

Rediscovering the Value of Human as a Way out Materialism

Yingwen Zhang

The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Department of Anthropology, Social Anthropology, WC2A 2AE, UK

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Abstract: Traditionally, Marxist political economy took labor as the source of value and tried to liberate human beings by changing the relations of production. However, this conception failed to deal with the problem of desire and seemed to be at a loss before the materialist plight where desire keeps changing into need. From an anthropological view, this dilemma could be due to the expulsion of values out of the value theory. Born in modern society, Marxist political economy held a dichotomy between value and values, or economy and culture, thus canceled out possibilities of solving economic problems with social, cultural or philosophical answers, which was exactly many non-western societies did. This article calls for an open attitude to non-western societies' ideas of what value is and where value comes from, among which traditional Chinese thoughts is an example. It attributes the source of value to human's life instead of labor, and in this way may change the idea that people only deserve to survive when they work hard, and may bring new light about how human's life should be respected to modern society.

1. Introduction

When I first came up with the proposition of this article, many objections came including those arguing that human, as a philosophical concept, cannot be the source of value, which is an economic issue, and those arguing that traditional Chinese social thoughts are based on feudalism thus cannot be “advanced” enough to converse with Marx.

Both objections, however, are based on a dichotomy between material and spirit as well as economy and culture, which is a special, if not unique, phenomenon of modern society. The second argument above was especially based on Marxist material determinism which not only unconsciously pre-assumed the economy-culture dichotomy, but even went further to assert that the social thoughts of certain times can never surpass its material conditions. This kind of assertion is likely to lead to a belief in the progress of history. Since the production forces have improved a lot, and the feudal relations of production have broken up, believers of the progress of history have enough reasons to infer that modern thinkers are necessarily wiser than the ancient ones, and this is why they regard traditional Chinese scholars as more unenlightened than Marx.

However, my aim in emphasizing an anthropological approach here is exactly to avoid the above limitations that political economy imposes on us, on our possible way of living, and on our choices out materialism. Once economy and culture are considered two separated domains, economic value seems to turn into some self-contained system upon which social, philosophical and aesthetic values cannot have fundamental influence (Graeber 2014). Nevertheless, if we jump out of the type of society which gave birth to political economy and examine the way that non-western people think about what we call “economic issues,” we would find the “economic” and the “cultural” domains much less distinguishable than they are in our society. Furthermore, if we must distinguish them and discuss their relationship, more often it is even “culture” that determines “economy,” which is the standpoint of traditional Chinese thoughts. In this kind of worldview, “social” and “cultural” means could be fundamental solutions to “economic” problems before it exacerbates to the point where political or even violent solutions have to be resorted to.

It is invalid to judge such idea with a material determinist criterion, since an anthropological approach requests an understanding of the world from non-western people's own perspectives instead of from a western one. A material determinist judgment on other peoples, if it could ever be

made, would turn out to be a biased one, considering how unusual modern society is among all possible human societies. It only appears natural to us because it has prevailed our times and is still sweeping out other forms of societies. Marxist political economy, therefore, cannot effectively negate traditional Chinese social thoughts. On the contrary, traditional Chinese thoughts, by negating material determinism, has already provided solutions to social problems that Marxist theories cannot really solve.

The limitation of Marx's own analysis on the relations of production is exactly that it drew clear line between values and value. While severely criticizing the exploitative relationship in the domain of economic value, it never traced its ultimate source to values in the philosophical sense, and therefore resorted to changing the ownership of means of production. However, as Merleau-Ponty (2009) pointed out, the change of the ownership cannot prevent the revolution classes turning into dominant ones. Institutional designs can never eliminate greed and desire, and since it is people who play with rules, any rules can turn out being used for the operators' pursuit of self interest even if they are originally designed to avoid becoming so (Zhou, 2006).

On this question Durkheim and Baudrillard went further than Marx himself. Durkheim (2013) insightfully perceived that the division of labor was only propelled to satisfy people's desire. The desired objects may be "neither necessary nor useful, but ... it has been so well enjoyed that it cannot be denied." They might not correspond to "the real need of our nature," but modern people have got so addicted to them that they cannot even live without them. When they grow accustomed to those transiently new things, they have to promote the division of labor in order to acquire new stimuli.

Baudrillard, in the same way, maintained that capitalism kept turning people's desire into need by continuously creating new commodities, rendering desire something that is hard to get rid of. Thus capitalism seemed to turn into something that we are unable to go beyond.

