

# THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION IN MARX

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In the past few decades, the concept of alienation has increasingly occupied a forefront in sociological and philosophical interest. This is mainly due to the growing awareness and concern over the negative and unexpected consequences of rapid scientific and industrial progress in contemporary life. Among Marxist scholars, discussions have centered on the meaning and significance of alienation in the context of the writings of Karl Marx. These debates have been sparked by the posthumous publication of some of the early works of Marx, notably the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, which were written in Paris when he was 26 years old. An important issue has been the question of whether there is any continuity or break in the ideas of the young and the old Marx. This paper examines Marx's use of the concept of alienation in his socio-economic and philosophic analysis, how it was employed in some of his later works and how useful it is in understanding problems of present industrial society.

## II

The philosophical origins of the concept of alienation can be traced back to antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Marx's use of the term, however, can be traced directly to the writings of G.W.F. Hegel and Ludwig Feuerbach. Hegel, in his philosophical analysis of the mind, uses the term *entfremdung* or estrangement in two different ways.<sup>2</sup> In one sense, it refers to "a separation or discordant relation" such as that between one's actual condition and essential nature or between the individual and the social substance. In another sense, it means "a surrender or sacrifice of particularity and wilfulness, in connection with the overcoming of alienation and the re-attainment of unity." Hegel speaks of the Absolute Spirit (or Mind or Idea or God) as alienated or estranged from himself. The empirical world or nature is but a manifestation or creation of the absolute spirit. The absolute spirit, however, does not recognize the external world or nature as its own, hence is alienated from himself. Within this context, man is the Absolute in

the process of de-alienation.<sup>3</sup> The development of history is viewed as the constant growth of man's knowledge of the absolute, and at the same time the development of self-knowledge of the absolute which, through the finite mind (man) becomes self-aware and thus transcends or overcomes its self-alienation.

Hegel also deals with human self-alienation, i.e., man's separation from his human essence. As Marx interprets it:

For Hegel, the human essence man, is the same as self-consciousness. All alienation of man's essence is therefore nothing but the alienation of self-consciousness. The alienation of self-consciousness is not regarded as the expression of the real alienation of man's essence reflected in knowledge and thought. The real alienation (or the one that appears to be real) in its inner concealed essence that has first been brought to the light by philosophy is nothing but the appearance of the alienation of the real human essence, self-consciousness . . . .<sup>4</sup>

Feuerbach, a student of Hegel, applied the latter's concept of alienation in his study of Christianity (*Das Wesen des Christentums*, 1841).<sup>5</sup> Unlike Hegel, Feuerbach treated alienation as no longer a phenomenon occurring only in the speculative (philosophical and theological) realm but in man's material existence or his relation to nature. He argued that religion, particularly Christianity, was actually man's awareness of his own essence (species being) projected beyond himself. Man is not the self-alienated Absolute Spirit (or God) but God is self-alienated man. The characteristics and powers attributed to God were actually man's own perfect nature externalized. Man creates God in his image and makes God creator of this world.<sup>6</sup> Religion is thus a form of man's self-alienation, making him exist in a world of illusion and preventing him from fulfilling his essence or species being. Feuerbach urged that the alienation of religion must be destroyed to enable man to live his natural species being. By a process of inversion of Hegel's theory, Feuerbach thus shifts from theology to anthropology. His anthropology, however, remained abstractly conceived, dealing with man's essence rather than actual historical development.

Marx praised Feuerbach's inversion of Hegel's analysis of alienation and his rationalist materialism but considered it still too abstract for purposes of criticizing social conditions. Marx

makes a break with both Hegel and Feuerbach by applying their philosophical concept of alienation in the study of man's historical development as a living, acting social being. This was in line with his criticism that "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."<sup>7</sup>

Marx treats man's alienation as a historically transient problem which can be transcended with the attainment of communism. Alienation is the consequence of the development of the capitalist mode of production which has transformed man's labor, conceived by Marx as an essentially self-fulfilling and social activity, into an onerous and dehumanizing existence. Industrial production, with its division of labor, specialization of functions and intense competition, results in the artificial segmentation of the whole human nature and relations into separate and compartmentalized aspects. Marx thus speaks of individuals as being separated from his work or life activity, from his product or the material world, from his fellowmen and from his species being. Consequently, the alienated individual becomes a mere "abstraction." Abstraction is used by Marx to refer to any factor which appears isolated from the social whole.<sup>8</sup> Alienation, therefore, represents a certain defect in human existence and a distortion of human nature.

As a philosophical concept, Marx uses alienation as a framework for viewing the totality of human relationships in its various aspects or manifestations -- economic, social, political as well as moral. It becomes an analytic tool for examining the empirical world.

