**Person Centered Marxism for the 21st Century**

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 **Abstract**

For more than a century, conflicting interpretations of Karl Marx have left the world in a quandary. Was he a hard line communist? An idealistic tyrant? A misanthrope? Or, a Western style humanist? What was Marx’s non-economic theory of values?

Formal Axiology can clarify these questions. Used as an interpretive framework, Formal Axiology will show beyond question that Marx’s Marxism was person-centered, and anti-collectivism. "Communism" was not a defined ideal economic system for Marx, but a society of humane social relations among fully developed individuals who will make their own institutions as needed. “Socialism” is not a dogma, but the process by which such decisions are made.

Formal Axiology’s Value Calculus is used for conducting a rigorous humanistic analysis of value assertions and assumptions. In the Value Calculus, each person is an intrinsic value. Only persons are in this category. Actions, things, etc. are extrinsic values. Ideas, systems, plans, etc. are systemic values. The activity of valuing also has three parts, each of which can be positive or negative, as the paper will show.

Marx’s non-economic theory of values is in complete agreement with the Value Calculus as to reserving a special category of value for the human person. In his criticism of religion, Marx wrote that “for man the Supreme Being is man.” And he added that in the real, material, world, this principle of value becomes a “categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected and contemptible being.” In other words, Marx, like the Value Calculus has a conception of positive and negative treatment for his supreme value – the human person.

The paper applies this analysis to a variety of Marx’s writings, early to late, and shows that he was consistently humanistic. Indeed, his ideas of “human emancipation,” and “free individuality,” the basic premises of his socio-economic critiques, are both person-centered value positions.

**Introduction**

Karl Marx wrote with an astute intuitive grasp of Formal Axiology. While he never articulated the symbols of the Value Calculus, or wrote explicitly of the three categories of value, or understood the word “good” as Hartman has defined it, his sense of value reality, and of the natural order of values, and especially of the nightmarish disorder of values in capitalist society, remains unparalleled over 130 years after his passing.

In this essay I will show how the Value Calculus is implicit in Marx’s basic criticisms of the value disorder in capitalism. This will be an exercise in the application of the Value Calculus to the study of social relations.[[1]](#endnote-1) My purpose here will not be to advocate for a *Communist Revolution*, or a *Dictatorship of the Proletariat.* Instead, I seek merely to illustrate how Formal Axiology can help people who want to see capitalist social relations as Marx saw them – as structures of value.

Robert S. Hartman hoped that his Formal Axiology would provide the basic principles upon which his successors would build the value sciences. As he has noted, the precise knowledge of “natural science has revolutionized our understanding of nature and our sensitivity to it.” Thanks to natural science, educated people are far less superstitious about such matters as the shape of the Earth, evolution, or the causes of disease than were pre-science people. The medical sciences, biology, and physics of Marx’s day, in the nineteenth century, could hardly have imagined the astonishing advances we now see all around us. In the same way, wrote Hartman, the precise knowledge of the value sciences “ought to make us more sensitive to moral reality.”[[2]](#endnote-2) Just as the natural sciences have improved the quality of health and of material life for much of humanity, Hartman hoped that the new value sciences would lead to a rise in the moral level of human civilization.

My own hope is that understanding social relations from the point of view of the Value Calculus, as Marx intuitively did, will change the meanings of those relations for the reader, whose empathic understanding of Marx’s passion for reform will then be enhanced and perhaps even shared. Raising levels of civilization, paralleling the transformations wrought by natural science, requires a reformist passion based in reason, as was Marx’s.

**The Value Calculus**

The Value Calculus has three general elements. First, the three value categories: the intrinsic, extrinsic, and systemic. Second, the three ways of valuing: intrinsically, extrinsically, and systemically. Third, the symbolic expression in precise formulas of the various relationships between the categories and forms of valuation. As a method, or a game, for understanding values and their interrelations, these are the rules.

For example, according to the Value Calculus the human individual is always notated as an intrinsic value, an “I.” Indeed, the person is the only occupant of the intrinsic value category. One person can be valued by another person in any of the three ways of valuing. That is, Jim can love Mary, or employ her, or think of her in her absence. Symbolically, Mary as a person is an intrinsic value, “I.” Jim’s love for her would written as II; or, an intrinsic value (Mary) valued intrinsically (Jim’s love). Jim employing her would be IE; or, an intrinsic value valued extrinsically. Jim thinking of her would be IS; or, an intrinsic value valued systemically. These examples are positive valuations, and are called “compositional” valuations in Formal Axiology.

