to another, but a relation of man with his species.

Man's need to objectify himself is a social need per se because it is tied up with the desire to create for others and to feel that his products satisfy another's want. The process of human production is a social endeavor. The full mastery of nature is realized not by one's effort alone, but through cooperation with others. A totally isolated worker is an illusion, something unhistorical and absurd, except in very rare occasions. Thus, human production and human consumption are both social in nature.

HUMAN NATURE AS HISTORICALLY MODIFIED

Human history is the story of man's progressive self-realization. As has been said, human beings are modified by circumstances and distinguished by the existing economic mode. This modification is both in terms of human capabilities and needs. Human needs are insatiable, man desires everything he produces. As forces of production improve man's capacity to produce, it likewise increases his capacity to consume.

The history of man is a never-ending process of development. Marx and Engels think that most societies pass through the same series of historical stages and will arrive at a common "end" which is a classless and a stateless society.¹ In their theoretical orientation as history analysts, Marx and Engels are evolutionists. In fact, Engels (1972, 71) was surprised by the parallels between Marx's theory of history and that of Henry Morgan, the main proponent of historical evolutionism in America. But like Morgan's theory, Marx and Engels cannot readily account for historical variations in different societies. They cannot offer substantial reasons why some societies regressed or even became extinct, while others progressed without passing through identical stages.

Society in Marxist view undergoes a series of transformation from one stage to another. Each stage is characterized by a definite mode of production. A change in the mode of production results in transition of society from one stage to another. One stage supersedes another in such a way as one decays before the commencement of its successor. Every form of society has its own issues of exploitation, alienation, and oppression.

Human history begins with the stage of primitive communism which Marx calls the *gens organization*. At this stage, human society is bound by blood

relationship. "The social structure is, therefore, limited to an extension of the family; patriarchal family, chieftains, below them the members of the tribe" (Marx and Engels 1972, 115). People are still nomadic except in certain areas where there is superabundance of resources. There is no private property and the only important source of production is the land which is never scarce. Everything is shared and appropriation is based on one's needs. Individuals act as proprietors of the land by virtue of their membership to the community. Labor distribution and social classes are organized by means of kinship relation. Aside from agriculture, other means of livelihood are hunting and fishing. At this stage, there is no self-realization in terms of human production. The latter is hampered by the forces of nature and the lack of technological knowledge and instrument. Man is still connected by an umbilical cord to nature and to the tribal community.

The second stage of history is characterized by the appearance of the family, private property, and slavery. During the primitive commune, there is still no sexual prohibition and no real family structure. With the introduction of father-rule and monogamy, the family becomes an organizational unit. Accumulation of private property is due to the invention of different tools for agricultural production. These tools enable some to produce more than what they need. The excess of one's production becomes his private property or wealth. Those who produce more become richer than those who produce less. The appearance of slavery modifies the existing production process and soon becomes its basis, the primary force of production.

The slave did not sell his labour power to the slave owner, any more than the ox sells its services to the peasant. The slave together with his labour power is sold once and for all to his owner. He is a commodity which can pass from one hand of one owner to that of another. (Marx and Engels 1972, 205)

Slavery becomes the first form of exploitation "peculiar to the ancient world; it is succeeded by serfdom in the middle ages and wage labour in the more recent period. These are the three great forms of servitude characteristic of the three great epochs of civilization" (Engels 1972, 234).

The continuous presence of wars and feuds leads to the accumulation of lands in the hands of a few powerful individuals. "War, formerly waged only in revenge for injuries or to extend territory that had grown too small, is now waged simply for plunder and becomes a regular industry" (Engels 1972, 220). Land becomes abundant while laborers are scarce. Peasants seek protection under the hands of powerful landlords who in return, designate them as permanent cultivators of the land. This dependence becomes hereditary and common everywhere. A new economic mode of production appears to supplant the slavery system which becomes too inefficient and limited.

During the third stage of history, serfs become the direct producing class and the primary economic agents. They are chained to the plot of the land they cultivate. If the landowners sell the land to another individual, they remain in the property and serve their new master. A serf has to produce for himself and for his landlord.

