

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

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1. The aporia of the Marxist view of labor

Advanced capitalist countries experienced high economic growth in the middle of the 20th century, but since the 1970s they have shifted to an era of low growth.¹ Furthermore, after entering the 21st century, we are witnessing a shift to zero growth amidst the trends of globalization, service-oriented economies, and informatization. In addition to taking the end of economic growth as fact, some even welcome² this development as a sign of the steady state that John Stuart Mill ([1848] 1970) advocated. In today's welfare state, more labor is needed for economic growth, and although the view of “no welfare without work” is deep-rooted, in recent years another trend advocating “welfare without work” has emerged. Considering the intersection of various labor trends in today's welfare state, the purpose of this paper is to consider how Marxist principles of labor are positioned in Marxist theory concerning future society.

Karl Marx emphasized the universal character of labor in “The Labor Process and the Process of Producing Surplus Value,” Book 1, Chapter 5 of *Capital*.

The labour process, resolved as above into its simple elementary factors, is human action with a view to the production of use values, appropriation of natural substances to human requirements; it is the necessary condition for effecting exchange of matter between man and Nature; it is the everlasting Nature-imposed condition of human existence, and therefore is independent of every social phase of that existence, or rather, is common to every such phase. (CW35:194)

This description seems to indicate Marx's recognition that labor is an essential activity for human beings in any society. If actual labor is alienated labor, our aim is to convert such labor to human labor, namely, “the liberation of labor.” However, in “Trinity Formula,” Book 3, Chapter 48 of *Capital*, Marx mentions that because of “the shortening of the working day” in “the realm of necessity,” the “development of human energy which is an end in itself” is possible in “the realm of freedom” where people are liberated from labor (CW37:807). Here, our goal is the “liberation from labor,” even if labor is free from alienation and becomes human. However, which

one is Marx seeking, liberation of labor or liberation from labor? Hannah Arendt (1958) observed the contradiction that existed in Marx's concept of labor, describing it as "the fundamental contradiction which runs like a red thread through the whole of Marx's thought" (104). Furthermore, she states:

[The contradiction] is present no less in the third volume of capital than in the writings of the young Marx. Marx's attitude toward labor, and that is toward the very center of his thought, has never ceased to be equivocal. While it was an "eternal necessity imposed by nature" and the most human and productive of man's activities, the revolution, according to Marx, has not the task of emancipating the laboring classes but of emancipating man from labor; only when labor is abolished can the "realm of freedom supplant the realm of necessity." ... Such fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate writers. (Arendt 1958, 104-105)

On the one hand, Marx advocates the liberation of labor, as labor comprises the essence of human beings, while on the other hand, he advocates the liberation from labor through the shortening of the working day. Marx's attitude toward labor is clearly contradictory. Arendt expresses confusion about how to understand this and abandons further elucidation.³ The questions concerning this aporia witnessed in Marx's view of labor have not yet been resolved,⁴ and I intend to answer them in this paper through an examination of this seeming contradiction.

The present paper is organized as follows. Section 2 classifies and organizes the concept of labor and free time in Marxist theory of social development. In Section 3, based on the arguments of Section 2, I will explore which of the five concepts of labor correspond to alienated labor. Next, Section 4 illuminates Marx's advocacy of "the shortening of the working day" in *Capital*. In Section 5, I clarify the relationship between the case presented in Section 4 and the argument that regards labor as an aspect of human nature. Finally, in Section 6, I present my opinion on the positioning of labor in Marx's thought system as the paper's conclusion.

2. Labor and free time in the theory of social development

The concept of labor is quite broad. Differences in definitions of labor are a source of major confusion in debates concerning the concept of labor. The roles of labor and free time in social

development will be considered and classified in this section. Labor can be classified as follows, according to its modes in various social systems:

- L1: Wage labor in a capitalist society
- L2: Labor in a market economy
- L3: Labor in a self-sufficient economy with private property
- L4: Labor according to the contribution principle in a socialist society
- L5: Labor as an advanced activity in communist society⁵
- F1: Advanced activity in free time
- F2: Leisure in free time

L1 refers to wage labor in a capitalist society. In this system, the capitalist hires workers and the workers receive wages in exchange for their labor. Labor is thus carried out only to obtain wages. In this relation of wage labor to capital, the surplus labor produced by workers is exploited by capitalists.

