

This excerpt was taken from a paper written for sociology class (Wealth, Power, and Inequality). The title of the paper is "Beyond Black and White: A Deeper Dive into Marxism and Capitalism". The purpose of the assignment was to choose one pro-socialist and one pro-capitalist theorist discussed in class and pick a side to disagree with argumentatively. In the excerpt provided, I critique the ideas of Karl Marx. This is not the entire essay, simply an excerpt.

Ideas need to be debated openly and truthfully for society to weigh the advantages and flaws of different ideological systems. No one ideology should silence any other; they should all be tested in intellectual combat on the battleground of ideas. Marxist ideas should be discussed and debated openly, and his supporters should not attempt to silence or downplay Ayn Rand's important ideas of liberalism, individualism, and personal responsibility. The contrast between Ayn Rand and Karl Marx is a crucial one to focus on because these two towering intellects' ideas of individualism and collectivism perfectly capture the nuances in the divide between capitalism and socialism. They put forth the most compelling and intellectually unique arguments for and against capitalism and analyze the issue from many different perspectives.

Marx's claim on capitalism's oppression of human beings can be viewed most effectively through his philosophical idea of the dialectic. In *Grundrisse*, Marx presents his theory of dialectics. This theory of dialectics differs from Georg Hegel's historical dialectics (that of thesis, antithesis, and their combination: synthesis). Marx instead views his dialectics in the forms of objects and beings, or "Unities" as he calls them. A Unity is a thing (anything from a commodity to a human being) that has two sides: a foreground and a background. The foreground is everything that a capitalist focuses on in an object: its value for which it can be sold in the market, also known as its exchange value. The background is everything else inherent in an object: its usefulness and every single way it can be used, also known as its use value. There is a tension between the foreground and background of an object, usually due to the difference in its exchange value and its use value. A back scratcher, for example, may have an exchange value of \$3, but its use value is to scratch someone's back, to reach an object stuck under a couch, and many other uses. A capitalist does not produce an object for its inherently useful qualities, but instead so it can be sold for a profit. Marx's dialectical reasoning is particularly important in his view of human beings under capitalism. Human beings are also a Unity, and there is an extreme tension between their foreground and background. The foreground of a human is his ability to work; a human can be paid a living wage (his exchange value) to work in a factory. The background is everything else that makes a human a human. His love for art, his passion for reading, the love he feels for his family. These things are all useful to him, therefore they make up his "use value." The ultimate tension, described by Marx, is between a person's foreground treatment as a commodity and his background humanity. Marx claims capitalism strips a human of his background, his use value, his innate humanity, in favor of treating him as a commodity. His value as a laborer is emphasized, his humanity de-emphasized.

With the human as a unity in mind, we can now observe Marx's dialectic through what he claimed is the point of view of a capitalist business owner. As a producing capitalist, a worker can be hired for his cost of production: a subsistence wage. Now, say that the worker works in the factory for 6 hours and in those 6 hours, the worker produces goods that are worth his wage. Instead of going home, though, the owner has the worker work for another 6 hours. Now, the

worker has produced 12 hours' worth of goods while being paid for 6 hours' worth of goods, so the producer keeps the remaining 6 hours' worth of goods as profit. This is Marx's famous Labor Theory of Value. The Labor Theory of Value has a second component to it, though: It does not apply to machinery. A machine's use value is equal to exchange value. In other words, a machine cannot add more to production than the machine is worth; it cannot create profit. If a machine cannot create profit, Marx thought, then increasing mechanization would lead to a drop in profits. This will lead to socialism as the bourgeoisie lose their wealth and power and the proletariat violently revolt.

