

# **Alienation In and Beyond Labor: Reflections for a New Century on Marx's *Paris Manuscripts***

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## **Preliminary Considerations**

There is a mountain of philosophical, economic, sociological, and political literature analyzing, discussing, criticizing, and commenting on Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*, otherwise known as *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. The volume of material is so large that it has been customary for quite some time for anyone who wishes to write on the topic to begin with an attempt to justify the presumption implied. After all, has not everything that can be said about the *Manuscripts* already been said? I have to admit that I find this an irritating question. The key works of Plato and Aristotle have been available for nearly 2500 years, and yet people are still writing about them. Aquinas has been dead since 1274, but contemporary Thomists continue to make their scholarly contributions. Compared to the works of these thinkers, Marx's *Manuscripts* are hot off the presses. But the recent publication of the *Manuscripts*, when measured on a scale of twenty-five centuries years, is not what justifies contemporary attempts to grapple with their meaning and practical significance. What does justify them is that, like the work of Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas, Marx's *Manuscripts* constitute a classic of human thought. Not only were they written by the greatest mind of his generation (at Marx's funeral, Engels began his eulogy with the words: "The world's greatest living thinker has ceased to think"). More importantly, they resulted from the application of that mind to a social, historical, and intellectual condition that was a turning-point in the history Europe, and through European economic and political expansion, of humankind as a whole. In the *Manuscripts*, the young Marx sought to comprehend the unique and unrepeatable intersection of three titanic developments: the Industrial Revolution in England, the political Revolution in France, and the culmination of classical German philosophy in Hegel's magisterial work. The confluence of these three great forces, from which the fully modern world was arguably born, happened only once, and happened to coincide with a stage in his life when Marx had reached a precocious intellectual maturity. The result was a classic, by which I mean a work that flashes a brilliant light on the world in which we continue to live, but which has changed and is still changing in ways that demand reinterpretation and extension of the original insights.

The point of such a project with respect to Marx's early achievement is to make the *Manuscripts* speak to us once again in a way that sheds light on our problems, predicaments, and necessary tasks, situated as we are, at the moment, in 2015. In

attempting to do this, I will be revisiting the theme that everyone knows is central to the *Manuscripts*, namely alienation, by tracing its root to the labor process, and proceeding from there to its exfoliation in multiple new forms. One virtue of the way Marx deals with his theme is that he makes use of the freedom to range over multiple expressions of human alienation, investigating the structures and processes unique to each, while nevertheless avoiding a vapid and politically fruitless affirmation of sheer “diversity.” Marx’s method locates the source of the different forms of alienation in the labor process, but without trying to reduce them to that source. I will argue that this has important practical, political implications for our own period.

*The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* is a difficult work. To begin with, parts of the text are missing. David Ryazanov, director of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow discovered the *Manuscripts* in incomplete form in the Institute’s archives in 1927, forty-six years after Marx’s death. There are four manuscripts, two of which – the second and fourth – are mere fragments, and none of which are completely intact. In addition to missing pages, Ryazanov faced the problem of getting the extant manuscripts into coherent, readable form. Marx wrote the first manuscript by establishing three vertical columns and filling each column while moving from page to page. After writing approximately a quarter of the initial manuscript this way, he abandoned that method and started writing across the entire page in the usual fashion, but sometimes discontinuously, developing his discussion of a given theme on pages not ordered consecutively. There are many words and sentences in the *Manuscripts* that have been crossed out with dark horizontal lines, complicated by thin vertical lines that run through certain of the paragraphs, but leave the writing clearly visible underneath. Some of the pages also have segments lost to what Marx once called “the gnawing criticism of the mice,” so that parts of sentences or paragraphs are missing. Along with Marx’s notoriously difficult handwriting, these problems make reconstruction of the text he intended to keep a daunting task.

Besides missing pages, vertical columns, discontinuous pages, cross-outs, torn segments, and general difficulties with legibility, there is the problem that Marx never finished writing the *Manuscripts*. Contrary to the opinion of many scholars, however, I believe that he planned on publishing them. It seems to me that this is the clear implication of the Preface found at the end of the fourth manuscript. The Preface announces an ambitious project for a work that was to consist in several “pamphlets” in which Marx would develop critiques of political economy, law, politics, ethics, and other unspecified themes, along with a special work that would show the interrelationship of the separate parts in a coherent whole, culminating in a final critique of what he calls, somewhat vaguely, “the speculative elaboration of that material.”<sup>1</sup> He also refers to “the present work” in which the connections between political economy and the other themes are treated “only to the extent that political economy explicitly deals with these subjects.” (63) There can be little doubt that the basis of “the present work” was to be the *Paris Manuscripts*, and that he originally intended to publish them after revision. But he soon abandoned the plan.

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<sup>1</sup> All page references are to Marx, 1964. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, edited by J. Struik and translated by Martin Milligan. New York: International Publishers. Where indicated, I have modified the translations.

The reason is that Marx's thinking was in transition in 1844. At the age of twenty-six, he was living in Paris with his wife and infant daughter, and making his living as editor of the *Deutsche-Französische Jahrbücher* (*German-French Annals*) published by his friend, the radical democrat, Arnold Ruge. Marx was in the process of cutting ties with the circles of Young Hegelian philosophers in which he had been active from his days as a doctoral student in Berlin, and allying himself with the communist movement he encountered during his two-year stay in Paris. The way had been prepared for this break and realignment by the year Marx spent, after receiving his doctorate, covering political, legal, and economic issues as editor and correspondent of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a newspaper in the Rhineland funded by liberal merchants and industrialists. By 1844 – while in Paris, the capital of European revolution – Marx was making a transition from his earlier Young Hegelian interest in the critique of religion to developing a critique of political economy closely connected with practical, revolutionary action. In my view, Marx regarded the *Manuscripts* as a first draft of that critique, which he originally expected to complete in short order. However, given the transitional nature of his thinking at the time, it is likely that he soon became dissatisfied with what he had written.<sup>2</sup> In reality, he would work on only the first part of the project announced in the *Manuscripts'* Preface for the next thirty-five years of his life, leaving behind more than 5,000 printed pages on a theme he had originally intended to cover in pamphlet form. Those pages comprise the bulk of Marx's life work, and include *The Critique of Political Economy*, *The Grundrisse* (*Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*), the three volumes of *Capital*, and *Theories of Surplus Value*.

The rather primitive and fragmentary communist movement Marx encountered in Paris appealed to him, not so much because of the ideas he found within it, as because its main supporters were independent French and German artisans on their way to becoming wage-workers. He wrote early in 1844, in the Preface to his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, that philosophy was the head of human emancipation but the proletariat was its heart. According to him, the only way the aspirations of a progressive, critical philosophy could be fulfilled was by alliance with the new working-class movement.<sup>3</sup> Yet in the *Manuscripts*, Marx's language is still that of his Young Hegelian past, filtered through the exciting new work of Ludwig Feuerbach.

The technical-philosophical character of the *Manuscripts* presents a problem to many readers who are unfamiliar with the concepts Hegel pioneered and their revisionist use by his radical young successors. The problem is compounded by the fact that Marx's philosophical development led him to study the writings of the classical political economists. "Political economy" refers to the economics of a nation (the German word is *Nationalökonomie*), in contrast with the "domestic economy" of the household. The

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<sup>2</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Marx ever rejected the positions he developed in the *Paris Manuscripts*. Quite the opposite. But I suspect that he abandoned his publication plans because he recognized a need to develop a more sophisticated and detailed understanding of political economy.

<sup>3</sup> By 1844, the workers' movement had succeeded in forming trade unions in England and France. Workers created an organization in England (The People's Charter) that was agitating for the universal franchise and other radical reforms, and in the 1830s, French workers mounted two revolutionary insurrections in the city of Lyon. By the time Marx arrived in Paris, both French and immigrant worker-activists had already allied, in conspiratorial clubs, with what remained of the revolutionary Jacobin tradition, and the descendants of Gracchus Babeuf's communist Conspiracy of Equals of the late eighteenth century.

discipline of political economy emerged along with capitalism, and is the social science that studies the capitalist system on a national and ultimately international scale. Marx relies especially on the writings of Adam Smith, author of the classic *Wealth of Nations*, though he also consults work by many other political economists, including Ricardo, Sismondi, Quesnay, and Say, as well as socialist and communist authors. In the *Paris Manuscripts*, we have Marx's early attempt to reformulate economics in philosophical terms, which is equally an attempt to reformulate philosophy in economic terms. The task is especially ambitious since Marx had just begun to study political economy in 1843. In 1844, he is still a novice. He will later reject some of the economic principles he accepted in the *Manuscripts*, while integrating others into the far more complex economic theory he developed in his masterwork, *Capital*, the first volume of which was published in 1867.

The *Manuscripts* first appeared in a Russian edition in 1932, and were not widely available in translation until after the Second World War. At that time, they were published in multiple languages, and their impact was astonishing. They caused an upheaval in the interpretation of Marx, who until then had been regarded principally as an economist and a "scientific socialist." They highlighted the philosophical dimension of his work, while spurring the development of a new school of Marxist humanism in opposition to official Soviet Marxism. Their impact was more profound outside of the Soviet Union and most other communist nations than within them, although they stimulated the creation of an important school of dissident Marxist thought in Yugoslavia, the Praxis School. They also had a decided impact on a group of young intellectuals at the University of Budapest studying with the great Hungarian philosopher, Georg Lukacs, who had worked on the *Manuscripts* under Ryazanov in the late 1920s. They influenced, not just philosophers, but sociologists, theologians, and psychologists as well as two generations of college students in Europe and the United States. Their influence on the radical student movements of the 1960s was pronounced. The *Manuscripts* were undoubtedly the most widely read philosophical work in the twentieth century, even though they were written in the middle of the nineteenth.

What accounts for their success is the profound and innovative way in which Marx handles their central theme, namely alienation. Nothing was the same after the Second World War. One hundred million war-related deaths, the holocaust of twelve million Jews, Gypsies, communists, homosexuals, and others in Hitler's extermination camps, and the appearance and use of the atomic bomb created a widespread sense of disorientation, a feeling of foreboding, and a threat of meaninglessness and pending annihilation. The existentialist movement in France, represented by Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean-Paul Sartre, gave intellectual expression to these social emotions, as did the absurdist theatre of Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco. Human beings seemed as homeless in a world that was foreign to them as the tramps in Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*. The rise, in Europe and the United States, of postwar consumer affluence did not resolve the quandaries left behind by the epoch of World Wars. If anything, it intensified them, since the ability to buy cars, refrigerators, and television sets seemed to many in the postwar generation just another way of evacuating life of real meaning. For many readers at the time, Marx's analysis of alienation offered a path to understanding the postwar predicament, and a possible way out of it.

The idea that human beings are not at home in the world (the idea of alienation in its broadest sense) did not originate with Marx. It is a well-worn theme in religion, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Old Testament, it is the meaning of the myth of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden into a world that requires Adam to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, and Eve to give birth in pain. In the New Testament, the Book of Revelation tells us that alienation will be overcome in the end times, when the sky rolls up like a scroll and “a new heaven and a new earth” replace those corrupted by sin. Redemption ends our alienation from God, and recreates the Garden of Eden in the form of a celestial Paradise where human beings can be at home once again.