Marx conflates two senses of alienation using the German words *entfremdung* and *entausserung*. *Entfremdung* is variously translated as estrangement or alienation in the sense of two individuals being alienated or someone's affection being alienated. *Entausserung* is often used to refer to the legal-commercial meaning of alienation as sale, transference, divestiture or renunciation of property as well as the sense of making something external to oneself.<sup>9</sup> Marx tends to use both terms interchangeably in highlighting various aspects of alienation. The diversity of meaning for both terms in German usage has undoubtedly resulted in differences of translation of Marx's works in English.<sup>10</sup>

Marx's views of alienation are extensively elucidated in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Although he tended to rarely use the term in his later writings, it, nevertheless, remained an important theme in his later works — *Capital* — and in the more recently published *The Grundrisse*. In Marx's view, the source of all human alienation is alienated or estranged labor from which other forms of alienation, whether social, political or religious may be understood. Marx explains what constitutes the alienation of labor:

First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker, therefore, only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is, therefore, not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced* labor. It is, therefore, not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it . . . . Lastly, the external character of labor for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs not to himself, but to another . . . it is the loss of his self.<sup>11</sup>

Marx goes on to explain four characteristics or aspects of alienated labor which correspond to four broad relations encompassing the whole of human existence in a capitalist society. These are man's relations to his product, to his productive activity, to his species being and to other men. Marx describes man's relation to the product of his labor as "an alien object exercising power over him. This relation is, at the same time, the relation to the sensuous external world, to the objects of nature, as an alien world inimically opposed to him."<sup>12</sup> Marx refers to this as "estrangement of the thing."

The worker's products are alien to him in the sense that he does not recognize them as his own. He has knowledge or control of what becomes of his products. This is because he has no part in deciding various aspects of the production process — planning the product according to needs, deciding on the quality and quantity to be produced, marketing, etc. The worker must thus constantly adjust to the requirements and demands of his products that are determined for him by others. Indeed, the objects that

workers produce often create new wants among consumers preceding the need that people feel for such products or resulting in synthetic, artificial needs. As both producer and consumer, the worker is confronted by the product of his labor as "an alien object exercising power over him."

A direct consequence of man's alienation from his product is his alienation from nature. Marx explains that nature — over the "sensuous external world" — provides the raw materials on which man's labor or productive activity is realized. Nature, therefore, provides the worker with the means of life in two senses. First, labor cannot exist without the natural objects on which to operate. Secondly, nature provides "the means for the physical subsistence of the *worker* himself." Because the worker's products are alien to him, i.e., he does not recognize them as his own, nature as the object of his products also becomes alienated or estranged from him. Marx puts it thus:

... the more the worker by his labor *appropriates* the external world, hence sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of *means of life* in a double manner: first, in that the sensuous external world more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labor -- to be his labor's *means of life*; and secondly, in that it more and more ceases to be *means of life* in the immediate sense, means for the physical subsistence of the worker.<sup>13</sup>

In discussing the second aspect of alienated labor, i.e., man's relation to his productive activity, Marx shows the problem of self-estrangement, or man's alienation from himself. The worker's activity is an alien activity, one that emasculates his physical and mental energies, his personal life, without offering him any satisfaction in and of itself but only by "the act of selling it to someone else."<sup>14</sup> The latter, of course, refers to the capitalist who controls the process of production, the conditions of work and the wages of the worker. The worker's activity is "turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him."<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the repetitive tasks characteristic of modern productive activity practically reduces man to a living appendage of the machine. It delimits the necessary functioning of man's faculties and stunts the full development of his potential. What takes place is the "retrogression of man's powers,"<sup>16</sup> reducing man to the status of a robot, depriving him of his human essence and resulting

in what Marx has referred to as the "loss of his self." A further consequence of man's relation to his productive activity is the reversal of his human and animal functions. Marx writes:

. . . man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his function – eating, drinking, procreating, or, at most, in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.

Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But abstractly taken, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions.<sup>17</sup>

For Marx, what distinguishes man and elevates him from the level of animals is his life activity, i.e., creative, productive activity. Since he has lost control over this activity in capitalist society, his free existence is reduced to the performance of animal functions, which are simply those biological functions necessary to his survival. It is in this context that the capitalist mode of production dehumanizes in both physical and spiritual terms.

The third aspect of alienated labor concerns man's relation to his species being. This can be deduced from the first two characteristics of alienated labor. Marx borrowed the concept of "species being" (*Gattungswesen*) from Feuerbach. Marx uses species being to describe man's essential characteristics, powers and needs that set him apart from other living, natural beings. He characterizes man as a species being by his will, consciousness and universality, which he brings to bear on his activity. These characteristics can be seen in the following passages from his *Manuscripts*:

Man is a species being not only because in practice and in theory, he adopts the species as his object (his own as well as those of other things) but . . . also because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being.