Marx's philosophical dialectics treat the nature of work as alienating. This description could not be farther from the truth. Nonetheless, Marx's perspective on a low wage worker is understandable when put into his perspective of the industrial revolution. He lived during a time when cities were booming, and the nature of work was changing; A worker worked in a factory to make another person's product. He then went home to his large family in a tiny room without any sanitation or ventilation. Fortunately, thanks to the capitalist surplus, these conditions soon changed. Plumbing came to his city, his building was renovated, his child began to attend school. Soon came the largest increase in average quality of life standards in human history. From 1848 to 2015, the percentage of people living in extreme poverty dropped from 87% to 10% (Roser). This cannot be overlooked, ignored, or misattributed. Marx, with his limited historical perspective, fails to realize the massive gains in life expectancy and poverty that marked the industrial revolution.

To counter this fact, Marxists focus on the fact that wages are not important, the only thing of importance is that that alienated labor is forced upon the individual. Marx seems to hate that people must work in capitalism; he thinks it is not human nature. But the nature of life is suffering in the absence of effort, and that suffering is only alleviated through the meaning and effort of work. That is, since suffering is inevitable, suffering in service of a higher goal is the best way to go about living. This is self-evident in my own life, as any person without a goal or direction lives in a meaningless state of torpor. My first year of college was spent without any aim, throwing caution to the wind and "enjoying my humanity." I ignored the "oppressive" work forced upon me by my professors and decided to live in a free state of pursuing passion. I soon fell into a nihilistic depression. Without an aim, without effort to guide my soul, I had no direction. The only thing that led me to emerge from that depression was the taking on of work and personal responsibility. I worked in a kitchen during my free time outside of class, making the same meals for the same patrons every day. Marx would've labeled my job as "alienating." While my job was difficult, and I soon realized that it was not something that I wanted to do; something about the effort I put in resonated with my soul. This job motivated me to put time into my studies, so that I may move up in the world and not work at such a place. It rewarded me with money, which I diligently saved and used to achieve my goal: to go visit my family outside of the country. Labor does not need to be inherently creative or artistic to be meaningful. Labor in and of itself, along with properly aligned goals that can be achieved through the labor, can provide tremendous meaning. Marx provides a weak example for the negative effects of capitalism on human beings. He claims that capitalism "objectifies" humans through work. But to provide meaningful work, one must objectify themselves in a way. A human must put

everything else that he is aside to focus on and achieve a desired goal within his work, which ultimately brings meaning and satisfaction. In any system, humans must force themselves to put effort into their lives and work; or else suffer the consequences. Work strengthens the individual against the terrible unfairness that is life; the responsibility inherent in free market capitalism empowers one to have a say in their own life. Ultimately, Marx's theories on societal changes over time and the advent of socialism and communism through revolution clearly have not come true, calling into question Marx's one-dimensional view of history.