The great achievement of Hegel was to secularize this religious story by interpreting human history as the medium in which what he called “Absolute Spirit” expresses itself in alienated form, as things that appear to be other than itself (something like failing to recognize one’s reflection in a fun house mirror). Absolute Spirit transcends this alienation stage-by-stage by coming to recognize its own image in a world that it has in fact created. In getting beyond alienation, it returns to itself, enriched by the experience acquired along its path of self-discovery. What split the radical Young Hegelians from the conservative Old Hegelians was a dispute about what Hegel meant by Absolute Spirit. The Old Hegelians regarded it as the God of traditional Lutheran Christianity (which made Hegel a defender of the official Prussian state religion), while the Young Hegelians saw it as an utterly human reality, which they variously conceptualized as self-consciousness, the Ego, or human species-being (making Hegel a radical critic of religion). For the Young Hegelians, if religion is the story of alienation, *it is because humankind alienates itself in the form of religion*. Feuerbach made this point in a way that had a significant impact on Marx’s thinking.

### **Feuerbach’s Contribution**

According to Feuerbach, the human species projects its essence, its genuine nature, outside of itself in the form of an imaginary object of worship. The attributes of God, such as power and knowledge, are really human attributes. They are supposed to be different from the attributes of human beings in that they are infinite, while human attributes are finite, but Feuerbach says that this supposition is a mistake. He claims first that any attribute at all is (intensively) infinite if it expresses a being’s nature. In one of his examples, the life of a caterpillar on the leaf of a plant is infinite since the leaf is the entire universe for that small creature; it is what enables it to affirm its being fully. Similarly, human power and knowledge are infinite since they are genuine expressions of our nature, complete affirmations of our being. But second, the attributes of humankind must be seen as properties of the species rather than the individual. Considered extensively, my power and knowledge might be limited, but it is supplemented by your power and knowledge, and the power and knowledge of all other human beings, past, present, and future. But this implies that there is no difference between ourselves and God. The various stages in the development of religion are really stages in the progressively more adequate understanding of ourselves. Feuerbach held that the Christian idea of a God who becomes human is the last stage in this developmental

process. It is the secret atheism at the heart of Christianity, the message that God and humanity are one and the same. Now is the time to reveal the secret. The task of what Feuerbach calls “the philosophy of the future” is to reclaim the wealth of existence that has poured forth from the human species and assumed the alienated form of God.

Marx began his philosophical career as a militant atheist, under the influence of his Young Hegelian friend, Bruno Bauer. But he had already evolved beyond that position by 1844. He now believed that religion is not the cause of alienation, but its symptom. At most, the atheistic attack on religion is able to remove the symptom, but it leaves the underlying pathology intact. In order to get at that pathology, the critique of religion must be replaced with the critique of political economy. The main thesis of the *Paris Manuscripts* is that alienation results from a particular kind of economic system. It is important, however, to understand what an economic system is for Marx, which is quite different than the theme of economics as an academic discipline.<sup>4</sup> For Marx, an economy is a comprehensive way people organize their relations with nature and with one another in the act of reproducing the material conditions necessary for their continued existence. The form of economic organization that creates alienation is what Marx will later call “the capitalist mode of production.” In the *Manuscripts*, he refers to it sometimes as “capital,” but more often as “private property.” It is based on private ownership of productive resources (personal possessions are not in question here) and the sale of free wage-labor. Capitalism is not the only kind of economy that has appeared in human history. There have also been economic systems based on slavery, serfdom, state ownership (e.g. ancient India and the Inca empire), and forms of cooperative labor and communal redistribution of goods (e.g. hunter-gatherer bands). In the *Manuscripts*, Marx recognizes that alienation occurs in at least one form of pre-capitalist society, namely, feudalism in which land is alienated in the form of aristocratic estates. But this is not a major theme of the *Manuscripts*, which remain focused instead on the alienated character of capitalism, and the end of alienation in the society Marx believes will replace it given the growing strength of the workers’ movement.

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx adapts Feuerbach’s theory of alienation to the analysis of capitalism, but in such a way as to transform the theory thoroughly. This is to be expected. Philosophies are not modular; we cannot swap one concept for another and expect the original framework to remain intact, as though we were replacing a carburetor or upgrading a computer keyboard. The concepts a philosopher develops are interdependent; they are related to one another in a complex web, so that, if we replace even a single concept, the result is a different web, a different philosophy. Feuerbach had already made the transition from Hegel’s Absolute Spirit to the human species as the subject of alienation. But he was interested primarily in religious alienation, and the alienation of human beings in religion is a matter of the head and the heart, of ideas and emotions. Feuerbach regarded himself as a philosophical materialist in that he saw humankind as an objective, natural species living in a natural world, which for him means a world of objects that present themselves first of all to the senses. This materialist conception of human beings was a lasting influence on Marx. Yet, by limiting his

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<sup>4</sup> See for example, Samuelson’s and Nordhaus’ definition in their book, *Economics*: “Economics is the study of how societies use scarce resources to produce valuable commodities and distribute them among different people.” Samuelson, Paul A., and William D. Nordhaus. 1998. *Economics*. Boston, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., Chapter 1, pages 3-7

analysis of alienation to religion (and later to philosophy as well), Feuerbach in effect abandoned the materialist standpoint, since the projection of human species-being into the image of God is a process that occurs within the mind rather than within nature. For Marx, on the other hand, the human species is a material reality in that its fundamental relationship to the natural world does not take place within pure consciousness. Instead, it is enacted in the labor process, of which consciousness is merely one, albeit important, aspect.

From 1844 until his death in 1883, labor is the most important concept in Marx's work. Although he returns to it again and again in order to refine it and develop it further, he never deviates from the idea of labor he first developed in the 1844 *Manuscripts*. What makes labor so important for Marx is the fact that he believes it to be the foundation of human existence, the basic activity that makes humans what they are. He has two arguments in support of this position that recur throughout his work. The first is that labor is the only human activity necessary for survival. People can stop writing books, making music, or going to funerals and the species will survive. But if they stop working, humankind will continue to exist for at most a few days. Procreation, of course, is also required for species survival, but it is not distinctively human since it is an activity that people share with all other living things. This brings us to Marx's second argument. Labor is fundamental to human existence in that it is the activity that distinguishes human beings from other biological organisms. Everything else that lives is pre-adapted for survival in what we would now call its ecological niche. In animals, pre-adaptation often takes the form of instincts or drives, which are patterns of behavior programmed, by the evolutionary process, into the individuals that make up a species (Marx read Darwin's work with great interest and enthusiasm). By contrast, human beings are not pre-adapted to survive in any ecological niche. Not only is their behavior not fully determined by instincts, but they lack the biological equipment necessary for survival – the fangs and claws of tigers for example, or the fur of bears, or the coloring that allows some insects to become invisible to predators against the background of certain plants. Since they are not pre-adapted for survival, human beings must deliberately create the conditions necessary to survive. They do this in two ways. First, they alter the natural world so that it can satisfy human needs, and second, they alter themselves in the process of altering the natural world. This two-sided activity is what Marx calls labor.

Marx frames his discussion of labor in the Paris *Manuscripts* in the context of Feuerbach's idea of species-being (the German word is *Gattungswesen*, which can be translated as either "species-being" or "species-essence," an equivalence lost in English). Feuerbach's idea is complex, subtle, and open to interpretation, because it brings together two different, and somewhat ambiguous, concepts of "species."

The first concept is that of the human species as both the totality of its members over the entire course its history, past, present, and future, and, more importantly, their complex relations with one another. At the center of this concept is Feuerbach's idea of the "I-Thou relationship," which is, according to him, more fundamental to human reality than either of its terms considered separately. Although Marx does not use the "I-Thou" terminology, he accepts and builds upon the idea behind it in his later work as well as the *Manuscripts*. The main point Feuerbach makes in his treatment of the I-Thou relationship can be interpreted in one of two ways. In some passages, especially in his early writings, Feuerbach seems to say that I need the Thou in order to experience a self-conscious being

outside of myself and discover reflectively that I am self-conscious too. So I recognize my species-being, my capacity for self-consciousness, reflected back to me from outside of myself in the form of the other person. But this would make the Thou into a simple mirror in which I discover only my own image. An alternative, more fruitful reading of Feuerbach's treatment of the I-Thou theme – and the one Marx ultimately adopts – is that the human species is *determined by neither the individual nor the collective as an abstract generality, but rather by the set of concrete relationships that connect the members of the species with one another*. In other words, the relationships between people have greater significance than either the individuals involved in them, regarded in isolation from one another, or the idea of the species as an abstract universal that somehow hovers above its individual members on a more elevated plane of reality. On this interpretation, concrete relationships between people are what make individuals what they are, as well as determining the nature of the species as a whole. The reality of the species is something that happens *between* the individuals who comprise it. Who and what you are is determined by the relationships you are involved in over the course of your lifetime: relationships with parents and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, neighbors, teachers, co-workers, lovers, husbands, wives, children, and even the strangers you pass in the street, and your more distant relationships with people long dead, both in and outside your family as well as with people who are not yet born, including your future children and grandchildren and nieces and nephews and their children and children's children, and the equivalent people in the lives of your friends, lovers, and associates, and so on and on and on. If starting with you, we follow this complex chain of relationships, we ultimately arrive at the entire set of relationships that comprises the human species in its totality over the whole course of its existence. In abstraction from this totality, you have no substantial being at all.<sup>5</sup>

The second of Feuerbach's concepts of the human species is that it is the species that understands its species-character, the species capable of genuine self-consciousness. That is to say, it is the only species on the planet that makes its being as a species an object of conscious reflection. Any species of plants or animals can be regarded as the set of relationships connecting its members with one another. But the human species is the only one that is conscious of this fact, both in its own case and those of all other species. This consciousness of species being makes it impossible to regard humankind as an exclusively biological reality. Animals, of course, have an awareness of the niches they inhabit, including the presence of other members of their species. But this awareness is determined by the biological drives of the animal to find prey and protect itself from predators, to establish territory, find a mate, sleep, and so on. There is no *conscious distance* between the organism and its niche, because there is no distance between the organism and its drives. Thus even though the animal is involved in relationships with other animals, it is not conscious of these relationships *as relationships*. It has no awareness of its species-character and what makes its species different than other species. It has no consciousness of its species-being, and therefore no genuine self-consciousness. To be conscious of its species-being, the animal must be free to assume a distanced,

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<sup>5</sup> Marx privileges certain relationships, which he regards as fundamental to human existence, over others. In his later work, he calls these "relations of production."



reflective relationship to its own mode of existence, and the human species is the only one that has that capacity.

The second concept of the human species as involving the capacity for distanced reflection has important implications for the first concept of the species as a set of concrete relationships between its members. The relationships that characterize the human species are different than the exclusively biological relationships that characterize other animals, and this is true, not only of the whole collection of relationships, but of each relationship considered individually. Of course, human beings are biological entities, but the point is that they are not only this. Each of the relationships that defines them has the distanced character, the conscious freedom from the niche, of which only humans are capable. There are advantages and disadvantages to this reflective distance. An example: no other animal goes through the kind of convoluted torment involved in reflecting on its love relationships that can afflict human beings. But neither is any other animal capable of the universal love of the members of its species that some – however extraordinary – people are able to achieve.