Of course, Jim can value Mary negatively in each of the three forms of value. Suppose Jim hates Mary (for marrying John). That would be written as II; or the intrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. If Jim fires her, IE; or, the extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. If a week later Jim is still thinking of Mary as an incompetent person, IS; or, the systemic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. These are examples of “transpositional” valuations in Formal Axiology.[[3]](#endnote-3)

**Man as Supreme Being for Man**

Marx’s criticisms of social relations in the capitalist system follows Formal Axiology’s Value Calculus to a “T” – even though Hartman had not begun to write about Formal Axiology until nearly 50 years after Marx’s death. Marx formulated his conception of the person, the human individual, as an intrinsic value early in his career. He did this in the course of criticizing religion, by which he generally meant European Christianity. In his 1844 essay, “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” Marx wrote that “the criticism of religion is the prerequisite of all criticisms.” The reason for this is that “The criticism of religion disillusions man, so that he will think, act and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses, so that he will move around himself like his own true sun.”[[4]](#endnote-4)

Marx recognized that while religious doctrines purported to be statements of Universal Truths, they were more forcefully *value ideologies*. Doctrines like man as sinner and God as the Supreme Being had huge consequences on the values that folks believed in. Such dogmas as “original sin” taught people a moralistic low self-evaluation, and consequently to accept the feelings of unworthiness and powerlessness before the All-Mighty. In Marx’s view, this value milieu of self-loathing and learned helplessness before God conditioned the person to acquiesce to ruling class domination and capitalist exploitation, as if he or she were deserving of such treatment. Marx understood that people with low self-esteem, who see the highest values as outside and above humanity, are more likely to accept oppressive and degrading socio-economic conditions than are people with high self-esteem and pride. That is why, for Marx, what is needed is the man whose values “will move around himself like his own true sun.” Marx wrote:

“Man’s self-esteem, his sense of freedom, must be re-awakened ... only with its aid can society ever again become a community of men that can fulfill their highest needs.”[[5]](#endnote-5) As we will see, those “highest needs” are for human liberation from oppression and toil, so that people can live in a self-governing society dedicated to the development of humane human potential.

In the terms of the Value Calculus, the situation in which having a person with low self-esteem is a benefit to the capitalist system can be written as (II)S; or, the positive systemic valuation of the intrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. To positively value the negative condition in which a person has learned self-loathing, II, the intrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value, is an axiological contradiction. Value consistency requires self-esteem; or, II, the intrinsic valuation of an intrinsic value. Yet, to Marx’s outrage, this contradiction in values was taught by religion’s capitalist-serving ideology.

As a corrective, Marx wanted to humanize society by raising human self-esteem so that people will act accordingly to change their social conditions. As mentioned, to begin this process requires the criticism of religion. Then he wrote: “The criticism of religion ends with the doctrine that *for man the supreme being is man*, and thus with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected and contemptible being.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

Contrary to religion, Marx’s supreme value is, then, that man himself is the supreme value. Humanity is the summit of Marx’s value hierarchy. Just as in the Value Calculus the person is the only intrinsic value, so for Marx there is no higher value, nor higher power, than humanity. Because Marx sees that a great part of humanity is a “debased, enslaved, neglected and contemptible being” in the capitalist system, human liberation *from this value milieu* is an urgent necessity.

Meta-Marxism, the use of the Value Calculus to interpret Marx’s writings, can also help to bring order to the chaos in the secondary literature on Marx. It can show with logical clarity why Marx once quipped, in reference to some of the confusion in the writings interpreting him, “If anything is certain, it is that I myself am not a Marxist.”[[7]](#endnote-7)

This use of the Value Calculus to interpret Marx’s writings helps clarify his meanings in several ways. First, it can show exactly why he criticized particular social relations in the capitalist system. That is, those relations were criticized for their axiological contradictions; such as learned self-loathing, II, rather than learning self-esteem, II. What continues to make these contradictions noteworthy are the deleterious consequences they have on the quality of human life. As I will discuss further below, this way of interpreting Marx also puts into proper perspective some common misunderstandings of his writings. For example, using the Value Calculus helps to show that his central focus was on the individual human being, or person, both as an individual and as an expression of humanity, the human species. I will show why he was not a “collectivist” who sought to force the individual to serve the group. This interpretive tool also helps to show that “communism” was not a moral ideal by which Marx passed judgment on capitalism. Marx never defined communism as a standard of goodness for society. Instead, when criticizing social relations in capitalism he used his intuitive sense of a humanistic value hierarchy and value consistency that precisely parallels the Value Calculus.

**Individuals, Groups, and the Value Calculus**

What is an individual? For Marx, the individual, as a matter of empirical fact, is more than a mere body in motion, like a social atom colliding with others of the same ilk. Rather, the individual is a sentient social being, a species-being, that is, an instance of the human group, who has his or her own consciousness and will, but who is also an expression of his or her culture. More than a standalone body, each person is a unique complex combination of individual, cultural, and human characteristics. Marx wrote,

Man, much as he may be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity

which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much

the totality – the ideal totality – the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself, just as he exists in the real world both as awareness and real

enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human manifestation of life.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Thus, Marx has an understanding of the individual both as an empirical fact and as a value category – of what the individual is, and of what he or she is worth. One reason for Marx’s placing only the individual in the category of intrinsic value is that the individual is where human life and human needs are experienced, and human potentialities realized.