With the increase in population, conquest of new territories, discovery of new sources of wealth, and the development of commerce and industry, production for internal consumption has to be replaced by production-for-trade. By this time, production in large scale is an invaluable resource. To accomplish this, commercial and industrial agriculture has to be introduced, machines have to be utilized. Labor ceases to be a way of life but a source of profit. Exchange of goods becomes widely practiced. Gradually, class polarization develops. Manufactured things and items of all sorts become increasingly in demand. The serfs abandon their self-sufficient production in favor of a more marketable system. They migrate to cities, learn skills, and become artisans. To protect themselves against country lords and regularized their manner of trade, they form closed guilds and association. But the industrial production under the monopoly of these guilds soon no longer suffices for the increasing demands of new markets.

The main purpose of Marx's analysis of history is to trace the emergence of the capitalistic mode of production in the early societies. Capitalism marks the fourth stage of history where class conflict is intensified between the capitalist class who owns the means of production and the proletariat or the wage-earner class.

The modern worker, the proletariat, is a product of the great industrial revolution, which, particularly during the last hundred years, has totally transformed all modes of production in all civilized countries, first in the industry and afterwards in agriculture too, and as a result of which only two classes remain involved in production: the capitalists who own the means of production, raw materials, and provisions, and the workers who own neither means of production, nor raw materials, nor provisions, but first have to buy their provisions from the capitalists with their labour. (Marx 1973,134)²

The capitalist system has one main feature: it is a commodity-producing system. All commodities require human efforts to produce. A commodity has value only because it is a fruit of the worker's sweat and labor. Human labor is, thus, the common denominator of all kinds of commodities. How is profit or surplus value extracted from commodities? To create surplus value, the capitalist must employ a commodity whose use creates value. Machines and raw materials do not create use-value for such items are constant capital—they add no more value to the product than what they lose in the production process. If surplus value cannot come from nonhuman sources, it can only come from the human work itself. The accumulation of surplus value constitutes the alienation and exploitation of the proletariat. Marx rules out the possibility that wage will increase as the capital increases. Businesses compete with one another in the market, so they have to sell their products as cheaply as possible. To keep the wages low, they will maintain a high rate of unemployment by using machines extensively or hiring children. In addition, to maximize the productive power of the workers, capitalists will resort to a rigid division of labor. Production

process will be divided into specific small tasks entrusted to different people who act either simultaneously or alternately.

HUMAN NATURE ALIENATED

Marx describes several forms of alienation (religious, metaphysical, juridical, political, etc.) but, in whatever usage, the concept conveys one basic meaning: it suggests a separation, a loss, an estrangement or a divorce of what must be united. It is the separation of something which belongs to man, a nonhuman objectification of himself, an estrangement from his own essence. For the purposes of this research, the discussion is limited to economic alienation—the alienation of persons in the process of production.

Hegel (1977, 805) identifies the term alienation with objectification. For him, it is the objectification of the Spirit or the Idea into the external world. The spirit or the Idea is alienated from its productive activity when the world is realized and projected as extrinsic to the Idea. Marx transforms the Hegelian theory and applies it to this own dialectics. He reduces the extension of the term to denote nonhuman objectification. For Marx, a thing is not alienated from man just because it is externalized, but only when it is related to man in an alien and strange way. Another difference between Marx and Hegel is that for the latter, when something is alienated, it is simply given up. For Marx, when something is alienated, whether a product or an activity, it is possessed by someone who should not own it. Every alienation is a form of oppression and exploitation.

Alienation is inherent in every society which practices private ownership of the means of production. That is why “the whole history of mankind (since the dissolution of private tribal society, holding land in common ownership) has been a history of class struggles, contests between the exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes” (Engels 1964, 5). Alienation, nevertheless, is a reversible process. An alienated being can still be de-alienated. Self-realization in Marxist terms is to set the human being free from the bondage of alienation.

