Marx distinguishes between two concepts of human nature: general human nature, which refers to those human qualities that are invariable, and specific human nature, which consists of qualities that may vary from society to society and in history. Marx derived his concept of human nature in general from a comparison of man with animals. Estrangement results when man is prevented from living according to his human nature, that is, general human nature. Unfortunately, students of Marx have not made a clear distinction between the two concepts of human nature embodied in his work, and as a result, his theory of estrangement has frequently been misunderstood and inadequately interpreted. Our interpretation therefore stands in opposition to Petrović's (1967:146). Translating Wesen with "essence" instead of "nature," and using, as does Ollman, "alienation" instead of "estrangement," he says that "if alienation of man from his essence is to be possible, his essence must not be conceived as something that all men have in common." We also find Ollman's (1976:135) view to be misleading and lacking in clarity, as is evident in the following statement: "If alienation is the splintering of human nature into a number of misbegotten parts, we would expect communism to be presented as a kind of reunification." By clearly making this distinction, we have laid the
foundation for a logically consistent and novel interpretation of Marx’s theory of estrangement.

Marx illustrated his theory in the context of his analysis of capitalist society and with particular focus on that part of society which depends on selling labor power. Thus, it could be shown how the workers, for example, are prevented from living according to their human nature, and in which ways they can therefore be viewed as estranged. Marx’s theory of estrangement does not end with the estrangement of the worker, although for various reasons he took sides with the workers and described their plight and misery in great detail. He specifically speaks also of the estrangement of the capitalist. What is it that prevents the capitalist from living according to his nature, since unlike the worker he is not forced to sell his labor power?

To resolve this problem, Marx’s views on the division of labor are analyzed in detail in this book. It has been found that throughout his work Marx advocates a society with a voluntary division of labor and that in his early work he directly associates estrangement with the fact that the division of labor is an involuntary one. The nature of a society’s division of labor is therefore the overriding category determining whether individuals in this society are estranged. This interpretation is consistent with the writings of Marx, not only with respect to his view that the capitalist is also estranged, but also with his vision of communism in which he postulates that neither estrangement nor an involuntary division of labor will exist. To regard the nature of the division of labor in a society as the decisive criterion on the basis of which man is said to be estranged must be considered a significant departure from existing interpretations of Marx’s theory of estrangement.

It is maintained here that, according to Marx, the nature of the division of labor must be the central criterion deciding the existence or nonexistence of estrangement. Thus, estrangement is a dichotomous phenomenon. It exists in the absence of a voluntary division of labor, and it is not envisioned to exist under communism. Students of Marx have not tended to give central importance to the division of labor when interpreting his theory of estrangement. Rather, they generally treat the division of labor as only an aspect of estrangement, whereby it has usually been emphasized that under capital the worker must perform minute, repetitive, and unchallenging tasks. While this statement may be factually correct and Marx himself may have given
similar illustrations, such an emphasis is highly misleading when we turn to an interpretation of Marx's theory of estrangement. As is maintained here, the emphasis must be not on the kind of involuntary division of labor, but on the very involuntariness of it. Marx advocates that all involuntary division of labor be abolished. Even though an involuntary division is made more "bearable" by humanizing work in various ways, the involuntary nature of the division of labor persists. Similarly, to envision communism as a society with a voluntary division of labor does not imply that individuals will not perform different tasks. Marx's vision of the many-sided individual is not contradicted here. There are good reasons to believe that the individual would be many-sided under communism. However, Marx's vision does not imply that there will be no "specialization" or "routinization" of work, on a voluntary basis, under communism. It only means that individuals are not socially coerced into performing certain tasks. Unfortunately, this is not made as clear as it should be. Ollman (1976:211), for example, makes the following unqualified statement: "... the best known descriptions of communism—a 'classless society', a time when 'the division of labor has come to an end' and when 'private property has been abolished'—are full alternatives."