Marx begins by describing the beginning of human history, the time that Homo Sapiens spent in tribes and bands of hunter-gatherers, as Primitive Communism. He claims that there was no real division of classes or labor, and that goods were communally shared. It's blatantly obvious through modern anthropological and biological research that hunter gatherer systems were not "pre-class" or communist. The idea that private property did not exist in ancient hunter gathering societies is purely incorrect. Although they did own fewer personal items due to their mobile lifestyle, the severeness with which they treated stealing was extremely violent compared to today's society (Santa Fe Institute). The idea that these societies were entirely communal, non-hierarchical, divided labor by only sex and age difference, and shared absolutely everything is ridiculous as well. After hunter-gatherer systems come Asiatic, Ancient, and Feudal societies. These can be considered together because they begin the process of class-struggle and as well as give rise to the means of production by which the bourgeoisie gain control. One thing that Marx gets right in his model of societal changes throughout history is that a driving factor within these historical societies is the hierarchical struggle. He incorrectly believes these hierarchies are constructed by humans as a tool of oppression, and that they are not present in nature. Natural hierarchies exist and are a tool of evolution, as proven by the Pareto principle that is observed in many different natural contexts. Observe hierarchical chimpanzee societies as evidence: A monarchy or oligarchy emerges due to a few dominant and socially capable males, and to this group goes most of the spoils of nature (Barner-Barry). Dominance hierarchies, insofar as they also characterize the animal kingdom to a certain degree, are clearly not only human constructions. There is evidence for the dominance hierarchy that goes back as far as the initial evolution of terrestrial photosynthetic life (Peterson, 14). Furthermore, it is both biologically and anthropologically clear that human hierarchies are not primarily predicated on power imbalances. As Marx states, humans are social creatures with "Social Being" possibilities within their psyche. Human dominance hierarchies are therefore predicated on social bonding and cohesion, once again evidenced by natural studies of our closest relatives: chimpanzees. What human society has achieved through capitalism is an egalitarian dream compared to nature. It is a more peaceful extension of the natural dominance hierarchy. Instead of most of our species succumbing to painful lives of starvation, privation, and failure to reproduce; we have instead expanded and cushioned the dominance hierarchies that exist in nature to fit the progress of our species. There are many dominance hierarchies in modern human society. Those of politics, those of business, of sport and of the arts, just to name a few. There are even many different arenas in which to rise in depending on geographical location and familial lineage. In human societies, it is not aggression, violence, or manipulation that are the main identifiers of successful people. It is instead IQ and social ability, as well as the ability to conform to and peacefully strive to ascend a dominance hierarchy (Dr. Indu H). This is backed up by psychometrics studies

and factor analysis among many different human populations. These agentive elements of a human's personality categorically contribute most to his or her success. It is a combination of these one-dimensional characteristics that greatly determines the success of an individual.

Human beings are constant structures eternally in flux. The constituent elements of a human's psyche, personality, and even physical body are constantly changing, but a human's existence is constantly there. People are what physicist Erwin Schrödinger calls a dissipative structure. A dissipative structure constantly exchanges information, energy, and matter with the external environment. This concept is part of Marx's fatal flaw and misattribution. Marx is correct in stating that there have been constant dominance hierarchies throughout time, and that their constituent parts have been in flux throughout different periods of time. From Asiatic societies with despotic rulers and independent communities to modern Capitalist societies with the bourgeoisie and proletariat, these hierarchies do exist in some form. What he fails to realize are three things: Firstly, these systems are made up of individuals in constant flux, and it is individuals themselves who affect and transition these systems from one form to another. It is not the system itself affecting the individuals that make it up. Secondly, these systems are far from simple, unidimensional power struggles where oppression is the main tool used to control. As Marx states himself, humans are social creatures. They interact with each other in socially acceptable ways, and it is through these interactions that individuals rise in the dominance hierarchy. Any power gained through alternative and socially destructive means is unstable, it does not work in harmony with the individual variables in the dominance hierarchy. This is what can contribute to the changing of the dominance hierarchy over time. It is the reason that despotic rulers are relatively short lived, and why systems are constantly in flux. As the individuals that are a part of a dominance hierarchy find flaws within themselves, the dissipative structure reorganizes itself and orients itself into a more fair and socially acceptable system. Thirdly, the destruction of these structures in favor of an "equitable" socialist or communist system simply will not work. There is no way to artificially dismantle a natural system to bend to the idealistic visions of humans; evidenced by the climate crisis we now find ourselves in. A dismantling of the naturally evolving dominance hierarchies will only reorganize it into a far more perverse and destructive artificial system, where the individuals at the top will now claim to act on behalf of society through their "Species Being," and will elevate their word to the divine. This will ironically prove Marx's theories correct, but in a completely counterintuitive fashion: It was not the past societies that were ruled through a system of oppressors against oppressed, but the future ones. It is not the system that changes the individuals, it is the individuals that decide to change themselves, which affects the system of which they are a part of. To resume, Marx has a point when he claims that history has been a dynamic struggle. But it has not been one of class struggles, and it has not been a black-and-white struggle against oppression. Ironically, his goal of communism eventually does establish "new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones."

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