L2 refers to labor in a market economy. It assumes the existence of a private property system and the social division of labor. Historically, the market economy appeared as simple commodity production, and before the emergence of capitalist society it did not become a dominant production relationship. The market economy has become dominant in capitalist society. Goods and services produced by this labor have value for others. Since capitalist society is based on a market economy, L2 includes L1. Therefore, there exists L2, which is not L1, that is, L2 – L1. From pre-capitalism to capitalism, L2 – L1 appeared as the labor of independent producers or self-employed persons. In the transition from a capitalist to a socialist society, L2 – L1 will appear as labor under market socialism based on property-owning democracy or self-managed enterprises. In terms of the historical order, L2 precedes L1, but since this paper is concerned with the modes of labor in the transition from capitalism to socialism, L2 is positioned after L1.

It is true that Marx does not refer to the market economy after capitalism. However, as seen in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, Marx theorizes that a socialist society will precede a communist society, which is the ultimate goal of social change, and before the socialist society, a transitional society will occur. Considering this gradual progression in the theory of social development, the approach of first pursuing a market economy in which capitalism is abolished can be found in Marxism.

L3 refers to labor in a self-sufficient economy with private property. The market economy is based on the private property system, but without the social division of labor, it is not a market economy, but a self-sufficient economy. Historically, self-sufficient economies have preceded market economies. However, the self-sufficient economy declined with the development of the market economy, and almost disappeared with the emergence of capitalism. While the use value of goods and services produced by labor in a market economy goes to other people, the use value of those produced by labor in a self-sufficient economy go to the producers themselves. However, even though the self-sufficient economy precedes the market economy historically, there is no inclusive relationship between the two.

After the capitalist society has been abolished and the market economy has declined, the alternative economic system cannot return to a self-sufficient economy. However, the self-sufficient economy has a lower degree of alienation, in that it produces use value for the producers themselves. Although L3 will not be realized as a social system in the future, L3 is placed after L1 and L2 in the logical order of societal development.

L4 and L5 refer to the supply of labor in the two stages of communist society in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. The labor contribution principle is applied in socialist society. L4 corresponds to this principle. On this subject, Marx writes:

What we are dealing with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society, which is thus in every respect, economically, morally and intellectually, still stamped with the birth-marks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society — after the deductions have been made — exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labour. (CW24:85-86)

In the communist society that follows a socialist society and is the last stage of historical development, the needs principle becomes dominant. L5 thus refers to labor in this society. Marx explains:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and thereby also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished; after labour has become not only a means of life

but life's prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-round development of the individual, and all the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs! (CW24:87)

The difference between L4 and L5 is that L5 is released from the self-ownership principle, whereas L4 is still affected by it. L5 is the dominant form of labor in a communist society, but it has existed in earlier societies and has played an important role in supporting these societies' foundations. As the market economy becomes dominant, the consciousness arises that labor that can earn paid income is the true work, while unpaid work is demoted to a subordinate position. However, even in the market economy, unpaid work has played an indispensable function, especially in the context of reproductive labor and social security. As the market economy shrinks in a communist society, unpaid work will regain its central position as the primary way of working.

Volunteer labor, such as that of helping the weak or rescuing victims of natural disasters belongs to category L5. Volunteer labor does not seek earnings. In the market economy, especially in capitalist society, the aim of which is gaining profits, volunteer labor is regarded as exceptional work that only occurs in special cases. However, in a communist society that is not based on the pursuit of profit or money, volunteer work plays an essential role.

Life in free time is expressed as F. F is divided into free activities (F1) and leisure (F2). Distinguishing between L5 and F1 is not necessarily easy.⁶ Labor is an activity for the necessity of substance metabolism. Labor consists of activities that are done to meet some economic necessity, even if it is unpaid and voluntary. On the other hand, free-time activities are of course unpaid and voluntary. Although free-time activities are not done to satisfy economic needs, they may satisfy those needs as a result. However, the agent of the activity does not intend to satisfy these necessities. Marx compares working hours and free time in *Capital* as follows:

The saving of labour time is equivalent to the increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which itself, as the greatest productive force, in turn reacts upon the productive power of labour. From the standpoint of the immediate production process, it can be considered as the production of fixed capital, this fixed capital BEING MAN HIMSELF. Incidentally, it is self-evident that immediate labour time itself cannot remain in abstract antithesis to free time, as it

appears to do from the standpoint of bourgeois political economy. Labour cannot become a game, as desired by Fourier, whose great merit it remains to have stated that the ULTIMATE OBJECT is the raising of the mode of production itself, not [that] of distribution, to a higher form. Free time—which is both leisure and time for higher activity—has naturally transformed its possessor into another subject. (CW29:97)

