
Understanding work as a fundamental category of capitalism: What does the crisis of work entail for the reproduction of contemporary society?

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Résumé

This paper aims to discuss the present and future of work in the framework of the value-critique theory (also known as Wertkritik). As argued by value-critique theorists such as Robert Kurz, Norbert Trenkle, Anselm Jappe and others, a critique of modern society should not take the standpoint of any subject formulated by this society – as for example the working class. Instead, critique should challenge all the fundamental categories of modern society such as value, money, capital and labour. The aim of this paper is to offer an insight to the following questions: Is the category of work trans-historical? What does the current crisis of work imply for social reproduction and the future of contemporary society?

The category of work is an ambiguous one. On the one hand, it is the banner under which all sides of society rally. Work is perceived as the creator of everything and there is a consensus, shared by both workers and capitalists, on the constant need for more work. On the other hand, work, in the form of abstract labour, is regarded as the "source of value" (Marx, 1992) and consequently, as the theory of value-critique points out, must be understood from the outset as a negative concept. As is the case for every social category, questioning *a priori* constructs (Vincent J-M, 1991) through a historical conceptualization contributes to the understanding of the category of work. On this basis, in its first part, the paper will discuss the notion of work as a historical category specific to capitalism.

Historical conceptualization will contribute to a better understanding of the category of work and its pivotal role in contemporary society. The expression "society of labour" used by value-critique theory to emphasize the importance of work for the constitution of contemporary society is indeed valid. In this context, work (or better yet, labour) is an abstract end-in-itself which acts as the internal motor for capitalist development. On this basis, understanding work is a key in understanding, on a deep and fundamental level, the logic of capitalism. On this issue, the paper discusses in its second part, the concept of abstract labour in the framework of what Marx identified in the *Grundrisse*, as the "moving-contradiction" and, in this light, discusses the future of social reproduction in relation to the crisis of work.

Mots-Clés: value, critique theory, work, Marxian "moving, contradiction", critique of work

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