The place of work in human perfection with special reference to Karl Marx's concepts of alienated labour

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between work and all rounded human development. Our central thesis was that work is indispensable in human perfection. Our study was primarily conceptual. Through library research, we obtained concepts and views regarding work, which we subjected to critical scrutiny and argumentation in order to determine and evaluate their meaning, underlying assumptions, implications, and justification. However, we attempted to contextualize our study within the Kenyan situation, through fieldwork strictly for the purpose of providing some empirical evidence for work-related claims that would otherwise appear to be purely speculative. The findings of this study suggest the likelihood that work is regarded solely as a means to material rewards by most workers in Kenya. This materialistic attitude towards work was argued to be a probable manifestation of alienation on the following grounds; first, it estranges the worker from his/her own personhood. By focusing solely on the material aspect of work, the worker disregards the significance of the spiritual dimension of work and the corresponding spiritual dimension of the worker. The worker loses sight of personhood as the appropriate end of his/her work. Secondly, regarding acquisition of material rewards as the sole goal of work, the worker tends to view and treat human beings as mere means serving selfish material ends. This adversely affects human relationships. Human beings are alienated from one another. The materialistic conception of work estranges the worker from enjoyment of and fulfillment in his/her work. Work is regarded as a necessary evil and exertions avoided like the plague. This negative attitude towards work evident among some Kenyans was traced to poverty, institutionalized prejudices and the structure of some work activities. Poverty tends to reduce work to a "survival" activity. Institutionalized prejudices, for instance, polarization of manual and intellectual work alienate workers from one another. The structure of some work activities, for instance, too much bureaucracy and authoritarianism make workers lose control of as well as enthusiasm in their work. The findings above provided some evidence for work-related claims contained in our first and second premises stated thus: 1. The view of work solely as a means to material rewards as opposed to the view of work as also a means to the development of human persons is widespread in contemporary Kenyan society. 2. The view of work solely as a means to material rewards is a probable manifestation of alienation. This study established that work is indispensable in human material as well as spiritual development. This finding is grounded on a holistic view of humans as material-spiritual beings who were perfectible. The distinctive human features of rationality, creativity, individuality, morality, and sociality are not only utilized but also improved through work. As such, work can be regarded as a rational and conscious ingredient of transforming human beings into human persons. The study recommends the promotion of professionalism at work as a viable means to ensure that the material as well as spiritual dimensions of human beings are given the attention they deserve.