This brief reference to love illustrates that consciousness of species-being is a matter of the heart as well as the head. For Feuerbach, along with concepts (thoughts) and decisions (acts of will), emotions are fundamental expressions of species-being. It is easy to see why. If the I-Thou relationship is at the center of species-being, then this means that *I experience the other human being as a need*. But to experience the other human being as a need is to feel an emotion, whether of love, desperation, anger at a refusal of satisfaction, or hatred of a third party who stands between me and the object of my need. For Feuerbach, what distinguishes emotions from concepts and decisions is that emotions are passive in relation to their objects, while concepts and decisions are active. We create and manipulate concepts, and make decisions, but we undergo feelings. There is a connection between emotion, passion, and passivity. We *suffer* feelings in the sense that, in the final analysis, they come to us from the outside. According to Feuerbach, of all the emotions, the primary one is sexual love, because it is a primordial expression of the human need to be completed by someone else, to become incorporated in a meaningful way into the I-Thou dyad. When we read in Marx's *Manuscripts* that the character of the relationship between man and woman is an index of the degree of alienation in a society (a theme we will discuss later on), we can clearly see Feuerbach standing in the background.<sup>6</sup>

Thoughts, decisions, and feelings in the sense we have been discussing are distinctively human ways of relating to the world. And all three are forms of freedom. To be free means to be able to choose one's relationship to objects, rather than to have that relationship predetermined by forces outside oneself. This is very different than the determination of animal response by an external stimulus. The flight of a male woodcock in early spring elicits mating behavior from females in the vicinity. But human beings can resist mating, no matter how strong the stimulus. They are free to adopt alternative responses, alternative relationships to the object of attraction. It is important to recognize, however, that freedom does not lift us out of the natural world. Both Feuerbach and Marx warn us against regarding freedom as something foreign to nature. The fact that human beings differ from other animals in certain fundamental respects does not mean that they

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<sup>6</sup> Neither Feuerbach nor Marx consider the significance of homosexual relationships, as is to be expected in the mid-nineteenth century.

are non- or super-natural. They do not possess souls that animals lack. They are not on their way to heaven or hell. Like all other animals, human beings emerge from nature, and they remain natural beings in spite of the species-consciousness they possess. As Marx writes in the *Manuscripts*, “History itself is a real part of natural history – of nature developing into man.” (143)

### **Alienation in the Labor Process**

In the *Paris Manuscripts*, and throughout his later work, Marx accepts Feuerbach’s insight that a form of awareness free from biological drives, i.e., consciousness in the proper sense, is a distinguishing characteristic of human beings:

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. (113)

Unlike Feuerbach, however, Marx sees consciousness as embedded in something larger, more complex, and more vitally necessary than itself. He regards it as part of the labor process. What creates the possibility of a consciousness beyond biological drives is the fact that people are not pre-adapted to a niche, but must transform nature to establish the conditions necessary for their survival. This is the origin of freedom, which, on this level, is inseparable from the necessity to work. Freedom and necessity, which most philosophers have taken to be opposites, are reconciled in this conception.

Let us follow Marx by looking at the labor process more closely. The person who labors has material needs, needs for food, shelter, clothing, and so on. Nature does not supply the means necessary for satisfying these needs spontaneously. In order to accomplish this purpose, it is necessary to change objects that occur naturally into objects able to satisfy the relevant needs. The person who labors brings about such change through the motions of his or her body. The human body is a natural object, just like the objects it works on. That is why it is possible to alter objects by setting the body in motion. But the motions involved in labor are not random. They are generated and ordered in such a way as to carry out a conscious plan. Before it can be translated into reality, the plan must exist within the mind of the laborer. The plan begins as a mental image, and the motions of the body enact the plan. At the core of the plan is an image of the object that will exist at the end of the labor process, provided it is successful. (Marx makes this point, not in the *Manuscripts*, but in *The German Ideology* which he wrote with Engels the following year). The particular pattern of motions involved in enacting the plan is a skill. Every act of labor not only transforms a natural object, but also develops the skill of transforming similar objects in the future. The only way to perfect a skill is actually to engage in the relevant labor process, since skills involve the acquisition

and refinement of motor habits. New skills can emerge from old ones, as the act of shaping natural objects suggests possibilities for shaping them in new ways, or even for creating objects different than the one initially planned. In this way, the labor process not only changes objects external to the human body; it also changes the human body itself and its mental capacity to envision new things.

Labor results in the existence of a new object through the transformation of an already existing object. The object upon which labor works may have resulted from earlier acts of labor. The wooden planks used in building a house, for example, were once logs, which were in turn once trees. The trees had to be felled and then cut into the appropriate lengths to produce the planks used in house building. Every product of labor can be traced back ultimately to an object produced without human intervention by nature. For Marx, labor is an activity, a process set in motion by the laborer. It is an expression of the laborer's life, of his or her active existence. It results in a new object, the product of labor. Marx expresses this relation between laboring activity and its result by saying that *the product of labor is its objectification*. At the end of the labor process, the activity of labor assumes the form of an object, a finished thing. *The product is the activity in congealed form*. It is the expression, in the form of an object, of the laborer's life, the summation and result of his or her activity. The world of objects that labor creates is a kind of "second nature" (the term is Hegel's). It is nature transformed, nature as the creation, or better, re-creation of human beings. Through labor, people impress their own image on the natural world, and then encounter themselves in the world they have made.

The process in which labor actively shapes an object supplied by nature is merely one side of a two-sided relationship, and it is not the dominant side. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx uses the term "inorganic nature" in an unusual way. He does not mean by it "inanimate nature," such as water, air, rock, and so on, but nature outside the human organism, both animate and inanimate. Inorganic nature in this sense is the same as external nature. However, after establishing this conception of inorganic nature as nature outside the human body, Marx goes on to say that inorganic nature is a kind of second body for human beings. The idea that we have a body outside our own bodies is very unusual, to say the least. What Marx means by it is that we have a metabolic connection with external nature. The concept of metabolism normally refers to an exchange of substances between different parts of the body, of nutrients and waste products between opposite sides of the cell wall, for example. According to Marx, labor is a metabolic exchange of substances between the laborer and external nature. Nature supplies the laborer with the objects on which she or he works, and the laborer returns to nature the objects as transformed by laboring activity. The entire circuit occurs within nature. It is an exchange of objects between organic nature and inorganic nature, between nature in the form of the working body and nature outside the body. There are two important points to be made about this exchange. The first is that the directions of exchange are not equivalent. The human species requires the objects (raw materials) supplied by external nature in order to sustain itself through work, but external nature does not require the objects produced by the human species. Nature existed before there were human beings and labor processes, and it will continue to exist when they disappear from the universe. The second, related point is one Marx makes in his later work, *Capital*. Without the expenditure of additional labor, the worked object loses its usefulness, and is reclaimed

by ordinary natural forces. So, for example, the house made from wood rots, just as a fallen log would rot, if not maintained by additional labor. In the metabolic exchange between people and external nature, external nature has the last word. These two insights are central to Marx's materialism. On the one hand, we need nature though nature does not need us, and, on the other hand, nature is indifferent to our purposes. The human species emerges from nature and remains within it as a vulnerable, finite part, even though it engages in a conscious transformative activity absent in other living things.

The purpose of labor is to satisfy needs. Needs are expressions of dependency. The only truly independent being is a being that does not need anything from the world outside it. But nothing living meets this description, and people are living beings. For Marx, as for Feuerbach, there is nothing negative about the fact that humans are dependent on things other than themselves. Passivity is as affirmative a mode of existence as activity. To have needs means that we are incomplete and that our completion depends on things other than ourselves. At root, this is an expression of the relational conception of human reality that Marx shares with Feuerbach. People are what they are only in relation to other things. This is one of the reasons why Marx always found the Robinson Crusoe stories of the classical political economists to be absurd. No one makes their way in the world by themselves. There are no rugged individualists.

The range of human needs is extensive.<sup>7</sup> To begin with, the most pressing needs are those for certain physical objects such as fresh water, food, shelter, and clothing. These are the needs that labor must satisfy in the interest of individual and species survival. Secondly, there are needs that can be postponed or even denied, but that are still in a sense necessary given a certain level of civilization; needs for modes of transportation, sophisticated tools, means of communication, aesthetically pleasing objects of use, and so on. This second level of need arises as a result of the development of the labor process over extended periods of time. So, for example, the production of objects for long distance exchange creates the need for modes of transportation and means of communication. The disciplined practice of handicraft labor creates the need for more sophisticated tools, and for products made in accordance with standards of beauty. Needs of the first two levels can be satisfied only through the production of objects. But thirdly, over and above the need for objects, people have social needs; needs for love and companionship, collaboration in work and play, stimulating conversation, humor, etc. Some of these needs can be fulfilled in the labor process itself when it is collaborative, but others require free time, time beyond the limits of the working day. So does a fourth level of need, that of the actualization or development of the human personality through engagement in such activities as making music, painting and sculpting, playing sports, studying history, mastering chess, writing or reading novels, learning to sail. Marx relies upon a distinction Aristotle first made to differentiate these activities from labor. The purpose of labor is to produce an object other than itself, while the purpose of the activities involved in developing the human personality is engagement in these very activities. Labor is a means to an end, while the self-actualizing activity of the fourth level of need is its own end.

While the third and fourth levels of need cannot be fulfilled directly by labor, the free time necessary for their fulfillment becomes available only as the productivity of

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<sup>7</sup> What follows is present though scattered throughout the *Manuscripts*. I have reconstructed the theme in accordance with the idea of four levels of need, which is not explicit in the text.

labor increases. This makes it possible to produce the means of satisfying more pressing first and second level needs in a decreasing number of working hours, thereby creating disposable time, time beyond the limits of the working day. Thus labor is a prerequisite for developing and satisfying needs of the third and fourth levels (social needs and needs for self-actualization), though it is not directly involved in their satisfaction. In fact, for Marx, the ultimate purpose of (non-alienated) labor is not the production of material things, but rather the production of the rich human being: “The *rich* human being is simultaneously the human being *in need* of a totality of human manifestations of life – the man in whom his own realization exists as an inner necessity, as *need*.” (141) Every need is a unique relationship to the world, so that the individual rich in needs has cultivated, extensively and intensively, a rich set of such relationships.

The recognition that labor is necessary for opening a sphere of self-actualizing activity outside the labor process exemplifies an important principle that runs throughout the *Manuscripts*. To say that labor is the fundamental activity of human beings is not to say that it is their only activity, or their only important one. The significance of the claim instead is that other forms of activity are impossible without labor, and that labor in various ways shapes these other forms. So for example, if the labor process is organized in such a way that the increasing productivity of labor generates time beyond work in the form of unemployment or leisure manipulated by advertising, then self-actualizing activities become impossible. Self-actualizing activities may seem to survive as class privileges, but then they are no longer truly self-actualizing. This is because they are accompanied by the degradation of millions of people, and so prohibit the communal relations necessary for self-actualization. The Wall Street broker who steps over the bodies of homeless people in order to hale a cab so that he may catch a plane on his way to skiing in the Alps is not contributing to the development of the human personality. We will see in a moment that Marx believes there are many forms of alienation in addition to alienated labor, but that all are consequences of the alienation of the work process. That is why workers’ transcendence of their alienation is the key to human emancipation in general.

