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capital, volume 1  
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The Evolution of Personal Worth: Karl Marx's 'Capital' The Evolution of Personal Worth: Karl Marx's 'Capital' In Chapters One and Two of Capital, Marx is relentlessly, thoroughly analytical in setting the stage for his famed socio-economic critique. His examination of the interrelationship between use-value and exchange-value, and between commodity and labor, provides the basis from which he transitions to an interpretation of society, an interpretation that he unfolds in purely economic terms. With no reference to other human factors, (feeling and morality, for instance, play no role) Marx posits a pristine, economically Darwinian view of the human condition that remains as pertinent and compelling as it was when Capital was published at the height of the Industrial Revolution. Early in the book, Marx declares that he writes of individuals "only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests" (Marx, 15). Today, the world economy is made more complex by the advent of the Internet, over which countless transactions take place in the blink of an eye, and the introduction of new and ever more sophisticated financial products. Consequently, relationships between labor and commodity, and between the working class and bourgeoisie, have grown more complex. The profound effect of recent economic instability in the U. S., aggravated by relaxed restraints on Wall Street and deprivations of the corporate elite, would seem to bear out Marx's contention (Name) 2 that not only is crisis the nature of capitalism, but that the essence of human action and interaction in a capitalistic society is inherently economic. "Persons exist for one another merely as representatives of, and, therefore, as owners of, commodities...we shall find, in general, that the characters who appear on the economic stage are but the personifications of the economic

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relationships that exist between them” (Marx, 96-97). If one proceeds from this premise, Marx’s stripping away of human traits, behaviors, tendencies, etc., is acceptable if one assumes that men and women do not, through their own actions, directly impact the economic stage but react to the vagaries of an ever-shifting economic substratum. Marx steers us toward an understanding that people who live under a capitalist system are motivated solely by bottom-line financial concerns, that all else happens in the wake of economic activity. Marx informs us that “ a particular commodity cannot become the universal equivalent except by a social act... Thus it becomes – money” (Marx, 98-99). One is tempted to take Marx on moral ground here and assume that he is making a statement about the ethical worth of capitalism itself. Rather, he is “ boiling” the system down to a Darwinian level of simplicity in which individuals make money and, in most cases, seek to make more money. This is their motive for interacting with other individuals. The variable worth of commodities sets the tone for an individual’s behavior and dictates how one interacts with other individuals within a capitalist system. Thus, the extent to which men and women achieve success in a capitalist society is determined by the financial outcome of their social interactions. In other words, personal worth and social success ultimately equate to money. That is the yardstick, Marx assures us, that matters most when personal success. (Name) 3 Works Cited

Marx, Karl. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1906.