In situations where labor becomes an end in itself and develops into advanced activities, the conflict between working hours and free time disappears. Advanced activities conducted during working hours and those during free time are almost identical. From a bourgeois point of view, labor and free time conflict with one another, but from a communist point of view, there are few boundaries between labor and higher activities conducted during free time. However, labor is distinguished from play, in that the former is a serious act to overcome obstacles. Marx continues:

It is true of work which has not as yet created the subjective and objective conditions (or also of the pastoral, etc., state which has lost them) for work to become travail attractif, to be the self-realisation of the individual, which in no way implies that work is pure fun, pure amusement, as in Fourier's childishly naïve conception. Really free work, e.g. the composition of music, is also the most damnably difficult, demanding the most intensive effort. (CW28:530)

Marx distinguishes between labor and play.⁷ Labor is an activity that wields serious power, but play is distinguished from labor even if it is advanced activity. Even with the same advanced activities, the attitude of the actor during labor and free activities are quite different. Labor requires mental concentration, whereas play does not. For example, in playing baseball, the degree of tension is completely different between an amateur playing as a hobby and a professional playing for his career. Free activities are less tense and more relaxed than labor. Fl will bloom in a communist society, but it appeared as long ago as labor did. The utopian description in *German Ideology* is that of free time, not working hours. Marx writes:

Whereas in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and

another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic. (CW5:47)

This "I" refers to a simple amateur, rather than a "hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic" as a professional worker. That is why they can change the content of their work, "as they have minds."⁸

The last category, F2, refers to pure leisure, that is, something other than advanced activities conducted during free time.⁹ As mentioned earlier, Marx classifies free time as "both leisure and time for higher activity" (CW29:97). F1 has similarities with labor regarding advanced activities, but F2 is in fact the opposite of labor. Therefore, pure leisure is distinguished from F1, and is called F2. Like F1, F2 appeared as long ago as labor did and gradually increased with the development of productive forces. Its time allotment per day will be greatest in a communist society. These are the definitions of the concepts of labor and free time.

3. Alienated labor

Based on the above definitions, let us now consider what kind of labor should be abolished. There are several reasons to discard labor. First, we must examine Marx's theory of alienation. There, the alienation of labor is most important. The general definition of alienation is as follows:

The division of labour offers us the first example of the fact that, as long as man remains in naturally evolved society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. (CW5:47)

Alienation refers to situations in which human beings oppose one another because of the division of labor. Therefore, if it is not caused by human acts, it is not considered alienated. For example, since the cause of economic recessions stems from human activity, this is a kind of alienation. In contrast, a famine that is brought about by natural disaster is not alienation.

Marx deduces the four provisions of alienation based on this definition. Those four provisions include (1) alienation from the products of labor, (2) alienation from labor, (3) alienation from the species being, and (4) alienation from other human beings.

Some points must be made here. Some Marxists explain from the perspective of exploitation theory that (1) means that workers cannot possess the products of their own labor. However, I think this explanation is inaccurate.¹⁰ As the above quotation shows, alienation refers to situations in which the products of the workers' labor lead to their own repression. That is why the act (2), which brings (1), is also alienated. Regarding the "species being" of (3), some Marxists argue that this is not the communal essence, but other essential elements common to human beings, such as free conscious existence.¹¹ However, if we adopt this argument, since we must give up the important point in the theory of alienation that human activities are divided, the argument cannot be accepted. It is true that (4) refers to the division between a human being and other human beings, but it does not imply that community is human essence itself. Therefore, (3) should be understood as the human communal essence.

Let us now examine which kinds of labor should be abolished according to Marxism. The first type of labor that should be abolished is L1. Marx argues for its abolishment in *Value, Price, and Profit* as follows:

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work!" they ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wages system!" (CW20:149)

The abolishment of capitalism eliminates the system where capitalists hire workers, workers provide labor, and capitalists pay wages as compensation for it. Therefore, labor for obtaining wages will be abolished. Since Marxists have concentrated their criticism on the exploitation of surplus labor by capitalists, abolishing wage labor is a minimal request.

What we should consider next is whether L2, precisely L2–L1, should be disposed of. In the wake of the failure of the Soviet economic system, the view that it is impossible to completely eliminate the market economy (although capitalism must still be abolished) is common among Marxists. From this standpoint, L1 should be abolished, but L2–L1 will survive. What does Marx think? He believes that L2–L1 should also be abolished, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

Lastly, the external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to another. (CW3:274)

In a market economy, labor is for the use of others, not for one's own use. This is still alienated labor. Because of that, Marx says in *Capital*, in "a community of free individuals, carrying on their work with the means of production in common" (CW35:89), the economic system "is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan" (CW35:90). Thus, Marx argues that the market economy should be abolished.

