

## T The Undergraduate Center

Ethics Reading Assignment:  
Excerpt from

### ***Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts***

Karl Marx

written between April and August 1844

First Manuscript:

#### **Estranged Labor**

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We must avoid repeating the mistake of the political economist, who bases his explanations on some imaginary primordial condition. Such a primordial condition explains nothing. It simply pushes the question into the grey and nebulous distance. It assumes as facts and events what it is supposed to deduce -- namely, the necessary relationships between two things, between, for example, the division of labor and exchange. Similarly, theology explains the origin of evil by the fall of Man -- i.e., it assumes as a fact in the form of history what it should explain.

We shall start out from a *present-day* economic fact.

The worker becomes poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and extent. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he produces. The *devaluation* of the human world grows in direct proportion to the *increase in value* of the world of things. Labor not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a *commodity* and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general.

This fact simply means that the object that labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as *something alien*, as a power independent of

the producer. The product of labor is labor embodied and made material in an object, it is the *objectification* of labor. The realization of labor is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy, this realization of labor appears as a *loss of reality* for the worker, objectification as loss of and bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as *alienation*.

 <p>Reading Tutorial Question</p>	<p>Marx says that the more efficiently you work, the LESS valuable you become, because the more you have produced, the easier you are to replace. Do you think that this feeling of alienation from work is true for many people now? Why or why not?</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; margin-bottom: 10px;"></div> <p>Your name? <input style="width: 150px;" type="text"/></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span><input type="button" value="Send information now"/></span> <span><input type="button" value="Clear form and start over"/></span> </div>	

So much does the realization of labor appear as loss of reality that the

worker loses his reality to the point of dying of starvation. So much does objectification appear as loss of the object that the worker is robbed of the objects he needs most not only for life but also for work. Work itself becomes an object which he can only obtain through an enormous effort and with spasmodic interruptions. So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the fewer can he possess and the more he falls under the domination of his product, of capital.

All these consequences are contained in this characteristic, that the workers is related to the product of labor as to an *alien* object. For it is clear that, according to this premise, the more the worker exerts himself in his work, the more powerful the alien, objective world becomes which he brings into being over against himself, the poorer he and his inner world become, and the less they belong to him. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains within himself. The worker places his life in the object; but now it no longer belongs to him, but to the object. The greater his activity, therefore, the fewer objects the worker possesses. What the product of his labor is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself. The externalization of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists *outside* him, independently of him and alien to him, and beings to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as hostile and alien.

Let us not take a closer look at objectification, at the production of the worker, and the estrangement, the loss of the object, of his product, that this entails.

The workers can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material in which his labor realizes itself, in which it is active and from which, and by means of which, it produces.

But just as nature provides labor with the means of life, in the sense of labor cannot live without objects on which to exercise itself, so also it provides the means of life in the narrower sense, namely the means of physical subsistence of the worker.

The more the worker appropriates the external world, sensuous nature, through his labor, the more he deprives himself of the means of life in two respects: firstly, the sensuous external world becomes less and less an object belonging to his labor, a means of life of his labor; and, secondly, it becomes less and less a means of life in the immediate sense, a means for the physical subsistence of the worker.

In these two respects, then, the worker becomes a slave of his object; firstly, in that he receives an object of labor, i.e., he receives work, and, secondly, in that he receives means of subsistence. Firstly, then, so that he can exist as a worker, and secondly as a physical subject. The culmination of this slavery is that it is only as a worker that he can maintain himself as a physical subject and only as a physical subject that he is a worker.

(The estrangement of the worker in his object is expressed according to the laws of political economy in the following way the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more worthless he becomes; the more his product is shaped, the more misshapen the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous the worker; the more powerful the work, the more powerless the worker; the more intelligent the work, the duller the worker and the more he becomes a slave of nature.)

Political economy conceals the estrangement in the nature of labor by ignoring the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production. It is true that labor produces marvels for the rich, but it produces privation for the worker. It produces palaces, but hovels for the worker. It produces beauty, but deformity for the worker. It replaces labor by machines, but it casts some of the workers back into

barbarous forms of labor and turns others into machines. It produces intelligence, but it produces idiocy and cretinism for the worker.

