

Multidimensional Analysis of Marx's Theory of Alienated Labor and Its Contemporary Value

Song Biwen¹

¹College of Marxism, Jiangsu University, Zhenjiang

Abstract— Starting from Marx's "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844", this paper systematically analyzes the four dimensions of alienated labor theory: the alienation of workers and labor products, the alienation of workers and production activities, the alienation of human and human nature, and the alienation between people. This paper further discusses the status and limitations of this theory in the development of Marxist philosophy, and expounds its enlightenment to the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics in combination with the reality of contemporary society, emphasizing its important value in realizing the free and all-round development of human beings.

Keywords— Marx; alienated labor; capitalism; human essence; contemporary value.

I. INTRODUCTION

Marx's theory of alienated labor is an important part of Marxist philosophy. It has been intensively elaborated in the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844". This theory profoundly reveals the complex relationship between workers and labor in capitalist society, and a series of social contradictions caused by it. In today's era, re-examining Marx's theory of alienated labor not only helps us to deeply understand the essence of capitalism, but also provides useful reference for the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and promotes society to better realize the free and comprehensive development of human beings.

II. MANIFESTATIONS OF ALIENATED LABOR

(1) Alienation of Workers from the Products of Their Labor

Under the capitalist mode of production, workers create a lot of material wealth through labor, but these labor products are opposite to the workers themselves. Marx pointed out that labor is the essential force of human beings, and labor products should be the embodiment of the essential force of human beings. It is the crystallization of workers' labor and should belong to workers. But the reality is that the more wealth workers produce, the poorer they are. This is because capitalists have mastered the means of production, and workers have to sell their labor to capitalists in order to survive. Labor products have become a tool for capitalists to obtain profits, while workers have become victims of labor products. The alienation of labor products makes workers lose control of their own labor results. Labor products in turn become the power to rule workers, and the relationship between workers and labor products becomes distorted and antagonistic.

(2) Alienation of Workers from the Production Process

The alienation of labor products further leads to the alienation of workers and production activities. Marx believes that alienation is not only manifested in labor results, but also in production behavior. In capitalist society, labor is no longer the embodiment of workers' internal needs, but an external and forced activity. Workers cannot carry out productive labor

according to their own subjective wishes, but are forced to work in order to obtain labor remuneration from capitalists to maintain basic life. This kind of labor cannot bring happiness and satisfaction to the workers, but make the workers physically and mentally tortured. Labor has changed from a free and conscious activity to a burden on workers, that is, workers "not affirming themselves in their own labor, but denying themselves, not feeling happy, but feeling unhappy". Labor is no longer the purpose of workers, but a means, and the relationship between workers and labor has undergone fundamental alienation.

(3) Alienation of Humans from Their Species-Essence

Marx borrowed from Feuerbach's term and transformed it. He believed that human beings are "class existences", that the essence of human beings is a kind of social relationship, and that labor is the embodiment of the essence of human beings. Under the condition of capitalism, the alienation of labor leads to the alienation of human nature. Labor should be a free and conscious activity of human beings. It is a subjective activity for people to achieve self-satisfaction and self-realization. However, in capitalist society, labor has become a means that is indistinguishable from animal instinctive activities. The class nature of human's free activity is depreciated, and the fundamental difference between human and animal is obliterated in this alienated labor. The alienation of human and class nature makes people unable to realize their own free and all-round development, and the essential power of human beings cannot be fully exerted.

(4) Alienation Between Individuals

Alienated labor also leads to alienation between people. Marx pointed out that the alienation between people is the alienation between people and other people, the labor of others and the labor products of others. The essence of human alienation is that the relationship between man and himself can only be realized through the relationship between others. In the capitalist production relations, the alienation of labor products and labor process makes the capitalist class become an alien force to rule the working class. The relationship between workers and capitalists is opposite. The acquisition of labor production by capitalists makes workers dependent on

labor production, and the resistance of workers to capitalists further aggravates this opposition. The relationship between people is no longer a harmonious relationship based on common interests, but full of contradictions and confrontations. This kind of alienated relationship between people is the concentrated embodiment of class contradictions in capitalist society, and it is also an important feature of capitalist society revealed by alienated labor theory.