In L3, the products obtained by labor belong to the laborer and the production of goods is conducted to satisfy his/her desires, not the desires of others. Therefore, in this respect, it is less alienated than L1 and L2. However, since L3 is premised on a private property system, the product obtained by labor is also privately owned by the direct producer. Thus, L3 is a very personal labor that is disconnected from society.

Private property thus results by analysis from the concept of *alienated labour*, i.e., of *alienated man*, of estranged labour, of estranged life, of *estranged man*.
(CW3:279)

The alienation theory presented in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* presupposes the existence of capitalist society and does not address a self-sufficient economy with a private property system. But in the sense that private ownership comes from alienated labor, the labor of a self-sufficient economy and that of a capitalist society are the same; however, the former expresses alienated labor in a pure form. The basis of private ownership is the self-ownership principle that one's own body belongs to oneself. This principle refuses the *species-being* of human nature and therefore will be abolished.

As for L4, in a socialist society in which the means of production have been socialized, each worker receives consumer goods proportional to their labor contributions. Since consumer goods for those who cannot work are deducted in advance, the self-ownership principle is incomplete; however, it is still effective. The self-ownership principle is the root of private ownership, and thus it is alienated. As such, L4 will be discarded in communist society. In this way, L1 to L4 are positioned as forms of labor that should be abolished.

4. "The shortening of the working day" in *Capital*

L5 refers to labor that is provided by the principle of "each according to his ability" in a communist society. There, "with the all-round development of the individual... all the springs of

common wealth flow more abundantly” (CW24:87). Regarding the substance metabolism between nature and human beings, the degree of constraint by the metabolism in a communist society is less than that in a socialist society. Nonetheless, the human labor involved in the metabolism is not eliminated; rather, it is “life’s prime want” in a communist society (CW24:87). This labor is labor freed from all repression and alienation. Therefore, from the viewpoint of alienation, L5 is not labor to be abolished. It seems that labor as an aspect of human nature has been realized here.

However, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper, in *Capital*, Marx argues for “the shortening of the working day” from the perspective of metabolism. The following long, but important quote, conveys this argument:

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production. Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilised man, and he must do so in all social formations and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants; but, at the same time, the forces of production which satisfy these wants also increase. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite. (CW37:807)

Why should labor be shortened despite it becoming “life’s prime want” (CW24:87) in a communist society? Labor is a fundamental principle in all societies, from capitalist to socialist, but labor loses its status as a societal essence in the process of a communist society developing productive forces. Labor that mediates the metabolism between nature and human beings is an indispensable condition in earlier societies, including capitalist society, but in a communist

society where productive forces have been sufficiently developed, labor ceases to be essential. The transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom is reached through the development of productive forces. This development makes labor unnecessary. However, even if labor becomes technically unnecessary, we cannot derive the judgment that labor should be reduced. Even when labor becomes technically unnecessary, if labor is a desirable activity, this activity should be continued as in the past. Nevertheless, Marx expects that communism will bring the shortening of the working day. Therefore, this is not a matter of recognition of fact but a matter of value judgment. There are several reasons to evaluate the activities of free time more than labor.

The first is the literal difference between necessity and freedom. Labor is a forced activity performed out of necessity due to the metabolism between nature and human beings. It can become the first desire of life through the liberation of labor. However, since labor consists of activities to achieve the purpose of metabolism, it can never be a completely free activity separate from this purpose.¹²

The second reason relates to the difference between labor and play. As mentioned earlier, labor is a serious activity while play is a more relaxed act. Based on the distinction between labor and play by Marx, there may be an understanding that he respects labor more; however, it is in fact the opposite. Labor activities that require total devotion of one's efforts largely exhaust human labor power and suppress human beings' internal nature. The extreme situation would be death due to overwork. It is preferable that such labor occurs as little as possible.

Third, labor as the substance metabolism with nature enhances the degree of exploitation of external nature through the production of goods.¹³ This leads to the destruction of the natural environment, eventually resulting in disaster for human beings in the end. Since in communist society the needs principle is dominant, labor and excessive production become unnecessary if the needs of the people are satisfied to a certain extent by their own free activities. This restrains the exploitation of the natural environment.

Fourth is the viewpoint of the coexistence between nature and human beings. It is true that the symbiosis between nature and human beings is possible through economic activities such as labor, production, and consumption in substance metabolism. However, if we can transcend the mediation of those economic activities and make the natural environment the partner of coexistence rather than the object of exploitation, the symbiosis of nature and human beings becomes full-fledged. There, the human being becomes again "a suffering, conditioned and

limited creature” (CW3:336).¹⁴ Communist society therefore promotes the symbiosis of nature and human beings by restraining economic activity.