The direct relationship of labor to its products is the relationship of the worker to the objects of his production. The relationship of the rich man to the objects of production and to production itself is only a *consequence* of this first relationship, and confirms it. Later, we shall consider this second aspect.

Therefore, when we ask what is the essential relationship of labor, we are asking about the relationship of the worker to production.

Up to now, we have considered the estrangement, the alienation of the worker, only from one aspect -- i.e., his relationship to the products of his labor. But estrangement manifests itself not only in the result, but also in the act of production, within the activity of production itself. How could the product of the worker's activity confront him as something alien if it were not for the fact that in the act of production he was estranging himself from himself? After all, the product is simply the resume of the activity, of the production. So if the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. The estrangement of the object of labor merely summarizes the estrangement, the alienation in the activity of labor itself.

What constitutes the alienation of labor?

Firstly, the fact that labor is external to the worker -- i.e., does not belong to his essential being; that he, therefore, does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, feels miserable and not happy, does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind. Hence, the worker feels himself only when he is not working; when he is working, he does not feel himself. He is at home when he is not working, and not at home when he is working. His labor is, therefore, not voluntary but

forced, it is *forced labor*. It is, therefore, not the satisfaction of a need but a mere *means* to satisfy needs outside itself. Its alien character is clearly demonstrated by the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, it is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Finally, the external character of labor for the worker is demonstrated by the fact that it belongs not to him but to another, and that in it he belongs not to himself but to another. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, the human brain, and the human heart, detaches itself from the individual and reappears as the alien activity of a god or of a devil, so the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity. It belongs to another, it is a loss of his self.



Reading  
Tutorial  
Question

Marx seems to say above that work should be a joyful spontaneous activity that you do because you want to, not because you are forced to do so to earn a living. Would society be better or worse off if everyone only did work they found joy in? Why or why not?

The result is that man (the worker) feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions -- eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in his dwelling and adornment -- while in his human functions, he is nothing more than animal.

It is true that eating, drinking, and procreating, etc., are also genuine human functions. However, when abstracted from other aspects of human activity, and turned into final and exclusive ends, they are animal.

We have considered the act of estrangement of practical human activity, of labor, from two aspects: (1) the relationship of the worker to the product of labor as an alien object that has power over him. The relationship is, at the same time, the relationship to the sensuous external world, to natural objects, as an alien world confronting him, in hostile opposition. (2) The relationship of labor to the \_act of production\_ within labor. This relationship is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something which is alien and does not belong to him, activity as passivity [*Leiden*], power as impotence, procreation as emasculation, the worker's own physical and mental energy, his personal life -- for what is life but activity? -- as an

activity directed against himself, which is independent of him and does not belong to him. Self-estrangement, as compared with the estrangement of the object [*Sache*] mentioned above.

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Let us now go on to see how the concept of estranged, alienated labor must express and present itself in reality.

If the product of labor is alien to me, and confronts me as an alien power, to whom does it then belong?

To a being *other* than me.

Who is this being?


The gods? It is true that in early times most production -- e.g., temple building, etc., in Egypt, India, and Mexico -- was in the service of the gods, just as the product belonged to the gods. But the gods alone were never the masters of labor. The same is true of nature. And what a paradox it would be if the more man subjugates nature through his labor and the more divine miracles are made superfluous by the miracles of industry, the more he is forced to forgo the joy or production and the enjoyment of the product out of deference to these powers.

The alien being to whom labor and the product of labor belong, in whose service labor is performed, and for whose enjoyment the product of labor is created, can be none other than man himself.

If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, and if it confronts him as an alien power, this is only possible because it belongs to a man other than the worker. If his activity is a torment for him, it must provide pleasure and enjoyment for someone else. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over men.

Consider the above proposition that the relationship of man to himself becomes objective and real for him only through his relationship to other men. If, therefore, he regards the product of his labor, his objectified labor, as an alien, hostile, and powerful object which is independent of him, then his relationship to that object is such that another man -- alien, hostile, powerful, and independent of him -- is its master. If he relates to his own activity as unfree activity, then he relates to it as activity in the service, under the rule, coercion, and yoke of another man.

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 <i>Reading Tutorial Question</i>	Marx says if we don't feel "free" in our work, we must feel "coerced" or "forced" to work. Who does Marx say above is the person that is doing the forcing? Is this true or not true for you in your work?
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