As a social being, a person has a many layered need for other people, which need is the primary basis for the individual’s intrinsic value. Because each individual needs others, each merits a supreme valuation. Marx suggests that the progress in a society of the consciousness of the person as an intrinsic value can be gauged by the amount of respect in the relationship between the men and women in the society. He writes,

The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man

to woman. … From this relationship one can therefore judge man’s whole level of development. … This relationship also reveals the extent to which man’s need has become a human need; the extent to which, therefore, the other person as a person has become for him a need – the extent to which he in his individual existence is at the

same time a social being.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Marx understood that even more fundamental than sex or helping with work, a person needs others as reflections of his or her own being, of who he or she is, and as such a confirmation of one’s own meaning as a human, or species, being. The individual who is liberated from the false consciousness of capitalist “individuality,” that is, of grasping egoistic selfishness, will experience himself or herself as a social being, and as a truly human person who will simply want to be with others. This want will include the desire to serve and support others in their self-development, just as he or she needs their service and support for the full realization of his or her human potentialities. This complex need of the individual for others to complete himself or herself, and even to understand his or her own humanness, plus the desire to be of service to others, are the primary reasons for placing the individual in the special category of intrinsic value.

Underlying Marx’s writing, then, is the Value Calculus formula, II – that is, the intrinsic valuation of an intrinsic value. Marx’s tacit theoretical commitment here is that each person is an instance of the category “intrinsic value,” and that each deserves to be valued intrinsically by every other person. As a form of valuation, intrinsic value entails the respect of each person simply as a person. To resurrect a word from Old English, to value a person intrinsically creates an I-Thou relationship of mutual respect, empathy, and compassion.[[10]](#endnote-10) In this form of valuation, the individual is too precious to be used or exploited as an instrument of production by the socio-economic system.

In the capitalist system, the individual worker is forced by economic conditions into the employment of the capitalist. Thus, the individual is reduced in value to that of an instrument for the capitalist to use to make his own profits. The value category of things, tools, and instruments for any sort of using, is that of extrinsic value. To value a person as a thing, then, is an extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value; or, IE.

**Work**

Marx understood that work is essential for living; both as the way for humans to sustain their lives, and as the way each working person can live a full life. The way a society organizes itself for life-sustaining work is its mode of production (and the way it relates to nature). In the ideal situation, the working groups in a mode of production, or economy, would be ones which facilitated each person’s self-development. As I will explain further below, a group is an extrinsic value. Hence, the ideal relation between the individual and group would be IE, the group serving the needs of the individual. In *Capital*, Marx wrote that to be truly human, “the collective working group being composed of individuals of both sexes and all ages must necessarily, under suitable conditions, become a source of humane development.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

Because capitalist labor sacrifices individual self-development to the needs of the system, the value relation is (IE)S – the systemic valuation of the extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. But an axiologically consistent, or ideal, mode of production for society would,

replace the detail worker of today, crippled by life-long repetition of one and

the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to the mere fragment of a man, by

*the fully developed individual* fit for a variety of labors, ready to face any change

of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs are but so

many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers.[[12]](#endnote-12)

This “fully developed individual” is the quintessential aim, the guiding light, the North Star, of Marx’s vision for humanity’s future. As the great English interpreter of Marx, Cyril Smith, notes, quoting Marx, “Marx’s conception of communism was founded on the possibility of ‘the free development of individualities.’”[[13]](#endnote-13)

According to Marx, goods and services in a communist society would be distributed by the principle of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” Clearly, the focus of this principle is the individual in a person-centered society – from *each* individual’s ability to *each* individual’s need.

“Communism,” then, is a mode of production that would serve the needs for folks to become fully developed individuals. Communism, for Marx, is that human community which is organized to support and facilitate the full development of each individual’s capacities to contribute to all through work, and for all to live in the consciousness of life’s richness. Communism is what would result from a reorganization of society so as to align with Marx’s non-economic value theory. The value structure for the person working to support all others in a communist system would be (IE)S – the systemic valuation of the extrinsic valuation of an intrinsic value. This would be a value relationship without axiological contradiction.

Again, so as to illustrate the use of the technical terms of the Value Calculus, when a worker is reduced by his or her work to a mere fragment of a person, then an intrinsic value is extrinsically disvalued, IE, which is a serious “transposition” of values. When work enables the person to realize his or her full development, that is the extrinsic valuation of an intrinsic value, IE, and a “composition” of values. Because the notation for work that sacrifices individual self-fulfillment *in order to* sustain the capitalist system is (IE)S, and the notation for communism is (IE)S, one can conclude that, in a sense, Marx’s entire life was dedicated to teaching people about the importance to their lives of lifting that “E” from sub-E to power-E.

**The Group as Distinct from the Individual**

One widespread misinterpretation of Marx’s writings is his understanding of how the group, as distinct from the individual, is to be valued. The Value Calculus can help clarify this. In the Value Calculus, a group of individuals belongs in the category of extrinsic value precisely because it is a different kind of thing in the world than an individual person.[[14]](#endnote-14) The empirical properties of a group are different than those of an individual. Groups are sets of properties which are shared by the members. Such terms as “capitalists,” “workers,” “socialists,” “communists,” even “men” and “women,” refer to collectivities of actually existing people whose common properties determine the type of group they are in. Of course, individuals are each unique, so they are not sets of common properties. These factual differences between a group of people and an individual are the basis for categorizing one as extrinsic value and the other as intrinsic value. While Marx did not explicitly draw this distinction, as we will see in the following discussion, he understood it intuitively.

