

What's Behind Exploitation?

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Whether it's "keeping up with the Joneses" or exploiting underdeveloped areas of the world for their natural resources, man has been seen by some as an insatiable creature insensitive to the harm he is doing. Is man's desire for "more, more, more!" basically wrong? What's behind it?

Let's look first at lower forms of life. Everything living desires to maintain its own life. For this it needs organic or inorganic materials. We can see, moreover, that plants and animals have certain preferences in their standard of living. A plant, for instance, would "prefer" to grow in rocky soil rather than in a rock crevice, or in a soil rich in humus rather than a fallow soil. Similarly, an animal might "prefer" scrubland to desert or pasture to forage.

So, beyond the basic necessity of maintaining existence, living beings seek nutrients in the quality and quantity that will enable them to grow to the size, strength, and activity natural to them. But plants and animals live according to natural law and instinct and have no consciousness of their situation. Rather, they respond to the situation at hand.

Man's innate desire

Man also prefers not to live at the level of mere subsistence, but at a level where his potential size, strength, and activity can be fulfilled. In contrast to plants and animals, however, man is a conscious being and not only responds to abundance differently than animals or plants, but tries to save in order to ensure stability or security. He wants a secure standard of living.

Furthermore, since man must labor to obtain the necessities of life, his consciousness expands to an awareness of what he has to do to obtain them. He wants to make it easier on himself, by working fewer hours, for instance. When this happens, his standard of living improves because more time is free for rest and replenishing the body.

When man has less, he feels he could do more and live better if he had more. He is conscious of his physical weakness and emotional lack. Consciousness is essentially an awareness of differences. Man compares himself to others, he sees the gap between actuality and hope. Marx, Stalin, and Trotsky pointed out man's desire for an adequate standard, not just subsistence.

But their materialistic view of man failed to take into account desire as a motivation for human activity. His desire will drive man to find a way to fulfill that desire.

The Divine Principle teaches that God created man (1) to have creativity himself; (2) to share in creating his own unique personality through his choices; and (3) with an inborn desire to pursue perfection in order to fulfill his purpose of creation as a child of God. Man's realistic desires go far beyond meeting his immediate physical needs.

Realistic desires

In order to fulfill his basic physical desires for sustenance and multiplication, man desires creatively-applied knowledge -- a desire that has not yet been fulfilled. For instance, man may seek to fulfill his basic emotional desire for beauty by collecting antiques. Thus, his desires are directed not only towards utility but also towards the spiritual desires of truth, beauty, goodness, and love. Because man was given the basic desire to fulfill his purpose of creation, then everything he may realistically desire must be by definition a necessity.

How does man seek to realize his basic desires? Everything was created with a purpose. The things of nature fulfill their purpose through the autonomous working of natural law. Man fulfills his purpose through his free will -- he was given the desire to fulfill his purpose.

Other creatures merely act to maintain their existence. Man alone has the desire to advance his knowledge and skill.

The progress of man's knowledge has historically been the work of individuals. Now creativity is collectivized in the laboratories of great corporations and universities.

How did this happen? Once man's basic needs are realized, he could consider fulfilling his other desires -- for beauty, goodness, and love. To do this he must apply his knowledge and creativity.

As the population grew, self-sufficiency declined and fewer people could produce more goods for more people. A higher standard of living became possible. Man's desires are endless, so large companies organized men to develop ways of helping man to realistically fulfill their many desires.

The role of big business

Large companies with their vast research capacities increase the standard of living by providing leisure time and reducing the need for physical effort.

Once an item has been created which might satisfy a realistic desire, the manufacturer consults a marketing firm to determine if there is a need for the item, how much of it to produce, what price the market will bear. If sufficient demand exists for an item and it can be produced at a reasonable cost, an advertising firm may be called in to inform potential customers of the new item.

Obtaining materials

Once the manufacturer knows what item and how much of it will satisfy a realistic desire and increase the standard of living, he must obtain raw materials. But an area enclosed by man-made boundaries will be rich in certain materials and poor in others. Some nations are poor in all resources; no countries are rich in all.

