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In Herman Melville's "Bartleby, The Scrivener", a narrator – a lawyer with offices on Wall Street – describes his experiences with a strange scrivener named Bartleby. Upon initial employment, Bartleby produced a significant volume of work. Bartleby begins his existence in the workplace as the ideal worker to the narrator – industrious, quiet, mechanical. One day, however, Bartleby replies to the narrator's request to accept a document with the phrase 'I would prefer not to'. The narrator is initially stunned but instead assigns the document to another copyist. However, Bartleby continues to respond to work assignments with 'I would prefer not to' and sits idle. The narrator becomes increasingly irritated and internally unstable; he cycles between anger and confusion, all the while attempting to reconcile with Bartleby in a benevolent manner. The narrator repeatedly elicits the thoughts of the other three workers in the office – Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut – all of whom provide some level of support for the narrator against Bartleby's idleness. Eventually, the narrator – unable to accept Bartleby's continued presence – leaves the office property altogether. Soon after he departs, Bartleby is imprisoned for vagrancy and dies from self-imposed starvation.

The primary source of conflict between the narrator and Bartleby is the narrator's inability to comprehend or accept the existence of a worker that does not work. Bartleby epistemologically enters the narrator's world as another worker to supplement his labor pool: the narrator comments that Bartleby's quiet manner could positively affect the behavior of fellow workers Turkey and Nippers. Bartleby's initial existence and role in the narrator's world is almost of a fantasy-worker, integrated so closely within the fabric of the ideal laborer that the narrator develops a "natural expectancy of instant compliance" (10). Bartleby's subsequent lack of compliance, then – 'I would prefer not to' – is unnatural, foreign.

What is also interesting to me, however, is the relationship between Bartleby and the other workers – particularly, Turkey and Nippers, who somewhat function as one joint character with dual or complementary behaviorisms. The worker is a laborer that directly provides value to the narrator, but Bartleby does not work and therefore deprives him of value. To Turkey and Nippers, however, Bartleby is a fellow laborer that does not provide any direct value to them. Bartleby can, though, indirectly increase Turkey and Nipper's labor expended covering work distributed away from Bartleby. Turkey and Nippers vocally demonstrate antagonistic feelings towards Bartleby when asked by the narrator. In the face of Bartleby's inaction, Nippers suggests that Bartleby should be removed from the office and an enraged Turkey prepares to physically assault Bartleby before being stopped by the narrator, among other hostile encounters. This behavior gives rise to several questions. What is the relationship between Bartleby and the somewhat unified 'other worker' of Turkey and Nippers? Where does Turkey and Nipper's hostility towards their fellow worker derive from? Moreover, how does one reconcile intra-worker antagonisms demonstrated in "Bartleby, the Scrivener" with Marx and Engel's vision of an 'inevitably' unified proletariat?

In the first section of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels dedicate several pages towards important discussion of the proletariat's development as a class. The proletariat is born from antagonism with the bourgeoisie; it begins separated and individuated but becomes more concentrated as industry develops. As the market becomes increasingly unstable by constant revolutionizing of production, the position of workers is homogenized and beaten down. From this point, Marx and Engels assert, workers form associations, and later a class, to more effectively further the interests of the working class. Marx and Engels note that this centralization is often interrupted by internal worker competition erupting from the equalization

of worker position, but that it “ever rises up again, stronger, firmer, mightier” (12). The formation of a proletarian class naturally derives from the conditions of bourgeois revolutionizing, insistent and recurring, insuppressible in the broad vision of history.

Does this understanding of the formation of the proletariat manifest in “Bartleby, the Scrivener”? It seems that it does not. For one, the world scope of the societies explored in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” and *The Communist Manifesto* are incredibly different. *The Communist Manifesto* is an overarching theory spanning across vast swathes of time and large masses of people; “Bartleby, the Scrivener” describes scenes in an office occurring within several days and involving a handful of people. Worker competition arises from a pressing equality between workers and a scarcity of wage-paying positions. While all scriveners in “Bartleby, the Scrivener” perform similar and interchangeable tasks, there is little scarcity of wage-paying positions. Bartleby’s introduction into the workplace does not threaten the livelihoods of Turkey and Nippers. Moreover, Turkey and Nippers do not take issue with the additional labor itself that is being transferred to them; the document that Bartleby notes he would ‘prefer’ not to examine is ‘speedily examined’ by Nippers.

It seems instead that it is the very *existence* of Bartleby as a worker that does not work which irritates Turkey and Nippers, rather than any particular intra-worker competition imposed by the relations of labor. The relations at play in this ecosystem are instead of identity and role within the capitalist system. A person that resides in a workplace is a worker; a workplace is a space designated for workers to engage in production. Turkey is a worker; Nippers is a worker. Bartleby, by process of constantly occupying the workspace, is also a worker. Bartleby, however, is a worker that does not work. Instead, he invokes the power of preference – a power which, in a bipartite capitalist system, is reserved for the bourgeoisie. Thus, Bartleby is a worker that, by his

passiveness, actively refutes the identity of a worker. Nippers scathingly mocks Bartleby's usage of the word 'prefer', being very sure to emphasize every occurrence of the term 'prefer' as to distinguish his own usage of the term from Bartleby's: "*Prefer not*, eh? .... I'd *prefer* him ... What is it, sir, pray, that he *prefers* not to do now?" (20). This, in turn, reflect Nippers' attack on Bartleby's means of *not* being a worker.