Product alienation

Passive product alienation happens when the product of the worker is made and disposed of without his control. “The product of labour is labour that has solidified itself into an object, made itself into a thing, that objectification of labour” (Marx and Engels 1972, 78). The worker incorporates his being in his produce, the product of labor is made into the human image, it carries an imprint of the human worker. It is but natural that the product should belong to the worker who produces it for it is the objective embodiment of himself and, thus, far from being alien to him. But in a capitalistic society, the product of one’s work ceases to be an expression of the workers’ personality. The workers have no control over the end and the means of their productive activity, much less over the profit that is derived from it. Instead, they are directed and compelled to suppress all individuality in the process of production through division of labor, work standardization, assembly lines, or brand

imaging. Occupation that is merely mechanical involving little use of mind or cooperative planning does not constitute self-creation. In failing to realize his creative potentials, the worker is also prevented from experiencing the social world as an objectification of his productive activity and, consequently, he feels strange in the world he has created through his own labor. The fruits of human work do not reveal a human person but a dehumanized and an automated social system.

When the product of workers does not only exist as something independent but is also absorbed into capital—those impersonal forces that oppose and oppress the workers themselves—the outcome is active product alienation. This means that as work creates capital by producing surplus value, it continuously reproduces its relation to capital. “[Work] creates capital, i.e., a kind of property that exploits the wage labour, and that cannot increase except upon condition of begetting a new supply of wage labour for fresh exploitation” (Marx and Engels 1964, 82). Human products appear as alien powers which sap not only the human energy but the richness of nature as well. Human beings, plants, animals, and minerals are all transformed by the capitalistic system into commodities, valued for their capacity to produce profit. The more one works, the poorer and less human he or she becomes while the capitalists get richer.

The laws of political economy express the estrangement of the worker in his object, thus; the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes, the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the mightier labour becomes, the duller becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature’s bondsman. (Marx and Engels 1972, 73)

Production alienation

The worker is not only alienated from his product but also from the very act of production. In fact, the first type of alienation can only be the effect of this for alien products can only be produced by an alien activity. “How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production” (Marx and Engels 1972, 73).

During the time of their work, workers do not belong to themselves but to their employer, i.e., they lose their autonomy as free and rational beings. Their very capacity to work has been sold to the capitalists. Labor time is not anymore a part of their lives but a form of sacrifice.³ Work is not a means for self-expression but simply a means to make a living. The employer assumes absolute control both in respect to the manner in which the workers discharge their functions or in respect to the end results of their actions. “[E]mployees are reduced to muscular or mental stores of energy who accomplish tasks that are never their own but

always dictated and imposed by bosses, assembly line speed, and corporate goals and strategies" (Aktouf and Holford 2009, 113).

The division of labor causes the worker to be arbitrarily and artificially separated from his capacity for creative activity. The production process has been apportioned in such a way as each employee has only a particular, limiting sphere of activity. Divorced from its essential ends, work ceases to be man's species-activity.

Self alienation

Alienation is an obstacle to human development. This is because human beings have no permanent or fixed essence as pointed out earlier. For this reason, humanization and dehumanization are both possible. Humanization is the process of developing human nature to the fullest while the dehumanization is its opposite—it is the estrangement of man from himself, a distortion of his personality, and a reduction of his nature to a nonhuman level.

In a capitalistic society, ordinary workers are degraded into the animal level because their work ceases to be a conscious and a creative activity. It usually becomes a highly routinized process which requires the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired skills. As they perform the same function repeatedly, many workers lose their capacity to accomplish other tasks, making them dull and stupid. In their work, humans are not anymore self-conscious beings—they are alienated from their species-life (Marx and Engels 1972, 68). As they sell their labor power to the capitalist, workers become a mere merchandise. They are priced and sold in the market, subject to the law of supply and demand, and "exposed to all vicissitudes of competition and to all fluctuations of the market" (Marx and Engels 1964, 68) like any other article of commerce.

According to Istvan Meszaros (1975, 177), Marx "often emphasizes that there are two sides of the same human alienation. Labor is the 'objectless subject' whereas capital is the 'subjectless object'." Capitalists are alienated from their nature as self-conscious and social beings as they become the personification or the embodiment of capital, stripped of all human qualities. They fail to see their employees as fellow humans for many capitalists have identified being with having and in so doing, they are estranged from their species-being. Their only purpose for existence is the maximization of profit.

Social alienation

Social alienation is the logical consequence of individual alienation, for a society composed of alienated members is an alienated society as well.