. . . The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic body* – both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man's *inorganic body* – nature, that is, in so far as it is not itself the human body. Man *lives* on nature – means that nature is his *body* with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he

is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.<sup>18</sup>

Estranged or alienated labor alienates man from his product, hence from nature and from himself in his life or productive activity. It also "estranges the species from man" and "changes for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life."<sup>19</sup> As a member of the human species, man is actively engaged in conscious, free productive activity not merely for the satisfaction of his own individual needs or for the maintenance of his physical existence but as a way of life. He freely appropriates or utilizes objects of nature constructively in association with other men above and beyond his physical needs, creating an infinitive range of objects "in accordance with the laws of beauty." It is in his work or productive activity — which Marx calls "active species life" — that man leaves his mark as a unique species. Through this activity nature appears as man's "work and his reality," that is, the fulfillment of his human faculties. Man's estrangement from his species being is, therefore, directly related to the object of labor as the objectification of man's species life. In Marx's words:

. . . The object of labor is . . . the *objectification of man's species life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created. In tearing away man from the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him, his *species life*, his real objectively as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him.<sup>20</sup>

Alienated labor changes the relationship between man and his life activity. In losing control over his product and the productive process, man experiences the estrangement of his species life from his individual life, his essential (species being) becomes a "mere means to his existence." Marx emphasizes that in becoming alienated from his species being, man also loses his advantages over animals. Species man has more needs and powers, e.g., will and consciousness, compared with animals. Animals produce only their immediate physical needs while man is able to produce or create objects which he does not immediately need: "An animal produces only itself while man reproduces the whole of nature . . . ." <sup>21</sup> In this sense, man's ties or relationships with

nature is much more complex than that of animals. These advantages that man has over animals are, however, taken away with the institution of private property and the capitalist mode of production. Man's freedom to take whatever natural objects he needs for his life activity becomes dependent on the consent of other men (i.e. property owners); his knowledge and creative skills become subject to control by other capitalists. In brief, alienated or estranged labor in capitalism transforms "man's *species being*, both nature and his spiritual species property, into a being alien to him, into a means to his *individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual essence, his *human being*." <sup>22</sup>

It may be noted that the alienation of man from his species being not merely represents a facet of the totality of human alienation but also incorporates other aspects of it, i.e., in his product, in his activity or work and other men, viewing their interrelationships from a different perspective. It illustrates Marx's use of alienation in analyzing part/whole relationships.

Man's alienation from his species being leads to the fourth characteristic of alienated labor, i.e., man becomes alienated from his fellowmen. Marx observes:

An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species being is the *estrangement of man from man*. When man confronts himself, he confronts the *other man*. What applies to a man's relation to his work, to the product of his labor and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's labor and object of labor. <sup>23</sup>

Under this aspect of alienation, the worker's alienation to his product and activity is linked to social alienation. This is particularly evident in the relationship between the worker with other workers, with the owner of his product, i.e., the capitalist as well as the landlord. Because of the competitive nature of modern industrial society, the worker is confronted with the problem of working for physical survival in the same manner that other workers are. Competition for jobs, promotion, pay, etc., leads to confrontation among workers, to the estrangement or alienation of man from other men. The worker no longer appropriates nature (in his productive activity) in association and



cooperation with his fellow men but in competition with and even in opposition to each other.

Because the worker is alienated from his product, he confronts the latter as an alien object, as something that is no longer his but as belonging to some other man. As such, he experiences no pleasure or fulfillment in his work activity. Marx writes: "If the worker's activity is torment to him, to another it must be *delight* and his life's joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man."<sup>24</sup>

The alien power dominating the worker is obviously the capitalist. The worker's product is, therefore, an essential embodiment of the confrontation between the worker and the capitalist because of their diametrically opposing interests. It is quite obvious that in this aspect of Marx's discussion lies the foundation of his subsequent writings on the concept of the inherent antagonisms and inevitable struggle between the social classes. Marx explains further the alienated relations between the capitalist and the worker:

... man's relation to himself only becomes for him *objective* and actual through his relation to the other man. Thus, if the product of his labor, his labor *objectified*, is for him an *alien*, hostile, powerful object independent of him, than his position towards it is such that someone else is master of this object, someone who is alien, hostile, powerful, and independent of him. If his own activity is to him related as an unfree activity, then he is related to it as an activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion, the yoke of another man.<sup>25</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx illustrates further the social alienation of man in the relationship between the worker and the landlord who has also become a capitalist. The worker's relation to his dwelling parallels the estranged relationship between the worker and his product; his relationship with the owner of his product, i.e., the capitalist. Marx compares the worker's home to a "cave" — "an alien habitation which can be withdrawn from him any day, a place from which if he does not pay he can be thrown out."<sup>26</sup> This only goes to show that as in other aspects of capitalism, "the worker's need carries no title to use what his own labor has produced . . ." <sup>27</sup>

Marx is not merely concerned with the problem of alienation of the worker. He also points out that capitalists are as much alienated as the worker. He emphasizes:

First, it has to be acted that everything which appears in the worker as an *activity of alienation, of estrangement*, appears in the non-worker as a *state of alienation, of estrangement*.

