

Does Mark Zuckerberg Want to Replace God?

During a recent commencement speech at Harvard, Facebook billionaire Mark Zuckerberg came out in favor of a system in which all people receive a standard salary just for being alive, no questions asked.

The system, known as universal basic income, is one of the trendiest economic theories of the past few years. Experiments in basic income have popped up in Kenya, the Netherlands, Finland, Canada and Oakland, California, among other places, according to the *Business Insider's* Chris Weller.

"We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful," Weller reported Zuckerberg told the crowd. "We should explore ideas like universal basic income to make sure everyone has a cushion to try new ideas."

And Zuckerberg is not alone. Tech executives like Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Y Combinator President Sam Altman and Facebook co-founder Chris Hughes—who runs a basic-income fund called the Economic Security Project—have endorsed basic income.

Many point to economic forecasts that say robots will displace much of the human workforce in the coming decades. A report from Oxford University in 2013, for instance, found that about 50 percent of jobs could be taken over within the next 10 to 20 years. A McKinsey report released in 2015 backed up that prediction, suggesting that today's technology could feasibly replace 45 percent of jobs right now.

Basic-income advocates say the changing nature of work—from human labor to artificially intelligent robots—combined with rising wealth inequality signals the need for an overhaul of how money is distributed, reports Weller.

“As our technology keeps on evolving, we need a society that is more focused on providing continuous education through our lives,” Zuckerberg said. “And yes, giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose isn’t going to be free. People like me should pay for it, and a lot of you are going to do really well, and you should, too.”

To those readers who studied history, political science and philosophy before PC culture destroyed American higher education “giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose” may sound vaguely like something from Karl Marx’s 1875 Critique of the Gotha Program: “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.”

But there’s a big difference in Zuckerberg’s formula and that of Karl Marx. In Marx’s formula, workers would own the means of production that would provide everyone with their “needs,” while in Zuckerberg’s formula, globalist capitalists would, with the help of robots and artificial intelligence, retain ownership of the means of production and bestow upon everyone the means to meet their needs.

The differences are important and were in some measure foreseen by Marx who predicted that capitalists would adopt something like Zuckerberg’s formula as he argued that capitalism would not be superseded until it had exhausted its potential. Essentially, as difficulties and resistance arose, capitalism would turn to novel strategies to continue its domination, until all possibilities had all been exhausted. In the process, capitalism would create the new institutions that will undermine it and that will be crucial elements in the system that will replace it. (See *Marxist Theory* by Dr. Ted Trainer, School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales.)

Thus, the notion that workers, once freed of the necessity of working to meet their needs, would allow an unelected capitalist elite to retain the power to raise or lower their

standard of living must have Marx chortling in his grave.

But there's another angle to Zuckerberg's Harvard speech that eerily echoes Marx.

Karl Marx put it this way:

The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.
They have a world to win. Working men of all countries,
unite!

Zuckerberg, like Marx, envisions a global community that would vanquish those forces, such as nationalism, that he considers to be reactionary:

Let's give everyone the freedom to pursue their purpose—not only because it's the right thing to do, but because when more people can turn their dreams into something great, we're all better for it.

But what if your "purpose" is something that contributes nothing to the greater good, say your goal is to follow in the footsteps of lazy, unemployed stoners like *The Big Lebowski's* Dude, Walter and Donny? Or to simply hang out and play video games?

This would seem to be one place where Zuckerberg and Marx diverge.

Zuckerberg seems to adopt Edward Bellamy's bourgeois attitudes to work and leisure, articulated in his influential utopian novel, *Looking Backward*: Work is a burden; at best, it should be avoided. But if that is not possible, it should be gotten over with as early in life as possible so that more of one's lifetime can be enjoyed in leisure.

In all fairness, Zuckerberg, like Bellamy, does not denigrate work as such. It is his celebration of leisure that betrays his bourgeois background and typifies the mentality of the bourgeoisie in capitalist society and upper classes throughout

history.

On the other hand, Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels, saw work as central to human existence.

This theme is developed by Engels in his unfinished essay, "The Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man," where he maintains that labor "is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labor created man himself." This speculation by Engels on the evolution of human beings focuses on the idea that walking on two feet freed the use of the hand and made possible its development for complex tasks. The specialization of the hand in turn led to labor, the mastery over nature and the differentiation of the human species. Labor brought people together under conditions "where they had something to say to each other." Thus, with labor came speech and the stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of human beings (from *The Meaning of Work: A Marxist Perspective*, Harry Magdoff, *Monthly Review*, 2006, Volume 58, Issue 05).

However, if Zuckerberg and Marx diverge on the centrality of work to human existence, they converge in the expulsion of God from their new utopia.

We are all familiar with Marx's dictum from *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."

While Mark Zuckerberg delivered his remarks in Harvard's Memorial Church and even quoted a traditional Hebrew prayer, God does not appear to have a place in Zuckerberg's robot-powered utopia. Instead, he substitutes the actualization of each individual's self-chosen "purpose" for the divinely ordained purpose that is central to the Judeo-Christian

concept of what it is to be human.

This substitution of humanly chosen “purpose’ for divinely inspired purpose is the central argument Whittaker Chambers made against Communism in his magnum opus *Witness*:

The Communist vision is the vision of man without God. It is the vision of man’s mind displacing God as the creative intelligence of the world. It is the vision of man’s liberated mind, by the sole force of its rational intelligence, redirecting man’s destiny and reorganizing man’s life and the world.

And later:

Hence the Communist Party is quite justified in calling itself the most revolutionary party in history. It has posed in practical form the most revolutionary question in history: God or Man? It has taken the logical next step which three hundred years of rationalism hesitated to take, and said what millions of modern minds think, but do not care or dare to say: If man’s mind is the decisive force in the world, what need is there for God? Henceforth, man’s mind is man’s fate.

“Henceforth, man’s mind is man’s fate.” Fifty-six years after Whittaker Chamber’s death, could anyone summarize Mark Zuckerberg’s vision of a remade human society with more accuracy?

The old Stalinist Communist Party that Whittaker Chambers rebelled against is long gone, but the Marxist vision of a society where man’s mind displaces God as the creative intelligence of the world is, as Mark Zuckerberg told us, alive and well. {eoa}

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