According to Marx, the division of labor under the communism of primitive society was based on age, sex, and physical strength (MEW, 23, p. 372). This division was, therefore, not yet a true division of labor. “Division of labour only becomes truly such from the moment when a division of material and mental labour appears” (CW, 5, pp. 44-45; MEW, 3, p. 31). At this point, however, private property has also arisen. “Division of labour and private property are, after all, identical expressions: in the one the same thing is affirmed with reference to activity as is affirmed in the other with reference to the product of the activity” (CW, 5, p. 46; MEW, 3, p. 32).

Marx’s treatment of the emergence of the division of labor is similar to that of the emergence of private property. Although there was personal property at earlier stages of development, it was not private property as Marx tends to use the term; and although there had been a division of labor, it became truly one only with the emergence of private property—with the emergence of a division between mental and material labor. In Capital, Marx also postulates that true division of labor goes beyond a physiologically based one and is accompanied by exchange. It is based on exchange and on the trend that products have become commodities
ESTRANGEMENT

(MEW, 23, pp. 372-373). Thus private property, commodity exchange, and a society-wide division of labor that is not based on physiology occur simultaneously, at least for analytical purposes, in the Ethnological Notebooks; however Marx very well realizes that there may be some "grey areas."

The division of labor occurs on two different levels: on the level of a society as a whole, and on the level of a firm, for example, among individual workers. In precapitalist society, the division of labor on the level of the whole society emerged from the "material conditions of production" and was legally formalized much later. Marx believes that this was the case under patriarchal regimes as well as under the feudal and caste systems. Under these forms of social organization, the division of labor of the whole society was based on distinct rules of authority, while in capitalist society there is no such distinct rule (MEW, 4, p. 151): "[M]odern society knows no other rule, no other authority for the distribution of labor than free competition" (MEW, 4, p. 151; translation mine).\(^1\) Marx postulates that since, on the level of society, the only other authority that determines the division of labor is free competition, the more the division of labor is determined by the entrepreneur's authority on the level of the firm. As long as the societal division of labor was based on legally formalized rules, the division of labor in the various production shops was little developed (MEW, 4, p. 151). The following rule can be established:

The less the division of labor within a society is determined by an authority, the more is the division of labor developed within a workshop and the more it is subject to the authority of a single individual. Accordingly, with respect to the division of labor, the authority in the workshop and the one in the society are in an inverse relationship to each other (MEW, 4, p. 151; translation mine;\(^2\) see also MEW, 23, p. 378 and Cl, p. 337 where Marx reiterates this idea).

At this point Marx compares the division of labor under capitalist and precapitalist societies.

If, in a society with capitalist production, anarchy in the social division of labour and despotism in that of the workshop are mutual conditions the one of the other, we find, on the contrary, in those earlier forms of
society in which the separation of trades has been spontaneously de-
veloped, then crystallized, and finally made permanent by law, on the
one hand, a specimen of the organisation of the labour of society, in
accordance with an approved and authoritative plan, and on the other,
the entire exclusion of division of labour in the workshop, or at all
events a mere dwarflike or sporadic and accidental development of
the same (C1, p. 337; MEW, 23, pp. 377-378).

The division of labor on the shop level is enhanced by the fact that the
workers in a particular workshop become more numerous (MEW, 4, p. 152),
and by the increased concentration of the means of production and the
introduction of machinery that tended to accompany this concentration
(MEW, 4, p. 153; see also MEW, EB 1.T., p. 473). Marx suggests that, on
the whole, machinery increased the division of labor in society, simplified
work in the shop, concentrated capital, and fractionalized man (CW, 6,
p. 188; MEW, 4, p. 155). Since the division of labor increases with the
concentration of the tools of production, he proposes that each significant
invention in mechanical technique results in an increased division of labor.
In itself, this division calls for new mechanical inventions (MEW, 4, p. 154),
producing a trend toward ever simpler, unskilled labor (MEW, 13, p. 18).
Although the worker as a worker loses in general productive ability because
his level of skill falls, the productive power of capital increases. “The divi-
sion of labour develops the social productive power of social labour, but
at the expense of the general productive ability of the worker” (TS2, p. 234;
MEW, 26.2, p. 232). In this respect, Marx follows Adam Smith who held
that “the farmer practices a trade requiring more intelligence than the manu-
facturing worker, who is subject to the division of labour” (TS2, p. 234).
The increased social productive power—brought about by an increase in
the division of labor—however, “confronts the worker . . . as an increased
productive power, not of his labour, but of capital, the force that dominates
his labour” (TS2, p. 234).