Sociality is a need, but it is also an essential characteristic of labor. Even when people work alone, and solely for their own consumption, their labor is social insofar as they have learned the requisite skills from other people. The most primitive forms of farming and hunting involve knowledge and techniques developed by countless human beings over the course of countless generations. Robinson Crusoe, stranded on his tropical island, is able to survive because of the skills and knowledge he acquired in England (that is, until, in good English fashion, he makes the native, Friday his servant). The language the laborer speaks, even when talking only to himself about the tasks he is engaged in, is a social product. But the normal case, of course, is not that of individuals working alone to produce objects for their own consumption. There is a social division of labor that assigns people to different occupations, and that shares the results of their work through acts of exchange. In addition, many of the tasks assigned by the division of labor involve the cooperation of two or more workers. In spite of the Robinson Crusoe assumptions or thought experiments of classical political economy, labor is social from the start.

Now Marx’s concept of labor, as reconstructed in the preceding account, is an abstraction since it applies to laboring activity in any economic system at all. But labor

always occurs under definite social and economic circumstances, and within specific forms of the division of labor. Class divisions are part of the division of labor in all societies with the exception of hunter-gatherer bands – in which our subspecies, *homo sapiens sapiens*, lived for the first 90% of its existence on the planet – and some agricultural communities. Class divisions are not simple social stratifications, which can include differences between generations, genders, and other groups with varying functions and status. Class divisions are determined by the relation of a social group to the means of production, expressed in forms of legal ownership. The central division in any society with classes is the one between those who produce an economic surplus above the subsistence needs of society, and those who take possession of the surplus through their ownership of economic resources and control of the productive process.

Capitalism is unique among class societies in that the relationship between the surplus-producers and surplus-extractors is organized through market exchange. The surplus-extractors (capitalists) possess the means of production – buildings, machinery, raw materials – while the surplus-producers (workers) sell their labor to the surplus-extractors in exchange for a wage. Although workers are free to accept or reject the terms of a labor contract with a particular capitalist, Marx tells us that their labor is nonetheless coerced since, lacking possession of the means of production, they *must* sell their labor in order to survive. Capitalists purchase the labor of workers in order to make products for sale in the market at a price that brings them a profit. Because of the competition between capitalists active in the same industry, the profit each acquires must be reinvested in the expansion of the enterprise. If the owner of a business does not reinvest profits from sales, then he or she is put out of business by a competitor who does. The imperative that drives the capitalist system is to “grow or die,” and growth occurs through the accumulation of capital (more buildings, machinery, and raw materials, more productive labor inputs, and more products that must be sold). Capitalists do not accumulate capital because they are greedy. They are greedy because they must accumulate capital. Greed is not a moral flaw of the individual, but an artifact of the system in which individual capitalists must function.

In the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx attempts to demonstrate the precise ways in which labor is alienated under the conditions of capitalist production. He begins by relying on the findings of political economists, all of whom are more or less apologists for capitalism, no matter how brilliant their insights. In this, he makes use of a principle, familiar to trial lawyers, that the strongest case is made by an appeal to the evidence introduced by the opposing side. As the *Manuscripts* progress, and Marx develops his own conceptual framework, he abandons this strategy in favor of an independent analysis of the nature of capitalism. This shift underscores the fact that the *Manuscripts* are a work in progress. The first chapter, “Wages of Labor,” is the crux of the initial strategy. It is part of a triad of opening chapters that also includes “Profit of Capital,” and “Rent of Land” (the three chapters Marx wrote in vertical columns). The chapters correlate three economic categories, labor, capital, and land, with three forms of income or revenue; wages, profit, and rent. Through this correlation, the chapters designate three social classes, the working class, the capitalist class, and the class of landowners. In “Rent of Land” we find out that the landowning class is a transitional group. It begins under feudalism as the class of lords entitled to exploit serf labor, but it loses its independent position in the social order as capitalism develops. In time, the landowner becomes just

another capitalist who invests in land the way industrial capitalists invest in industry, though the former make their profit in the form of rent.

That leaves us with only two classes that are basic to capitalism, those of workers and capitalists. (Marx repeats this point – that capitalism has a tendency to evolve into a two-class system – in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848). The relation between the working class and the capitalist class involves a contradiction. According to the political economists, labor is the source of all wealth (this is “the labor theory of value”). But it is the capitalist who becomes wealthy while workers are impoverished. Why does the class that produces wealth not own it? There is no way to reconcile this contradiction in terms of the framework of political economy and its defense of capitalism. Beneath the apparent rationality of the system of capitalist production, there is an irresolvably antagonistic relationship between workers and capitalists, evident in the struggle to determine the worker’s wage. Naturally, it is in the interest of workers to receive wages that are as high as possible. But increases in workers’ wages result in decreases in capitalists’ profits. Therefore, it is in the interest of capitalists to drive wages down to their bare minimum – the minimum necessary for workers to eat, clothe, and shelter themselves as well as to raise children who will supply the next generation of workers.

According to “The Wages of Labor,” in the struggle between workers and capitalists, capitalists have the advantage. Say that workers attempt to increase their wages by means of a strike. Because of their possession of interest-bearing capital (bank accounts, stocks, and the like), capitalists enjoy an income during the strike, while workers have only their wages to live on, which, of course, are not paid when striking. It is far easier for the capitalists to outlast the workers than for the workers to outlast the capitalists. But the ability to outlast workers in a strike is not the only advantage capitalists possess. The competitive struggle between capitalists results in one firm driving another out of business and taking over its markets, or in one firm acquiring another through what we now call a “hostile take-over,” or in two or more firms amicably merging. The result in each case is the combination and concentration of capital in larger and more powerful companies. All of this is in accordance with the statutory laws of a capitalist society. But workers enjoy no such legal imprimatur to come together in equivalent combinations (i.e. powerful labor unions). In Marx’s day, laws explicitly prohibited workers from forming unions, though labor organizing proceeded, often heroically, in the face of legal repression anyway. One might think that this prohibition is ancient history. But in the contemporary United States, the situation is not so different, since U.S. labor law makes it difficult to form new unions (by allowing bosses to wage aggressive anti-union campaigns), and relatively easy to break existing ones (through court injunctions, capital flight, protection of strike-breakers, refusal to rehire workers on strike, etc.), while prohibiting many kinds of strikes and other weapons of the labor movement (sympathy strikes and secondary boycotts are examples). Thus, over time, capitalists become stronger in relation to workers, and workers become weaker (as anyone who looks at the history of the U.S. labor movement over the past four decades can plainly see). Yet, according to political economists, capital is nothing but the product of labor, what Adam Smith called “stored up labor.” What this means is that workers create the very power – namely capital – that weakens and subjugates them.

Workers face another major disadvantage in relation to capitalists. Their work produces profits for the capitalists who employ them. Industrial capitalists invest a part of these profits in new machinery. The machines enable them to produce a greater number of products at the same or lower cost and thereby undersell their competitors. The increase in labor productivity through the use of machines (each worker produces more products than before in a given period of time) enables capitalists to save on labor costs by throwing a part of the workforce onto the streets. Of course, this hurts the workers who become unemployed, but it also depresses the wages of those able to hold on to their jobs. (Unemployment increases the demand for work in relation to the supply of jobs, so workers must be willing to accept lower wages than would be the case if jobs were plentiful and workers scarce). Marx tells us that, in capitalism, the worker is a commodity, subject to the same laws of supply and demand as any other commodity. Notice that, in this example, like those preceding it, what undoes the worker is her or his own labor. Labor creates the profits that are converted into machinery, which augments the productivity of labor. The increase in productivity in turn abolishes labor for the segment of the workforce that becomes unemployed, and reduces wages or keeps them static for those who hold on to their jobs. Every increase in the power of labor disempowers the laborer. The key to understanding the alienation of labor under capitalism is that capitalist relations of production turn labor into a destructive force for those who engage in it. *Alienation lies, not in the fact that the capitalist damages the worker, but rather in the fact that, under capitalist conditions, the worker cannot help but damage him- or herself.*

In the most famous chapter of the *Manuscripts*, “Estranged Labor,” Marx specifies four “dimensions” of alienated labor. The German word is *Bestimmungen*, which is of Hegelian origin and usually translated as “determinations.” In English, however, the word “dimensions” comes closer to Marx’s meaning.

1) The first dimension is the alienation of the worker from the object he produces. Alienation has a technical meaning in law. It is the act of transferring property (through sale, gift, inheritance, or confiscation) from an original owner to someone else. The transferred property is said to be “alienated” from the original owner, since it is no longer his – it is now alien to him. Insofar as the worker never owns the object he makes while employed by the capitalist, the object is alienated from him in a more extreme way than simple legal alienation. Marx says that the objectification of labor is its realization. It makes labor real in the form of an object. But when workers objectify their labor in the capitalist production process, they become less real, less actualized, less powerful themselves. They lose the object that ought to be an affirmation of their essential being. The realization of labor is its de-realization, says Marx. But it is important to keep in mind that the worker’s product under capitalist conditions not only belongs to someone else (the capitalist), but that it is also converted into a hostile, destructive force that undoes the worker. The first dimension of alienation, then, consists in the loss of the object by the worker, and its conversion into capital, which, as we have seen, is a force opposed to him. The two aspects of alienation from the object are equally important: the loss of the object, and its transformation into a destructive force. It is like the monster in the novel, first published in 1818, by another great radical with distinct socialist leanings, Mary Shelly. The monster escapes from his creator, Dr. Frankenstein, and so thoroughly



destroys what gives his creator's life meaning (by killing his wife, his brother, and his closest friend) that Frankenstein ends by dying, a spent and dejected man.

Marx says that the worker's alienation from the object she produces is at the same time her alienation from nature. Remember that the object originates in nature as raw material and re-enters nature as a finished product. If the worker is alienated from her product (and so from the raw material that goes into it), then she must also be alienated from nature, the realm of things given to her senses. The "second nature" labor produces includes farms, factories, offices, apartment buildings, vehicles, roads, and just about everything else we observe in the course of a day. But this transformed nature does not belong to the worker, nor does she feel at home in it. Instead of being humanized by labor, nature becomes anti-human. (Think of the damage done by the tornados, tsunamis, floods, and forest fires resulting from the production for profit of climate-changing hydrocarbons). Instead of encountering her image in a world she has made, the worker sees only the power of her own activity turned back against her. In this way, Marx comes upon a form of alienation that goes beyond the actual work process. *The worker is alienated from the entire natural world as transformed by human beings.*

2) The second dimension of alienation is that of the worker from the process of work. The product is the result of the work process; it is the process in the congealed form of an object. Marx's word "objectify" is a transitive verb. The living activity of the worker must objectify itself in the form of a product. On this basis, Marx argues that the only way an object can be alienated is if the activity that produces it is alienated. He asks rhetorically: "How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself? The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labour is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself." But Marx's argument is fallacious. Say that I own a metal-working shop where I forge a knife for my own use. My activity is not alienated, because it is under my control, and neither is the object I have produced, because it belongs to me and is available for my use. But suppose a thief takes the knife from me and threatens me with it. The object is now alienated from me in the two senses we identified above: it is no longer my possession, and it has become a hostile force. But this obviously does not change the nature of the activity that produced the knife. I engaged in the activity freely and for a purpose I chose. The process of making the knife was not alienated, and nothing that happens to the knife after I make it can alter that fact.