Ollman (1976:158-160) also fails to specify that the involuntariness of the division of labor is manifested by the fact not only that individuals are "locked" into one activity, but also that particularly under capital the producers never determine what is to be produced and for what purposes. Therefore, as long as there is commodity production, regardless of whether individuals are "locked" into one particular activity, the division of labor will be an involuntary one. That is, the market as such will as an impersonal force coerce individuals into certain productive activities as long as these individuals are dependent on commodity production for a livelihood. Here lies the importance of Marx's insistence that production under communism will have to be based on agreement and not exchange. For Marx, the involuntary division of labor can be abolished only by the abolition of production based on exchange, regardless of whether production on exchange "locks" individuals into a single position.3

Walter Kaufmann4 is particularly insensitive to this important issue. Referring to Marx’s vision of a society with a voluntary division of labor in which individuals will no longer be "locked" into an exclusive sphere of activity, he maintains that "one of the results of the social mobility in
the United States—lateral as well as upward—is that a waiter, for example, is much less likely to feel . . . that his role defines him, freezes him. . . . Thus the alienation implicit in the division of labor is diminished significantly.” Kaufmann also states that Marx’s dream, to a significant degree, “is realized in the United States of America. It is not in the least unusual for the same person to have many different jobs before he is thirty.”

Schacht (1971:100), on the other hand, misunderstands Marx’s theory of estrangement and concept of an involuntary division of labor in another way. He faults Marx for seeing estrangement as resulting from individuals being subject to an alien will:

Consider, for example, a camera man in a film studio, or a member of an orchestra. The “labor” of both is not and cannot be “self-directed” and “spontaneous.” In each case it is directed by another man—the director or the conductor.

As a consequence, Schacht suggests that “it would seem more fruitful to drop all reference to the mediation of an ‘alien will’.” This conclusion is decidedly unjustified and neglects Marx’s contention that all labour in which many individuals cooperate necessarily requires a commanding will to co-ordinate and unify the process, and functions which apply not to partial operations but to the total activity of the workshop, much as that of an orchestra conductor. This is a productive job, which must be performed in every combined mode of production (C3, p. 383; MEW, 25, p. 397).

Working under a commanding will in situations of cooperation does not automatically imply that the division of labor is an involuntary one. On the contrary, just as cooperation can be voluntary cooperation, accepting “a commanding will to co-ordinate and unify the process” can also be a voluntary act. Therefore, Marx distinguishes between this case of cooperation and coordination and that in which coordinating activity also entails coercion:

The labour of supervision and management, arising as it does out of an antithesis, out of the supremacy of capital over labour, and being
therefore common to all modes of production based on class con- 
trdictions like the capitalist mode, is directly and inseparably connected, 
also under the capitalist system, with productive functions which all 
combined social labour assigns to individuals as their special tasks (C3, 
p. 386; MEW, 25, pp. 399-400; see also C3, p. 385).

ESTRANGEMENT AND THE 
ABOLITION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

When we maintain that according to Marx the division of labor must 
be the central criterion deciding the existence or nonexistence of estrange-
ment, we are able to provide an answer to the long-standing debate on 
whether estrangement is abolished with the abolition of the private 
ownership of the means of production. In our view, Oiserman (1965: 
84-89) is incorrect when he maintains that estrangement necessarily 
disappears with any socialization of the means of production. Any 
socialization of the means of production does not in itself guarantee 
a voluntary division of labor. It does not in itself guarantee a condition 
in which there is no domination of man by man, that is, a condition in 
which man is allowed to live according to his nature and is not subject 
to an alien will.

We need not engage in a detailed analysis of present-day socialist 
societies to observe that they are not the realization of Marx's vision 
of communism, a society in which estrangement would be nonexistent 
and the division of labor voluntary. Engels, we might say, foresaw the 
problem of present-day socialist countries when he maintained that, 
the more productive forces the state takes over,

the more citizens it exploits. The workers remain wage-earners, 
proletarians. The capitalist relationship is not abolished; it is rather 
pushed to an extreme. But at this extreme it changes into its oppo-
site. State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution 
of the conflict, but it contains within itself the formal means, the 
handle to the solution (AD, pp. 312-313; MEW, 20, p. 260).^5

A few pages later, Engels points out how communism is to be achieved 
(note that he refrains from using the word "state"):
The seizure of the means of production by society puts an end to commodity production, and therewith to the domination of the product over the producer. . . . Men's own social organisation which has hitherto stood in opposition to them as if arbitrarily decreed by Nature and history, will then become the voluntary act of men themselves. . . . It is humanity's leap from the realm of necessity into the realm of freedom.