The capitalist mode of production is not the only case in which an in-
crease in the division of labor can be said to have consequences that are
beyond the control of individuals and that can affect their lives in ways
not necessarily expected originally. An economy with trade relations exceed-
ing those of a barter economy, but not reaching the magnitude of capitalist
exchange relations, may be taken as an example.
[T]he circulation of commodities differs from the direct exchange of products (barter), not only in form, but in substance . . . B’s commodity replaces that of A, but A and B do not mutually exchange those commodities. It may, of course, happen that A and B make simultaneous purchases, the one from the other; but such exceptional transactions are by no means the necessary result of the general conditions of the circulation of commodities. We see here, on the one hand, how the exchange of commodities breaks through all local and personal bounds inseparable from direct barter, and develops the circulation of the products of social labour; and on the other hand, now it develops a whole network of social relations spontaneous in their growth and entirely beyond the control of the actors (C1, pp. 113-114; MEW, 23, p. 126; see also MEW, 23, p. 121).

Although the barter-type of exchange differs in form and substance from an economy involving a currency, still Marx believes that an established barter economy tends to enhance commodity production. The enhancement of commodity production, however, is likely to lead to forms of exchange involving a currency and enhancing the further division of labor on the basis that a greater number of transactions can take place in or between given societies. Therefore,

circulation bursts through all restrictions as to time, place, and individuals, imposed by direct barter, and this it effects by splitting up, into the antithesis of a sale and a purchase, the direct identity that in barter does exist between the alienation of one’s own and the acquisition of some other man’s product (C1, p. 115; MEW, 23, p. 127).

Since circulation bursts through all restrictions as to time, place, and individuals, Marx concludes that the division of labor in manufacture, for example, excluding modern industry based on machinery,

acquires the best adapted form at first by experience, as it were behind the backs of the actors, and then, like the guild handicrafts, strives to hold fast that form when once found, and here and there succeeds in keeping it for centuries. Any alteration in this form, except in trivial matters, is solely owing to a revolution in the instruments of labour (C1, p. 343; MEW, 23, p. 385).
Under capital, the division of labor is determined by free competition, which itself is the result of a further increase in the number of exchange relationships. With free competition as the sole "authority ... determining the division of labor"—and thus replacing any former authority determining the division of labor—it becomes easy to see why Marx names this state of affairs "anarchy in the social division of labor."

Marx describes how the development of commodity production proceeds until it becomes the general form of production:

[T]he same conditions which give rise to the basic condition of capitalist production, the existence of a class of wage-workers, facilitate the transition of all commodity production to capitalist commodity production. As capitalist production develops, it has a disintegrating, resolvent effect on all older forms of production, which, designed mostly to meet the direct needs of the producer, transform only the excess produced into commodities. Capitalist production makes the sale of products the main interest, at first apparently without affecting the mode of production itself. Such was for instance the first effect of capitalist world commerce on such nations as the Chinese, Indians, Arabs, etc. But, secondly, wherever it takes root capitalist production destroys all forms of commodity production which are based either on the self-employment of the producers, or merely on the sale of the excess product as commodities. Capitalist production first makes the production of commodities general and then, by degrees, transforms all commodity production into capitalist commodity production (C2, p. 36; MEW, 24, pp. 41-42).