The problem is that Marx is wrong when he says that the object is nothing but the summary of the activity of producing it. It is also what people make of it after it has been produced. How else could we make sense of the claim that the worker's product is alienated because it belongs to someone else who stands in an antagonistic relation to the worker? As Marx writes, "If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker."

We can re-formulate Marx's position so that it avoids this fallacy. What Marx ought to have said is that, under the specific conditions of capitalist production, the alienated product is the result of the alienated activity that produces it. Those conditions

are specified in the labor contract. When the worker sells his labor to an employer, he sells a definite part of his life. His working day belongs, not to him, but to the capitalist. And since the working day belongs to the capitalist, so does what the worker produces in the course of that day. The sale of wage labor is the sale of an activity, for a specified period of time, that produces an object that is alienated from the worker under the terms of the contract. The labor movement had a word for this in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: “wage-slavery.” To say that the worker is a wage-slave is to say that he sells himself into slavery *for the period of time he agrees to spend at work*. The difference between this time-limited slavery and chattel slavery is that the chattel slave is a slave all the hours of his life. The worker also differs from the chattel slave in that he can choose to leave employment with a particular capitalist and look for a job elsewhere (provided the unemployment rate is low enough), although he is *compelled to sell his time to some capitalist* if he wants to survive. Still, during the period of work, the activity of the wage worker belongs to the capitalist just as the chattel slave’s activity belongs to the slave-owner, and the objects the worker makes during the working day belong to the capitalist just as the objects the slave makes belong to the slave-owner. Under such conditions, loss of ownership of one’s labor results in loss of ownership of the object one makes. We can conceive of other social relations in which the activity of work belongs to the producer though the object produced does not, as for, example, in nomadic pillaging of independent farming communities. But these are not the social relations of capitalism.

3) The third dimension of alienation is closely related to the second. Marx calls it alienation from human species-being. Remember that, for Marx, human species-being is the form of activity that distinguishes human beings from other living things. It is conscious, creative, transformative activity that humanizes the natural world and develops the powers and sensibilities of the people engaged in it. But, under capitalism, such activity is turned into a commodity that the worker must sell to the capitalist in exchange for a wage. The commodity is labor-time, a portion of the life of the worker. By being alienated through sale under the terms of the labor contract, time spent at work comes under the control of the capitalist. By so doing, it becomes a means to an external end – namely the maximization of profit for the capitalist. It is divided into segments in the form of discrete tasks, and the segments are recombined in such a way as to serve this extrinsic end. Adam Smith had already described the increase in labor productivity that resulted from the division of labor in the work process into simple repetitive tasks, with each worker specializing in one such task. This reconfiguration of conscious, creative, transformative activity in the interest of profit maximization changes that activity entirely. The worker does not pursue a freely chosen end, and the repetitive specialized function to which he is assigned is machine-like, which is what prepares the way for the replacement of workers by machines. The production process as a whole retains its conscious, creative, transformative character, but the role of the worker is reduced to that of a cog in the machine.<sup>8</sup>

Labor, which serves an external end for the capitalist also serves an external for the laborer, namely, earning of a wage that permits sheer survival. As a result, Marx tells us, the alienation of human species-being involves an inversion in the proper relationship

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<sup>8</sup> In a famous scene, Chaplin’s film, *Modern Times*, illustrates Marx’s point through the actor’s incomparable physical comedy.

between the worker's human activities and his animal ones. Instead of feeling affirmed in his species-being, he is thwarted, denied, and subjugated by it. Instead of developing his powers and capacities in his central life activity, it is there that his body becomes exhausted and his mind dulled, while he secures only the most basic prerequisites of physical and social life (the phrase, "earning a lively" illustrates this point). He watches the clock waiting for the working day to end so that he can go to his home where he gets what pleasure he can from his purely animal functions – eating, sex, sleep – without connecting them with his distinctively human purposes. So he dreads and avoids, to whatever extent he can, his specifically human activities, and seeks solace instead in his animal functions detached from any context that would give them a human meaning. Here we have the second extension of the concept of alienation in Marx's text beyond the work process itself. *The worker is alienated in his domestic life as well as on the job.*

4) The fourth dimension of alienation Marx discusses in the chapter "Estranged Labor" is the alienation of the worker from other people. For Feuerbach, the I-Thou relationship is the cellular expression of human species-being, since it is through that relationship that the species establishes itself. Now the basic relationship involved in capitalist production is that between worker and capitalist. But for the capitalist, the worker is no more than a factor of production, the cost of which must be kept at a minimum in order to maximize profits. And for the worker, the capitalist is the source of his income, but this is only because he is the purchaser of the labor-time the worker sells, and so is in command of the worker's life for the duration of the working day. Thus the two people who are essential to the labor process under capitalism exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship. The relationship central to human species-being, which ought to be affirmed in the work process, is one in which the species tears itself apart. The I-Thou relationship that is the cell of human species-being splits in two, and the parts are at war with one another.

In his third extension of the concept of alienation beyond the labor of the worker, Marx tells us that the capitalist is alienated. He is the human embodiment of Capital. His existence as capitalist is restricted to the imperative to maximize profits, defeat his competitors, and, in the process, accumulate ever more capital. He does this at the worker's expense, not because of any personal animosity or psychopathology, but rather because it is what his master, Capital demands. Thus *the capitalist, like the worker, is in the grip of an alien force.* However, Marx says this fact is hidden from him by his wealth and power over the productive process, giving him the illusion of being in control of his life activity.

### **Alienation Beyond Labor**

So far in the *Manuscripts* – until the end of "Estranged Labor," – Marx has established that the origin of alienation lies in the way the labor process is conducted under the conditions of private ownership of productive resources, and the related necessity of workers to sell their labor for a wage. He has identified four inseparable dimensions of alienation: 1) alienation from the product of labor, 2) alienation from the process of labor, 3) alienation from human species being, and 4) alienation from the other person in the form of the capitalist. But in the course of his treatment, he has also

identified three kinds of alienation that extend beyond that of the worker in capitalist production: 1) the alienation of the worker from the natural world as transformed by human labor, 2) the alienation of the worker in his or her domestic life, and 3) the alienation of the capitalist as the personification of Capital and its limitless drive to augment itself. None of the three would exist without the alienation of workers in the labor process. Each is a consequence of that underlying estrangement, but as expressed in a sphere of human experience other than labor.

In the chapter of the *Manuscripts* titled “Private Property and Communism,” Marx goes on to identify three additional kinds of alienation. The context is a discussion about the nature of communism as it emerges from capitalist society. Marx writes:

The antithesis between *lack of property* and *property*, so long as it is not comprehended as the antithesis of *labor* and *capital*, still remains an indifferent antithesis, not grasped in its *active connection* with its *internal* relation, an antithesis not yet grasped as a *contradiction*. It can find expression in this first form even without the advanced development of private property (as in ancient Rome, Turkey, etc.). It does not yet *appear* as having been established by private property itself. But labor, the subjective essence of private property as exclusion of property, and capital, objective labor as exclusion of labor, constitute *private property* as its developed state of contradiction – hence a dynamic relationship moving to its resolution. (132)

The point is dialectical. The relationship between labor and capital is dynamic while the relationship between poverty and wealth (“*lack of property* and *property*”) is not. Prior to capitalism, the antithesis between poverty and wealth appeared as an “indifferent antithesis.” There was obviously an antithetical opposition, and even an antagonism, between poverty and wealth in ancient Rome. But the antithesis was static, appearing to be a permanent condition. It is only with capitalism that static antithesis is replaced by a contradiction. A contradiction is a dynamic, or dialectical, antithesis that actively moves to its resolution. The reason for its dialectical character is that the antithesis exists in “active connection with its internal relation.” What Marx means by this is that the contradiction is internal to each side of the antithesis, so that no balance or stasis of the antithetical sides is possible.

Under capitalist conditions, labor (one side of the antithesis) is “the subjective essence of private property as exclusion of property.” This is a reference to Adam Smith’s discovery that capital is nothing other than “stored up labor,” combined with the insight that labor is excluded from the possession of capital. But this is a contradiction. Consider the worker who decides to strike (my example). That decision involves recognizing that *capital is nothing without labor*, so that if the “subjective essence” of capital (i.e. labor) excludes itself by withdrawing from production, the owner’s capital ceases to function. In ancient Rome there could be no equivalent recognition that wealth is nothing without poverty. It may be true that “the poor ye always have with you,” but if the Roman poor were to die, the wealthy would still survive. No one in ancient Rome considered slaves to be poor, since they were the property of their owners. Poor freeborn citizens had no role in the productive process based on slave-worked agriculture, and so the propertied could live without them.

If we look at the second side of the antithesis involved in modern private property, we see that capital takes the form of “objective labor as exclusion of labor.” But this is simply the mirror image of the contradiction we discovered on the side of labor. Capital as stored up labor is labor in the form of an object that appears to be independent of its creator (“exclusion of labor”). Yet, as on the labor side of the antithesis, the worker need only withdraw his labor to demonstrate the contradiction involved in capital’s claim to exist on its own. In short, whichever side of the antithesis we start with, we encounter an internal contradiction that refers us to the other side for its resolution. But on the other side, we encounter the self-same contradiction with terms reversed, as though it were reflected in a mirror. This makes the relationship between capital and labor dynamic – in other words, fraught with irresolvable tension. Given its inherent dynamism, private property is able to advance for a while by expanding industry through reinvestment of profit. But, since the contradiction is irresolvable on both sides of the antithesis, Marx claims that it must finally give way to a new social form, namely communism.

Marx, however, treats communism as it emerges from capitalist society as harboring contradictions of its own. What he calls “crude communism” – the first stage in the development of a new society – is not the transcendence of private property, but its expression in universal form. Property ownership may be in the hands of society as a whole, presumably through expropriation of the means of production by the state, but this does not socialize property; it simply makes it a universal private possession. The community becomes a collective capitalist that issues pay checks in exchange for wage-labor, while all members of society become alienated wage-workers. Marx characterizes this social stage as the expression of a crude leveling impulse rooted in universal envy, not very different than the envy of a capitalist for property larger than his own. Instead of developing human capacities to higher, more differentiated levels, crude communism levels them down to a “preconceived minimum.”

