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ByDmytri Kleiner

Dmytri Kleiner strikes again! This time responding to comments by Michel Bauwens regarding this previous post, Kleiner spells out in more detail his views on the compatibility of the existing form of 'commons-based peer production' with really existing capitalism as well as providing a retort to arguments for a basic-income as the material plug-in to the 'weightless economy' of information production circulation.

Some of this chimes with the debate on this site that followed the Immaterial Labour, Multitudes and New Social Subjects: Class Composition in Cognitive Capitalism conference in Cambridge this May

Michel Bauwens of the P2P foundation has made some comments regarding my views on free production as expressed in my recent review of the presentations of Lessig and Benkler at Wizards of OS 4, you can find the here:

<http://blog.p2pfoundation.net/?p=494>

Michel begins wondering if my argument about the "sustainability of peer production may rest on a confusion" -- I must admit a little confusion as to where I say that peer-production is unsustainable?

My specific argument is that commons-based peer production can not change the distribution of wealth between labour and capital so long as the commons is made up entirely of information-product with no reproduction cost.

In fact, commons-based peer-production is what I am advocating, only that the commons must include actual property.

Bauwens claims that peer-production is non-reciprocal and that "direct connection between an income, in exchange for an engagement, is not peer production, but belongs to the exchange economy."

The fact that it is non-reciprocal is falsified by the work of Benkler directly, as he shows that most contributors to free software feel that they receive more than the value of their contributions from the free software community. I guess this may be a different interpretation of the word 'reciprocal'.

However, his contention that peer-production does not belong to the exchange economy is, in my mind, more problematic. Especially as food, for instances, and shelter, are clearly part of the exchange economy. How then are peer-producers intended to provide for their material substance or accumulate wealth?

Bauwens trots out that old neoliberal stand-by, the "Basic Income," as a solution for material subsistence, but this is yet another mirage.

Increasing income, without increasing production, only serves to increase prices. The structure of distribution of wealth between labour and property remains unchanged. Basic Income is nothing more than a welfare system without the disefficiency of means-testing.

So long as the producer is denied independent access to the means of production, his entire product minus his subsistence costs will be captured by Property.

The problem is deeper than what is presented by Bauwens, you can not simply define peer-production as being outside of the exchange economy, you must provide an explanation as to how the use-value created by the peer-producers can be converted into exchange-value. My contention is that owners of scarce property will capture all of this exchange value.

Apologies for a vulgarity, but calling for a "a mixture of a reinforced gift economies for services and surviving traditional economies, and a reformed, peer-informed, non-capitalist market" reminds me of the phrase "Throwing Shit Against the Wall and Seeing What Sticks."

Bauwens makes the claim that the content of the commons for peer production can not be scarce, yet this is not true. There exist means by which scarce property can be communally managed. Specifically, I endorse those argued for by ARJ Turgot, Henry George, Silvio Gesell and others, where scarce property in the common stock is rented by its possessor (or "taxed") at the price of its marginal productivity, and this rent or tax is then divided among the peer-producers equally or used to fund further development of the commons, this is part of what Silvio Gesell refers to as "freiwirtschaft" (free economy) and is also a part of my work-in-progress proposal for achieving free production: Venture Communism.

Michel is "also particularly puzzled by Kleiner's argument that the portion of the commons-created use value that can be monetized, can only be appropriated by the owners of property." but then goes on to say that "Peer producers can, and perhaps should, create their own vehicles to monetize the commonly created value."

Which is exactly my point, peer-producers can and should create such vehicles, but they can only do so to the degree that they can acquire physical capital, without physical capital they can not do so, and they can not acquire physical capital by applying their labour to an information-only commons. Therefore, those that do have physical capital will always capture the entire marginal productivity of the information-commons.

The work of Bauwens and the P2P foundation seems very interesting, and I look forward to discussing these issues with Michel and his colleagues further, we seem to be working towards the same goal and therefore this could be a very productive discussion.

Thank you Michel, further comments are very welcome. Feel free to forward or post these comments anywhere you choose.