These are the grounds for L5 to be discarded.¹⁵ Therefore, all forms of labor are abolished, from L1 to L5. The abandonment of labor includes not only alienated labor, L1 to L4, but also L5. That is why Marx argues for the abolition of labor, as demonstrated by the following quote:

[T]he proletarians, if they are to assert themselves as individuals, have to abolish the hitherto prevailing condition of their existence (which has, moreover, been that of all society up to then), namely, labour. (CW5:80)

It is said that labor that is “the hitherto prevailing condition of their existence” must be disposed of. Labor has traditionally supported the survival of society through the substance metabolism. However, in communist society, F1 is in charge of metabolism, and supporting the survival of society, labor becomes unnecessary. Alienated work, as in L1 to L4, is expected to become labor that is not alienated, like L5. This is the liberation of labor. However, if productivity sufficiently develops and the technical conditions are in place, L5 is expected to transform into F1. This is the liberation from labor.

F2 is the portion of twenty-four hours a day minus F1. However, again there will be a small distinction between activity and leisure. Whether hunting or fishing, it will be carried out with relaxation and enjoyment. Therefore, F1 and F2 are equal in value. If the essence of free time is that we can do whatever we like during that time, then time spent being lazy and doing nothing has the same importance as F1.¹⁶ As a communist society develops, L5 will change into F1 or F2. Thus, the liberation from labor is predicted.

For alienated labor, such as L1 to L4, it is desired that they become liberated like L5, as should occur in the process of the liberation of labor. However, if the productive forces develop sufficiently and the technical conditions are met, it is expected that L5 will become F1 or F2, which represents the liberation from labor.¹⁷

5. Labor as human essence

Thus, in Marx's theory of social development, labor is expected to first be reduced and then abolished. On the other hand, however, Marx has much wording suggesting that labor is essential for human beings. Therefore, some Marxists persist in the theory of labor as the human essence.¹⁸

The basis of this persistence is the theory of substance metabolism. Discussions based on substance metabolism try to combine production and labor as an indivisible unit. Since the economic activity of substance metabolism is universal to human beings, it is assumed that labor for that is also universal and essential to human beings. This discussion captures the relationship between human beings and labor, from the materialistic point of view, and in that respect, seems to have a Marxist tendency. Marx says the following on this point in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society. On the other hand, the labour which posits exchange value is a specific social form of labour. (CW29:278)

Labor that creates exchange value is a special form that can be found only in a market economy, which includes a capitalist society. However, labor that produces use value is a common to any society. Since human beings are also a kind of animal, we must consume some kinds of goods, which requires labor to produce goods from nature. Therefore, Marx seems to argue that labor is an essential element of human life.

I think that the phrase “quite independent of the form of society” should be understood as referring to the social forms existing before communist society. In that case, labor for material necessity is indispensable. However, when the productive forces of a communist society are sufficiently high, there is no need to consciously work for material production. At this stage, labor is gone but, of course, production continues, and F1 is in charge of it. Through voluntary activities, people produce goods and provide services. In other words, in this society, production without labor becomes possible. Therefore, it is not possible to derive the theory of labor essence from the universality of material metabolism.

It may be argued that even in a communist society, F1 alone is insufficient for human survival, and L5 is still necessary. Even if we accept this argument, we cannot derive the theory of labor essence from it. For example, if we think of the situation in which Robinson Crusoe has to live alone on a remote island, it certainly would not be possible for him to survive without labor. However, it is not possible to conclude that labor is essential for human beings from the case of an isolated individual. Some people work in society, others do not. In any society, there is a certain

proportion of people with low labor skills, such as children, elderly people, sick people, handicapped people, etc. Labor is not essential for them. Therefore, even if we assume that labor is inevitable for material metabolism, we cannot derive the theory of labor essence from there.

Secondly, Marx points out that labor is a purposeful activity. He states:

He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. (CW35:188)

In labor as a substance metabolism between nature and human beings, unlike other animals, human beings try to achieve their goals based on the recognition of law. Indeed, this is an essential element universally found in labor. However, although this is an essential element of human labor, it is not essential to human beings. Because some people cannot work, as mentioned above.

Moreover, Marx points out the limit because labor has a purposeful character in *Capital*. He continues from the previous quotation as follows:

Besides the exertion of the bodily organs, the process demands that, during the whole operation, the workman's will be steadily in consonance with his purpose. This means close attention. The less he is attracted by the nature of the work, and the mode in which it is carried on, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as something which gives play to his bodily and mental powers, the more close his attention is forced to be. (CW35:188)

Marx thus distinguishes between labor and play. He says that the purposefulness of labor requires tension and attention, which is related to the fact that the free nature and attractiveness of labor is low. The purposeful nature and the free and attractive character of labor are argued in a confrontational way. Labor is thus not part of the essence of human beings.