This leveling down based on envy has its counterpart in the treatment of women in crude communist society. Just as the private property of the capitalist corresponds to the bourgeois marriage in which the wife is the property of her husband, so does the collective private property of crude communism correspond to the universal property of men in women. Marx here associates crude communism with a kind of universal prostitution in which, instead of a woman being subject to the possessive lust of a single man, all women are subject to the lust of men in general. The problem with Marx’s example, however, is that it does not correspond to anything communists were advocating at the time, or at any time in the past, except perhaps in the lurid imagination of their opponents. It is true that many early communists were also advocates of “free love.” But this was quite different than Marx’s collective prostitution, since it was meant to liberate women from the restrictions of the bourgeois family by allowing them to choose their lovers and companions outside of the marriage contract. This was the form in which Emma Goldman, for example, advocated free love roughly a half century after Marx wrote the *Manuscripts*. Even Fourier’s earlier vision of the utopian “Phalanx” as a community arranged in such a way as to satisfy collectively the need for sex well as meaningful work, paid scrupulously equal attention to the desires and needs of women as well as men.

In whatever way Marx arrived at the idea of collective prostitution, it does serve a positive function in the *Manuscripts* by allowing him to make a more general point about

relations between men and women under the rule of private property. The idea of a marriage contract expresses a principle similar to that of the labor contract. In both, property is alienated through legally recognized exchange – in the labor contract, property in labor time and in the wage exchanged for it, and in the marriage contract, property in the human body. With a considerable degree of insight into the nature of bourgeois society in the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant defined marriage as a contract giving each partner exclusive possession of the sexual organs of the other partner. Whether or not Marx had Kant's definition in mind, he draws the consequences of the interpretation of sex in terms of property ownership. In the body of the partner, man and woman encounter nature in the form of the other person. This is an immediate expression of the unity of nature and humanity, a unity that the labor process must achieve in a mediated way, i.e. through the activity that transforms natural objects. Just as the rule of private property results in an alienated form of the labor process, so does it result in an alienated form of the man-woman relationship. At this point, Marx introduces the metaphor of prostitution. If marriage involves the husband's acquisition of a property-right in his wife's body (the male being dominant in bourgeois marriage), then it does not differ significantly from purchasing the right to use the body of a prostitute. On this basis, Marx calls the imagined collectivization of marriage under crude communism, "universal prostitution." But this is merely one expression of the prostitution involved in all private ownership.

Still the proprietary relationship between men and women has a significance more profound than that between an owner and any other form of property. The reason is that, in the man-woman relationship, each partner encounters the other both as a natural entity and as a human being. In this case, nature and humanity are immediately indivisible, while, as noted above, the labor process must first be completed to result in a similar state. So, Marx tells us, the relation between men and women is the most revealing index of the relation between people and nature in general. In the man-woman relationship, we can see the extent to which nature has been humanized and humanity naturalized. This is the same as the extent to which our natural needs have become human ones and our human needs natural ones. In sexual love under the rule of private property, our need for the other person as concretely embodied becomes a need to possess the body of the lover as the passive object of our will. This, after all, is what characterizes private ownership in all of its forms. In non-alienated sexual love, our need for the body of the lover is the need for a natural entity imbued with all of the properties, all of the active capacities as well as the ability to experience suffering and passion, of a being who lives a life in conscious pursuit of its own ends. Beyond alienation, the object of sexual love is thoroughly human and thoroughly natural at one and the same time.

This fourth extension of the idea of alienation to a phenomenon outside the labor process continues to locate the original source of alienation in the way labor is organized and conducted in a society dominated by private property. One of the most important of Marx's insights in the *Manuscripts* is that *the essence of private property is alienated labor*. The alienation of labor is not an expression of private property, private property is an expression of alienated labor. It is labor's self-alienation that establishes private property rather than the reverse, because the activity of labor is what defines human beings as human, and therefore has priority over the object it creates. The implication is that any instance of private ownership, including the property right a man acquires in a

woman's body through marriage or prostitution, is, in the final analysis, an expression of the alienated life-activity essential to human beings.

The fifth form of alienation is what Marx calls "the alienation of the senses." This is a very broad topic because, under the category of the senses, Marx includes more than the usual sense modalities of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. He also includes all those "organs" of a person's "individual being" that "are in their *objective* orientation or in their *orientation to the object*, the appropriation of that object." In addition to the five sense modalities, Marx lists thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, and loving as examples of the human senses. What is characteristic of a sense, in Marx's use of the word, is that involves the human appropriation of an object. To appropriate an object means to make it one's own, but Marx wants to contrast *human* appropriation with private possession. In human appropriation, a person appropriates an aspect of human reality in the form of an object. That is to say, the purpose of human appropriation is not possession of the object, but rather exercise of the human power or sensibility that a relation to the object permits. For instance (my example), I can appropriate a diamond simply by looking at it if it helps to develop my sensitivity to the beauty of diamonds. It is not necessary for me to own the diamond, or to exclude other people from its use. In fact, according to Marx, human appropriation and private property are antithetical:

Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it – when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., – in short, when it is *used* by us. Although private property itself again conceives all these direct realizations of possession only *as means* of life, and the life which they serve as means is the *life of private property* – labor and conversion into capital. (139)

In private property, the human senses are alienated in "the sense of *having*." In human appropriation, by contrast, "Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their *egotistical* nature, and nature has lost its mere *utility* by becoming *human* use." (139)

Now we can better understand what Marx means when he describes crude communism as the universalization of private property. He contrasts universal private property, as a form of egotistical possession that has been made available to everyone, with human appropriation of the range of powers, capacities, talents, and sensibilities that an advanced society makes possible. The purpose of a society beyond alienation is not universal possession of riches, but development of the rich human being, the human being "profoundly endowed with all the senses," such as the ability to make and enjoy music, to recognize and appreciate visual beauty, to give and accept love, and so on. Only in a society that has gotten beyond both individual and universal private property, beyond private and collective capital, beyond capitalism and crude communism, would "the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities" become possible.

Before we leave the topic of the emancipation of the senses, it is important to take note of a point Marx raises that he will repeat in all of his later work. The alienation of the senses under the rule of private property is a preliminary stage of development necessary for their emancipation. In more general terms, private property, i.e. capital, prepares the way for the human emancipation that will be realized in an advanced

communist society. This is because the self-alienation of labor in the form of capital results in the development of industry. (Capital, remember is inherently expansive because of the need to reinvest profits under conditions of competition). But industry is nothing but the expansion and realization of human powers and sensibilities, albeit in alienated form: "...the history of *industry* and the established *objective* existence of industry are the *open book of man's essential powers*..." (142) Capitalist industry creates the wealth of human capacities that are to be liberated through the positive transcendence of alienation in a new society.

The sixth form of alienation beyond the labor process is the mutual alienation of philosophy and natural science. The rise of the modern sciences, beginning with the revolution in physics and astronomy of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, represented a great challenge for philosophy. Not only did the new mathematical sciences of nature upend the old Aristotelian view of the universe accepted by the philosophers of the Middle Ages, but they also opened the question of what independent role philosophy could possibly have given the claim of the sciences to fathom the underlying structures of reality. This challenge emerged gradually, since physics and astronomy at first saw themselves as branches of philosophy. Even in the seventeenth century, Isaac Newton named his groundbreaking treatment of the laws of physics, *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy*. But as the sciences began to develop on their own autonomous foundations, philosophy faced the problem of carving out a sphere of its own, while accepting the undeniable achievements of natural science in its own domain. This is the great problem that all philosophy of the modern period contends with, and it remains unresolved to this day.

Thus natural science and philosophy became alien to one another. But philosophy could not ignore the fact that natural science was beginning to reshape ordinary human experience profoundly through its impact on industry. After a certain point, industrial capitalism came to depend upon the systematic application of scientific discovery to the process of production. As we have seen, the production process results in the creation of objects that constitute a "second nature," a nature shaped by human activity. It is this nature that we all now inhabit. But the involvement of natural science in that process proceeds in alienated form under the rule of private property. Science develops human powers in such a way that they belong, not to people, but to capital. It is inserted into the production process as driven by the demand to maximize profits and endlessly accumulate capital. (Consider how the practice of science at universities is now shaped by the search for corporate funding). In the face of the penetration of ordinary life by science, philosophy retreated into a sphere of purely speculative thought, increasingly detached from ordinary human concerns. Just as natural science was alienated by its subservience to capital, philosophy was alienated by its withdrawal into a domain of its own, apart from everyday life.

Toward the end of the chapter on "Estranged Labor," Marx envisions the reunification of science and philosophy in the form of a single discipline. He now conceives of philosophy, or its successor, in Feuerbach's terms as "the science of man," though Marx's version of that science would obviously differ from Feuerbach's anthropology by focusing on the activity of labor. Marx tells us that: "Natural science will in time incorporate itself into the science of man, just as the science of man will incorporate itself into natural science; there will be *one* science." (143) In order for this to



happen, natural science and philosophy will have to overcome the forms of estrangement currently infecting them. Natural science will have to liberate itself from its subservience to capital, and philosophy will have to come down from the clouds of speculation and rejoin the natural sciences on the ground where humanity and nature meet.

There is a seventh form of alienation beyond labor, which Marx discusses in the chapter that follows “Estranged Labor” in the *Manuscripts*, titled by its editors, “Needs, Production, and Division of Labor.” This is perhaps the most uncannily prescient chapter in the *Manuscripts*, since it anticipates the rise of consumer capitalism that occurred during the economic boom following the Second World War. Here Marx is a full century ahead of his time. Under the rule of private property:

...every person speculates on creating a new need in another, so as to drive him to a fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him to a new mode of gratification and therefore economic ruin. Each tries to establish over the other an alien power so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish end. (147)

Marx is talking here about the creation of artificial needs by the system of private property, the seduction of the consumer in the interest of sale for profit, and the subjugation of consumers to what they falsely regard as their own needs, as to an alien power. It is remarkable just how prescient this description is. Not only was Marx a full century away from the consumerism and mass advertising that followed the Second World War, but he was also five years away from the Great Exhibition in London, famous for its Crystal Palace, which housed the first significant display of consumer items mass-produced by the new industries.

