

WHY LABOUR AND WHAT KIND OF LABOUR? FROM MODERN TO SOME PRESENT PHILOSOPHICAL REMARKS¹

Ana BAZAC²

Abstract *In the beginning, the traditional model of labour is related to the traditional aim and ideal of a good life. The reason is to emphasise that philosophy has to solve the problem of the possibility to generalise the model of a creative and pleasant life. Therefore the goal of the paper is twofold. The first is to question the necessity of labour from the standpoint of the rebel thinking transfigured into the literature of laziness as an alternative to the ancient tradition of hard working. The other is to mention some present philosophical theories about cognitive labour. By asserting the fundamental changes in the regime of work opened up by the new industrial revolution which began more than thirty years ago, a mere conclusion would be that the present philosophy still has a big duty toward this crucial and obviously open problem.*

Keywords: *labour, laziness, modern industrial revolutions, cognitive labour, creativity, entertainment, human self-development.*

The constitution of modernity brought forth the refuse of labour as toilers' response to the constraints of the new system made by both the first industrial revolution in course of taking shape and the capitalist relations. The tendency of labour to become autonomous towards the domination was quite old in the human history, as an inherent ground of the dialectic of self-consciousness – as Hegel suggested in his famous chapter “Master and slave” from *Phenomenology of spirit* (1807). In this respect, during the entire pre-modern times, the conscience of humanness was transfigured into the ideal model of man as the free and intellectual person capable to occupy himself with politics – and rejecting even the intellectual work of sculptors for example, as in ancient Greece³ – or as the free medieval

¹ Revised form from *Philosophical relevance of the contemporary challenges*, collective volume in very few copies, București, Printech, 2008, pp. 125-139.

² Division of Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science, Romanian Committee for History and Philosophy of Science and Technology, Romanian Academy.

³ See Ana Bazac, “Aristotle and the labour force. Aristotle’s tradition in the present-day industrial revolution ideology”, *Revue roumaine de philosophie*, 1-2, 2004, pp. 87-106.

chevaliers or troubadours. The acquisition of self-consciousness was conceived of exclusively as the result of the relationships with the other “I” of the same condition. The shock of the clash with other types of human beings⁴, in extraordinary situations or in the every day use of the labour of servants and distant labourers *did not introduce the problem of labour in the philosophical discourse*. Even though the theologians tried to answer the obvious contradiction between the axiom given in the Holy Bible that men have to earn their living by hard working⁵ and, on the other hand, the fact that some did not follow this direction (on the contrary, the *model* of their life being that of spending their time by enjoying themselves, and this model itself constituted the dominant *ideal* of the time), *labour* – in relation with the living time of the human being – *was not a philosophical problem*.

The birth of modernity began to change things. Le Goff demonstrated that the new requirements of the market in formation have generated new interpretations of the Church about the respectable character of labour⁶. And the well-known *Protestant ethic* of Weber (1904) showed that the discipline of labour in the developing capitalism had a strong impulsion from the Calvinist ethos which considered labour (including the hard one) as vocation. *But labour became a philosophical problem⁷ only nearby the social*

⁴ Let us remember the phrase of Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, 1940, VII, https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/Concept_History_Benjamin.pdf (new access 31-VII-2022): “there is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism”.

⁵ *The Holy Bible*, King James Version, 2000, The First Book of Moses, called Genesis, 3, 19: “In the sweat of the face shalt thou eat bread”.

⁶ Jacques Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Age. Temps, travail et culture en Occident*, Paris, Gallimard, 1978. See the chapter Time and work.

⁷ What does it mean that a certain phenomenon becomes a philosophical problem? A *philosophical problem* means: the decomposition of the characteristics of a certain phenomenon (in our case, labour) in connection with the social and historical context, so with other phenomena from the same domain but also from other domains, the grasping of the contradictions of the real process, the analysis of its representations, thus the de-construction of the given concepts, theories and *Weltanschauungen* concerning the phenomenon, by outlining a coherent image about the relationships between the real processes and the theoretical constructs, thus the emphasis on its significances in a historical context. Therefore, the philosophical problem implies – if it is serious, i.e. consistent with the requirements of rationalism, so of the rationalist development of scientific thinking – the critical approach to presuppositions and theses related to the subject.

problem. For this reason, labour had to be understood in its concrete manifestations, namely in economy and the concrete functioning of society.

The present paper is not dedicated to this history of the understanding of labour. However, we have to mention Marx's theory because it constituted for the first time a consistent philosophical theory of labour. In this theory:

1. The notion of labour, as all social concepts, is *social* and *historical*;
2. Consequently, it cannot be conceived of in an abstract manner, but as a historical social relation;
3. The living time of the historical human beings is the result of the system of *time of labour* and *spare (free) time*, and thus the result of the social division of *labour time* and *leisure time* between different social classes and strata;
4. Labour and the time to work have been connected to the level of the productive forces/means of production, (i.e. the lower the level of technology is, the harder the labour of the classes that do it and the longer their time to work);
5. The control of labour is the main condition of the capital;
6. The time of labour and the intensiveness of labour are the sources of productivity, so of the profit of capital, irrespective of how many intermediary links compose the process of self-multiplication of value;
7. Estrangement is just the manifestation and result of the modern dominated labour⁸; alienation means that labour is hated because it is compelled, *au fond* leading to non-humanity; it is not felt as a manner of human realisation, and the spare time is only time to rest and consume; in fact, *if labour is not the means of human realisation, nor is spare time*;
8. The regime of labour is not only the consequence of the objective process of the development of productive forces and of the logic of capital(ism), but also of the *social pressure (class struggle)*, i.e. of the

⁸ Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Third Manuscript, Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property,

<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm>:

"Estrangement is manifested not only in the fact that *my* means of life belong to *someone else*, that which I desire is the inaccessible possession of *another*, but also in the fact that everything is itself something different from itself – that my activity is *something else* and that, finally (and this applies also to the capitalist), all is under (the sway) of *inhuman power*" .

manifestation of demands of the class who works/produces goods and surplus value.