Third, Marx emphasizes the social character of labor, as follows:

In production, men enter into relation not only with nature. They produce only by co-operating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only

within these social connections and relations does their relation with nature, does production, take place. (CW9:211)

Labor not only mediates the material metabolism between nature and humans but also mediates social relations among humans. The characteristic of human labor is that it is always done in socially cooperative relationships, not by a single individual.¹⁹ However, Marx does not limit human social activities to labor. He states:

Only at this stage does self-activity coincide with material life, which corresponds to the development of individuals into complete individuals and the casting-off of all natural limitations. The transformation of labour into self-activity corresponds to the transformation of the previously limited intercourse into the intercourse of individuals as such. (CW5:88)

In a society where individuals are separated by private ownership and the division of labor, self-expression is restricted to labor and thus, exchanges among various individuals are limited. However, in a communist society where the means of production are socialized, with labor turning into the activity of pure self-expression, interaction among individuals becomes universal. Here, labor and pure self-expression are compared from the perspective of the range of interaction among individuals, and the latter is said to be superior to the former.

Fourth is the aspect of self-actualization:

A. Smith has no inkling that the overcoming of these obstacles is in itself a manifestation of freedom—and, moreover, that the external aims are [thereby] stripped of their character as merely external natural necessity, and become posited as aims which only the individual himself posits, that they are therefore posited as self-realisation, objectification of the subject, and thus real freedom, whose action is precisely work. (CW28:530)

Adam Smith negatively conceived of labor to be a curse. According to Marx, labor is always an activity restricted by natural inevitability. The human being regulates its external purpose as its own and achieves self-realization within that framework. Thus, labor has a positive side. Indeed, Marx says that labor can enable self-realization or freedom through purposeful activities.

However, that does not mean that only labor makes self-realization and freedom possible. Although the aspect of self-realization in labor materializes when labor becomes a free activity, the pursuit of wealth in a capitalist society prepares material conditions to extend rich individuality and develop human activity.

As the ceaseless striving for the general form of wealth, however, capital forces labour beyond the limits of natural need and thus creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality, which is as varied and comprehensive in its production as it is in its consumption, and whose labour therefore no longer appears as labour but as the full development of activity itself, in which natural necessity has disappeared in its immediate form; because natural need has been replaced by historically produced need. (CW28:251)

Rich individuality becomes sufficient in both consumption and production, and the desire also changes from a natural to historical one. Labor and activity itself are compared here regarding their range, and the latter is regarded as being superior. Marx regards the broader range of human activity as better than labor limited to satisfying material needs.

Labor in a communist society is not alienated work, but “life’s prime want” (CW24:87). However, we cannot derive the theory of labor essence from the universality of material metabolism and the purposefulness of labor. Although they form the essence of labor, they do not form the essence of human beings. It is true that social cooperation and self-realization comprise the essence of human beings, but these are not limited to labor. These enjoyments become even more feasible in activities freed from labor. Compared with free activities, labor is still restricted regarding social cooperation and self-realization, so that the reduction of labor and its abolition are advocated.

6. Marxism and labor

Marx hopes that labor will eventually be reduced and finally abolished. Nevertheless, he emphasizes the positive role that labor plays in substance metabolism, purposefulness, social cooperation, and self-fulfillment. Thus, why does he find positive elements in an activity that should eventually be abolished? To answer this question, we need to examine the normative philosophy inherent in Marx’s historical materialism.

In my book (Matsui 2012), I argue that ideas like freedom, equality, property, utility, and justice are not the principles of socialism but of liberalism, that socialists accept them as the given principles of a capitalist society and foment revolutions based on these principles, and that this is a method of Marxist social change. The best example is Marx's exploitation theory, which forms the core of Marxism, and criticizes capitalists' exploitation of workers' labor. In this case, capitalist exploitation is refuted based on the bourgeois principle of self-ownership. This explanation can also be applied to the relationship between Marxism and labor.