Man's social nature can only be developed in a society where members live in unity and harmony. But behind the whole structure of capitalistic system stands those who do not work but own everything and those who work but do not own anything. Such society is conflictive. It is divided into those who have and who do not have, the exploiters and the exploited, the capitalists and the proletarians.

“It is not merely a political conflict between two parties standing on the ground of one society, but a conflict between two societies” (Marx 1973, 252).

A capitalistic society is not only a conflictive society but also an egoistic one. Most people are motivated by greed and self-interest. Workers enter the process production having in mind the desire for a higher salary. Businesses invest in the process of production in order to accumulate profit. Relations of people in the workplace are impersonal, business-like, competitive and, at times, hostile or antagonistic (Cf. “At work, no more Mr. Nice Guy...” 2011).

It is the basic presupposition of private property that man produces only in order to own. The purpose of production is to own. It not only has such a useful purpose, it also has a selfish purpose. Man only produces in order to own something for himself. The object of his production is the objectification of his immediate, selfish need. Man—in his wild, barbaric condition—determines his production by the extent of his immediate need whose content is the immediately produced object itself. (Marx 1988, 36)

MEANING AND VALUE OF WORK

If there is any human activity that can relate man to himself, to nature, and to his own species, it is no other than human work. Marx defines work as the conscious use of his natural faculties which results, directly or indirectly, in the transformation of nature for the purposes of satisfying some form of human need. As a conscious and teleological act, it is always accompanied by reason. Animal activity cannot be considered work.⁴ It is only proper for man to work as a self-conscious being. In every phase of human history, work assumes different forms. In the early stages, work simply refers to manual activities like house building, hunting, and agriculture, but as civilization advances and man assumes different ways of living, work becomes more complex. It cannot be considered anymore as an individual activity but a joint effort of so many people. It involves not only the actual production process but also the conceptual, scientific, sociological, and technical preparations as well as postproduction efforts, such as marketing, promotions, delivery, and others. Nonetheless, no matter what proportion of mind, muscle, or will is involved, the meaning and value of work come from the very fact that it is an activity which emanates from the person.

To be human for Marx is not simply to be born with a rational nature. “Man as he sprang originally from nature was only a mere creature of nature, not a man” (Engels 1972, 261). Human nature is a product of human activity, not heredity. “Birth only provides a man with his individual existence and constitutes him in the first instance only as a natural individual” (Marx 1975, 175). To be human means to work, to produce something, to imprint a human image in something that is nonhuman. Through work, man learns to distinguish himself from animals.

Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or anything else you like. They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence. (Marx and Engels 1972, 114)

While Marx and Engels accept the Darwinian evolutionary theory of human origin, they criticize Darwin for failing to recognize the role played by work in human evolution. Engels writes that it is by means of work that humans evolved from primates. Man started to work when, from being a tree-dweller ape, he assumed terrestrial residence and began to stand erect. This posture freed his hands from locomotion and enabled him to make use of flints and sticks as tools for food-gathering. This is the first form of human work, when humans tried to accomplish mastery of nature by his planned activity. "Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand with labor, and widened man's horizon at every new advance" (Engels 1972, 253). Aside from the hands, other human organs such as the eyes, tongue, brain, teeth, and ears were developed as humans engaged in various activities for production. The organ of speech evolved due to the human need to communicate in the productive effort. "In short, men in the making arrived at a point where they had something to say to another. The need led to the creation of the organ" (Engels 1972, 231-32). The development of his capacity to speak led to the enlargement of the brain. "Just as the gradual development of speech is inevitably accompanied by a corresponding refinement of the organ of hearing, so that development of the brain as a whole is accompanied by a refinement of all senses" (Engels 1972, 255). In order to fully satisfy his growing needs and efficiently exploit the richness of nature, humans began to associate and collaborate with each other. Because of this, humankind emerged from the condition of primitiveness or barbarity into an organized society. Work is not only instrumental in humanizing nature but in humanizing man, too. It is man's species-activity, i.e., it is not only an activity of man but his self-activity.