However, in Marx’s writings whether he has a group or an individual in mind is not always clear.

Sometimes Marx wrote intentionally of a group, or relations between groups, and sometimes he used the same terms, but as metaphors for the person. As with any problem of interpretation, the context must be studied for clues as to the speaker’s or writer’s intentions.

Marx’s term “human liberation,” for example, appears to refer to the entirety of humanity, the human group. In one sense, Marx did believe that the entire group of humans needed liberation – from its false consciousness and consequent oppressive social relations. But as a matter of actual practice the term only makes sense as meaning the liberation of each unique individual to realize his or her human worth and human potentials to the fullest in cooperation with others. Marx understood that, as an empirical matter, human liberation is achieved, and experienced, person by person.

As an example of another empirical difference between the group and the individual, suppose that *as a group* the Jews were enslaved in ancient Egypt and Moses led the group to freedom. The group left Egypt, but only individuals *felt* the actual suffering of enslavement and the joy of liberation. A group *as such* does not feel the misery of oppression, or the joy of liberation, but only the individuals within the group. Because feelings occur within a particular individual’s nervous system and consciousness, only an individual person feels his or her own feelings.

As an example of Marx clearly referring to groups, consider his observations concerning “class warfare.” His writings are, indeed, full of references to the “working class” and the “ruling class.” These concepts refer to actual groups in a political system, and their interactions can be observed and described. The empirical condition of one group enslaving, or exploiting, another group, can be notated as EE – the extrinsic disvaluation of an extrinsic value. Loving the working class can be notated as EI – the intrinsic valuation of an extrinsic value. Hating the ruling class, EI, the intrinsic disvaluation of an extrinsic value. (By the way, hating the very idea of the capitalist system is SI, the intrinsic disvaluation of a systemic value.)

Class domination and exploitation in the capitalist system was such an anathema for Marx precisely because within it, *the particular and unique person* is constrained and mutilated. Marx’s most passionate concern was that in capitalism the individual’s unique potentialities, for work abilities as well as for such feelings as conviviality and brotherhood, were not being given a chance to fully develop, but were being constrained, suppressed, standardized, and reduced in value to that which the economy could use; (IE)S – the positive systemic valuation of the extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. Marx’s passion arises out of his empathy for the abused individual, who also stands as a metaphor for the group of oppressed persons.

Contrary to widespread misunderstanding, therefore, Marx is no “collectivist.” That is, Marx did not value the group over the individual. Indeed, he tacitly grasped that they are two distinct categories of value, with intrinsic value as “supreme” over extrinsic value. As we have seen, in his vision of the communist society, the system, and the working groups within it, would serve the needs of the member individuals. Ironically, in actual practice, aside from the false consciousness generated by propaganda, capitalism is the real “collectivist” society. Marx condemned capitalism precisely for its denigration of the person by making the person subservient to the system, standardizing and constraining him and her. As worker, the person is subsumed into the working class, IE, which is itself subservient to the collectivity of the ruling class, (IE)E; and all so as to maintain the capitalist system, ((IE)E)S – the systemic valuation of the extrinsic valuation of the extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value.

Marx envisioned communism as a classless society, so that no individual would be subsumed into, or dominated by, any class or collectivity. Marx wrote,

Within communist society, the only society in which the genuine and free development

of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase, this development is determined precisely by

the connection of individuals, a connection which consists partly in the economic prerequisites and partly in the necessary solidarity of the free development of all.[[15]](#endnote-15)

Unlike religion’s so-called “principle of love,” as the way “nice people” connect, Marx’s “solidarity” is more like the *dedication* implied in the expression “all for one and one for all.”

The concept of the “person” in the capitalist system is a far cry from what Marx means by the term. In *Capital*, Marx wrote, “the persons exist for one another merely as representatives and hence owners, of commodities.”[[16]](#endnote-16) For example, in capitalism, the worker sells his or her time, efforts, and skills in the same way a car is sold. Also, with everyone blinded by the fetishism of commodities, the person is valued for how much he or she has, rather than for who he or she is – an individual human being. In this valuation the person is reduced to the function of a piggy bank, and honored for what’s in the bank. This value relation can be notated as (IE)I – the intrinsic valuation of the extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value; i.e., the positive valuation of the negative valuation of a person. A fine piece of a value contradiction.