We observe two lines of reasoning:

a. one is the objective determinism of the situation of labour and of the time of labour – the technical determinism, i.e. the relations between man and nature;

b. the other is the *subjective* determinism. In this respect, history is the result of the pressures between classes with antagonist interests and views.

But what do these two directions of analysis mean? First of all, these directions are by no means contradictory to each other, but obviously they describe the contradictory tendencies from the real world. In this complex way, on the one hand, exploitation⁹ is inevitable until technology and, generally, the means of production do not allow the liberation from labour – i.e. the cancellation (as non-necessary, so absurd) of the hard and long and exhausting work: not only as physical labour, but as forced labour by the fact that it is caused, in essence, not by the need to act and the pleasure to create, but by the need to earn a living. On the other hand, exploitation is not a uniform process, and it generates opposition and control of this one. But, as we know, Marx was understood in unilateral ways, either as if the liberation of labour would be possible any time in the modern era¹⁰, or if there would never be any possibility to do this¹¹.

⁹ Marx explained the transition from the formal subordination of labour under capital to its real submission, *The Process of Production of Capital, Draft Chapter 6 of Capital* (1864), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1864/economic/index.htm>.

¹⁰ Or Lenin insisted enough that if the objective conditions do not exist – while the international context also demonstrated that there were not subjective conditions capable of the liberation from labour by the revolution – the consequence is only the *state capitalism* (in a specific form, of a socialist type legitimising values and slogans etc.) For this reason, “socialism” was “de-formed” from the beginning, and not as Trotsky said, only from the rise of Stalin.

See Ana Bazac, “Capitalismul de stat ‘socialist’” (The “socialist” state capitalism), *Lumea nouă*, 2, 1999, pp. 30-47; “O discuție despre stalinism plecând de la cartea lui Ted Grant și scrisoarea lui Rafael Fernandez” (A discussion about Stalinism starting from Ted Grant’s book and the letter of Rafael Fernandez), *Lumea nouă*, 3-4, 1999, pp. 98-105; “Octombrie, capitalismul birocratic, stalinismul și stânga (I)” (October, the bureaucratic capitalism, Stalinism and the left), *Lumea nouă*, 6, 2000, pp. 41-45; “The historical crisis of the left”, in *Balkan Socialist Center “Christian*

Anyway, what is important is that after Marx, labour began to be taken into consideration within philosophy. *Estrangement, the time of the human being, ethos*, could not be understood without this concept.

The spring of the first industrial revolution, to which Marx was contemporaneous, was an occasion for him to *deconstruct the images about labour and to decompose the process itself*. The rigorous work of Marx describing the greed for surplus labour and the struggle for a normal working day was at the same time full of compassion and revolt¹². In a non explicit manner, conscience was broken in front of the tension between the knowledge of the inherent constraint of the labour force in this industrial revolution and, on the other hand, the real situation of the working class. Marx demonstrated that in spite of the advancement of the Western civilisation, only parts of the working class benefited, temporarily, from the growth of wages generated by the technical development. Thus F.A. Hayek's position – in *Capitalism and historians* (1954), where he stated that the first industrial revolution had generated a general improvement of the living standard of the working people – is easy to combat, without speaking about the status of the population from peripheral countries and colonies. Ultimately, if the neo-liberal Hajek believed, during the stage of the post-war *social state*, that the capitalist development would have

Rakovsky", vol. 2nd Conference, Athens, March 15-19, 2001, pp. 37-48; "Nehány gondolat az álamiszocializmus-vitához (A few ideas concerning the state socialism debate)", *Eszmélet*, nr. 62, iunie 2004, pp. 27-46. Also, in my books: *Anarhismul și mișcarea politică modernă (Anarchism and the modern political movement)*, București, Editura Universitară, 2002, 340 p. (pp. 190-191, 197-204, 209-210, 233-244) and *Geopolitică (I) Imperiul și războiul (Geopolitics. Empire and war)*, București, Cartea Universitară, 2003, 211 p. (pp. 45, 48-58).

The importance of the historical context was underlined by Alex Callinicos in order to show that "Stalinism represented a break with Leninism rather than its completion" and was "a contingent outcome of the circumstances...". That means that the complexity of history allows "the necessity of political intervention", as was also a key theme of Lenin's political thought, Alex Callinicos, "Leninism in the Twenty-First Century? Lenin, Weber and the Politics of Responsibility", in Sebastian Bugren, Stathis Kouvelakis and Slavoj Žižek editors, *Lenin Reloaded. Toward a Politics of Truth*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, pp. 34, 25.

¹¹ And capitalism – in its "democratic" form – would be "the end of history".