Secondly, that the worker's *real, practical attitude* in production and to the product (as a state of mind) appears in the non-worker confronting him as a *theoretical attitude*.

Thirdly, the non-worker does everything against the worker which the worker does against himself; but he does not do against himself what he does against the worker.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, Marx was unable to elaborate on this point any further as the manuscript on *Estranged Labor* breaks off at this point. Nevertheless, one can point to practical examples of the capitalist's self-alienation. In the first place, the capitalist is not directly engaged in the worker's life activity which for Marx is the hallmark of species man. The capitalist merely views the object of the worker's labor as something to sell for profit or gain. He is indifferent to the ends for which these products will be used. The most glaring example would be the capitalists of the munitions industry as well as chemical industries used for biological warfare.

While it is true that unlike the worker the capitalist is not dominated by his products, he is subject to the same socio-economic conditions which to a large extent determine their production and exchange. The capitalist is forced to plan and sell his products according to market demands and price conditions rather than human needs. However, he can also manipulate consumer needs and tastes creating artificial, synthetic needs for his products by means of advertising, often resorting to false information. These tend to show that while capitalists may not be physically dehumanized as the worker, they are just as spiritually dehumanized, hence alienated from their species being and from their fellowmen. Marx describes the capitalist's alienation from other men in the following words:

. . . no eunuch flatters his despot more basely or uses more despicable means to stimulate his dulled capacity for pleasure in order

to sneak a favor for himself than does the industrial eunuch – the producer – in order to sneak a favor for himself a few pennies – in order to charm the golden birds out of the pockets of his dearly beloved neighbors in Christ. He puts himself at the service of the other's most depraved fancies, plays the pimp between him and his need, excites in him morbid appetites, lies in wait for each of his weaknesses – all so that he can then demand the cash for his service of love . . . .<sup>29</sup>

The competition for profit among capitalists also leads to the mindless exploitation of natural resources. One need hardly refer to the current problems of environmental pollution, the looming shortage of certain irreplaceable resources such as natural gas and oil, that threaten human survival, as destructive consequences of the intense competition for production. All of these tend to attest to the capitalist's social alienation. He may be materially comfortable in his alienation in that he appropriates the worker's products but he is just as spiritually dehumanized as the worker.

Marx concludes his discussion on the four manifestations of estranged or alienated labor by referring to private property as "the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of alienated labor, of the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself."<sup>30</sup> Wages are also considered as identical to private property and a direct consequence of estranged labor. Private property for Marx is the "material, summary expression of alienated labor" embracing both "the relation of *the worker to work and to the product of his labor and to the non-worker*, and the relation of the *non-worker* to the worker and to the *product of his labor*."<sup>31</sup>

Marx discusses other economic categories such as division of labor, exchange and money as embodiment of alienated human relations arising out of the existence of alienated labor and private property. He asserts that the division of labor is "the economic expression of the *social character of labor* within estrangement."<sup>32</sup> Both the division of labor and exchange rest on private property and, therefore, are "*perceptively alienated* expressions of human *activity* and of *essential human power* as a *species activity and power*."<sup>33</sup> Money as the medium of exchange represents private property and all the alienated relations that the latter symbolizes. Marx puts it:

By possessing the property of buying everything, by possessing the property of appropriating all objects, *money* is thus the *object* of eminent possession. The universality of its *property* is the omnipotence of its being. It, therefore, functions as almighty being. Money is the *pimp* between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life. But that *which* mediates *my* life for me also *mediates* the existence of other people *for me*. For me it is the *other* person.<sup>34</sup>

It follows that the solution to the problem of human alienation involves the abolition of private property. This would lead to the emancipation of workers and society in general as explained in the following:

... 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 consequence of this relation.<sup>35</sup>

Such political emancipation of the workers would be attained under communism. Communism for Marx is the positive expression of annulled private property which is also the annulment of transcendence of human alienation. Marx stressed that his idea of communism or transcendence of human alienation. Marx stressed that his idea of communism differed from those of Babeuf, Proudhon, Cabet or Villegardelle. He considers their ideas as intermediary stages towards the attainment of true communism. Comparing these conceptions of communism with his own, Marx discusses three types of communism.<sup>36</sup> The first type he calls crude communism. It seeks to destroy all private property that cannot be possessed by all, wants to do away with talent and to replace marriage with the idea of the community of women. For Marx, this type of communism still is far from solving the problem of alienation since it is ruled by envy and destroys the most natural relationship of human being to human being, i.e., between man and woman. The second type is political communism. It seeks to abolish the state but still retains substantial private property and hence is still afflicted with the estrangement of man from man. True communism for Marx is more comprehensive than the first two. It is —

... the *positive* transcendence of *private property*, as *human self-estrangement*, and, therefore, as the real *appropriation of the human* essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a *social* being -- a return become conscious, and accomplished within the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the *genuine* resolution of the conflict between man and woman -- the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the species . . . .<sup>37</sup>

