

Alienation of Labor

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To say that, through labor, man has brought something into existence that now stands as a power of its own, apart from the man and independent of him, is to sound as though he has been vested with god-like qualities, but that is not the case. On the contrary, this occurrence, under a capitalist environment, devalues the man from a species-being with a world of its own, an individual, to merely a machine, capable of producing something that has more than likely been given an implied value by the Other. All this so that he can earn the ability to do that that would be normally done as a natural part of his being. In the following, we will see how this occurrence develops and the effect it produces.

It is interesting that man, which once would have labored at his own leisure only for what he needed to enjoy life has evolved into a being that works for others, to produce, not what is always necessary, but has been implied s needed by another, so that he may simply survive.

From its very beginning the situation of the worker seems grim. His worth as a producer is judged and is the basis of his being hired. However, when he is compensated for his work, instead of it being his value to the employer that is shown in the amount, he merely receives what is needed to insure his survival as well as his

needing to remain at work. Sartre talks of how the worker, "goes to sell himself every morning at the factory."¹ Interestingly enough, in regards to this selling, it is the same one who determines the value of the product that also determines the value of its producer. In regards to production, Marx writes:

"The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. The devaluation of the human world grows in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things"²

As production increases due to harder work on the part of the laborer, the profit of the employer increases, however the pay of the worker remains the same. In most instances this increase of production on the part of the worker actually *devalues* him to the employer as now the product supply is up, decreasing the immediate need of the worker. He has, as the old saying goes, worked himself out of a job. A Lack of need for production results in an immediate lack of labor for the producer and no labor means no wages.

The end product, the work of the laborer now stands against him as something independent. It is not his; in return for bringing it into being he will receive some wages, which he, should he desire the object to be his own, will have to return to the employer to receive the object. Before him is the embodiment of his

¹ Cumming, Pg. 462

² Marx, Pg. 2

labor, standing now as an alien being vested with a power given to it by others. It is a being that was dependent on the producer for its existence, but is now a being on its own. Once it is taken out into the world it is no longer attached to its producer. It is alienated from him. The laborer is no longer in relation to the product after production is done. Labor presents itself to the laborer in reality and then this reality as it were slips away from him and the labor is now embodied in the product, the product is estranged, alienated from him and replaced by earnings. Marx:

“So much does the realization of labor appear as a loss of reality that the worker loses his reality to the point of dying of starvation.”³

The laborer's self becomes starved through the continual feeding of this objectification of his labor, it is his very laboring to live. Sartre:

“His free activity, in its freedom, takes upon itself everything that crushes him: exhausting work, exploitation, oppression, rising prices.

Marx seems to be correct in his saying that there is an inverse proportion between the workers misery and his level of production. The more that is produced, the more is there to be seen as possibly being had by the producer, however, it was never his to begin with. The laborer enters into a denial of self – existence, a denial of his being that the object of labor might be brought into being but at what cost to the laborer?

³ Simon, Pg. 60

Even the natural of a person has to change and adapt to another that one might meet the standards set up for them externally of their self. Sartre:

“Those factory girls ruminating a vague dream, are at the same time pulsating with a rhythm *external to them*— a rhythm which is the work of all as the other. It is correct to claim that the semi-automatic machine is dreaming through them”⁴

Now, instead of being dependent on his existence for his being, there has been another step added to the equation in that his being is dependent on the product of his labor which allows for his existence, a product that was never his and a being that is falling into denial. Marx:

“The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his work becomes an object, an external existence, but also that it exists outside him independently, alien, an autonomous power, opposed to him. The life he has given to the object confronts him as hostile and alien.”⁵

Once this denial reaches it's full potential, the worker can actually come to a sense of comfort with his being dependent on others for his very being. Heidegger:

“Falling Being-into-the-world, which tempts itself, is at the same time tranquillizing. However, this tranquility in inauthentic Being does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity, but drives one into uninhibited 'hustle'”

However, he later says about this tranquility:

“Falling Being-into-the-world is not only tempting and tranquillizing; it is at the same time *alienating*.”⁶

⁴ Cumming, Pg.462

⁵ Simon, Pg. 60

⁶ Heidegger, Pg. 222

Marx shows how even nature, which produces on its own and freely can be exploited by those who would chose to do so. Man is to live as his full self with nature as he is a natural being. Man is to exist or Be within nature as his is a part of it. And nature provides for the existence of labor in that it can be cultivated, used for sustenance, provide for housing, etc. However, once the world of nature comes to be seen as merely product and the potential for more of it, it holds inside itself the means for man to merely survive from the labor invested in it. That which is freely produced by nature is now a commodity not just to be had, but purchased. Instead of man receiving his *living* from his Being, his being is dependent on the living he earns from his working. Marx:

“But just as nature provides labor with the means of life in the sense that labor cannot live without objects on which to exercise itself, so also it provides the means of life in the narrower sense, namely the means of physical subsistence of the worker.”⁷

The more the world is made product the less there is for just being. It is all now something to be had as opposed to something to just be. The very world in which one finds himself thrown is one that is made to hold him hostage. He is held hostage to unnatural obligations of bringing into being that object which would serve to enslave him, obligations that must be met in order to allow for his being.