¹² Karl Marx, *Capital*, volume one (1867), chapter 10, the working day, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch10.htm>.

infirming Marx's theory, it is more difficult for his colleagues today to support the ideology of capitalist development.

Labour was a main preoccupation not only for Marx. The economists of the establishment suggested a philosophy of labour which was situated in the pattern of the traditional view. Its main reason was to control labour more efficiently and with fewer troubles.

The first tenet of this philosophy (as well as of Marx's) is: *labour was necessary*. But labour was not pleasant for the majority of people (certainly because of the low level of technology). As a result, it was *forced*, in modern times not mainly through political domination, but through economic compulsion. The profound wish of the ordinary working people was to free themselves from labour and only the rebel philosophy, opposed to the mainstream, considered this wish. For Marx, liberation was to be realised with the development of productive forces beyond the limit of the automatic factory¹³, but it did not mean the abolishment of work, but only of the forced work. Labour was to mean discipline and a strong rational position towards its elements – including nature – so self-control, self-management in order to attain better results from the human activity. But labour was to become more and more pleasant, for its intellectual and creative content was to develop with the development of the means of production. Nevertheless, it was to be labour, distinct from game or enjoyment, so with specific requirements of problem solving, but at the same time full of feelings of pleasure.

This conception was also common to H.G. Wells (from the Fabian Society) in his famous book *The Time Machine* (1895): if there weren't a real liberation from labour, the future of humankind was to be gloomy, with the persistent class structure in which the human race will even be divided into two branches, the leisure class formed by quite unintelligent and low

¹³ See Karl Marx, *Capital* Volume One (1867), Chapter Fifteen: Machinery and Modern Industry, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch15.htm>.

This aspect was grasped by some contemporaneous thinkers who insisted on the original and creative theory of Marx, confirmed by the development of the present industrial revolution. The entire logic of this development emphasises the rationality of class struggle. See the contribution of John Stachel, *Marx's concepts of universal and collective labor and their Implications for a contemporary labor strategy*, at Congrès Marx International V, section Économie, October 2007.

efficiency people, and the working people toiling underground and keeping the conditions of the airy Eloi.

But what would happen until the liberation *from* labour? It is not the place to discuss the problem of the social and political opposition, the problem of the political organisation of the labour class. I would like to mention only that the compassion towards workers and the revolt against their *trajectory of life* have manifested at the theoretical level:

A. through the refuse of labour as such and

B. through a transposition into the language of intellectualism: considering that the only significant labour for the human being would be the intellectual labour. Only this one would be the realisation of the human.

Intellectualism (B.) supposes that the knowledge resulting from physical labour and its consequences would be irrelevant to philosophy. The problem of the hard working people, and of the modern constrained labour, was so hard to research that a solution seemed to be simply its new exclusion from the philosophical thinking. For this reason, this perspective was named intellectualism: as we know, it reflects the social division of labour and the existential distance of intellectuals from physical labour.

A more rebel and naïve variant was aestheticism, where art was of central importance in life and its appreciation. But the model existent in famous quotations of Oscar Wilde – “Art is the most intense mode of individualism that the world has known” and “the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture – in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation”¹⁴ – reflected too the *historical separation between the physical and intellectual labour* and thus the creativity “concentrated” in the latter. And what would Nietzsche’s theory mean about the strong individual – to whom he opposed the weak one, sustained and formed just by the ideology of domination and hypocritical compassion – than the image in mirror about a society based on the domination over the labour force, domination which generates human non-realisation (i.e. perversion of human morals) at the level of both the superficial masters and the submitted and reactive slaves (*On the Genealogy of Morality*, 1887)?

¹⁴ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, 1891, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>.

A. The refuse of labour reflected the deep compassion¹⁵ towards the destiny of labourers as well as the revolt against the regime of work. The literature of laziness reflected this compassion. Au fond, why is there so much suffering in the world, by disturbing even the melancholic and well-intentioned artists? This is because labour is the “normal” regime of the many. And this happens because this regime tends to be generalised in the form of everyone’s duty to do something included in the conformist discipline of the domination. In the spirit of *épater le bourgeois*, Robert Louis Stevenson (“An Apology for Idlers” and “Ordered South”, in *Virginibus Puerisque and other Papers*, 1881) insisted that “idleness does not consist in doing nothing, but in doing a great deal not recognized in the dogmatic formularies of the ruling class”. There is a significant tradition of the ironical laziness literature¹⁶. See Lessing, John Keats, Coleridge, Jerome K. Jerome, Samuel Johnson, Herman Melville, Jean Cocteau, John Keats, Henry Miller, George Orwell, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, William Wordsworth, Hemingway, Huysmans, G K Chesterton, and others.

This line is continuing today,¹⁷ but it is connected, more or less strongly, with the literature of revolt against the regime of labour, so against the relations of domination-submission.

Following the ideas of the first utopians, the criticism of the modern regime of labour manifested as criticism of the modern system itself, developed just with the first industrial revolution. Thus Paul Lafargue wrote *Le droit à la paresse* (1883)¹⁸, where he opposed “the furious passion of work, pushed even to the exhaustion of the vital force of individual”, just because this passion was induced to the labour class, and just because this class was obliged to work in order to earn their living. In the same line, later Bob Black (a pseudonym) showed in *The Abolition of Work* (1985)¹⁹ that

¹⁵ Sometimes compassion remained at the level of philanthropy, and generated different institutions. In this respect, philosophy is constitutive of policies.