By the combined functioning of hands, speech, organs and brain, not only in each individual but also in society, human beings became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and were able to set themselves and achieve higher and higher aims. The work of each generation itself became different, more perfect and more diversified. Agriculture was added to hunting and cattle raising; then came spinning, weaving, metalworking, pottery and navigation. Along with trade and industry, art and science finally appeared. Tribes developed into nations and states. Law and politics arose, and with them that fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind—religion. (Engels 1972, 258)

Work is not simply the transformation of matter but the objectification of human nature. It is an extension of human personality, a self-realization of the worker in terms of his faculties, intention, and power. Through work, humans

accomplish their objective or goal. They become aware of their powers and bring them to perfection.

Marx emphasizes not only the personal character of work, but its social character as well. The goods and services which result from the work process are all meant to satisfy human needs. Since one's product is the object of another's need, humans enter into a network of relationship through work. Soon, this work relationship will assume social relationship. Human society is a society of work. "It follows that a certain mode of production or industrial stage is always combined with a certain mode of cooperation, or social stage" (Marx 1975, 277). When humans work, they do not only provide themselves with a means of livelihood. They also participate in the process of transforming society and developing institutions. "Work then not only makes man a man but also a fellowman, a member of human society" (Koren 1967, 32).

CONCLUSION AND SIGNIFICANCE

A human person is truly a *Homo faber* or a working being from the Marxist perspective. Through work, man realizes and confirms his authentic nature. Work acts as the mediator between man and nature, man and the social world, and man and his species. It is work which relates the different components of human life which would otherwise disintegrate on account of tensions and conflicts arising from the concrete circumstances of one's daily living. In Marx's (1988, 38) own words:

(1) In my production I would have objectified my individuality and its particularity and in the course of the activity I would have enjoyed an individual life; in viewing the object I would have experienced the individual joy of knowing my personality as an objective, sensuously perceptible and indubitable power. (2) In your satisfaction and your use of my product, I would have had the direct and conscious satisfaction that my work satisfied a human need, that its objectified human nature, and that I created an object appropriate to the need of another human being. (3) I would have been the mediator between you and the species and you would have experienced me as a reintegration of your own nature as a necessary part of yourself; I would have been affirmed in your thought as well as your love. (4) In my individual life I would have directly created your life; in my individual activity I would have immediately confirmed and realized my true human and social nature.

From this analysis, work acquires a central reference point both socially and existentially. This means that on the social level, the real solution to many of our social problems can be achieved only by promoting an authentic culture of work where the latter is valued for its own sake, and by giving primary considerations to the welfare of human workers in formulating our laws and economic policies. But more importantly, on an existential level, work holds the key to the fundamental question of the meaning of life. In contemporary terms,

authentic human existence is possible only if human beings work and find fulfillment in it. Part of the Marxist analysis of history is to demonstrate how a specific historical stage of production prevents the full development of the workers' potential or *telos*, thus alienating them not only from one another but even from their own nature. While the subject of Marx's investigation is primarily the factory system of his day, he is more concerned with something that is more fundamental: the unquantifiable human cost of profit-centered economy. In their projection of a future communist society, Marx and Engels present their vision of an authentic de-alienated human existence: Work will cease to be a class attribute, for everyone will work for his or her needs. The division of labor will be based on the individual's natural talent, physical ability, choice or inclination, not something socially mandatory. Monotonous and tiresome jobs will be rotated and distributed to all employees; hence, labor will lose its class character. Through job rotation, workers will be able to develop more skills and become more productive. There will be no need for big salaries to motivate people to work because the latter will be the primary want of life, a real expression of oneself, once the means of production ceases to be individually appropriated.⁵ The economy will be cooperatively and centrally planned. Through this, Marx believes that the competition to acquire goods and unemployment in the midst of unexhausted labor force will be avoided. Working hours will be reduced to the shortest term possible. Not bothered by inflation, unemployment, overwork, or inadequate wages, workers will have enough time to rest, recreate, and pursue further training and education to enhance their knowledge and skills. Each one will contribute to the wealth of the nation according to his own ability. Wage system will be abolished and replaced by a more equitable sharing and redistribution of profit. All will be assured of employment, old-age pension, security for illness and injury, and other social benefits.

