

“The Shortening of the Working Day” in Marx's *Capital* and Labor as Human Essence

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My study examines the positioning of the concept of labor in Marxism. Section 1 is an introduction. Marx appealed for the “liberation of labor” because labor is the essence of human beings. However, he advocated “liberation from labor” through “the shortening of working day” in *Capital*. This aporia seen in Marx's labor concept remains unresolved. Therefore, I have attempted to solve it. In Section 2, I classified the concepts of labor and free time in Marxist social development theory as follows. L1: wage labor in capitalism, L2: labor in market economy, L3: labor in self-sufficient economy under private property system, L4: labor in the principle of contribution of socialist society, L5: labor as an advanced activity in communist society, F1: advanced activity in free time, and F2: leisure in free time. In Section 3, based on the arrangement in the previous section, I explored which type of labor is judged to be alienated. From the definition of alienation, L1 to L4 are included in alienated labor. In Section 4, I examined L5, F1, and F2. L5 is the labor freed from alienation. Therefore, from the standpoint of alienation, L5 should not be discarded. However, if the productive forces develop sufficiently, it is expected that L5 is converted into F1 or F2. Why is F1 or F2 more desirable than L5? When comparing both, the latter is freer, its burden on human beings as internal nature and the environment as external nature is lesser, and the coexistence between nature and human beings is easier in F1 or F2. This is why L5 should be replaced by F1 or F2.

In Section 5, I discussed the relationship between the argument in the previous section and the Marxist beliefs that labor is the human essence. L5 is the labor that has become “life's prime want.” However, the theory of labor essence cannot be deduced from the universality of the metabolism between nature and human beings. Purposiveness is indeed the essence of labor, but it is not the essence of human beings. Although social cooperation and self-realization can certainly be called the human essence, they are not limited to labor, but rather in free activities without labor. These enjoyments become possible in free time. Therefore, Marxism advocates the shortening and eventual disposal of labor. Section 6 concludes with my suggestion on the positioning of labor concepts in Marxism. The Marxist stance on labor varies according to the stages of development of the social system. In a capitalist society, labor is in an alienated form, and in the early stages of communist society, it gains a human form. However, as a communist society develops, the proportion of labor will decline, and lose its position as the ideal. The “liberation of labor” is a priority for us living in a capitalist society, and therefore, labor without alienation is presented as the goal. This is due to the adoption of the immanent critique based on historical materialism. In communist society, “liberation from labor” is the subject, and labor is *not* the human essence *in this sense*.