¹⁶ See Tom Hodgkinson and Matthew De Abaitua (eds.), *The Idler’s Companion: An Anthology of Lazy Literature*, London, 4th Estate, 1996.

¹⁷ See Tom Hodgkinson, *How to be idle* (2004), New York, HarperCollins Publishers, 2005. And the journal *The Idler*, <http://www.idler.co.uk>.

¹⁸ Paul Lafargue, *The Right to Be Lazy*, 1883, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lafargue/1883/lazy/index.htm>.

¹⁹ Bob Black, *The Abolition of Work*, 1985; see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Abolition_of_Work

a life of play would be the real human one and it is “totally incompatible with existing reality,” for “play is always voluntary”.

Nietzsche showed that the destruction of the Pharisaic morals and of the Pharisaic use of science – and this destruction supposes the serene assuming of contradictions – is necessary precisely because people *must understand life in a poetical manner*. Or things were quite opposite to this: even in Western Europe, full of self-pride grounded on banal knowledge²⁰, “almost all people are similar due to the fact that they look for work so as to earn a monthly wage. Work is a means for everyone and not a purpose in itself”²¹. But “the good does not mean to transform someone into the function of a more powerful cell”²². Only the artists and those who occupied themselves with contemplation considered labour as a pleasure²³. Creation (*poiesis*), namely the understanding of life in a poetical (artistic) manner, meant no more living in the constraint of the urgent needs, or, differently said, living and experiencing creation as an urgent need.

And the above-cited Oscar Wilde, even though he counter-posed socialism – which “would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others” (as the liberation of labour could have occurred anytime) –, to capitalism (where is “a very large number of people...under an industrial barrack system”²⁴), insisted that the freedom of labour²⁵, i.e. the

<http://www.primitivism.com/abolition.htm>; KRISIS, Beiträge zur kritik der Warengesellschaft, <http://www.krisis.org/>; here, <https://www.krisis.org/1985/the-abolition-of-work/>; or <https://inspiracy.com/black/abolition/part1.html>.

²⁰ Fr. Nietzsche, *De l'utilité et des inconvénients des études historiques* in Nietzsche, *Considérations inactuelles*. David Strauss. *De l'utilité et des inconvénients des études historiques* (1873-1876), Paris, Société de Mercure de France, 1907, § 9, p. 223.

²¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, § 42.

²² *Ibidem*, § 118.

²³ *The Gay Science*, § 118.

²⁴ Oscar Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism*, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/wilde-oscar/soul-man/index.htm>,

emphasised that capitalism during the development of the first industrial revolution was in the same manner a “barrack system” of development as the later Stalinism, which he prefigured by showing: “if the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first.”

²⁵ Nevertheless Wilde was conscious of the fact that this liberation would not be possible without the development of technique: “all unintellectual labour, all

abolishment of private property, was to liberate the creative potential of all. Just this would be “individualism”: to “freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him”, just in order not to miss anymore “the true pleasure and joy of living”. To those who argued that all these are mere dreams, Oscar Wilde replied: “progress is the realisation of utopias”.

Nowadays, we meet such works as *Terror of Labour*²⁶, where, after discussing the constrained character of work, the author pointed out that “the terrorism of labour” is the “strategy of crisis management”. And *Manifesto Against Labour*²⁷, where it is stated that labour cannot be re-defined, but only cancelled by a struggle which is “anti-politics”, meaning criticism of the political relations which are the frame of the submission state of labour. Even the festive work – as spectacles, carnivals, shows, festivals – is made in order to fortify the entertainment economy (to win customers)²⁸ and, even if there are always elements of resistance to the goals of the logic of status quo, it is part and parcel of what Guy Debord called *Society of the Spectacle*.²⁹

monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery”, and explained at which level the social property of technology will lead to individualism (but for the word individualism remember Marx’s *Economic-philosophical manuscripts of 1844*) that will not be selfish and affected and through which “the public” will be “artistic”.

²⁶ Norbert Trenkle, *Terror of Labour*, 1998, <http://www.krisis.org/1998/terror-of-labour>.

²⁷ In English, *Manifesto Against Labour*, 1999, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/krisis-group-manifesto-against-labour> (new address); But see also the French site <http://www.mondialisme.org/spip.php?rubrique39>, where laziness is seen as opposition to the neo-liberal policies initiated under the presidency of Sarkozy (cancellation of the measures taken in 2000 – 35 hours work per week –, the slogan of supplementary work to make a better living). See here the organisation *Résistance au travail aliéné*.

²⁸ Michael J. Wolf, *The Entertainment Economy: How Mega-Media Forces Are Transforming Our Lives*, Three Rivers Press, 2003. But also, the item Festive Work.

²⁹ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm>;

But also, Internationale Situationniste, *Sur l’emploi du temps libre*, 1960, <https://www.larevuedesressources.org/sur-l-emploi-du-temps-libre.039.html>, and Guy Debord, *Perspectives de modifications conscientes dans la vie quotidienne*, 1961, <https://inventin.lautre.net/livres/Debord-Perspectives-de-modifications.pdf>. Also

The labelling of “anarchism” or “communism”, of this type of literature, is not relevant, nor the idea that this literature reflects mere lazy writers who live with the products of so many people who really work. This type of literature is not the one of evasion, but of indirect and direct social criticism. Labour has to be freed, and this means that human beings have to be freed. But is it possible?