Unfortunately, Marx and Engels did not present a detailed and systematized socioeconomic program in their writings. They gave no specific guidelines on how the political order should be organized, how production and exchange will take place, or how investment, taxation, and foreign trade will be conducted. The revolutionary measures mentioned at the end of section two of *The communist manifesto* (1964) are not meant to be a sort of blueprint for all societies that have gone through the proletariat revolution. Aside from the reason that Marxism focuses on historical analysis and the critique of the capitalist system, social and economic principles, as the manifesto states, have to be adapted to the prevailing historical conditions. Furthermore, there are human shortcomings and imperfections that may not be eliminated through the socialization of the means of production alone. Some occupations may be socially necessary but may not contribute to full human development or may not satisfy one's expectation of a meaningful employment.

The main significance of the Marxist model, however, is that it demonstrates that work is good not only as a means to an end but, more importantly, as an end in itself, for work is essential in order to live an authentic human existence. As man's self-activity, work is intrinsically related to man and vice versa. "[U]nder this model, the challenge for business ethics is to

articulate the type of work that can foster the full development of human potential” (Shaw and Barry 2010, 465). The corporation has to be a place of partnership and dialogue. It becomes the responsibility of businesses to provide employees with meaningful work and to explore creative ways of business organization and occupational conditions that would make it possible for them to find fulfillment in their working life.

NOTES

1. The future communist society is the end of the capitalist history and at the same time the beginning of a new history when human life is consciously determined by authentic and nonalienated individuals.

Communism [is] the positive transcendence of private property, or human self-estrangement, and therefore [is] the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore [is] the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e. human) being—a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. (Marx and Engels 1972, 84)

2. While the capitalism of today is much different from the capitalist system ushered in by the 19th-century industrial revolution, which Marx and Engels analyzed, few could question the relevance of Marxism in pointing out the defects of capitalism: unbridled competition leading to monopoly, profit-centeredness, consumerism, and neglect of the workers' welfare. Consider the following facts:

*The assets of the world's top three billionaires are greater than those of the poorest 600 million people on the planet.

*Globally, there are seventy thousand people who possess more than \$30 million in financial assets—enough to fill a large sports stadium. Half of the world's 587 billionaires (enough to fill a large disco area) are Americans, whose wealth increased collectively by \$500 billion in 2003 alone. They possess the same amount of wealth as the combined gross domestic product of the world's poorest 170 countries.

*More than a third of the world's people (2.8 billion) live on less than two dollars a day.

*1.2 billion people live on less than one dollar a day.

* The average compensation in 2004 for the CEOs of the top 367 U.S. companies was \$11.8 million, up from \$8.1 million in 2003. On average, CEOs in 2004 made 431 times what a production worker made, up from a 107:1 ratio in 1990 and a 42:1 ratio in 1982.

*CEO pay has increased by 300 percent over the last fifteen years, whereas wages have increased in the same period by only 5 percent (and minimum wage workers have seen their pay fall 6 percent). If wages had kept up with the percentage increase in CEO pay, in 2004

the average pay for production workers would have been \$110,136, instead of \$27,460.11.

*The top 20 percent of American households control 83 percent of the nation's wealth, while the bottom 80 percent of Americans control only about 17 percent of the nation's wealth.

*A total of 34.6 million Americans in 2002 (12.1 percent of the population) lived below the official poverty line (which is set absurdly low), and 8.5 million of them had jobs. Overall, Black poverty is double that of whites. (D'Amato 2006)

3. "[W]orking hours make time an artificial, saleable product as opposed to the natural time of the seasons, the cycle of day and night, and the biological clock" (Aktouf and Holford 2009, 113).

4. Marx and Engels (1972, 76) remark:

Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man confronts his product. An animal forms objects only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object.

5. Here is what Magdoff (2006, 23) says:

A frequently met objection to the communist vision is the claim that people will work only if driven by an economic motive. Yet this notion is refuted by many of the primitive societies we know about, where non-economic work incentives predominate: social responsibility, tradition, desire for prestige, and pleasure in craftsmanship. Given the record of past changes in people's attitudes to the community and to their work, it is reasonable to assume that human nature will adapt, and adapt with enthusiasm, to a social order based on cooperation, elimination of a rigid division of labor, and the opportunity for a fuller development of the individual.

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