Once commodity production becomes capitalist commodity production, the division of labor is totally uprooted from the traditionally set patterns and develops in a thoroughly unchecked manner:

When production by means of wage-labour becomes universal, commodity production is bound to be the general form of production. This mode of production, once it is assumed to be general, carries in its wake an ever increasing division of social labour, that is to say an ever growing differentiation of the articles which are produced in the form of commodities by a definite capitalist, ever greater division of complementary process of production into independent processes (C2, pp. 35-36; MEW, 24, p. 41).
IN VOLUNTARY DIVISION OF LABOR

Although the division of labor in precapitalist societies that exchanged commodities rested upon a formal authority, and was therefore not subject to the anarchic conditions created by free competition, it cannot be said that it was not based on coercion. This division of labor as well as that under capital is an involuntary division.

The division of labor and private property are two sides of the same coin for Marx. One does not exist without the other. The division of labor between the city and the countryside, for example, can rest only on private property.

[T]he contradiction between town and country can only exist within the framework of private property. It is the most crass expression of the subjection of the individual under the division of labour, under a definite activity forced upon him—a subjugation which makes one man into a restricted town-animal, another into a restricted country-animal, and daily creates anew the conflict between their interests. Labour is here again the chief thing, power over individuals, and as long as this power exists, private property must exist (CW, 5, p. 64; MEW, 3, p. 50). 3

Clearly, private property is accompanied by an involuntary division of labor which, along with private property, is to be abolished. Marx maintains that the involuntary division of labor created the possibility of contradictions within a society

because the division of labour implies the possibility, nay the fact, that intellectual and material activity, that enjoyment and labour, production and consumption, devolve on different individuals, and that the only possibility of their not coming into contradiction lies in negating in its turn the division of labour (CW, 5, p. 45; MEW, 3, p. 32).

Man is subsumed not only under a division of labor which is imposed on him, but also under a class. Being subsumed predestines his life-condition. These two conditions can be eliminated only by the abolition of private property and the involuntary division of labor (MEW, 3, p. 54). Marx argues that the communist revolution will differ from previous
revolutions insofar as it will not merely create a new distribution of labor leaving the kind of activity untouched. Instead, it will be directed against the hitherto existing kind of productive activity and the involuntary division of labor\(^4\) (MEW, 3, pp. 69-70).

It would seem that individuals under capital are freer than they were earlier because their life circumstances are more subject to chance. Exactly the opposite is the case, however, since they are more subject to impersonal forces (MEW, 3, p. 76). This point of view is in agreement with the postulate that, under capital, the division of labor is based only on the authority of free competition and not, as earlier, on a formal-legal authority. Accordingly, labor, too, competes under capital and is considered to be free. The individual is nevertheless subsumed under the division of labor and is coerced by the authority of free competition which also determines the division of labor. For the individual this division is involuntary.

\[T\]he \textit{a priori} system on which the division of labour, within the workshop, is regularly carried out, becomes in the division of labour within the society, an \textit{a posteriori}, nature-imposed necessity, controlling the lawless caprice of the producers, and perceptible in the barometrical fluctuations of the market-prices. Division of labour within the workshop implies the undisputed authority of the capitalist over men, that are but parts of a mechanism that belongs to him. The division of labour within the society brings into contact independent commodity-producers, who acknowledge no other authority but that of competition, of the coercion exerted by the pressure of their mutual interests (C1, p. 336; MEW, 23, p. 377; see also MEW, G, p. 484).

A logical consequence of this is that “Labour is free in all civilised countries; it is not a matter of freeing labour but of abolishing it” (CW, 5, p. 205; MEW, 3, p. 186).

In the origin of private property and commodity exchange, Marx also saw the origin of an involuntary division of labor. The involuntary division of labor spans all human history past the point at which the division of labor was based merely on sex, age, and physical strength. His writings in the \textit{Grundrisse} (MEW, G, pp. 369-374, 484), as elsewhere (for example, MEW, 23, pp. 93-94), illustrate this with regard to precapitalist societies. This emphasis on the involuntary nature of the division of labor is directly juxtaposed to the need to have a voluntary division of labor.
And finally, the division of labour offers us the first example of the fact that, as long as man remains in naturally evolved society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape (CW, 5, p. 47; MEW, 3, p. 33).5

This emphasis on the involuntary nature of the division of labor is one of our main criteria for interpreting Marx's theory of estrangement. The next section shows the absolute centrality of Marx's emphasis on the involuntary nature of the division of labor in his theory of estrangement.