Marx is also forwarding-looking in his recognition that the creation of false needs operates primarily through phantasy (think about contemporary advertising). For its purpose is to expand the market for items that have no real connection with human needs, whether needs for subsistence goods, or needs for human self-actualization. In order to accomplish this end, it must inculcate in the consumer a phantasy of gratification by appealing to capricious or excessive desires. Marx even goes so far as to say that the capitalist puts himself at the service of the consumer’s “most depraved fancies, plays the pimp between him and his need, excites in him morbid appetites, lays in wait for each of his weaknesses.” (148) As in his critique of the alienated relationship between men and women under the regime of private property, Marx appeals to the metaphor of prostitution. But this time, the focus is not on the body of the prostitute as the object of lustful private possession, but rather on the appetites of her customer, which the capitalist as pimp stimulates by manipulating phantasy. The capitalist does this in order to “sneak for himself a few pennies – in order to charm the golden birds out of the pockets of his dearly beloved neighbors in Christ.” Ultimately the goal is to maximize the quantity of money pumped out of the consumer. This leads Marx to examine the deep-rooted connection between alienated labor and what he calls “the money system.” (107)

Before moving on to his reflections on money, Marx discusses one final form of alienation outside the sphere of labor, the alienation of political economy and ethics. The stimulation of false needs through phantasy with an eye to selling the means of their satisfaction is an expression of a more basic principle of political economy, namely, that

everything is saleable. The only kind of human interaction the political economist recognizes is purchase and sale in the pursuit of private interest. As in Adam Smith's theory of the "invisible hand," unrestricted self-interest is supposed to be the royal road to improving the material conditions of everyone. But, Marx asks, does this mean that I am justified in selling my body for the sexual pleasure of another, or selling my friend into servitude? To the extent that it is true to its principles, political economy can voice no objection. Its strategy in such cases is to refer the questions to the attention of ethics. But all that ethics can give by way of an answer is to invoke some abstract moral principle, such as that the most important thing is be virtuous or to live with a good conscience. But, Marx asks, "how can I live virtuously if I do not live? And how can I have a good conscience if I am not conscious of anything?" The point is that the laws of political economy are the rules of survival under the regime of private property, so that the counsels of ethics are necessarily empty and ineffective. And yet, how can we stop asking ethical questions, when no society would be possible at all if the sole connection between human beings were the war of each against all. The problem is that political economy and ethics are separate spheres of alienation, and are alienated from one another to boot. Each "focuses attention on a specific round of estranged essential activity, and each stands in an estranged relation to the other." The modern system of private property produces a culture that is not only fragmentary, but internally antagonistic. No coherent form of life is possible on its terms,

Before proceeding, let us pause to summarize the main results of Marx's analyses so far. He begins by identifying the root or original form of alienation as the alienation of the worker in the labor process. He further analyzes this original form into four inseparable "determinations," or dimensions: 1) alienation from the object of labor, 2) alienation from the activity of labor, 3) alienation from human species-being, and 4) alienation from the other person in the guise of the capitalist. He then identifies, in the context of his general discussion, eight kinds of alienation that are consequences of alienated labor, but occur outside the labor process: 1) alienation of the worker from nature as transformed by human labor, 2) alienation of the worker in his or her domestic life, 3) alienation of the capitalist as personification of Capital, 4) alienation of the relationship between men and women, 5) alienation of the senses, 6) alienation of natural science and philosophy from one another, 7) alienation of consumer needs, and 8) mutual alienation of political economy and ethics. There is no suggestion in the *Manuscripts* that these are the only forms of alienation in addition to alienated labor. On the contrary, there is an implication that the opposite is true, that every significant social phenomenon in a society based on alienated labor represents another sphere of alienation. The implication is especially strong in Marx's reflections on the money system.

### **The Money System**

In his treatment of money, Marx proceeds differently than he does in any other part of the *Paris Manuscripts*. At the center of his focus are, not works of political economy, but rather those of two figures who are arguably the greatest writers of the early modern period, Shakespeare, who straddled the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Goethe, who straddled the eighteenth and nineteenth. Marx had tried his hand at

poetry as a university student, though with decidedly poor results. He was also a life-long friend of the poet, Heinrich Heine, with whom he spent considerable time in Paris, which is where Heine was living while Marx was working on the *Manuscripts*. Like his soon-to-be friend and collaborator, Fredrick Engels, Marx always regarded great literature of the modern period as an invaluable source of insight into the nature of capitalist society. In addition to Shakespeare and Goethe, he often turned to Dickens, Cervantes, Balzac, Fielding, and other writers for the light they could shed on the world as it is under the sway of private property.

In the *Manuscripts*, Marx turns to Goethe's *Faust* and Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* in his efforts to understand the significance of money in bourgeois society. In order to follow his discussion, it will be helpful to reproduce the relevant passages from the two works in their entirety. The passage from *Faust*, in the original German, is:

„Was Henker! Freilich Händ' und Füße  
Und Kopf und Hintre, die sind dein!  
Doch alles, was ich frisch genieße,  
Ist des drum weniger mein?  
Wenn ich sechs Hengste zahlen kann  
Sind ihre Kräfte nicht die meine?  
Ich renne zu und bin ein rechter Mann  
Als hätt' ich vierundzwanzig Beine.“

In English (my translation):

What, Hangman! Of course, hand and foot  
And head and backside belong to you!  
But everything fresh that I enjoy  
Is that to be declared less mine?  
If I can buy six stallions  
Do their powers not belong to me?  
I run along, a proper man  
As though I had twenty-four legs. (166)

The two passages from *Timon of Athens*, are from Act 4, Scene 3. Though Marx cites them in German translation, I will, of course, give them in the original English.

“Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?  
No, Gods, I am no idle votarist! ...  
Thus much of this will make black white, foul fair,  
Wrong right, base noble, old young, coward valiant.  
... Why, this  
Will lug your priests and servants from your sides,  
Pluck stout men's pillows from below their heads:  
This yellow slave  
Will knit and break religions, bless the accursed;

Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves  
And give them title, knee and approbation  
With senators on the bench: This is it  
That makes the wappen'd widow wed again;  
She, whom the spital-house and ulcerous sores  
Would cast the gorge at, this embalms and spices  
To the April day again. Come, damned earth,  
Thou common whore of mankind, that put'st odds  
Among the rout of nations."

...

"O thou sweet king-killer, and dear divorce  
'Twixt natural son and sire! thou bright defiler  
Of Hymen's purest bed! thou valiant Mars!  
Thou ever young, fresh, loved and delicate wooer  
Whose blush doth thaw the consecrated snow  
That lies on Dian's lap! Thou *visible God!*  
That solder'st *close impossibilities*,  
And makest them kiss! That speak'st with every tongue,  
Think, thy slave man rebels, and by thy virtue  
Set them into confounding odds, that beasts  
May have the world in empire!" (166-67)

Marx's rather straightforward interpretation of the passage from *Faust* is that it asserts that money, as a universal medium of exchange, is able to confer upon its possessor powers not his own. My ability to buy and use twenty-four equine legs, even though I come equipped with only two human ones, illustrates the point that money is able to change my being by conjuring into existence new powers that henceforth belong to me:

Thus what I *am* and *am capable* of is by no means determined by my individuality. I *am* ugly, but I can buy for myself the most *beautiful* of women. Therefore I am not *ugly*, for the effect of ugliness – its deterrent power – is nullified by money. I, as an individual, am *lame*, but money furnishes me with twenty-four feet. (167)

Through the exchange of money, I can acquire any power at all, or at least any human power. If I am stupid, I can buy the services of intelligent people, and my power over the intelligent makes me more intelligent than they are (as more than one U.S. president has discovered). Though I am a scoundrel, money makes me trustworthy. If I am a coward, it makes me into a hero. In short, money allows me to purchase whatever power or quality I lack, and therefore transforms my inability, my lack of being into its opposite.

It is curious that Marx either does not notice or refrains from commenting on another aspect of Goethe's verse. Its reference to the hangman is not arbitrary. It establishes a correspondence between the powers a person acquires by spending money

and the parts of a victim's body that belong to the executioner. From Marx's programmatic perspective, this affinity between the power of money and the parts of a corpse can be read as a metaphor for the relation between the powers of the worker, under the alienated conditions of private property, and their objectification in the product of work as "dead labor."

Marx, however, makes a different point, one that provides a segue to his commentary on Shakespeare's verses. In its ability to convert the absence of power into power, and the absence of reality into real being, money as the universal medium of exchange is the bond tying me to society, humanity, and nature. But it is just as much the solvent that is able to dissolve all bonds, since money has the power to destroy traditional or otherwise long-lived relationships (such as when the members of a community decide to sell their land to developers). Marx tells us that money is the "bond of all *bonds*" as well as the "universal *agent of separation*" – "*the galvanic [electro]-chemical power of society.*" (167)

In Marx's interpretation, like the verses from Faust, those from *Timon of Athens* emphasize the ability of money to change things into their contraries – black into white, foul into fair, wrong into right, base into noble, old into young, coward into valiant.<sup>9</sup> As the universal power of exchange, money is a "visible god" that confounds and compounds all things, bringing "close impossibilities" into an intimate embrace. Money creates a topsy-turvy world in which what exists gives way to what does not, and all powers and qualities transform into their opposites. Returning once again to the metaphor of prostitution, Marx builds upon Shakespeare's verse by saying that money is "the common whore, the common pimp of peoples and nations." It is the pimp between humankind and its needs – the universal procurer. And it is its common whore in that it promises any gratification that can be imagined in exchange for a price.

This piling of metaphor upon metaphor has a point besides vivid illustration. In Goethe's and Shakespeare's poetry, Marx finds a powerful description of what money really is, underneath its glittering surface:

This overturning and confounding of all human and natural qualities, the fraternization of impossibilities – the *divine* power of money – lies in its character as man's estranged, alienating, and self-disposing species-being (*dem entfremdeten, entäußernden und sich veräußernden Gattungswesen der Menschen*). Money is the alienated ability of mankind. (168)

It is worth pausing to absorb this remarkable conclusion. Money is the "estranged, alienating, and self-disposing species-being" of humankind. What exactly does Marx mean by this statement?

Money, of course, has been around for thousands of years, and certainly existed in societies that predate capitalism. But in such societies it played a limited role in facilitating the exchange of surplus goods between economically self-sufficient units, such as villages or households. The money *system*, however, comes into existence with

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<sup>9</sup> Twenty-three years later, Marx will repeat his citation of the two verses from Shakespeare, and the points he makes on their basis, in his discussion of money in Volume 1 of *Capital*, thereby establishing a close connection between the *Paris Manuscripts* and his later masterwork.

capitalist private property, and is based on the principle that money can be exchanged for anything at all, a principle that extends purchase and sale to all spheres of life. In particular, wage-labor cannot exist until money penetrates the labor process, which, in European history, required the end of serfdom and independent farming as well as the destruction of the guilds. The wage, after all, is the amount of money the capitalist pays in exchange for that part of the worker's time during which she or he is obligated to work. Without a wage, there is no capitalism, and without money there is no wage. Money is also what the capitalist receives in exchange for the products he or she sells as well as the means of payment for the raw materials, machines, buildings, and labor required to continue and expand production. To risk one more metaphor, money is the blood that runs through the veins of modern private property at each stage of its cycle of life.

As the universal medium of exchange, the medium convertible into anything at all, money represents all of the wealth produced by labor. In so doing, it expresses the universal character of the alienation that originally appears in the labor process. As conscious, creative, transformative activity, labor is what distinguishes people from other animals; it is their species-being. But human species-being is not something given once and for all. It is enacted in ongoing fashion in the complex network of relationships that connect people with one another through the act of transforming nature and reproducing the material conditions necessary for their existence. Thus labor is universal in two senses. On the one hand, it connects all members of the species through the productive process, including past generations who have handed down the techniques and results of their labor to the current generation. On the other hand, labor transforms the external world the species inhabits. If all labor is universal in these two senses, then what happens to the universality of alienated labor? The answer, of course, is that it is alienated. Within the context of capitalist society, that estranged universality takes the form of money.