Communism would be the culmination of the historical movement from man's alienated condition back to an unalienated but not primitive condition. It is the "necessary pattern and dynamic principles of the immediate future" but not the goal of human development as such.<sup>38</sup> For Marx the ultimate goal of human development is the restructuring of alienated society to an unalienated form where man's needs, wants and activities will no longer be determined for him by others who are alien and hostile to him. Rather, man would be free to determine for himself, in association and cooperation with other men, his own needs and activities. In all his productive, creative activity man would be acting and thinking as a social human being relating his own senses, his individual faculties, creativity and needs with those of other men in such a way that "Activity and mind both in their content and their mode of existence are social: social activity and social mind."<sup>39</sup> Nature would no longer be appropriated for man's own egoistic needs and interests but for society as a whole. In communism will be accomplished the harmonious relationship of man's individuality with his society. Marx conceives communist society as "the unity of being of man with nature -- the true resurrection of nature -- the naturalism of man and the humanism of nature both brought to fulfillment."<sup>40</sup>

Marx explains that communism as the positive transcendence of private property would also be the positive transcendence of all estrangement, "the return of man from religion, family, state, etc. to his *human*, i.e., *social*, existence." This is because while religious estrangement "occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of men's inner life," economic estrangement is "that of real life."<sup>41</sup> The transcendence of economic estrangement, therefore, embraces both aspects of human alienation.

## III

The posthumous publication of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* has sparked a great deal of controversy as to the importance of his theory of alienation. Some writers have used it to support the thesis that there is a break between the romantic-philosophical humanism of the young Marx and the revolutionary writings of the old Marx. The question of why Marx did not publish this important work seems to underlie this controversy.

Lewis Feuer, for example, argues that Marx and Engels discarded the concept of alienation in their mature writings as it was "a romantic concept with a preponderantly sexual connotation."<sup>42</sup> He attributes Engels' reluctance to publish the early writings of Marx to embarrassment "because he was being reminded as an old man of youthful writings which were filled with sexual and romantic language and yearnings . . . ."<sup>43</sup> For Feuer, there are two Marxes, the young Marx preoccupied with the romantic-philosophical concept of alienation and the old Marx concerned with economic and political problems who made the concept of class struggle central to his writings. Unfortunately, Feuer cites passages out of context from the early writings of Marx to support his position. He does not seem to have grasped the centrality of the concept of alienated labor in the *Manuscripts*, and as it is later used in *Capital*, hence his misunderstanding of alienation as having preponderantly sexual connotation.

The truth is that Marx and Engels never rejected their early writings though they acknowledged some of their formal shortcomings. Marx and Engels had intended their early works to be published but circumstances prevented them from achieving this aim.<sup>44</sup> As Marx explained in his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, first published in 1859, the manuscript of *The German Ideology* (1846) was not published because "altered circumstances did not allow of its being printed. We abandoned the manuscript to the gnawing criticism of the mice all the more willingly as we had achieved our main purpose — self-clarification."<sup>45</sup>

In the theory of alienation, the foundation of Marx's later writings, e.g., his critique of capitalism and his theory of communism, have been laid down. It is true that the concept appears less frequently in *Capital*, but it nevertheless remains an important underlying theme. The idea of alienation was not so much discarded as it has been superseded, developed, and clarified in a more objective and scientific manner. The recent publication of Marx's thousand-page-manuscripts -- the *Grundrisse der kritik der politischen ekonomie* (written in 1857-1858) -- which forms the "centerpiece" of his thought tends to support this view.<sup>46</sup> The *Grundrisse* contains Marx's plans for his volumes on *Capital*. It continues the basic theme of alienation which Marx had written about in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. One finds such topics in the *Grundrisse* as "Money as a Symbol of Alienation in Capitalist Society;" "Alienation, Social Relationships and Free Individuality;" "Alienated Labor and Capital;" "Property as the Right to Alien Labor"<sup>47</sup> -- all practically reproductions of what can be found in the *Manuscripts* but devoid of much of their earlier metaphysical overtones. The significance of the *Grundrisse* in Marx's ideas can hardly be overlooked. Marx's failure to publish it during his lifetime is attributed to his desire to carefully edit it well since it was for him "the result of fifteen years of research, thus the best period of [my] life . . ." and that "this work upholds for the first time in scientific manner an important conception of relationships in society."<sup>48</sup> Personal problems prevented him from achieving this goal during his lifetime.