Indeed, capitalist “individualism” is a silly piece of false consciousness, and of gullibility. In practice, the individual worker in servitude to the capitalist system has no free individuality, but is debased to a fragment of a man, and treated as an appendage to the machine of industry, a mere instrument of profit making for the capitalist, IE. A worker is a commodity whose labor is purchased at whatever stingy wages the market will bear. The individual consumer is an object of manipulation for advertisers and marketers. The “individual” person is an automaton whose personhood is mutilated and shaped to serve the economic system; (IE)S. Life’s meaning for the “individualistic” consumer of capitalism is reduced to the vacuous practice of making and spending money. The individual then vainly tries to fill the consequent emptiness with all sorts of self-destructive kinds of behavior. [ft Fromm Sane Society …][[17]](#endnote-17)

The term “society” can be used to refer to a collectivity, or group, subsuming individuals who are living and working together; indeed, a group of groups. But as to the use of this term Marx again clearly stated the value relation between the term “society” and the individual. He wrote, “It is, above all, necessary to avoid once more establishing ‘society’ as an abstraction over against the individual. The individual *is* the social being. His vital expression [, as a form of human life,] is therefore an expression and confirmation of social life.”[[18]](#endnote-18) In other words, the person naturally implies, or “expresses,” a society, but is not reduced in value for it. For Marx, the correct order of values is always society serving the individual (IS), and never the reverse (IS).

Marx was very cognizant of humanity as a human group, often using the term “the species-being of man.” One of his criticisms of the capitalist system is that it divides the human group into antagonistic classes; namely, the working class and the ruling, or capitalist, class. This valuation of the human group is ES; or, the systemic disvaluation of an extrinsic value. Of course, this systemic divisiveness has unhappy consequences for the quality of individual lives. That is why, for Marx, the dissolving of class constructs was one way of furthering individual feelings of membership and unity in the human family.

**Communism is NOT Marx’s Standard of Goodness**

The interpretation of Marx as intuitively applying the Value Calculus shows that he did not use “communism” as a moral standard, or as an ideal form of society, by which to condemn capitalism. Instead, his *method of* *criticism* was to analyze existing social relations for their contradictions with his basic value principle that Man is the Supreme Being for Man. He deplored the abusive condition of capitalism requiring value transpositions for its own existence. He saw that the individual in capitalism, whether of the working class or ruling class, will always be used as an instrument to serve the system, a value relationship of (IE)S. Marx’s focus for both criticism and reformation is always the *value structure* of social relations in capitalist society. His standard of evaluation was his intuitive grasp of what we now know to be the Value Calculus, as first articulated by Hartman.

Indeed, Marx explicitly rejected the practice of using some fanciful notion of a futuristic society as the basis for criticism. He wrote,

we do not anticipate the world with our dogmas but instead attempt to discover

the new world through the critique of the old … we have no business with the construction of the future or with organizing it for all time, [rather we focus on] the

task confronting us at present: the *ruthless criticism of the existing order*, ruthless in

that it will shrink neither from its own discoveries, nor from conflict with the powers

that be.[[19]](#endnote-19)

Marx never defined the specific institutions of a communist society. Communism was never a plan, or blueprint into which social relations would be fitted. He was not a “law giver” or a constitution writer. He left that for others to handle during each nation’s transition out of capitalism. He trusted the folks of the future to form institutions as they saw fit. His “Dictatorship of the Proletariat” was meant to be a temporary form of governing during the transition out of capitalism, only used on an as-needed basis, and not a required step.

Rather than an ideal institution, or a Platonic permanently perfect form of social organization, communism for Marx was more a poetic vision of humanity’s *potential* to form a fully humane society. Marx understood that how this would be done, perhaps as some combination of work and leisure, is not now foreseeable. That is why he never got more specific than “fish in the morning, hunt in the afternoon, and criticize books in the evening.” His vision was not of a defined set of economic and/or political institutions, but a set of social relations consistent with his hierarchy of values – S serving E, serving I, a value relationship of (IE)S. His vision was of a society with the person as the center of value.

**Evolution**

As we have seen in the discussion of man’s relation to nature, Marx believed that humans evolved out of nature. While he didn’t use the Native American term, his views fully agreed with the idea of “Mother Nature.” Marx accepted the theory of biological evolution which held that one species can serve as the base out of which a new species emerges. He extended this theory to his understanding of history, often called “historical materialism;” that is, one set of historical conditions can form a base out of which new conditions emerge to form a new base, etc. This change can be gradual or revolutionary.

Consistent with his evolutionary thinking, he also believed that communism is not the last stage of human evolution. “Communism is,” he wrote, “a real phase, necessary for the next period of historical development, in the emancipation and recovery of mankind. Communism is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism is not as such the goal of human development – the [final] form of human society.”[[20]](#endnote-20) Communism is the antithesis of capitalism, but not the end of history. Marx optimistically assumed that humanity will always find new ways to make life better. Unlike religion, Marx had no fixed vision of heaven for humanity.

**Social Psychology and Crude Communism**

Communism, for Marx, would be a mode of production in which people could realize their potential for *feeling* the fullness of life through their creative contributions to the whole. In this sense, Marx’s focus was on human consciousness, on how folks *experienced* *their lives*. Marxism, in this sense, is the study of inhumane social relations, their causes, their consequences for the individual, and the study of how the harming can be stopped, and the wounds healed. Using the language of American social science, Marx was more a social psychologist than an economist. As to this distinction, there is a widespread failure to understand Marx. But, he understood the difference. He contemptuously called the reduction of his vision of communism to mere economics “crude communism.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Crude communism is concerned with government imposing a fixed mode of production and social order on humanity. It is more concerned with dividing material wealth equally than with the development of the “rich human being.” Marx condemns it as “universal envy constituting itself as a power.” Because of its pecuniary and leveling obsession it “negates the personality of man in every sphere.” Thus, crude communism is “the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilization.” Its value relationship would be the same as capitalism’s – (IE)S; a system that sacrifices the needs of the person so as to satisfy its own needs for persistence. Obviously, Marx was no crude communist.