The universality of social labor (human species-being) under the rule of private property appears as money. In money, human "ability" is detached from the workers in whom it originates, and made available to anyone who has the requisite price. The exchange of money takes place in the same network of relationships through which labor attains its universal character. But since the exchange of money "compounds and confounds" all powers and qualities, since it results in a world turned upside down, it is human species-being as "estranged, alienating, and self-disposing." The metaphors for money that Marx interprets along with the ones he originates in his commentary on Goethe and Shakespeare – universal bond and separating agent, galvano-chemical power of society, visible god, pimp, and whore – are merely different ways of characterizing human species-being under the alienating conditions of capitalist production.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of Marx's conclusion. By identifying money as the alienated and alienating expression of human species-being, Marx has demonstrated the way in which the original alienation of the labor process is communicated to other spheres of social existence. He has identified the manner in which alienated labor serves as the root of all other forms of alienation, without reductively reabsorbing them back into itself. The alienation of the work process shapes every sphere of society in which money is a significant factor, which means, with the generalization of commodity exchange, every social sphere without qualification. But the particular form

alienation takes beyond the labor process is determined by the specific structures and processes of the sphere of society that is at issue in each case.

It is a relatively easy task to demonstrate the role money plays in each of the eight forms of alienation beyond the labor process that Marx discusses in the *Manuscripts*. 1) The alienation of workers from the natural world as transformed by their own labor results from the fact that the possessors of capital – which of course takes the form of money – determine the purposes served by production, and so the way in which the natural world is altered, and also by the fact that, because of the restricted character of the wage, workers lack the money necessary to purchase their own finest creations. 2) The alienation of the worker from his domestic life is a direct effect of the worker's need to sell his labor for a wage. For it is the worker's alienation from his essential life activity in wage-labor that makes recourse to the physical satisfactions of the domestic sphere a purely animal affair. 3) The alienation of the capitalist as the personification of Capital follows from the necessity to maximize monetary profits at all costs, to drive wages down to a minimum, and to best rival capitalists in the competitive struggle. 4) The alienation of men and women from one another is a result of male treatment of women as objects of possession. The paradigmatic example of this is the use of the prostitute, which is an outright matter of purchase and sale. But, even in the case of marriage, the husband's possession of the body of his wife is made possible by her economic dependency on him. Such treatment would be ineffectual if women were able to support themselves through a wage equal to that of men, or an equivalent transfer payment from the state. 5) The senses are alienated by the substitution of simple possession and immediate use for relations in which their objects evoke and develop the human powers corresponding to the related sense. But possession and immediate use – which Marx calls “the sense of having” – occur by means of purchase and sale. 6) Philosophy and science are alienated, both internally and from one another, because science is subject to the imperative of profit maximization through its incorporation into industry, while the exclusion of philosophy from the production process and its pursuit of profit results in its retreat to the sphere of academic speculation. 7) Consumer needs are alienated through the incitement and manipulation of phantasy in the interest of selling commodities. 8) The defense by political economy of purchase and sale in the service of self-interest detaches it from any positive relation to ethics, while the separation of ethics from the realm of purchase and sale empties its precepts of all practical significance.

In indicating the role of money in each of the eight examples, there is no attempt to deny that the form of alienation concerned has its own, unique characteristics. Male possession of women obviously involves psychological phenomena, forms of behavior, and modes of subjugation quite different than those involved in the conduct of science within the context of private industry. The expression of alienation in each of the eight spheres possesses a *relative autonomy* that would need to be taken into account by any movement dedicated to human emancipation. The liberation of women, the transcendence of consumerism, and the establishment of sustainable relations between the human species and the transformed natural environment are not automatically assured by the successful struggle of workers at the point of production, or by workers' conquest of the state. The point remains, however, that emancipation in any of the eight spheres, or with respect to any other form of alienation, is impossible as long as labor remains subordinated to the wage and the self-expansion of capital. According to Marx, that is the

origin, the root, the enduring source of alienated and alienating species-being as it manifests itself in all social spheres. This is Marx's meaning when he asserts in the chapter, "Estranged Labor:"

From the relationship of estranged labor to private property it follows that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*; not that *their* emancipation alone is at stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation – and it contains this, because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and a consequence of this relation. (118)

### Getting Beyond Alienation

In the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx is clear that the transcendence of alienation demands that we dismantle private property by bringing productive resources into common ownership. But he is equally clear that common ownership is not enough to get beyond alienation. Emerging from the system of private property, common ownership is inevitably marked by its origin. As we have already seen, it initially takes the form of a universalization of private property. In "crude communism" all members of society become wage earners, while the community serves as a collective capitalist and paymaster. Because the purpose of such a system is to make it possible for everyone to own the products of labor in accordance with a fixed egalitarian standard, it universalizes private ownership rather than fundamentally transforming it. Under such a system, the "prostitution" involved in private property becomes available to all members of society, who, to repeat an earlier quote, remain "so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it – when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., – in short when it is *used* by us."

It is necessary to break the back of the existing social and economic order if we want to transcend our alienated condition. Since private ownership is the negation (alienation) of human species-being, communism is, in Hegelian terms, "the negation of the negation." But for that reason, it fails to stand on a foundation created by itself and so bears the mark of the world it negates. Marx tells us that communism is "the actual phase necessary for the next step of historical development in the process of human emancipation," but it is not the final phase. He distinguishes between "crude" communism as the universalization of private property and a subsequent stage of development involving the "positive transcendence of private property." In the *Manuscripts*, however, he equivocates about what to call this more advanced stage. In some passages, he continues to refer to it as "communism." But, in others, he suggests that a society that has transcended alienation lies beyond communism entirely. In a passage from the chapter, "Private Property and Communism," Marx writes: "communism is not as such the goal of human development – the form of human society



(*die Gestalt der menschlichen Gesellschaft*).”<sup>10</sup> (146) Unfortunately, the manuscript breaks off at this sentence, leaving us guessing about its meaning. Nevertheless, it is possible to achieve some clarification from a passage that occurs in the chapter, “Needs, Production, and Division of Labor:”

In order to abolish the idea of private property, the idea of communism is completely sufficient. It takes actual communist action to abolish actual private property. History will come to it; and this movement which in theory we already know to be a self-transcending movement, will constitute in actual fact a very severe and protracted process. But we must regard it as a real advance to have gained beforehand a consciousness of the limited character as well as the goal of this historical movement – and a consciousness which reaches out beyond it. (154)

And the paragraph that follows:

When communist artisans associate with one another, theory, propaganda, etc., is their first end. But at the same time, as a result of this association, they acquire a new need – the need for society – and what appears as a means becomes an end. In this practical process the most splendid results are to be observed whenever French socialist workers are seen together. Such things as smoking, drinking, eating, etc., are no longer means of contact or means that bring together. Company, association, and conversation which has society for its end are enough for them; the brotherhood of man is no phrase with them but a fact of life, and the nobility of man shines upon us from their work hardened bodies. (154-55)

We can interpret this paragraph as elaborating upon Marx’s reference in the one that precedes it to a consciousness that reaches out beyond the limited character and goal of the communist movement. In that context, the words “company, association, and conversation” and “the brotherhood of man” would correspond to his assertion, in the passage from “Private Property and Communism,” that “the form of human society,” rather than communism as the abolition of private property, is the goal of historical development.

“Another passage from “Private Property and Communism sheds more light on this conception of “the form of society” as the goal of history:

... *just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him. Activity and enjoyment, both in their content and in their mode of existence, are social: social activity and social enjoyment. The human aspect of nature exists only for social man; for only then does nature exist for him as a bond with man – as his existence for the other and the other’s existence for him – and as the life-element of human reality. Only then does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence. Only here has what is to him his natural existence*

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<sup>10</sup> I have altered the translation slightly. The original German reads, “... *der Kommunismus ist nicht als solcher das Ziel der menschlichen Entwicklung – die Gestalt der menschlichen Gesellschaft.*”

become his *human* existence, and nature become man for him. Thus *society* is the complete unity of man with nature – the true resurrection of nature – the consistent naturalism of man and the consistent humanism of nature. (137)

Let us try to fit this passage into Marx's view of the place of humankind in nature. The human species is a product of nature and remains within it, in spite of the fact that it is conscious in a way other natural entities are not. Human consciousness is a natural capacity both because it is directed to natural, sensuous objects (including the species itself), and because it belongs to an objective, embodied entity dependent upon the world of nature outside of it. The being who possesses such consciousness does not exist by itself. It is part of a network of relations that ultimately extends to all others of its kind, including those who are dead and those yet to be born. Society is a human product since it has no existence apart from the relations that connect human beings to one another, and human beings are a social product since they have no identity or reality apart from the relations that define them. Just as the species never leaves nature behind, so do the social relations that connect the members of the species retain their natural character. They are relations between embodied entities who must satisfy their material needs through the process of production. Under the rule of private property, every aspect of this complex interconnection between nature and humanity is alienated; the relations between one human being and another, between humans and the objects they produce, between humans and external nature, and between humans and their needs. In such a state, nature remains the basis of social existence but in a perverted or inverted way, which is to say that it serves as the foundation for an inhuman form of life. The transcendence of alienation would humanize what is currently inhuman – our natural foundation as transformed by labor as well as our relationships with one another. Only then would humankind be unified with nature, and nature "resurrected" in the humanized form of a non-alienated society. It is likely that this is what Marx means when he says that the goal of history is, not communism, but "the form of society." But what, exactly, would that look like?

The best way of answering this question is to refer back to our analysis of the four levels of human need. A society beyond alienation would obviously have to make available to its members 1) the objects necessary for physical survival (food, shelter, clothing, and so on), and 2) the objects necessary for living at the current stage of social and economic development (means of communication, transportation, etc.). Our relationship to objects of both kinds is necessarily one of use. The purpose of bringing productive resources into social ownership is first of all to assure production of the goods required for satisfying needs of the first two levels, and to distribute those goods to all members of society. This is the task of "crude communism," which Marx does not disparage, since he regards it as a necessary transitional stage in the process of overcoming alienation. Once needs of the first two levels are satisfied, it becomes possible to move from mere utility to what Marx calls "human use." This would occur primarily on the third and fourth levels of need. There the purpose of social production and distribution is 3) to create the material infrastructure and the free time – through increasing labor productivity and a reduction in the working day – necessary for engaging in a full range of social relationships, and 4) for developing human talents and sensibilities. On these levels, our relation to objects is no longer that of crude utility or

sheer possession, but rather a relation to the objective means of human flourishing. While the purpose of the production and distribution of objects under the rule of private property is to maximize profit as an end-in-itself, their purpose in a society beyond alienation is to serve the full unfolding of the individual as well as the species.

In the *Paris Manuscripts*, Marx's discussion of the nature of a society beyond alienation remains on a high plane of generality. He does not discuss the concrete institutional arrangements that would make such a society possible, and his later writings are also sparing in this respect. He once said that he was not in the business of "writing recipes for the cook shops of the future," thereby contrasting himself with such "utopian socialists" as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier. He had defensible reasons for his reticence. The new society, should it materialize, is bound to be the outcome of a complicated historical process that cannot be anticipated in detail. And, in any event, its shape will be defined by those generations actually in a position to create it. But the period in which Marx's reticence made sense is now past. After the collapse or conversion of the crude communist regimes established in the twentieth century, after the end of that "very severe and protracted process," the need for institutional details is pressing. It is now up to those to provide them who remain inspired by the vision of a society beyond alienation that Marx originally developed in the *Paris Manuscripts*.