Marx's concept of alienation is essential to an understanding of his more mature theories. Bertel Ollman has said: "Grasping 'labor' whenever it appears in his writings as 'alienated labor' in its full multi-dimensional sense is the key to understanding Marx's economic theories."<sup>49</sup> This does not mean, however, that the "core of the philosophy developed by the young Marx was never changed . . .," as Erich Fromm argues.<sup>50</sup> To agree with such a view would be to deny the historical development of Marx's thoughts and philosophy in the context of the changing socio-economic conditions of his lifetime. The importance of Marx's early works has to be judged from the point-of-view of his more mature writings. Marx seemed to have this in mind when

he dissuaded Wilhelm Liebnicht in 1871 from reprinting some of his early essays and convinced the latter instead that he "must reprint rather long sections from *Capital*." <sup>51</sup>

A brief survey of Marx's use of the concept of alienation in his subsequent works can give some idea of the development of his thought. In *The Holy Family* (1844-45), Marx uses the concept of alienation as the basis of his discussion of the antagonism between the social classes. He had touched on this problem in the *Manuscripts*, chiefly in the relationship between the worker and the capitalist as well as the landlord. In his later works, Marx's doctrine of class struggle and the inevitable victory of the proletariat, which was central to his later economic theory, has already become an important theme. He explained in *The Holy Family* that the class struggle is rooted in the same condition of human self-alienation of the possessing class and the proletariat as expressed in private property. <sup>52</sup> This doctrine is elaborated in greater detail, and in its historical context, by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* (1845-46). <sup>53</sup> Although the concept of alienation or estrangement hardly appears in this work, it remains an important theme in the discussion of the division of labor, both mental and material labor, the productive process and relations among individuals. Alienation is expressed, for instance, in the following passage:

... the productive forces appear as a world for themselves, quite independent of and divorced from the individuals, alongside the individuals: the reason for this is that individuals, whose forces they are, exist, split up and in opposition to one another, whilst, on the other hand, these forces are only real forces in the intercourse and association of these individuals. . . . <sup>54</sup>

*The German Ideology* was not published until 1932.

The idea of labor as embodying alienated social relations is further developed in Marx's lectures on *Wage, Labor and Capital*, published in 1849. <sup>55</sup> Alienation as a concept is not also used but the discussion of worker-capitalist relations is basically similar with that of alienation labor in the *Manuscripts*. The worker's activity, his labor power, is a commodity that he sells to the capitalist, hence, the same alienated and antagonistic relations are expressed, i.e., the slavery of the worker and the domination



of the capitalist. Such alienated relations would be transcended only with the historical achievement of a revolution by the proletariat.

The fully developed economic theory of Marx in *Capital*, continues the same basic themes of alienated relations. This can be seen in Marx's discussion of such entities as labor, labor power, value relations, surplus value, profit, interest, money, capital, etc. These are treated by Marx not simply as things but as human relations expressed as things. Speaking of capital, for example, Marx argues:

Capital is not a thing. It is a definite interrelation belonging to a definite historical formation of society . . . . Capital signifies the means of production monopolized by a certain part of society, the products and material requirements of labor made independent of labor-power in living human beings and antagonistic to them, and personified in capital by the antagonism. Capital means not merely the products of the laborers made independent of them and turned into social powers, the products turned into rulers and buyers of their own products, but also the forces and social relations — forms of this labor — which antagonize their products . . . .<sup>56</sup>

The above quotation is clearly reminiscent of Marx's discussion of alienated labor and capital in his *Manuscripts*. As defined above, capital embodies the worker's alienation from his product, i.e., "the products of the laborers made independent of them and turned into social powers . . . ." It also expresses the worker's alienation from his fellowmen, i.e., capitalists and from his species being or human essence.

Alienation also appears in *Capital*, in Marx's discussion of the "fetishism of commodities." It expresses not only the worker's alienation from his products but also the alienation of the capitalist from the worker and from his human essence. Both capitalist and workers worship commodities as an outside, mysterious power, as things that have become personified and which shape their social relations. As Marx explains it:

A commodity is, therefore, a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of man's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of the labor;

because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor. This is the reason why the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses . . . . In order, therefore, to find an analogy, we must have recourse to the mist-enveloped regions of the religious world. In that world the productions of the human brain appear as independent beings endowed with life, and entering into relation both with one another and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. This [I] call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is, therefore, inseparable from the production of commodities.<sup>57</sup>

There are many other passages where Marx uses the idea of alienation in his *Capital*. For purposes of this paper, the example cited would be sufficient in showing the continuity in Marx's thinking from his earlier writings to his more mature works. To understand Marx's economic theory, his analytical categories must not be viewed simply as representing objects or things but rather as embodying ethical social relationships between individuals.

#### IV

The question may now be raised: Of what value is Marx's concept of alienation? Like any other theory, alienation should be evaluated not on the basis of how true it is but on the criteria of utility. How useful is it in helping us to organize the discrete facts of the real world to understand their interrelationships? Undoubtedly, Marx's concept of alienation has enabled us to have deeper insights into the workings of capitalist, industrial society not only in the context of his own lifetime but in the contemporary world as well. Its comprehensive scope has brought to the forefront social, political and ethical implications of economic relationships and processes. Many of the alienated relations among workers, between workers and capitalists discussed by Marx remain as true at present as they were during his time. The fetishism of commodities is very much a feature of contemporary society as can be seen in unmitigated advertising, in the competition to possess the latest models in cars, appliances, etc.