From a technical standpoint, the present industrial revolution, based on IT, microelectronics, biology, nanotechnology, allows such high productivity that a very big spare time – bigger than labour time – is really possible. Today, this productivity supports the huge bureaucracy, and war and warfare activities. Thus, it would be possible to feed the whole world³⁰ decently and to organise work in such a manner so as to no longer be forced, but pleasant, creative and intimately linked to a pleasant and creative time to live (“spare time”).

In this way it is possible that philosophy to put the problem of *what kind of labour* as a real and urgent analysis of the day. This was just the preoccupation of those who questioned the *cognitive capitalism*. The changes have occurred over the last decades, and in an accelerated manner have configured the new type of labour as an essential element of this revolution and, at the same time, of capitalism. It is both an element of increase and decrease of social stability.

Starting from the concept of *general intellect* coined by Marx in his *Grundrisse*, some philosophers considered that “the objective of our time (is) the abolition, the elimination, the refusal, of waged labour as such” and they “posed the existence of waged labour as the great barbarity of our time”³¹.

But let us remember briefly Marx’s theory of labour. “The higher productivity of labour is expressed in the fact that capital has to buy a smaller amount of necessary labour in order to create the same value and a greater quantity of use values, or that less necessary labour creates the same exchange value, realizes more material and a greater mass of use values.” “This means at the same time that a smaller quantity of labour sets

Ana Bazac, Fifty years from Guy Debord’s *La société du spectacle*/The society of the spectacle, 28th August 2017, <http://egophobia.ro/?p=11893>.

³⁰ See Jean Ziegler, *L’Empire de la honte*, Paris, Fayard, 2005.

³¹ Paolo Virno, interviewed in the Spanish *Archipelago*, number 54, <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpvirno2.htm>.

a larger quantity of capital in motion.” What kind of labour could do this? In capitalism, “the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of *fixed capital*³², in so far as it enters into the production process as a means of production proper”. This is just because “the productive force of society is measured in *fixed capital*, exists there in its objective form”. Fixed capital is what imposes the rules and values of capital. For this one, the knowledge included in the process of production is the means of its own power and thus accentuates the opposition between labour and capital: “In machinery, knowledge appears as alien, external to him; and living labour [as] subsumed under self-activating objectified labour”. The logic of profit pushes capitalists to spend money to develop the fixed capital – machinery constructed more and more as “automaton”, more productive, as well as more at hand raw materials and energy – just to reduce their need for living labour³³.

But the more knowledge becomes a productive force³⁴ – i.e. utilised just for the development of fixed capital – the more productivity appears and becomes the result of the social combination of labour. Paradoxically, “fixed capital is productive, rather, only in these common labours which subordinate the forces of nature to themselves”. The higher the productivity of fixed capital is, the more “the creation of real wealth comes

³² Fixed capital = means of production (means of labour + raw materials and energy, i. e. the technique through which raw materials and energy become elements of the means of production; means of labour being equivalent just with tools, machines, technique.) Fixed capital is objectified labour, whilst the living labour is circulating/variable capital.

³³ “Machinery inserts itself to replace labour only where there is an overflow of labour powers... Machinery enters only where labour capacity is on hand in masses”, Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1856-1858, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/index.htm>.

³⁴ “Science too is among these productive forces”, “laws, arising directly out of science, which enables the machine to perform the same labour as that previously performed by the worker”, “all the sciences have been pressed into the service of capital”, “Invention then becomes a business, and the application of science to direct production itself becomes a prospect which determines and solicits it”. Marx, *Grundrisse*, NOTEBOOK VII, End of February, March. End of May - Beginning of June 1858, *ibidem*.

to depend less on labour time and on the amount of labour employed than on the power of the agencies set in motion during labour time, whose 'powerful effectiveness' is itself in turn out of all proportion to the direct labour time spent on their production, but depends rather on the general state of science and on the progress of technology, or the application of this science to production".

With the development of technology, wealth – as a result of human effort– appears to be more and more "neither the direct human labour he himself performs, nor the time during which he works, but rather the appropriation of his own *general* productive power, his understanding of nature and his mastery over it by virtue of his presence as a social body". In fact, society is based on "the development of the social individual which appears as the great foundation-stone of production and of wealth".

But with this transformation, "as soon as labour in the *direct* form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, *labour time* ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value"³⁵. Rather "the free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as to posit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of the necessary labour of society to a minimum, which then corresponds to the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in the time set free, and with the means created, for all of them".

For Marx, the huge contradiction consists in the fact that capital, which "calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it", wants at the same time "to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value".

³⁵ In this respect, a process that leads to the growth of human creativity which, in its turn, becomes the basis of wealth (instead of the former labour time, and consequently of the law of value), is the free access to the transmission of knowledge, so the free communication. See Ana Bazac, "Comunicarea gratuită: o provocare reală", (The Free Communication: A Real Challenge), in *Comunicare și cultură: aplicații interdisciplinare* (coord. Adela Rogojinaru), București, Tritonic, 2006, pp. 50-79.