Durkheim and Baudrillard's analyses finally pointed to something close to values, which is about desire, greed, about what is worth pursuing and what should be considered important. Social structure and the mode of production do bound individuals, yet if we go one step further, we will see that what makes these conditions of existence for us is fundamentally a philosophical problem, namely our own values.

In this sense Marx's political economy even formed a theoretical basis for Baudrillard's plight: it set a necessary sequence in the realization of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom, and once people were educated to believe in such a rigid sequence, they would never dare to dream about spiritual liberation until the satisfaction of material needs. Yet the problem was that needs and desire were indistinguishable in capitalism. As long as capitalism kept creating new desire and turning it into need, it was forever putting off the moment of "satisfaction of material need" that Marx imagined. In this way, the liberation of human beings would indeed become an event in remote future that could never be reached.

However, if we examine historical facts, not much evidence supports the necessary Marxist sequence of the realization of the two realms. Since what modern thinkers call "economy/material" and "culture/spirit" are inseparable in many pre-modern societies, the two realms are actually inseparable. Therefore, the realization of the realm of necessity is itself the realization of the realm of freedom. It is modern times that tears these two realms apart, traps people forever in one realm, and pushes the other far into unachievable future.

I will illustrate this point in the following parts. In the next part I will explain how "value" in the economic sense and "values" in the philosophical one are two sides of the same coin in non-western societies. In the third part, I should focus on traditional Chinese social thoughts as a specific example where human, instead of labor, is the ultimate source of value. Finally, based on these discussions, I will give some suggestions on substitutive solutions to political economy as a way out materialism in the last part of this article. Surprisingly, these substitutive solutions seem to have been coping with those difficulties that political economy finally comes to realize for thousands of years. Human beings have never lacked ways out the plight of modern times, and what they need is only to listen to them.

2. How Our Understanding of Value Could Have Been Much Broader

I have specified above that political economy is based on one particular society where economy has become a separated domain from other social domains. Therefore, its understanding of what is money, and most crucially, what value means and where value comes from, is largely limited and biased by the modern social conditions.

Nowadays if we ask Chinese students in political economy what currency is, they will probably answer that currency is the one specific commodity that becomes the only universal equivalent in the world of commodity. It has five functions: measure of value, means of circulation, means of hoarding, means of payment and world currency.

However, if we consider this question on the scale of all human societies, this definition will turn out to be a very narrow one, largely limited to the type of society where market is the dominant form of human exchange. Yet it is not the only nor any justified form. Abundant anthropological literature has studied societies where market does not prevail, yet these societies do have what they see as valuable and make no less efforts than modern men do for those valuable things in their eyes. Accordingly, money has much different meaning in these societies than in the modern one.

For example, currency is used to coordinate the relations between people in many African groups (Graeber 2014). None of dowry, bride price and blood debt is paid in the sense of a sum of money. Instead, they stand for a debt of person, where the debtor owes the creditor a person, a real life that cannot ever be paid with money. It could be a member of a family killed by the debtor, or a daughter that eloped with him. Here, currency is given as a proof of a debt or a token of promise not because the it is valuable itself, but because it stands for something that is really invaluable, which is the person, the life of human.

In modern society, however, the human and social aspect in currency has been deleted, with only the shallow economic relations left. In this way, tribal peoples' giving currency for a wife can be misunderstood as “selling women” in modern scholars' eyes, just like paying service fee for sexual workers. But in fact, what the tribal peoples really care about is real persons in real life (Wagner 1986). It is only when money is abstracted the human substance that the misimpression of “selling women” can happen.

To define currency as commodity already implies a preexistence of market, yet the question not asked is: Is market the only place where value can be found?

The answer from many non-western societies is “no,” but it is surprising that their voice have not been recognized by political economy even in the present days. In the cornerstone of economic anthropology, Malinowski (2014) described how islanders of the western Pacific valued necklaces and armshells not the slightest because the artifacts could be used to buy as many commodities as possible, but all because transiently possessing and then exchanging them was the way that the islanders periodically held and past on dignity and realized all other social meanings.

The exchange took place among islands and the route was such big maritime circle that it could take a year to complete a single round of journey. Inhabitants overcame extreme difficulties in order to carry out this social activity. Not only is building canoes collaborative work of hardship, but the navigation itself could cost people's life. If the objects of exchange were not valuable, the islanders would not have input so much into them. Therefore, it is clear that value does not solely emerge from market.