A criticism that may be directed at Marx is his failure to make a distinction between fact and value in his theory. His con-

ception of human nature as essentially distinguished by its creative self-fulfilling life activity may be cited as lacking empirical basis. Corollary to this is the implication that human beings are essentially rational, acting in harmony with their fellowmen and with nature. It is obvious that men do not always act rationally, that their actions are as much determined by the conditions under which they live as much as by their psychological make-up or "character structure."<sup>58</sup> Viewed in this context, it may be said that Marx's concept of human nature is more essentialist or idealist than empirical. Marx seems to be guilty of the same essentialist position that he had criticized in Feuerbach and Hegel's works. Hence, the validity of the criticism of his failure to make a fact-value distinction. It must be borne in mind, however, that Marx's aim was to help change the world by exposing its defects and highlighting the historical possibilities of the full development of human potentialities in society. Thus, the fact-values dichotomy does not seem to be an appropriate criteria for judging his theory of alienation.

A related criticism is that Marx's analysis of alienation is faulty, hence his predictions are wrong. For instance, Walter Kaufmann argues that Marx's prognosis that alienated relations will become progressively worse, especially in England and the United States, and that a revolution by the proletariat was inevitable has never happened.<sup>59</sup>

It is quite true that the English and American capitalist societies have been able to adopt far-reaching reforms that have greatly alleviated the conditions of the proletariat, and hence, forestalled the predicted revolution. It must be realized, however, that these reforms were probably adopted not in spite of but rather because of Marx. It is very possible, especially in England, where Marx spent many of his productive years, that members of the intellectual and political elite had read his writings. They, perhaps, realized the gravity of the socio-economic conditions that he exposed and were probably convinced by his prophetic vision to adopt the needed reforms. Moreover, the labor or worker's movement that Marx and Engel spearheaded may have been highly instrumental in bringing about reforms. This movement had its counterpart in the United States. Marx's predictions

cannot, therefore, be simply dismissed as wrong. They seem rather to have played the role of a "suicidal prediction." i.e., they may have been correct at the time they were made. But because they became public knowledge, the individuals concerned consciously altered their behavior and relevant conditions. These self-correcting changes which Marx failed to foresee thus falsified his predictions.

Kaufmann's other criticism is that Marx's vision of unalienated society has not been achieved in any communist society. To begin with, there is at present no existing communist society according to Marx's conception in his theory of alienation. Existing Marxist societies call themselves socialist systems and justify their existence as mere transition towards Marxian communism. The form or organization that communist society would take was never made clear by Marx.

What Marx, perhaps, failed to foresee is the inevitable development of a new type of elite and the centralization and bureaucratization of state power after the victory of the workers' revolution. This is the prevailing situation among the socialist countries. Alienation has not ceased in these societies. Individuals are still forced to work within realm of necessity, i.e., to earn a living, rather than within the realm of freedom, i.e., to work according to his capabilities in cooperation with others for his own and others' welfare as Marx had envisioned in communist society. Their work activity is still determined for them by a separate class, an elite often possessing interests that are different from the workers. Socialist societies have thus far not achieved the classless communism. Alienated labor still exists in these societies, such as the Soviet Union. As Marcuse describes it:

By definition, there is no alienated labor in Soviet Society because production is nationalized. But nationalization does not preclude alienation. The latter prevails as long as (socially necessary) labor time is the measure of social wealth.<sup>60</sup>

What Marcuse observed seems to be a common characteristic of present socialist states. It is still short of Marx's vision of unalienated productive relations in communist society. Where the socially necessary labor time "will be measured by the require-

ments of the social individual” and “social productivity will grow rapidly that, although production is reckoned with a view to the wealth of all, the disposable time of all will increase . . . .” Marx goes on to assert:

. . . real wealth is the developed productive force of all individuals. It is no longer the labor time but the disposable time which is the measure of wealth. Labor time as the measurement of wealth implies that wealth is founded on poverty, and that disposable time exists in and through opposition to surplus labor time; it implies that all an individual's time is working time and degrades him to the level of a mere worker, and as an instrument of labor. This is why the most developed machinery forces the worker to work longer hours than the savage does, or than the laborer himself when he only had the simplest and most primitive tools to work with.<sup>61</sup>

To be sure, there are conscious attempts among these countries to eliminate alienated labor relations. This can be seen in the factory communes in Yugoslavia where workers are allowed to participate in the determination of their productive activity. It is also evident in the radical experiments in Chinese enterprises to permit workers' brigades to periodically take over the entrepreneurial functions. This gives workers a sense of participation in and identification with the productive process. To some extent, this approaches Marx's ideal of the “free development of each” as the “condition for the development of all.”<sup>62</sup> Such experiments seem to have proven as costly in terms of efficiency and output,<sup>63</sup> but have also given the workers a sense of accomplishment and cooperation rather than competition.