Therefore the inner logic of capital, consisting in the development of fixed capital (which indicates the degree of development of wealth, of capital), leads to the growth of the quality of circulating capital, thus of general knowledge without which it would no more be possible to develop the capitalist economy. From this standpoint, the inner logic of capital – the rush to profit – requires that the waging and exchanges on the basis of the law of value/the labour time continue, whilst, at the same time, profit is more and more dependent on the general creativity of people, thus on new “measurements” of labour and issues which are opposed to the law of value/ or of the labour time.

By revealing this contradiction, Marx’s theoretical construction emphasises to what extent labour is not a simply economic concept, but a fundamental philosophical one, just because the *human being* and *time*, *society* and *individual* – their evolution and their values (the phenomenology of the human spirit) – cannot be explained without it. In this way, Marx constructs and provides a theory of the *objective* ground of the *possibility* of transition from capitalism to a very progressive non-capitalist society (to communism): “the development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the *general intellect* and been transformed in accordance with it”. General intellect is just the result of “the development of the creative abilities of people situated in all the parts of production, so of economy, so of society”.

The new type of labour – and, in this way, the new types of values and social relations – is not firstly the result of the capitalist answers to the “natural” changes of technology (so of desirable capitalist adaptations), but the consequence of the constraints put on capitalism by its inner contradictory logic. “Capital itself generates the elements of its own destruction: it becomes evident that the growth of the forces of production can no longer be bound up with the appropriation of alien labour, but that the mass of workers must themselves appropriate their own surplus labour”. Only on this new ground of social relations, the “necessary labour time will be measured by the needs of the social individual, and... the development of the power of social production will grow so rapidly that, even though production is now calculated for the wealth of all, *disposable time* will grow for all”. “The measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labour time, but rather disposable time”.

Therefore, knowledge transposed into technology, and, generally, into the means of production (fixed capital), liberates the direct labour, which no longer appears as the basis of production³⁶. Rather this one appears as the result of the combination of social activities, including those *before*, *behind* and *after* production as such (including the development of the cultural and innovative abilities of the labour force – the variable capital). The development of the creative forces of people as a whole becomes the most important condition to continue and develop production and thus profit. But the above-mentioned contradiction compels the capitalist economy to save labour time and, at the same time, to depend on labour and labour time (because its result is the profit. For this reason, and as already Marx observed, people work longer even if technology could save their time). But “the saving of labour time [is] equal to an increase of free time, i.e. time for the full development of the individual, which in turn reacts back upon the productive power of labour as itself the greatest productive power”, the new “fixed capital being man himself”³⁷. The notion of *general intellect* or, as it was developed nowadays³⁸, *mass intellect/intellect of the masses* derives from this process, and thus it is obvious that Marx himself does not consider in a mechanical way the character of general intellect as fixed capital, rather he suggests that during capitalism even the intellect of the masses is integrated into the functioning of capital, as if it would be a simple fixed one³⁹. But, despite the entire pressure to integrate the intellect of the masses, the inner capitalist logic of

³⁶ Almost everything has the form of automats.

³⁷ All the above-mentioned references are quoted from Marx, *Grundrisse*, 1856-1858, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/index.htm>

³⁸ Paolo Virno, *Grammaire de la multitude* (2001), Paris, Éclat, 2002, p. 24. See an electronic form at: <http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/virno4/grammaire06.html>.

³⁹ We have to note Virno’s criticism of Marx’s understanding of general intellect as fixed capital. He insisted that now, in post-Fordism, general intellect reveals itself as more than fixed capital, as a linguistic interaction of the living labour. For this aspect, but also for a complex discussion related to different theories concerning the political forces of the transformation of capitalism – and concluding that to deduce a politics from ontology (i.e. from the objective changes in the regime of labour) is an impossible bet, see Pierre Dardot, Christian Laval et El Mouhoub Mouhoub, *Sauver Marx? Empire, multitude, travail immatériel*, La Découverte, 2007, pp. 208, 253.

technology and labour works against this integration: or toward the transformation of capitalism itself.

This theory of Marx is taken into consideration only by writers who adopt the dialectical method, so who do *not* explain society as a sum of individuals, *nor* society and individuals taken separately, *nor* individuals as a mix of the “eternal human nature” and chance, *nor* history without the social (spatial), *nor* culture without social and economic ground, *nor* the economic and social ground without cultural values, *nor* the human and social development in a pre-figured frame of concepts. Generally, those who do this ignore the political economics and try to impose a philosophy of economics built on the basis of the politics of Robinson.

But in the last decades – corresponding to the rise of trans-national capitalism and the present industrial revolution, and named “late capitalism” (Habermas), “post-modern capitalism”, “cognitive capitalism”⁴⁰ – the new phenomena of intercourses between the new types of labour and time, politics, culture, social structure and institutions have been so strong that philosophers had to question this dry and “untraditional” problem.

It is not the place to dissect it, or to run over the different theories that introduced labour into philosophy (let it be “only” the philosophy of economics)⁴¹. What is important here is to draw attention to two opposite points of view.