Distinguishable from market, there is another principal of exchange and way of organizing society, which is “gift.” Studies on gift show that market is not necessarily the dominant form of human relations. Tracing back history, we can see that it is ourselves who made it so dominant. Our greed for more wealth, more commodities and more power propelled the pathological expansion of market. As Graeber (2018) points out, before modern times, no great thinker wrote books discussing how to make most wealth; they only wrote to discuss how to cultivate best people. For this reason, capitalism is far less a political issue than a social cultural one. It is far less an overarching entity than what we make for ourselves.

I am not denying that each social member is born into certain social structure which limits individual's freedom, yet I do want to stress that the social structure is made by ourselves. The time

when we believe market to be the only field of value is the start time when all social meanings of value are expelled out of picture and when all relations between people are defined as “economic,” and when all injustice in these relations have to be solved with political means including violence.

A best way to understand this is to examine the history. Market was not the dominant form of exchange from the beginning, nor did politics use to be the thorough solution for economic problems. There was a history before our situation becomes so, a story of how commodity prevailed over gift to be the main reflection of human relations.

Mauss's foundational work on theories of gift revealed that pre-modern societies did have words that meant “valuables,” but the rules that dominated the circulation of these valuables were different from that of modern society. They were the rules of gift: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to repay (2001).

What ensured people's obedience to these obligations was a spirit of gift. It would always want to return to its homeland, and out of such earnest will, the spirit would compel each receiver of the gift to pass it on, otherwise some misfortune would happen. In modern society, however, the spirit of gift can no longer be found in objects. They become hollow commodities and people have to rely on contracts to guarantee the fulfillment of obligations. Though Mauss did not explain the reason of this change explicitly, it surely has something to do with what Max Weber calls rationalization and disenchantment of the world.

What may surprise those political economists is how much human efforts were put into activities concerning gift: a whole village's efforts to make a canoe, years after years of risky navigation in order to exchange ornaments of shells, potlatches where huge amounts of food were lavished and so on. If these human resources are converted into necessary labor hours in production, the value that they create would surely be high. Then why did these people input so much into objects that seemed much less useful than commodities? Why did they call them “the valuables?”

Clearly, hours of necessary labor is not the only source, and commodities are not the only carrier of value. Besides commodities, there are gifts, which people value most because it concerns how social members and social relations are respected, and this kind of value is worth human efforts no less than that of commodities does.

3. A Dialogue between Traditional Chinese Scholars and Marx

By limiting the definition of value only to the value of commodities and the source of value only to labor, Marxist political economy has exactly limited the value of human. It rules out other possibilities where human beings can define what is valuable to them, and measures the value of human efforts solely by the exchange value in market. Nevertheless, it cannot avoid a contradiction: while finding value only in the commodity world, it cannot attribute value solely to the production of commodities. It has to specify this production of commodities as human's efforts, namely labor, otherwise anything that produces commodities could have been considered creating value, and machines could have been paid wages.

This contradiction can be seen in Marx's own works. On one hand he acknowledged labor as the source of value, on the other hand he could not admit all kinds of labor to be the source of value. He wrote, “If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value.” (1887: 10) Marx's theory cannot be unconditionally affirmative to the value of labor. It needs to add one condition, which is the usefulness of labor. But who will be deciding whether a certain kind of labor useful?

In this way, Marx pushed the philosophical questions of meaning aside, though in his early ages he once believed that “man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.” (Marx 2012). In later political economic analysis, he did not continue with this argument. The strict sequence of the realization of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom limited his thoughts, and trapped him in a plight where as long as the physical need - which nowadays is routinized desire - has not been satisfied, man can never produce in freedom.

However he may have never imagined that this plight has long been solved by many non-western

peoples, the peoples that he criticized as alienated by religion, including the ancient Chinese. For these people, things are nothing like “man truly produces in freedom when he is *free from* physical need,” but that “man still pursues production in freedom even when he is *in* physical need.” This is why they insisted offering the best production to “religious” use even in ancient times when the production forces were at extremely low level and material resources in great deficiency.

In fact, the category of “religion” is to large extent arbitrarily drawn (see for example, Asad 1993, Pouillon 2016, Sahlins 1996). Many non-western belief systems are labeled as “religion” by western scholars merely because they have some similar appearance with Christianity. However, if leave these superficial similarities aside, what they call “religions” may be more close to something like worldviews and values.