III. THEORETICAL STATUS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ALIENATED LABOR THEORY

(1) Theoretical Status

Marx's theory of alienated labor is an important achievement of his profound analysis of capitalist society, which lays a foundation for the development of Marxist philosophy. This theory sublated the limitations of Feuerbach's understanding of human beings, made new provisions and breakthroughs in the essence of human beings, strengthened the attention to reality, further transformed into materialism, and built a bridge for historical materialism. The theory of alienated labor profoundly reveals the contradiction between laborers and labor in capitalist society, and the social problems caused by it, which provides a theoretical basis for the liberation of the proletariat.

(2) Theoretical Limitations

Although the theory of alienated labor has important theoretical significance, due to the influence of Feuerbach's humanism, Marx still has some non-historical views in this theory. For example, in the theory of alienated labor, Marx used the essence of real human to oppose the existence of real human, and used labor as the expression of human's essential strength to oppose alienated labor. This view ignores the historical nature of human nature to a certain extent. In addition, the theory of alienated labor also has an abstract humanistic color to a certain extent, and the analysis of capitalist society is not comprehensive and in-depth enough. These limitations affect the scientific nature and integrity of the theory of alienated labor to a certain extent.

IV. CONTEMPORARY VALUE OF THE ALIENATED LABOR THEORY

(1) Implications for the Practice of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

Marx's theory of alienated labor has important implications for the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In contemporary society, although the capitalist mode of production has undergone great changes, the problem of labor alienation still exists. The development of socialism with Chinese characteristics should pay full attention to the all-round development of human beings and avoid the occurrence of labor alienation. This requires us to focus on improving the quality and skills of workers while developing the economy, protect the legitimate rights and interests of workers, and enable workers to realize their own

value in labor. At the same time, we should pay attention to social fairness and justice, narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, and avoid the antagonistic relationship between workers and labor products and production activities.

(2) Value in Achieving Free and Comprehensive Human Development

The theory of alienated labor emphasizes the free and all-round development of human beings, which is of great value to contemporary society. In today's era, with the rapid development of science and technology and the progress of society, people's living standards have been greatly improved, but the problem of labor alienation still exists. While pursuing material wealth, people often ignore their all-round development. Marx's theory of alienated labor reminds us that labor should be a free and conscious activity of human beings, and a subjective activity of human beings to achieve self-satisfaction and self-realization. We should pursue freedom and happiness in labor and realize our all-round development. The development of socialism with Chinese characteristics should take the free and comprehensive development of human beings as the goal, pay attention to improving the quality of people's life, enrich people's spiritual and cultural life, so that everyone can realize their own value in labor and achieve free and comprehensive development.

V. CONCLUSION

Marx's theory of alienated labor is an important part of Marxist philosophy. It profoundly reveals the contradiction between workers and labor in capitalist society and a series of social problems caused by it. Although this theory has limitations to a certain extent, it still has important value to contemporary society. We should dialectically look at the positive achievements and immaturity of the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844", put the "Manuscripts" in the whole history of the development of Marxism, combine the characteristics of the times, keep pace with the times, absorb and learn from the useful experience to guide the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics today. Only in this way can we better realize the free and all-round development of human beings and promote the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Karl Marx, Frederick Engels: Selected Works of Marx and Engels (Vol. 1) [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2012.
- [2]. Karl Marx. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 [M]. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2018.
- [3]. Zhang Yibing. Back to Marx: Philosophical Discourse in Economic Context (4th ed.) [M]. Nanjing: Jiangsu People's Publishing House, 2020.
- [4]. Han Lixin. Is Marx's Theory of Alienated Labor a Circular Argument? [J]. Academic Monthly, 2012, (03).