⁴⁰ “As cognitive capitalism we name a mode of accumulation in which the object of accumulation is mainly constituted by knowledge that becomes the main source of value as well as the main place of the self-multiplication...the mode of production (of material goods, services, signs and symbols) the cognitive capitalism...is based on the labour of cooperation of brains reunited in net with the help of the computers. The very quick development of the organisation under the form of project administration, of control of little units articulated in net and led by secondary (tertiary, etc.) level contracts, of partnership or relations at local scale is the translation of this transformation”, Yann Moulier Boutang, *Le capitalisme cognitif. La Nouvelle Grande Transformation*, Paris, Multitudes/Idées, Éditions Amsterdam, 2007, pp. 86, 87.

⁴¹ See for example, David Rousset, *La société éclatée*, Paris, B. Grasset, 1973.

But this perspective has already been outlined by *Civilisation at turning-point* (ed.. Radovan Richta, Czechoslovakia) (1967); Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *The Third Wave*, Bantam Books, 1980; Kevin Robins and Franck Webster, *Cybernetic Capitalism: Information, Technology and Every Day Life*, in Vincent Mosko and Janet Wasko

The first insists on the fact that the obvious and strong tendency of the present capitalism is the development of labour linked to high technology – the *info-rich* of Toffler – and thus the characteristics of the present state of the system, in a transition marked by its crisis or its capacity of adaptation⁴², would be deduced rather from the immaterial, “invisible” labour⁴³: but this is incongruent with the waged labour, i.e. with the measurement of labour in quantities, in time units, thus by the law of value.

The *second* is that this tendency of capitalism to become cognitive, even though leading to and being a huge and quick transformation of labour and society, *coexists* with types of labour specific to the first industrial revolution as well as to non-industrial epochs and performed by a certain majority of the world population. (This means that the profit is obtained not only from immaterial labour – even if this is the most important source – but also from the labour of millions who work in somehow the first industrial revolution type of factories (sweat shops) from China, India and

(eds.), *The Political Economy of Information*, Madison, The Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1988;

Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century*, Bantam Books, 1990; J. Womack, D. Jones, D. Roos, *The machine that changed the world*, New York and Don Mills (Ont.), Macmillan, 1990; Robert Reich, *The Work of Nations*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1991; E. Sternberg, *Transformations: the Eight New Ages of Capitalism*, Mimeo, Department of planning and design, State Univ. of New York, Buffalo, 1993; Jeremy Rifkin, *The End of Work. The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995; Samir Amin (ed.), *Post-Fordism: A Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell 1994; T. Kochan, R. Lansbury, J.P. MacDuffie, *After lean production: Evolving employment practices in the world auto industry*, Ithaca and London, ILR Press, 1997; *The McDonaldization thesis: Explorations and extensions*, London, Sage, 1998; Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (I -*The Rise of the Network Society*, II -*The Power of Identity*, III -*The End of Millenium*), Cambridge, Mass., Blackwell Publishers, 1996-1998.

⁴² Certainly there are different writers who support these opposite opinions.

⁴³ According to Maurizio Lazzarato, *Immaterial Labour*, in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardy, eds. *Radical Thought In Italy: A Potential Politics*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, pp. 133-147 (133), “immaterial labour is the labour which produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity.” “Its cooperation and its subjectivity guaranteed management, innovation, productivity of the post-Taylorist system.”

Brazil)⁴⁴. From this standpoint, some insist that the source of the transformation of the present capitalism would be the labour force employed in these factories.

My aim here is not to describe the answers to this hypothesis. However, I have to observe some essential aspects.

One is related to the symbolic labour. *a.* Not all types of work in the service sector of services contain the most significant part of high intellectual skills and creativity: there are those from the laundries, McDonalds, real estate brokers etc. Or *b.*: There are many jobs in IT which are monotonous, repetitive, with or without high IT skills. As well as *c.*: The intermittent and precarious character of many types of work belonging to the “intellectual capital”, and the phenomenon of *working poor* – the poor who work, thus are not unemployed – meaning rather *vulnerability to poverty*⁴⁵. (Let alone that in more than 80 countries, the income per person is smaller than it was 10 years ago, and that the difference between the rich and the poor countries has accentuated – in 1960 it was 30 to 1, in 1990 it was 60 to 1, in 2003 it was 80 to 1⁴⁶, while the internal inequality visible in education⁴⁷ is visible at the level of malnutrition worldwide⁴⁸ but even in developed countries together with job insecurity, suicide and drug abuse⁴⁹, showing both the already known opposition of 1% and the rest of 99%⁵⁰ and

⁴⁴ “Industrial hinterlands delocalised in the South”, Yann Moulier Boutang, *Le capitalisme cognitif. La Nouvelle Grande Transformation*, p. 165.

⁴⁵ In the winter of 2006-2007, one half of the French affirmed that it could be possible to lose their homes, according to Yann Moulier Boutang, *ibidem*. And it was a period of economic boom, not as at present.

⁴⁶ According to Peter Lemprecht, « Idéologie pan-économique et bien commun », in (sous la dir. de Olivier Delas et Christian Deblock), *Le bien commun comme réponse à la mondialisation*, Bruxelles, Bruylant, 2003, p. 3.

⁴⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, Patrick Champagne, « Les exclus de l'intérieur », *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, Vol. 91-92, mars 1992, Politiques, pp. 71-75.

⁴⁸ Dr Francesco Branca, *Malnutrition: It's about more than hunger*, 16 October 2017, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/commentaries/malnutrition/en/>.

⁴⁹ See Anne Case and Angus Deaton, “Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century”, *PNAS*, No 49, Vol. 112, 2015, pp. 1578-1583.