For example, Confucianism is nowadays widely considered a religion, yet if knowing a little deeper about its core propositions, it will be much more proper to understand it as a value theory of human. Instead of counting the value of human in socially necessary labor time, Confucians maintained that economic value should, and could only subordinate to humane value. In fact, it is even very odd for Confucians to study economics or political economy, because for them, concern in interest can only arouse conflicts in interest, and any society without proper philosophical values can only sink into endless fight for profit. The famous conversation between Mencius and King Hui of Liang State clearly shows this point:

Mencius went to see King Hui of Liang. The King said, “Old man, since you do not think thousands of *li* a far distance to travel to see me, may I presume that you have some good suggestions to profit my kingdom?”

Mencius answered, “Your Majesty, why must you speak of profit? It could have been enough with Humaneness and Rightness. If you always say 'how can I profit my kingdom,' your top officers will ask, 'how can we benefit our clans?' And the elites and the common people will only ask, 'How can we profit ourselves?' In this way, Superiors and inferiors will struggle against each other for profit. The country will be in danger! In a kingdom of ten thousand chariots, the murderer of the sovereign is usually from a clan of one thousand chariots; in a kingdom of one thousand chariots, the murderer of the sovereign is usually from a clan of one hundred chariots. It is not that those who have a thousand chariots in a kingdom of ten thousand chariots do not own much, nor for those who have a hundred chariots in a kingdom of one thousand chariots. The problem is that once they place profit over rightness, no one will be satisfied without grabbing something.” (Mencius 2003)

For Confucians, values were far more important than value, because once proper values were established, desire and conflict in interest would be reduced to the least extent, and economic problems would be automatically solved. That was why they input much into humaneness-related issues. For example, Confucians held up as good offerings to those passed away as to them when they were alive (Gu 1996), and objected to the proposition of simple burials of Mohist School. From an economic point of view, these can seem puzzling, since the dead can never enjoy good offerings or decent funerals, but they will not be hard to understand if one knows that economic interest is not the first concern of Confucians and that humaneness is. It is because they could not express their love and sorrow for the departed ones enough that they could not help offering the best to them.

Marx's problem was that he brought even the Confucian true expression of human love into the analysis framework of the distribution of products. Any religion, he thought, was alienation of human beings because it deprived man of his products and distributed them to supernatural beings. His first concern was the ownership of material products. Accordingly, in his criticism of religion, there was no room for anything that was far beyond economic interest. In this way, all “religious” people were judged to be unenlightened and unliberated unless someday their products belonged to them.

With this judgment, the liberation of the Chinese is postponed to an unreachable future. In ancient times they used to offer the best to their beloved ones no matter how unimproved the material conditions were, and that was the time when they could express their love freely regardless of material limitations. However, once they are taught to see this as primitive superstition, they

cease to love people right now and here and instead start to struggle against each other for material interest. Caring for others turns into some future topic which is not worth consideration before everyone owns their products.

This kind of dichotomy between current difficulties and future liberation, between the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom, reflects deep influence from Christianity. Ostensibly crying out strong objection to religions, Marx may not realize this, but Sahlins (1996) insightfully points out that few western thinkers up to the modern times really escape the thinking mode of Christianity, even including Marx. The theory of original sin and the opposition between body and soul, this world and other world exerts a subtle influence on mainstream social theories, leading them to start their analyses with bodily need and see it as some basis of human existence that is almost impossible to overcome, and trapping them in the contradiction between physiological desire and moral code, individual and society, as well as present misery and future freedom.

The real problem of today's social theory is that other "religions" (actually it may be better to refer to them as values and worldviews) are not recognized as equal foundations of social science as Christianity. Unconsciously having root from Christianity, Marx's theory continues negating all religions, and still insists in some kind of material determinism. In this situation, traditional Chinese thoughts can never be taken seriously. They will keep being seen as immature ideas based on undeveloped relations of production and thus will never have a chance to provide human beings with a different solution to modern problems of materialism.

But the fact of our society is that our real situation is determined by what we choose to believe. Chinese history has proved this. When most people believe that superstructure is determined by infrastructure, the mental strength of the whole society has become so weak that people cannot even defend their values before economic pressure or material temptation. The society becomes a field where people do whatever they can for self interest including remanufacturing expired foods and selling unqualified vaccine. By contrast, at the time when people valued rightness over material interest, they would rather starve to death than betray humanity.