There are two kinds of labor, L1 and L4, that are alienated, as well as L5, which is not alienated. Different explanations are necessary for these two kinds of labor concepts. For alienated labor, the approach of my book can be applied as it is. This kind of labor has the strongest connection to property among the above five concepts. As discussed in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, alienated labor is inextricably linked to private ownership. It is one of the super structures that inevitably appears on the basis of a capitalistic economic structure. The self-ownership principle, which states that one's own body belongs to oneself, is closely tied to the concept of alienated labor. The fact that exploitation theory is based on the principle of self-ownership means that it is also based on the concept of alienated labor. In the super structure of capitalist society, not only property but also alienated labor receives an important status. Therefore, Marx argues that L1 to L4 are essential for human beings despite being alienated.

Then, what about L5? L5 is labor that is not alienated, so we cannot directly apply the above method. However, the same logic can be applied in that it should be abolished. In the early stages of communist society,²⁰ labor becomes "the life's prime want" (CW24:87). It temporarily occupies the role of human essence. However, it will gradually lose this position as a communist society develops and will transfer its essential position to free-time activities and leisure. Thus, Marx's assertion that labor is part of the universal human essence was intended to apply only to the beginning stages of a communist society.

The position of labor changes depending on the society in question. In criticizing exploitation in a capitalist society, the alienated labor concept, which is based on the principle of self-ownership, is adopted. In criticizing alienated labor, labor freed from alienation in communist society is the standard. Furthermore, when insisting that labor itself should be overcome, a society in which people are free from labor and enjoy free time is assumed. Thus, Marx's stance on labor differs according to the development stage of the social system.

Marx's method of critique is not transcendental but endogenous. The standards for solving the contradictions in existing society depend not on a transcendental idea that can be universally

validated in any society, but on an upper structure that corresponds to the economic structure. The priority issue for us living in a capitalist society is the liberation of labor, and for that reason, labor without alienation is presented as the human essence.²¹ However, this argument is based on a critique that can be applied to capitalist society. In communist society, the liberation from labor is the central issue. Labor does not constitute human essence *from this point of view*. Since Arendt did not refer to a theory of social development such as historical materialism, she could not understand such a way of thinking. This is my answer to Arendt's aporia.²²

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¹ For more on this structural change in advanced capitalist countries in the 21st century, see (Uni 1999).

² For example, see (Hiroi 2001; Latouche 2010; and Lummis 2003).

³ See (Momoki 2014).

⁴ Sugihara (1973) also presented the same question.

⁵ In *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (CW 24: 87), Marx distinguished between “the first phase of communist society” and “a higher phase of communist society.” I will call the former a socialist society and the latter a communist society for the sake of brevity.

⁶ Takada (1988, 1989, 2010) presented strict examinations of the distinction between labor and free activities, and limited free activities to “spiritual and cultural activities.” In my view, however, free activities include productive activities that are done “as I have a mind,” as stated in *German Ideology* (CW5:47).

⁷ Imamura (1981) focused on the fact that Marx was interested in the ideas of C. Fourier in *German Ideology*. Concerning Fourier's *travail attractif*, he states as follows: “Labor as an objectification activity does not change into pleasure. Another function of labor is necessary so that labor as an objectification activity may change into *plaisir*, or so that labor and pleasure may be integrated. It is not an objectification, but an unobjectification labor, that is an association or a social relationship” (258). Imamura emphasized that L5 and F1 are almost equivalent regarding the terminology of this paper, and I agree with this argument. However, if F1 is also taken as labor, the meaning of the “abolishment of labor” becomes unclear. I understand that Marx emphasized the difference between labor and play for that reason. Therefore, I cannot agree with Imamura's concept of “an unobjectification labor.”

⁸ In this description of communist society, Marx denies the division of labor. However, this denial of the division of labor is not “the overall development.” In this society, individuals can do whatever they want at any time and do not have to be able to do everything. See (Aoyagi 2012) for more on this point.

⁹ We can define leisure as advanced activities done during free time, but here, it is narrowly defined and excludes advanced activities.

¹⁰ Although the theory of exploitation is indeed based on the principle of self-ownership, this principle is alienated from the viewpoint of communist society. See Chapters 3 and 4 in (Matsui 2012). (Uchida 2005) is an excellent work that examined the concept of free time, which is the theme of this paper. Uchida stated as follows: “If we recapture the surplus labor monopolized by capital as free time to use for the free development of all people, we will restore the right to dispose of his labor's product and be freed from alienation” (352). Although the extent of alienation is certainly reduced by regaining the right to dispose of labor products, it cannot be said that he is liberated from alienation because he is confined to the principle of self-ownership.

¹¹ For example, see (Sawada 2006).

¹² From here it can be argued that freedom is the highest ideal of Marxism, but I do not think so. Among the three freedoms mentioned in (Matsui 2012), freedom in the realm of freedom is cooperative freedom, neither freedom of control nor personal freedom. Therefore, it is restricted freedom.