Among capitalist societies, there are also ongoing developments to mitigate human alienation. There is the diversification of production to give consumers alternative choices, the rationalization of the productive process not only to improve working conditions but also to allow some worker participation in the decision-making mechanism. Here lies the ultimate usefulness of Marx's theory of alienation. In spite of all its defects and shortcomings, it has brought about a critically increasing awareness of the dehumanizing and destructive consequences of alienated relations in industrial society and given impetus to the continuing search for overcoming human alienation and man's inhumanity to man.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Alienation's metaphysical usage is attributed to the writings of Plotinus, the Neo-Platonists and later incorporated into early Christian theology such as that of St. Augustine. In these early theories, alienation refers to a state of ecstatic contemplation in which the human soul or spirit is transported from its own realm and elevated to the state of unity with God or the One. Man's alienation or estrangement from himself in this sense carries no negative connotation. See Nathan Rotenstreich, *Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy* (Indianapolis-New York-Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1965), ch. 7. Alienation is also used in Judeo-Christian philosophy to refer to man's fall from a state of grace or alienation from God. See Istvan Meszaros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 1970), ch. 1.

<sup>2</sup>See Richard Schacht, *Alienation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971), ch. 2.

<sup>3</sup>The following summary of Hegel's ideas is taken from Gajo Petrovic, *Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Yugoslav Philosopher Considers Karl Marx's Writings* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), pp. 135-138.

<sup>4</sup>David McClellan, tr. and ed., *Karl Marx: Early Texts* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 165.

<sup>5</sup>Rotenstreich, *op. cit.*, ch. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Karl Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, ed. with an introduction by Dirk J. Struik, tr. by Martin Milligan (New York: International Publishers, 1964), pp. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup>Karl Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1972), p. 109; See also K. Marx, "The Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole," in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *op. cit.*, p. 172. Emphasis by Marx.

<sup>8</sup>Bertel Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in a Capitalist Society* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), pp. 133-134.

<sup>9</sup>Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-59; McClellan, *op. cit.*, p. x1; Schacht, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14; 21-23.

<sup>10</sup>*Die Entfremdete Arbeit*, for example, is translated by McClellan in *Ibid.*, as "Alienated Labor" while Milligan in Marx, *Ibid.*, and Tucker, *op. cit.* translate it as "Estranged Labor."

<sup>11</sup>Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111. Emphasis by Marx.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109. Emphasis by Marx.

<sup>14</sup>Meszaros, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

- <sup>15</sup>Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.
- <sup>16</sup>Ollman, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
- <sup>17</sup>Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. op. cit.*, p. 111.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.* Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 114. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 115. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 116. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.
- <sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 155.
- <sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 148.
- <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 117.
- <sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 159. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 163. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 165-166. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 119. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 133-135.
- <sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135. Emphasis by Marx.
- <sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 146.
- <sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 137.
- <sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136. Emphasis by Marx.

<sup>42</sup>Lewis Feuer, "What is Alienation? ; The Career of a Concept," in *Sociology on Trial*, Maurice Stein and Arthur Vidich, eds. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), pp. 129-136.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>44</sup>David McClellan, *Marx Before Marxism* (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 207-209.

<sup>45</sup>Tucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6

<sup>46</sup>Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, ed. and tr. by David McClellan (New York: Harper Torchbooks, Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 2-3. See also the translation and foreword of Marx's *Grundrisse in Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* done by Martin Nicolaus and published by Vintage Books, Random House, New York, 1973.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 59-64; 70-73; 96-105; 132-140.

<sup>48</sup>Marx, as quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>49</sup>Ollman, *op. cit.*, p. 172. In his discussion of Marx's theory of value, Ollman also writes: "I would consider the theory of value exposed here a closed book for anyone who has not mastered, at least in broad outline, the theory of alienation of which it is part and the philosophy of internal relations which serves it as a necessary frame . . ." *Ibid.*, p. 188.

<sup>50</sup>Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), p. 79.

<sup>51</sup>Quoted in Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>52</sup>Tucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-106.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 111-164.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 154.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 167-190.

<sup>56</sup>*Capital*, Vol. III (1864-65), p. 947, quoted in David McClellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p. 118.

<sup>57</sup>*Capital*, quoted in Tucker, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>58</sup>Ollman, *op. cit.*, pp. 242-243.

<sup>59</sup>Walter Kaufmann, "Introductory Essay" in Schacht, *op. cit.*, p. li.

<sup>60</sup>Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Columbia



University Press, 1958), p. 238. See also the essays of Ernest Mandel and George Novack in *The Marxist Theory of Alienation* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1974).

<sup>61</sup>Marx, *The Grundrisse*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-145.

<sup>62</sup>*The Communist Manifesto* in Tucker, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

<sup>63</sup>Barry Richman, *Industrial Society in Communist China* (New York: Random House, 1969), *passim*.