Ancient China is often criticized of the political tendency of encouraging agriculture and suppressing the development of commerce. From a Marxist perspective, such policy hindered the liberation of relations of production and impeded the progress of history. Such conclusion is drawn out of the ignorance of the connection between values and value. But the ancient Chinese saw it clearly. They even saw how the growth of commerce would stimulate desire and result in materialism, which is the situation of our times. Therefore they set their policy in every aspect avoiding facilitating the increase of desire. For them, history does not necessarily need to evolve through the stages of primitivism, feudalism, capitalism to communism, and freedom is something that must be realized right here and right now. Freedom is how humans choose to live their life, not how material determines how man should live.

Behind this is the question of which one of values and value is the basis for the other. For Marx it is the latter, but for traditional Chinese thinkers it is the former. As Tang Junyi, the New Confucian, argued,

Before China and India opened their port to modern trade, the political economic problems that people sensed was not necessarily so urgent as religious, moral, artistic or other problems of life. In future times, men can also not regard political economic problems as the most important ones. Examining the infinite human history, we may find that such a particular attention to political economy is but an anomaly of the recent two or three hundred years: how can we divide the world with only the category of political economy?

... political economy is nothing but the most outside layer of humanity, the most superficial one. People are likely to see the importance of political economy as well as to view culture, life and the world through this category, perhaps exactly because it is the most outside and superficial layer. However, the prevalence of this kind of view increasingly limits people within an shallow understanding of the world of humanity. (Tang 2019)

Denying the foundational position of humanity in the construction of our world, Marxist political economy traps human beings in the material domain and cancels out their freedom of deciding what

value ought to be and where value could come from. The value of human is simplified into the value of labor. Had it ever opened its mind to man kind's diverse possibilities of value, human beings, including westerners, could have had other ways of defining what they thought was important and what was worth human efforts and respect. The meaning of human life could have been much richer than any ethereal class identity of workers or capitalist, and as the following discussion between Confucius and his students shows, it is ultimately human life rather than the performance of social role or even the enrichment of national wealth that is the source of value:

Zilu, Zeng Xi, Ranyou and Gongxi Hua sat in attendance on Confucius. The Master said, "... If someone did recognize your worth, how would you serve him?"

Zilu answered without thinking, "Let's say a medium-sized state is hemmed in by several large states. It is harassed by troops from outside and is suffering from famine. If I were sent there to govern, by the end of three years, I would have been able to imbue all the people with courage and set them on the right course."

The Master smiled at him then asked, "What about you, Ranyou?"

Ranyou replied, "Let's take a small state of sixty or seventy, or even fifty or sixty square *li*. If I were to govern it, by the end of three years, I would have made everyone prosperous. As for reviving the rituals and music, that would have to wait for a wise and honorable man to come along."

The Master turned to the third disciple, "And you, Gongxi Hua, what would you do?"

"I would not like to talk about ability, but the willingness to learn. At ancestral worship and negotiations with foreign allies, I would dress up in ceremonial robe and cap, and serve as a minor protocol official."

"And what about you, Zeng Xi?" The Master asked.

Zeng Xi was approaching the end of a piece *Se* music which he had been playing. After plucking the final note, he laid the instrument down and rose from his seat, replying, "My idea is very different from theirs."

The Master said, "That does not matter. After all, each one of you are entitled to talk about your own aspirations."

Zeng Xi then said, "In late Spring when everyone has put on spring clothes, I would, in the company of five or six adults and six or seven children, bathe in the Yi River and enjoy the breeze on the Rain Altar and sing our way home."

Heaving a deep sigh, the Master said, "I'm all for Zeng Xi!" (Lin 2016, slightly adapted)

4. Conclusion

This article has been a dialogue between traditional Chinese thoughts and Marxist political economy, longing for an open attitude to non-western views about the relationship between values and value, about how value can be defined, and about where value can come from. Such a conversation can only be possible when Marxist theory is not seen as more advanced than traditional Chinese thoughts and when non-western tradition of thinking is treated as equal foundation of social analysis as the western one.

Knowing more about Marxist theory than their own traditional scholarship, contemporary Chinese scholars are likely to judge traditional thoughts of their country with a Marxist criterion, which is more or less based on some material determinism, maintaining that undeveloped infrastructure cannot bear advanced social thoughts, and that human freedom can only be realized when all material need is satisfied.