¹³ See (Yamaguchi 2013) as a study analyzing Marx's concept of exploitation from the viewpoint of the use of nature.

¹⁴ Yamanouchi (2004) emphasized this point, which I agree with. However, I cannot agree with Yamanouchi about the discontinuity between “the third draft” in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* and “late Marx.”

¹⁵ If L5 should also be abandoned, it can be argued that it is also alienated labor. However, since this paper adopted the definition of alienation as described above, L5 is not designated as alienated labor. This point will be referred to later.

¹⁶ French socialist Paul Lafargue appealed to “a right to laziness” as follows: “It must return to

its natural instincts, it must proclaim the Rights of Laziness, a thousand times more noble and more sacred than the anaemic Rights of Man concocted by the metaphysical lawyers of the bourgeois revolution. It must accustom itself to working but three hours a day, reserving the rest of the day and night for leisure and feasting” (Lafargue [1880] 2016, 15).

Marx did not leave any comments on this work by Lafargue, his son-in-law. I assume the reason for this is as follows. Regarding the vision that “the right to laziness” would expand in a communist society, it seems that Marx and Lafargue were in agreement. Lafargue further advocated laziness as a worker’s right in a capitalist society. This perspective differed from that of Marx. Based on historical materialism, Marx believed that superstructures that respect production and labor were dominant in capitalist society, and should be esteemed and pursued in the transition to a socialist society. Lafargue believed that it is possible to form a communist superstructure that accepts laziness in a capitalist society. For Marx, this was not compatible with historical materialism. Indeed, laziness becomes more prevalent in a communist society; however, it is not a goal but a result brought about by changes in the foundations of productivity and the socialization of production means.

Like Lafargue, Bertrand Russell admired laziness in his work *In Praise of Idleness*. He avouched himself as a socialist but criticized Soviet-style socialism, which regards labor as virtue and claims the following: “I mean that four hours’ work a day should entitle a man to the necessities and elementary comforts of life, and that the rest of his time should be his to use as he might see fit” (Russell [1935] 1963, 18-19). Russell argued that they should educate the workers on how to use leisure time. In my view, it is wrong to regard labor as a virtue as in the Soviet Union, but regarding laziness as a virtue and promoting it as a kind of moralism is different at least from Marxian materialism.

¹⁷ Kymlicka (2002) understood Marx’s perfectionism as follows: “In Marx’s case, our distinctive excellence is said to be our capacity of freely creative cooperative production. To produce in a way that stunts this capacity is to be ‘alienated’ from our true ‘species-nature’” (190). Kymlicka argued that since Marx’s perfectionism excludes values other than productive labor, it is not compatible with liberalism, which respects freedom of lifestyle. I think that Marx’s image of human beings in communist society was based on, to some extent, a kind of perfectionism, but it is a human perfection including play and laziness as described in this paper. Thus, Kymlicka’s criticism of Marx was based on a misunderstanding.

¹⁸ For more on labor essentialism, see (Ario 1994a, 1994b).

¹⁹ “Marx does not explicitly explain the interrelationship between interaction and labor, but rather reduces one to the other, namely, communicative acting to instrumental ones under the unspecific title of social practice” (Habermas 1968, 45). According to Habermas, although the concept of labor is regarded as both production and interchange, the latter is subject to objective and rational production. The aspect as interaction independent of production does not exist. However, as I mentioned, Marx thought that interchange could not simply be reduced to production and labor, but rather that free interchange or mutual action would be possible in areas transcending them. Therefore, Habermas’s critique is not valid.

²⁰ This early stage does not refer to a socialist society when divided into a socialist and communist society, but refers to the stage where labor remains in the latter communist society.

²¹ This does not mean that in capitalist society the task of liberation from labor should be shelved.

²² In this paper, I have expressed my understanding of Marx’s text. However, I believe that to make Marxism more appropriate to the present age, we should change the stipulation of L5 by Marx as long as it does not conflict with his theoretical framework. As mentioned above, Marx thought that L5 was necessary because we will not be liberated from the necessity of material metabolism in the early stages of communist society. This is because he thought that the development of productive force in the sense of production volume was necessary, even if we enter a socialist and communist society from a capitalist one. However, considering the achievement of today’s science and technology and the present situation of natural environmental

problems, the increase in production volume has already reached dimensions sufficient to realize a communist society, while environmental problems have worsened. Therefore, it can be argued that further increase in production volume is unnecessary and inappropriate. If so, in a communist society, labor L5, which is supposed to be necessary, should be eliminated. I would like to discuss this in further detail on another occasion.