**A Note on Form and Feeling**

The Value Calculus is a formal language used for the precise description of value relationships. But to have meaning, it must be understood empathically. In the terms of the Value Calculus, for example, when a worker is reduced by his or her work to a “mere fragment” of a person, then an intrinsic value is extrinsically disvalued, IE – but the intensity or seriousness of this transposition is not conveyed by the symbolically expressed formula. Rather, the reader of the formula must be able to *feel* the degree of emptiness and degradation that any normal person would likely feel in such a social relationship. No one but an individual slave, of course, can have the actual inner experience of slavery, which is also an IE social relationship. But our common species-being, or membership in humanity, enables us to empathize to some degree with one another. It is in such empathy where the real meanings of Value Calculus formulas exist.

Changes in the formula can engender changes of feeling in the reader. The debased and fragmented person, IE, may inspire pity in the reader who can understand how such a working person likely feels. But when the formula is expanded to include more of the worker’s social relationships, both a meaning and a feeling of a different order can be generated in the reader. Take, for example, the formula (IE)S; the positive systemic valuation of the extrinsic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. This means that the individual worker’s labor is exploited, his life emptied and sacrificed, *so that* the capitalist system can sustain itself. In Marx, pity for the poor and miserable worker takes a quantum leap into outrage over the intolerable injustice of sacrificing human life by a predatory socio-economic system. This is made worse, in Marx’s consciousness, because he sees that members of the subject classes are often numb to their pain, or are finding ways to numb it, and are unaware of its causes. He can also see that if the workers were in touch with their suffering, and understood its causes, they could unite and thereby have the political power to abolish the system that abuses them, and institute a system that could enrich the lives of all. The passion that Marx felt when contemplating the formula (IE)S can be felt by anyone. The formula gives the precise reason for the feeling. The Value Calculus thus unites reason and feeling.

**The Value Concrete and Two Value Axioms**

Like other humanists, Marx takes his evaluation of man as supreme to be a personal commitment, and as intuitively and self-evidently true. As we have seen, he asserts his belief in man as the utmost value to counter the devaluation of man by religion and the capitalist system.

Two value axioms can be derived from Marx’s postulate that man is the supreme being for man. The first is that people are more important than things. The second is that people are more important than ideas, systems, mental constructs, etc. This postulate and its two value axioms constitute the axiological structure of Marx’s non-economic value theory. Throughout this essay, these axioms have been implied in the symbolic formulas of the Value Calculus. The first axiom, “people are more important than things,” is a generalized statement of the relationship between the two value categories intrinsic and extrinsic. The second axiom, “people are more important than ideas, systems, etc.,” is a generalized statement of the relationship between the two value categories intrinsic and systemic.

In *Capital,* Marx criticizes what he calls “the fetishism of commodities;” that is, the reduction of the individual to his or her *use* value, an IE social relation. This shows his intuitive application of the first value axiom. A further implication of this axiom is that the development of destructive technology, such as for war, would be a profane activity. Producing things solely for killing people, (IE)E, would probably be unheard of, perhaps unthinkable, but surely not tolerable, in the truly human community.

Of course, Marx was the one who first defined capitalism as a system, and condemned the sacrificing of human life to it, an IS social relation, implying the second value axiom. As mentioned above, the religious dogmas about man as sinner, or original sin, when applied to an individual are instances of IS, the systemic disvaluation of an intrinsic value. Moralizing, like crusading, always implies that ideas are more important than people. Marx’s personal commitment to the second value axiom explains why it would have been a self-contradiction for him to blueprint the communist mode of production. Blueprinted systems are mere mental productions which, if rigidly enforced, would inevitably result in constraining individual self-realization rather than facilitating it. When human variety and growth must be confined within the limits of the system, so that the system can be maintained, the result is (IE)S, making the system more important than the persons within it.

The second value axiom also makes it clear that Marxism is no “statism.” A “Marxist state” is a contradiction of terms. Insofar as “statism” results in the subordination of human development to state maintenance requirements, enforced by a ruling class, it perpetuates the value transposition of (IE)S. Thus, wherever government domination frustrates free individuality there is value discord and room for improvement. Today there are probably no nations in the world where such value disorder does not exist. Indeed, as the world order begins to harmonize with Marx’s value theory, the “state,” as a divisive system, will begin to “wither away.”

What specific kind of system a people live under is of far less importance for Marx than the quality of their lives. Whatever its institutional structure, the only value the system has is in relation to the actual existence of the people who live under it. If their system is making their lives miserable, IS, rather than fulfilling, IS, then they should, like the USA Founding Fathers, and the leaders of the Cuban Revolution, abolish the old system and institute a new one.

