

Module 4-2 Philosophical Implications on Human Labor

Work was interpreted and valued differently by different peoples

For primitive man: to appease the gods through ritual and magic

For Greeks: work is profane and separate from the sacredness of nature, such that work is only for slaves and animals (with greek society being split between free and unfree, with free men living on the work of others)

For Middle Age Christians: work in the light of God's creation (God worked for 6 days and rested on the 7th day)—work is an imitation of God's creative act; but work is also toil and a consequence of sin (from the Fall of Humanity through Adam and Eve)

In the Middle Ages: craftsmen grouped themselves in guilds according to their type of crafts and work on a mutual basis

Merchants were hated because they commerce for profit rather than meeting consumer needs

St Thomas: Work as good for man as it cultivates industriousness, controlling unruly passions and overcoming idleness (idle hands are the devil's workshop). Work allows man to earn a living and give alms, but also does not possess its own intrinsic value as it is non-intellectual

For the monks: "Ora et labora" (work is noble as long as it is not attached to the fruit's of one's labor but offers it to God)

St. Benedict's rule: "Laborare est orare"

Eventually the power of the guilds decline, shifting to capitalistic enterprises

Individualistic philosophy spearheaded by Rene Descartes

Everyone must work, man is homo economicus

Karl Marx: there is an interdependence and interaction of man and nature achieved in labor, labor is central

"The whole of world history is nothing but the creation of man by human labor, and the emergence of nature for man"

Human labor is different from animal labor:

animals produce only what is necessary to survive (a compulsion for physical need), animals do not distinguish themselves from their own activities

Meanwhile, man works universally, not only because of physical need but can also produce free of such need

Man reproduces the whole of nature is not confined to his own species (e.g. creation of

planes which allow man to fly like birds), can produce according to the natural laws of beauty and in accordance with standards of other species

Man is not fully identified with his work

His life activity can be an object of his will and consciousness

His own life is an object for him, and his labor is a free activity

Man produces using forces to make instruments, which are extensions of their own body

Use of tools imply division of labor

But this division of labor makes man interdependent with other men

Man is made a fellowman

Work is not just a means to a goal, but is an end of itself, a value in itself

Working for a wage makes work and worker a commodity, as work cannot be only reduced to a means to live

Man lives in order to work, as work is the way for man to realize his true humanity

The rise of work in brought by capitalism gives view of man as controller and master of nature

Man's dignity lies in his ability to stand for himself, to acquire master over nature and his own passions

For Marx, labor confirms his own being as a species-being

Man is not merely a natural being, but also a human natural being (man is a being =who treats himself as a present, living species)

Man is the only thing who can make the community his object both practical and theoretically

Man can make himself and his humanity his own object (universal and freedom of man)

Man is man because he objectifies himself through labor: e.g. making a chair; man is transcending himself and making himself an object for-itself by means of nature -> chair becomes an expression, externalization, and realization of man's species life and an embodiment of his creativity.

The human stamp in the chair; nature becomes humanized

"The human significance of nature exists for social man, because only in this case is nature a bond with other men, the basis of his existence for others and of their existence for him"

Man must produce for society and with the consciousness of acting as a social being -> this is only how the work becomes human, and the object a human object (social object)