However, in above I have discussed the lack of evidence for such material determinism. As Sahlin reveals, it is based on the Christian theory of original sin which takes bodily need as the start point of all further analyses. If we jump out of the Christian tradition and examine the abundant non-western ways of living, we will find economic value not the first concern of these people. It may not even be a separate concern from values. Tremendous human efforts can be input into non-economic purposes which local people regard as valuable, and these purposes are often more about society, life story and humanity.

Compared to this, the labor theory of value is a relatively narrow explanation of value. It is produced in one certain type of society where commodity exchange has become the dominant form of human relationship. Here economy and culture, value and values has departed from each other so far that anything humane cannot seem to be the source of economic value. The value of human is deleted of its ample content, leaving only the value of labor for commodity production. In this way, human beings can only be treasured when they occupy themselves with work.

This kind of belief, when evolving to an exacerbated stage, can turn into a value theory of work. As economic anthropologist David Graeber (2018) argues, working has become the moral compulsion in our society. People having a job receive social recognition and legitimated payment no matter how pointless or even socially harmful their jobs are, while people without a job, no matter how meaningful their career is, are criticized as parasites of society who deserve poverty and begging.

The fundamental problem of this injustice is modern theory's refusal to accept non-economic purposes as possible source of value. Political economy is too objective. There is no room for human, nor human's choice to decide what is valuable. This theory of value, Chinese eminent monk Master Shoupei (Shi 2015) had commented early in the twentieth century, is very narrow. It attributes the source of value only to material production, not to humane production. Thus philosophy is cheaper than economy, human is lighter than material, those whose career is to care about the whole human beings are less respectful than those who do whatever to pursue self interest, and the question of what ought to be done is less important than how to maintain the current injustice.

Even if so, Marxist political economy seems to already trap itself in its own pitfall. Regarding superstructural solution as unreliable, it cannot but find the infrastructural way inadequate as well, especially in solving problems of desire. Capitalism has succeeded in constantly turning newly manufactured desire into daily need, and controlling desire does not look like anything that adjusting the relations of production can cope with.

However, traditional Chinese thinkers as well as many other non-western peoples have been dealing with this problem in thousands of years' time, and the true solution lies in the values. Ancient China had never conceived any discipline like economics or political economy, because it knew that the ultimate problem was not in relations of production, but in values of people. For them, human was the ultimate source of value, and that was why they looked like "wasting" material resources on the departed ones and regarded fulfilling social positions or making prosperous and strong states as less important than the realization of human life. They even set policy of suppressing commerce because they knew that commercial development would necessarily arouse desire, and that they had to restrain the growth of desire from the very beginning.

Fundamentally, values should be the base of value, and humanity should be the base of economy, rather than the other way around. Our real situation is shaped by the way that we understand the relationship between material and human. When human is seen as the ultimate source of value, all material resources will be organized in a way that serves human just like in ancient China, regardless of to what degree production forces have developed. By contrast, when human labor is seen as the source of value, our society can even sacrifice human freedom and dignity for the acquisition of most labor. This point is not hard to understand if we think about the gender discrimination in labor market just for females cannot work during the maternity leave, and how rural migrant workers in cities are treated so that most labor value can be squeezed out of them at lowest cost.

Chinese Marxist political economists prefer trusting institution to educating people because nothing can guarantee that human does not turn bad. It is true. Nothing can guarantee this. But we must also be aware that institution is nothing more reliable than human, especially in the fundamental problem of desire. It is humans that indulge their greed and desire. It is them who place the value of material over that of human. It is them, who acknowledge the everyday injustice and remake it. As anthropologist David Graeber writes,

Every morning we wake up and re-create capitalism. If one morning we woke up and all decided

to create something else, then there wouldn't be capitalism anymore. There would be something else.

One might even say that this is the core question - perhaps ultimately the only question - of all social theory and all revolutionary thought. Together we create the world we inhabit. (Graeber 2018: 238)

What we need is to realize that we create our own difficulty. It is not any objective relations of production that trap us in the modern plight. It is us, our desire, our values and our recognition of injustice. And this is not a problem that institutional change can solve. The ultimate solution is in our values.

The first step that we need to take is to open our minds to listen to those non-western people who have been coping with desire and who are aware that human being is the ultimate source of value. Nothing remains to be said, but everything is to be done. It is time to listen to their voices and review our theory of value in a new light.

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