⁵⁰ *Una economía al servicio del 1%*, OXFAM, 18 de enero de 2016.

the 20% of the upper middle class and the rest of society⁵¹, and the rising of all types of inequality from 1980 onwards⁵², including racist discrimination in developed countries⁵³. And the soar of *gig economy*, where a huge number of workforce is “self-employed”, as a perverse way of accentuating the dependence of labor on capital⁵⁴. This means that the system generates *useful* people and *useless* people (for capital). This last aspect emerges on the grounds of rarity⁵⁵).

Another aspect is that the means of control over the “cognitariat”⁵⁶ are at the same time brutal and sophisticated, persistent, traditional and utilising the newest technologies, as they were during the transition to modernity represented by the first industrial revolution: i.e. the sense of control corresponds to the level of society; only the tools – including knowledge – are different.

Another one is that the coexistence of the new IT revolution and the former one, as well as the pre-modern mode of production, and their types of labour and labour relations, does not annul the fact that the new phenomena constitute the main trend of the present society. Thus philosophical inquiry and scientific research can no more be focused on

⁵¹ Richard V. Reeves, *How the American Upper Middle Class Is Leaving Everyone Else in the Dust, Why That Is a Problem, and What to Do About It*, Washington, DC, Brookings Institution Press, 2017.

See also Anne E. Nigra et al., “Inequalities in Public Water Arsenic Concentrations in Counties and Community Water Systems across the United States, 2006–2011”, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, Vol. 129, No 12, 2020.

⁵² Lucas Chancel, Facundo Alvaredo, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez et Gabriel Zucman coord., *Rapport sur les inégalités mondiales 2018*, Paris, Seuil, 2018.

⁵³ See Daniel Trilling, ‘I’m not racist, but ...’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 41, No 8, 18 April 2019, critically reviewing three academic legitimating of racism.

⁵⁴ James Manyika et al., *Independent work: Choice, necessity, and the gig economy*, October 2016, <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/independent-work-choice-necessity-and-the-gig-economy>.

⁵⁵ “The individual is built in its humanity by the other individuals at the same time as surplus and as rare”, Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique. I. Questions de méthode*, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p. 212.

⁵⁶ This word was used by Franco Berardi, *The Factory of Unhappiness*, 2001, excerpt from Franco „Bifo” Berardi, *The Soul at Work. From Alienation to Autonomy*, translated by Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia, Semiotext(e), Cambridge 2009, pp. 90-98, <https://konfrontacje.pl/en/kontekst/the-factory-of-unhappiness/>.

separately taken aspects of labour, thus ignoring the persistence of the old types of labour, or the newest ones, or the coexistence itself.

Another aspect is given by the obstacles put by capital in front of the objective changes within the economic relations, in other words a problem of rhythms and intervals of transformation.

Another one is the huge contradiction between the hopes of millions of high skilled young people to face another type of labour, freer and more creative and accessing free information all over the world, and, on the other hand, the obstacles against free information and the tendency of capital to *integrate* them into the wage system, thus reducing the high skilled labour in the logic of capitalist evaluation. In this respect, even education is put under pressure: from a viewpoint, it has to develop high skills, inherently through the expectations related to it, as the universalisation of the free high education; from another, it is forced by the political and economical framework to continue the differentiated instruction to perpetuate the cheap and weak skilled labour.

A first conclusion of this short survey is that Heidegger, for example, could not take into account the social as such, including labour – with its concrete evolution and interactions, not only for his assumption of traditional ideological suppositions, but also because during his life the first industrial revolution and the wage relations, the submission of labour and the traditional hierarchical (physical-intellectual) division of labour seemed to be eternal. At present, it is no longer the case, and the neglecting of labour by philosophy is only a proof of a conservative ideology it shares.

Another conclusion is that, by assuming the problem of labour, philosophy assumes also the problem of social transformation, critically analysing the themes of balance and conflict: of both revolution and the suppositions of the eternity of social domination.

So, why labour? How could labour be considered as a framework for the human behaviour and model if, on the one hand, the model of a successful life is no more based on labour, but on money, irrespective of its provenance? And what kind of labour⁵⁷, if, on the other hand, the newest

⁵⁷ See the volume 7, number 1, February 2007 issue of *Ephemera*, questioning the Immaterial and affective labour. And Giuseppe Cocco and Barbara Szaniecki (Eds.), *Creative Capitalism, Multitudinous Creativity, Radicalities and Alterities*, Lanham, Boulder, New York, London, Lexington Books, 2015.

representation of labour being related to the immaterial type of work, only art – including its most non-conformist versions – seems to be freed from the discipline of hard learning and experiencing, quite opposite to its situation centuries ago? What kind of labour, if some experience/ perceive labour as a pleasant activity, whilst – nevertheless in the same world – others feel it as a trap, as centuries ago? What kind of labour, if it belongs to a cage which perpetuates the alienation of the working people, even if the lack of employments seems to make work rather a privilege?

All of these constitute a process under way. Therefore, the re-inclusion of labour into philosophy raises new problems concerning social continuity and change: if capital is what authorises mobility, if it requires flexibility in order to restructure, upon a dynamic basis, new apparatuses for its proper reproduction, how could the forces which oppose these tendencies be named? Where are the guiding marks?

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