Thus, societies which developed a higher standard of living earlier than others sought the natural resources they lacked in areas where they were accessible. Indigenous people in those areas often became politically, economically, or culturally dependent on those who developed their resources.

Was this wrong? Let's look at the situation from the perspective of God's purpose for man. God created man with both spirit and flesh, and intended that man achieve the kingdom of heaven in spirit with ideal physical conditions.

God's providence throughout history has been to perfect man spiritually through religion and physically through science. The search for new sources of raw materials took the Western European culture all over the world. In this way God's providence centering on Western Europe could be extended to all peoples of the world, bringing them to higher civilization in preparation for the advance of God's providence. It is His intention that the fruits of the blessing He bestowed on Western Europe should be given to the other peoples of the world.

In short, God's central providence directed the people of Western Europe to seek the realistic fulfillment of their basic desires. To meet these desires, they developed large companies and undertook research, giving rise to service industries to help distribute the products. To continue the pursuit of their original purpose, they sought natural materials in underdeveloped areas, thus carrying out God's desire to have His providence brought to those areas.

Objections countered

If man had not fallen, all people would have fulfilled their realistic desires at the same rate. Society would very quickly have attained a high state of development. But after the fall, man became ignorant about his

world and, most importantly, of his spiritual nature. Thus, he sought his desires selfishly giving rise to a history of domination, exploitation, and struggle, which continues to this very day.

No one questions whether man desires a high standard of living. As we said earlier, this is a basic desire given to man by God. Man has both an internal and an external nature. He desires internal attainment of the heavenly kingdom by seeking truth, beauty, goodness and love. He desires the external heavenly kingdom through ideal living conditions.

The gross distortions of this basic desire that we see in today's society came about because of the fall of man. Man's desires became self-centered. Thus, although large companies are necessary for broad-scale research, development, and distribution, these companies often grew through selfishness and denial of others.

But we can't blame the entrepreneurs solely. They were able to succeed because they were surrounded by a whole society of fallen men seeking to satisfy self-centered desires. However, not to allow this to happen would have meant that man would have remained at a primitive level of society. Often it is the entrepreneurs who have the most drive, organizational ability, and creativity. God was able to use these capabilities to develop new technology, greatly expanding the possibility for others to fulfill their desires. Also, because of Satan's influence, the false must appear first, then be converted into good.

The Carnegies and Rockefellers have been prominent in philanthropy, for instance, benefiting society in a number of ways beyond just creating a product or supplying a service.

The standard of living in developed areas of the world has risen to the point where it is no longer possible to accuse large companies of directly exploiting workers. However, some critics maintain that exploitation continues indirectly through advertising campaigns which "force" people to buy what they neither need nor want. This accusation is not true. We must realize that we live in a fallen society in which appeals to man's fallen nature can be made by equally fallen men. The job of bringing knowledge of products and aiding distribution is legitimate.

Sales can be increased only up to the point that all who have some desire, however small, may be enticed to buy. Those who have no desire will not buy. Marxists also accuse producers and governments of exploiting underdeveloped nations. This charge is also unfounded. The pursuit of natural resources is necessary to fulfill man's desires.

Because man's desires are fallen, however, the manner in which the pursuit of natural resources has been undertaken has been exploitive of others. We must remember that it is the people themselves and their desires which have motivated the actions of companies and nations.

Even so, we can point to the fact that the standard of living in underdeveloped areas has greatly increased. In short, God's Will to extend his providence from Western Europe to all areas of the globe was furthered by the search for natural resources.

The basic problem is man's fallen nature. It is selfish desire centered on Satan that drives man to dominate and exploit other men. Violent revolution or a change in the structure of society will not solve this problem. Only a spiritual revolution in men's hearts, made a reality in society, will bring about universal and permanent change.

Then man can pursue his desires centered on God and united with others in give and take. There will be no separation between men, and the standard of living will increase without end.