

Marx and epicurus theories of a happy and meaningful life



What is the picture of the ‘ point’ of human life implicit in Marx’s discussion of “ alienation”, and how does this picture contrast with the views of Epicurus? Explain which of the two views you find more plausible and why.

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the contrasting views of Marx and Epicurus for a happy and meaningful life, and ultimately support the view of Marx over that of Epicurus, because it is more relevant in current times and a way of live.

This paper will develop two arguments, by which Epicurus will disagree with Marx. The first is that Marx’s concept is mostly related to materialistic considerations, where Epicurus focuses on contemplation, pleasure, and friendship. Secondly, Marx does not consider people to be intelligent, where for Epicurus wisdom is the most valuable thing in life.

According to Marx, with the emergence and development of capitalism people work to live and they choose work to afford other things, not for the work itself. They relate to a product that is not related to them and are thrown into “ forced labor”, which disconnect them from human nature (p. 2). Therefore, Marx sees importance in the relation between labour, production and reality with human nature (p. 3). One is alienated from his/her productions and he/she is driven away from his/her nature, and consequently from other human beings, then “ nature is taken away” (p. 3). Because everybody is employed in the machine of economical forces one cannot see any actually free human beings to relate with “ one man is alienated to another, just as each of them is alienated from human nature” (p. 4). Marx disapproves of capitalism. He believes such an economic system is inferior as it leads to estranging people from their production, or “

alienation of the thing”, from the act of production “ the relationship of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity”, from their human species and from other people (pp. 2, 3). Thus, Marx believes that what makes us human is the conscious ability we have to be creative in a universal act of production (p. 3). Therefore, capitalism deprives one from being a human. However, according to Marx the meaning and happiness of life are embedded and related to materialistic considerations. One is unhappy, because he/ she produces “ commodities” and he/ she is not related to them (Marx, 1844, p. 1). Capitalism leads to alienation of product, and this leads to all other alienations that Marx talks about, which makes one’s life unhappy. Therefore, if he was related to those commodities, he would be happy. Thus, according to Marx, activities and products are essential for our happiness.

Epicurus’ concept is built on a pursuit of pleasure, which one could conceive with the elimination of mental and physical pain. He sees wisdom as the most valuable virtue of all. Where, the most precious thing that wisdom could attain is friendship, from all the “ means that wisdom acquires...the most important is friendship” (Epicurus 2, p. 2). Therefore, Epicurus concentrates its discourse on the importance of a non-materialistic world. He believes in one living wisely, honourably and justly with directed interests toward tranquility of the mind. This is what Epicurus sees as a pleasurable and happy life “ we call pleasure the alpha and omega of a happy life” (Epicurus 1, p. 2). Therefore, Epicurus will disagree with Marx. Products, no matter in what way created, should not be of primer importance for one to be happy. Friendship is something that can not be simply produced, but is an

established connection with another human being, through common interests, visions, discussions, unrelated to material production.

Marx believes that people are not happy in a capitalist's society, because they are dehumanized and alienated from everything in their life. Thus, Marx talks about a universal act of production that enables one to feel as a "free being" (Marx, 1844, p. 3). However, none of his arguments considers one to be an intelligent human being. Moreover, he says that capitalism and mass production leads to "imbecility and cretinism for the worker" (Marx, 1844, p. 2). His concept is based on the relation of humans to their nature, and therefore closer to their instincts. Thus, their belonging to the natural is substantial and it is before a process of active reasoning in their life. In Marx's words, in terms one to be happy, he/she must be mainly active in a physical way, not on a mental level. However, one could be intellectual, when he/ she works and his/ her object of labour is "objectification". This "objectification", on the other hand, is related to the absence of alienation from one's production (Marx, 1844, p. 3). Where, Epicurus' idea about pleasurable life is highly tied with the notion of one being wise. He says that a wise man or woman, that ultimately would be a happy man or woman will always think about what he/she does in his/her life and "greatest interests... will be, directed by reason throughout his [her] whole life" (Epicurus 2, p. 1). Thus, Epicurus believes that there is no such thing as a chance in the life of a wise man or woman. If a wise man or woman is experiencing "misfortune" in his/her life that is much better than "prosperity of a fool" (Epicurus 2, p. 2). Therefore, if Marx does not consider people to be wise, if they overcome the

capitalist's machine of dehumanization, it would be a chance, and their happiness would not be a real happiness, according to Epicurus.

However in my personal opinion, living in a dominant western capitalist society, constrains people in the way that Marx describes. If you ask me if I am happy, I will never explain it in terms of other emotions or pleasures, pain or wisdom. I will talk about my experience as a human being, what I achieved in life, school and career. I will explain it with relationships to other human beings in my life. This does not mean that I don't have a life of reason, or I am not employing my intellectual abilities in my life. Even if something happens by chance in my life I would appreciate and enjoy it the same way as everything that I have planned. Thus, I believe that what we feel defines our life. When we talk about happiness and pleasure, those notions seem to be very short-sighted consideration. The meaning of mine life is a feeling about what I will leave after me, what I will achieve and how I will contribute in to this world. Does not always matter how something happens in our life, if it makes us feel complete and in touch with our instincts and nature, as Marx would agree. Moreover, relation to a universal labour and production is what better defines my vision for the world we live in.

Going to work nowadays is a must for one to maintain at least basic living standards. We do not spend enough time with our families and friends. We are enslaved in life, scheduled by our work. Thus, we spend so much time doing something, which results in products and services belonging to somebody else. Moreover, the social structure that we are part of makes work, production and consumption more important than our nature as <https://assignbuster.com/marx-and-epicurus-theories-of-a-happy-and-meaningful-life/>

human and social beings. In my opinion, no matter how much reason and wisdom we put in our actions, we will define our life, by our productivity, relations to nature and material considerations which consequently is much closer to Marx's concept.

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