⁷ Marx, Pg. 3

The ones that own the means of production, that provide work for those who will labor, they can regulate the very lives of those are needed by them to put the machines into operation. However, the workers are in need of the owners that their labor might be objectified and from that they might receive their living. The living they receive from the objectification of the labor is only so much that it allows for them to survive and they would have to return to the machine as long as they are in demand for their production. The owners of the machines live luxuriously off the objectification of the laborers all the while the workers are reduced to shacks, a lack of the necessities of life, and underdevelopment as human being existing within nature. Marx:

"It is true that labor produces marvel for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labor by machines, but it casts some of the workers back into barbarous forms of labor and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but for the worker it produces imbecility and cretinism."⁸

The seeds of estrangement themselves are contained within the act of production by the producer. Marx:

"How could the product of the worker's activity confront him as something alien if it were not for the fact that in the act of production he was estranging himself from himself?...The estrangement of the object of labor merely summarizes the estrangement, the alienation in the activity of labor itself."⁹

⁸ Simon, Pg. 61

⁹ Marx, Pg. 4

The being of the product, unless it has been produced solely for his own use, taken and distributed for the gain of the capitalist, removes from the laborer the result of his labor. It is then substituted, supposedly, by what the work provided for the employer to be distributed to the worker, a substitution in no way proportional to his labor.

Being does not bring with it the necessary consequence of labor. Interestingly enough it actually negates the authentic existence of being through self-denial being seen as necessary for existence. The denial of the natural self that the product might come into existence that allows for the producer to continue producing, not Being, but producing. The denial of self-satisfaction in essence merely prolongs the existence of the creature, which is not being its true self, all the while this is happening it is for the providing of satisfaction and material goods for others. Marx calls this forced labor. It is labor that is not done to satisfy any needs of the self but is just means of satisfying needs that exist outside ones self. The end result of this is that the imagined needs of an other have brought about the sacrifice of one its own kind.

Through this dependence on the objectification of the object by the producer for his survival, Marx shows how all the normal, natural, animal functions of a human being become dependent on the unnatural existence of labor for their

satisfaction. Things such as "eating, drinking, and procreating"¹⁰ are the only time that man feels he is truly free, this thinking in turn reduces him to an animal. They can only be done because labor, the unnatural, has been completed first. Instead of their being done because they are a part of his being he must first do the unnatural for others that he might have a part of his being back. Man comes to need the production of what he does not have, and is not his, and is not natural, and is not needed by definition of his being, so that he might have all those things which are natural, needed and are a part of what it is to be a human being.

Man, as a species being, exists as nature within nature. Nature, set apart by its conscious being as its own part of nature. Man, nature dependent on nature to exist until the time of natural death. Estranged labor is not natural in that it separates the who-I-am and the what-I-am which naturally co-exist and turns them into the what- I- can- do so that I might be what- I- am, all the while the who- I- am is lost to the production of an object that other wise in nature would not exist. Instead of doing what one does for ones own benefit all the while using what is freely given by nature for existence, the worker is removed from this natural state of being the implied necessity of labor solely done so that he might survive from moment to moment. All the while the time for being in those moments is lost. Man is alienated from what it is to be man. Marx:

¹⁰ Marx, Pg. 5

“Estranged labor reverses the relationship so that man, just because he is a conscious being, makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means for his existence.”¹¹

Through labor, man is alienated from his very being. External demands that were not his own have demanded he take it upon himself to produce goods for others that in providing for their being his is lost to him in the objectification of his labor into a product to be taken from him and sold. In return for this sacrifice of his being he is allowed to exist on the basis of another's judgment upon him of his selling worth. Through this meeting of demands, man watches all he does be taken and placed opposite him as an independent being that he must sacrifice a part of his existence should he want it for himself. He could not truly want it back for himself, as it was never his to begin with. This is alienation.

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¹¹ Marx, Pg. 7

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