Every “ism” which divides humanity conflicts with the second value axiom. All thought-based divisions of the human community, such as tribalism, clanism, racism, sexism, nationalism, and every other type of divisive “ism,” deprive people of that full measure of wholeness which Marx wanted people to experience as truly *human* people. Subordinating the individual to the maintenance of any system, ideology, or ism disvalues the individual, IS. The full fruits of the human community cannot be realized until all people become full-fledged members of it, and feel their full membership. This requires the abolishment of all class divisions and other IS social relations.[[22]](#endnote-22)

**A Socialist Social Science?**

Liberation from the current “dehumanized world,” in which individuals are debased, mutilated fragments of persons, can be achieved through the construction of a mode of production the values of which are in line with Marx’s value theory – his value concrete and two value axioms. Human liberation, in this understanding of the term, can be measured. The ideal is the situation in which each person values himself or herself, and each other person, as of “supreme” value, too precious to be used as an instrument for the maintenance of some class divided system. The measure, then, would be the self-esteem of each individual, and the esteem he or she has for every other individual. Surveys can be devised to show what the numbers are of folks who actually debase themselves when they value things over people – IE – or ideas over people – IS. They can also show how self-esteem, and the esteem of others, is distributed throughout a society.

Further research questions could include: What are the causes of both low levels of such esteem, and of the unevenness of its distribution in society? Can a Human Wealth Index be devised? Marx seems to have thought it can be. In a more liberated society, he writes,

It will be seen how in place of the wealth and poverty of political economy come the

rich human being and the rich human need. The rich human being is simultaneously

the human being in need of a totality of human manifestations of life – the man in

whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as need … [and who can] experience the need of the greatest wealth – the other person.[[23]](#endnote-23)

Today there are over 190 nations in the United Nations, each with its own political and socio-economic organization. Which political system is best? How can it be determined if one system is better than another? This can be done by examining the actual operations of the system. Then by asking whether and to what degree the system is helping or hindering human self-development? Are its people living full lives, or are their lives constrained by system maintenance requirements?[[24]](#endnote-24)

**Politics**

Before human liberation can happen, the resistance of those who fear change, or who benefit from entrenched fragmentation and exploitation, must be overcome. To overcome such opposition requires hard work, self-sacrifice, and a strong political organization. Marx spent much of his time working to organize the Communist International Party, even to the neglect of his intellectual work, because he understood that human liberation can only come out of political conflict.

While political violence might be necessary, it is not the only way human emancipation from the degradations of capitalism can be achieved. In the later years of his life, at the Congress of the Workers’ International in 1872, the maturing Marx declared:

Someday the workers must conquer political supremacy, in order to establish the

new organization of labor ... Of course, I must not be supposed to imply that the

means to this end will be the same everywhere ... and we do not deny that there are certain countries, such as the United States and England in which the workers may

hope to secure their ends by peaceful means.[[25]](#endnote-25)

Marx’s life goal was to educate humanity about the understanding that servitude to an exploiting socio-economic and political system was not somehow an unalterable act of nature, or the unchallengeable Will of God, but a human creation that humans can re-do, either gradually through democratic processes, or, like the French in 1789, by abolishing the offending system and fashioning an alternative ad hoc. He understood that political action is always a practical matter; that is, that politics is the art of the possible. Just as there are no perfect circles, squares, or straight lines in nature, so human affairs are rarely conducted along the straight lines of law, ethics, or the Value Calculus. To pass from (IE)S to (IE)S means that individuals are already steeped in conditions that disrespect individual dignity and intrinsic value. Indeed, the capitalist system is sustained not only by police violence, but by the violence it does to the human personality and sense of self-worth. Marx was neither a Gandhi nor a Christ. He recognized that if violence was the only way to break the grip of the ruling class on the masses, then let it be done. Of course, violence is always a value transposition, an IE. Ironically, the value structure for the person affected by political violence in the name of “human liberation” is (IE)S, the same as that of life in capitalism. But as a practical matter, such as Russia in the early 20th century, and China and Cuba in mid-20th century, violent revolution was the only option if the momentum towards the reorganization of social relations was ever to be initiated.

As discussed above, Marx understood that for people in the present to try to design a communist society for the future would be a foolish endeavor. While the momentum must be initiated, communist society can only be reached incrementally. Plateaus must be built, upon which heretofore unforeseeable plateaus can then emerge by creative leaps into the unknown. A complete communist society, a finished product, can no more be constructed today than a self-propelling horseless carriage, like a Lincoln Town Car, could have been constructed by an 18th century New York City liveryman. As Marx well knew, the base must precede the superstructure. In this sense, socialism is the school of political thought that estimates what policies are needed, which are possible, and how the possible can be realized. Thus, answering the question “what is to be done?” requires a judgment socialists must make country by country.