IN VOLUNTARY DIVISION OF LABOR AND ITS CENTRALITY TO THE THEORY OF ESTRANGEMENT

As discussed in Chapter 2, Marx has two conceptions of human nature. First, those characteristics that distinguish man from animals biologically can be said to constitute the unchanging aspects of human nature. Man is a conscious being and can relate to others in ways that animals cannot. Second, there is for Marx that type of human nature that is historically conditioned. Although man has always been distinct from the animals on immutable biological grounds, his specific human nature, as contrasted with his general human nature, has undergone changes in history. Marx's theory of estrangement derives only from his biological definition of human nature, however. Man, according to Marx, is estranged because he is prevented from living according to his nature. Specifically, the worker is estranged from the product of his labor and the act of production because he is prevented from subjecting either of the two to his will; nonetheless, he does have a natural ability to do so; this ability distinguishes him biologically from animals and makes him specifically human. Being prevented from subjecting both the product of one's labor and the act of production to one's own will results directly in man's estrangement from himself, from nature, from his species-being, and from other men.

The worker's inability to subject both the act of production and the product of his labor to his own will indicates the presence of a coercive
condition. Indeed, capital controls labor, and the worker is forced to sell his labor power if he wants to maintain his physical existence. Under capital, "labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour" (CW, 3, p. 274). The coercion is not simply a matter of one individual coercing another. The capitalist is only the personal agent of capital and is himself constrained by factors that lie outside his influence. Competition is one case in point. That work is coerced and not voluntary depends on factors that are beyond the control of any particular individual; these factors have become independent, alien forces. Work is coerced because the societal division of labor as such is involuntary.

In the previous sections, we have shown that Marx believes that the division of labor in society has been involuntary ever since the destruction of primitive communism. Under capital, competition became the regulator, but the involuntary nature of the division of labor was not abolished. Competition in the marketplace determines the nature of the division of labor in a society or among nations as well as in a particular industry. Although the capitalist determines what to produce and subjects the labor power and the product of labor to his will, he does so for reasons outside his control. Nevertheless, it is an alien will to which the worker is subjected and to which he must, contrary to his natural ability, subject his labor power. As a result, he, in agreement with others, cannot determine what is to be produced, how products are to be produced, and for what purposes. Man, unlike the animals, is by nature capable of doing so. Therefore, production under capital can exist only at the expense of the workers' estrangement. 6

The involuntary nature of the division of labor is central to Marx's theory of estrangement. The common denominator of all forms of estrangement can be found in the involuntary nature of the division of labor. Because of it the worker is coerced into subjecting his labor power to an alien will. The capitalist himself must be viewed as merely an agent of capital, an actor who, although enjoying his social position, is himself constrained by the laws of the market. The division of labor, however, although the result of the actions of individuals (exchange) is generated involuntarily, thus leading to the subjection of man to an alien will.

NOTES

1. Kennt is translated here as "knows" rather than as "has." (See CW, 6, p. 184.)
2. For the translation given in the Collected Works, see CW, 6, p. 185.
3. See also MEW, 3, p. 32 for a similar statement, namely, that the division of labor is involuntary. In addition, see MEW, 3, p. 66.

4. Here Marx, as in MEW, 3, pp. 54, 77, mentions that Arbeit (labor) must be abolished. This does not mean that Marx envisions a leisure society without labor. On close inspection, it becomes evident that the word Arbeit can be substituted by "involuntary division of labor" or "involuntary labor." If man is subsumed under a division of labor, it cannot be said that his productive activity is voluntary, that is, that his labor is voluntary.

5. In the Manuscripts, Marx says that if man relates to his "own activity as an unfree activity, then he relates to it as an activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion, and the yoke of another man" (CW, 3, pp. 278-279; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 519; translation mine; [the German verbalten is not optimally translated by "to treat," since "to treat" refers to the subject's perception, while "to relate" does not exclusively so.]

6. The question as to whether Marx's theory of estrangement is also applicable to precapitalist societies, in which the division of labor was also involuntary, is discussed in Chapter 8.