**Conclusion: The Three Levels of Marxism**

Formal Axiology’s Value Calculus provides an interpretive framework with which to clarify the all-pervasive ambiguities about what Marx intended in his writings. The textual evidence, from his early to late years, shows overwhelmingly that Marx intuitively felt the order of values which is formalized specifically in the Value Calculus. The individual person is Marx’s core value. Each person needs the others, like a body needs arms, for his or her own completeness as a social being. My review of the textual evidence leads to the following conclusions:

**\*At the systemic level**

Marx did not advocate the imposition on society of a defined blueprint for “communism;” rather, he advocated a change in the organization of social relations from (IE)S to (IE)S.

**\*At the extrinsic level**

At the level of action Marx advocated the actions he thought would initiate the needed momentum along the path to that desired reorganization in the structure of social relations. Revolution where necessary. Street fighting and demonstrating when useful. A campaign of public education and voting to push the changes forward where possible. Socialists are activists who share Marx’s values and who determine what is possible to do within their particular circumstances.

**\*At the intrinsic level**

Marx advocated the reorganization of social relations *so that* the individual experience of life would move from the personal emptiness and misery of alienation and exploitation in capitalism to the fullness of life he foresaw as achievable in a communist mode of production. His focus was on *feeling* – the individual’s self-esteem and personal experience of life. He focused on economics only because that is the base, the organization of which can constrain life and cause pain and misery, or enable a human liberation resulting in immeasurable inner richness.

Marx understood that there are personal rewards for both living in communist social relations, and for taking political action to realize that aim. That is one reason why he was such an activist.

Even in the immediate moment, acting (E) to implement plans (S) for political reform can result in the deep satisfaction (I) of serving humanity; hence, the value structure of such political action is SE=I.

1. Robert S. Hartman is the founder of Formal Axiology, which is the formal basis for the development of the sciences of value. His main publication on this is *The Structure of Value*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1967. I have shown how political science can be made the first value science, in accord with Hartman’s intentions, in my essay “Normative Political Science - as Constituted by the Formal Axiology of Robert S. Hartman and David Easton’s Concept of the Political System,” posted as a draft for comment at, <https://independent.academia.edu/WilliamJKelleherPhD> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. *The Structure of Value,* ibid, page 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For more on the Value Calculus, see my essay cited in note 1, above. To fully develop the potential of the Value Calculus for clarifying value relationships will require a community of interested and informed persons to raise and discuss issues of application and validation. As that does not yet exist, all formulas herein are only illustrative. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/index.htm> All links to the Marxist Internet Archive go to material that can be freely and safely read, copied, or download. True to their values, no registration or permission is required. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge. May 1843. Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_05-alt.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. *Marx on Religion*. John C. Raines. Temple University Press 2002, page 177, quoting his translation of the “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” In concluding that essay, Marx wrote, “The only liberation of Germany which is practically possible is liberation from the point of view of that theory which declares man to be the supreme being for man. … The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of man.” Id., page 182. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Quoted in Engels, Letter to Eduard Bernstein (1882). Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/subject/quotes/>

Cf <http://libcom.org/forums/theory/context-marxs-i-am-not-marxist-quote-09062009> [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. “Private Property and Communism.” In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. Marxist Internet Archive, at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. “Private Property and Communism,” id., Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Marx did not use the I-Thou expression, but it fits his intentions. Cf. Erich Fromm. *Marx's Concept of Man*. Frederick Ungar Publishing Co. 1961. See excerpts from that book at the Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/fromm/works/1961/man/index.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. *Capital,* vol. 1, Charles H. Kerr & Co. 1912, page 536. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. *Capital*, ibid, page 534. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. “Private Property and Labor,” quoted by Cyril Smith. *Marx at the Millennium.* The Marxist Internet Archive at, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/smith-cyril/works/millenni/index.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. A living individual would depart from the category of intrinsic value and become a thing upon his or her death. A corpse is an extrinsic value, even though its survivors would still regard it with love and respect; EI, an extrinsic value valued intrinsically. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. *The German Ideology,* Chapter 3, critique of Max Stirner. Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/i/n.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. *Capital*, ibid, page 97. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. See, for example, the writings of Erich Fromm, especially *The Sane Society*; Marx's Concept of Man; and,

*Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium* (1965) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. “Private Property and Communism,” id., Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Letter from Marx to Arnold Ruge, September 1843

Marxists Internet Archive

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09-alt.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. “Private Property and Communism,” id., Marxists Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. “Private Property and Communism,” id., Marxists Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/epm/3rd.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. My book, *Progressive Logic*, shows that Progressives throughout American history have also intuitively grasped and applied the same value theory as Marx. In addition, the book applies Marx’s value theory to several current issues in USA politics, and shows how the consciousness of individual intrinsic value can be raised through political action. See the reviews on Amazon at, <http://www.amazon.com/Progressive-Logic-Framing-Unified-Progressives/dp/0977371719> [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. “Private Property and Communism,” id., Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/comm.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. To learn how to measure the goodness of a political system, see my essay “Normative Political Science - as Constituted by the Formal Axiology of Robert S. Hartman and David Easton’s Concept of the Political System,” <https://independent.academia.edu/WilliamJKelleherPhD> [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler. Source: *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*. Paul Mattick. Merlin Press. 1978.

Marxist Internet Archive, at

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/mattick-paul/1939/kautsky.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-25)