To carry through this world-emancipating act is the historical mission of the modern proletariat (AD, p. 318; MEW, 20, p. 264).\(^6\)

One may hold the opinion that this world-emancipating act of which Engels speaks has not fully occurred in present-day socialist countries, although "the handle to the solution" is there.\(^7\)

As a consequence, it is the division of labor, and not the existence or nonexistence of private ownership of the means of production, which must serve as the criterion in deciding whether estrangement exists. According to our interpretation, then, Marx's theory of estrangement is directly extendable and applicable to socialist countries. Those who do not give central importance to the division of labor in interpreting Marx's theory of estrangement are necessarily led to other conclusions. Knecht (1975: 217), for example, asserts that Marx's theory of estrangement cannot be applied to societies in the "transitional stage" to communism. He believes that Marx's theory is only an instrument for the critique of capitalism. A critical analysis of the "transitional stage" requires first that the theory undergo a revision, and he thinks this revision is provided by Sartre. "With Sartre, the concept 'estrangement' does not only serve as an instrument in the critique of capitalism."

Ollman (1976:252-253) is compelled to maintain a similar position for similar reasons. He argues that because present-day socialist countries regulate production and consumption via a plan rather than the market, Marx's theory of estrangement "loses a full half of its meaning." He does not mean to

imply that the alienation which is found in "communist" countries cannot or should not be studied or treated theoretically, but the interaction of these men and these particular societies can only be adequately grasped by a theory which focuses on the decisive role of the plan, the
party, the state and the bureaucracy generally. Marx’s theory of alienation is not such a theory.

However, Marx’s theory of estrangement can very well serve as an instrument for the critique of today’s socialist countries, since, according to our interpretation, estrangement consists of the fact that man is prevented from living according to his nature because of the existence of an involuntary division of labor. Moreover, we can do so without necessarily accepting an existentialist position, implying, as Sartre does, that estrangement is basic to all human existence at all times. (See also Chapter 7 and Schaff, 1964). Marx’s concept of estrangement remains a concept bound only to definite historical periods. As Ludz (1976:8) and Remmling (1967:152) indicate, estrangement arises with the downfall of primitive communism, and according to Marx, it ends with communism. Estrangement comes into existence with the advent of an involuntary division of labor and is abolished not necessarily with the abolition of private property, but with the introduction of a voluntary division of labor. Our interpretation of Marx’s theory of estrangement is therefore also compatible with Marx’s theory of history.

A NOTE ON THE APPLICABILITY OF MARX’S THEORY OF ESTRANGEMENT

In the preceding chapter, we show that, if Marx is not to be misinterpreted “estrangement” cannot be measured or viewed in quantitative terms. We also demonstrate that according to Marx estrangement as such cannot meaningfully be viewed as a cause for specific behavior, feelings, or attitudes. Since mainstream American sociology, however, has attempted both to quantify estrangement and to postulate it as a cause of certain behavior, feelings, or attitudes, the question arises as to the use of Marx’s theory of estrangement.

Essentially, the use of Marx’s theory of estrangement is of a quite different order than was commonly thought. Remmling (1967) already showed how Marx is an exponent of total suspicion. Indeed, his system of thought allows Marx to be an all-encompassing analyst and critic of society, and his theory of estrangement is the basic building block upon which the rest of his analysis rests. It consists of an empirical statement of
what man's nature is and a reason why, throughout much of history, man has been prevented from living according to his nature. This theory of estrangement, coupled with the demand that man be able to live according to his nature, provides Marx with both the basic framework for interpreting the social world and the goal the interpretation is to serve. Hence, the demand that all involuntary division of labor must be abolished if man is to live unestranged, that is, according to his nature. As Marx's analysis is total, his demands are total demands. Nothing short of a total change can rid man of his condition of estrangement.

In attempting to measure what Marx calls estrangement and in postulating that only certain behavior, feelings, and attitudes are caused by estrangement, mainstream sociology does not consider Marx's thrust for total change. However, the usefulness of Marx's theory of estrangement for sociology lies exactly in its power to critically conceptualize social reality and to employ it in the service of social change. For this to occur, however, Marx's vision of a future society based on a voluntary division of labor must not be rejected as "utopian." At least the possibility must be accepted that society could indeed be organized such as to allow for a voluntary division of labor. However, only praxis will tell.

NOTES

1. We disagree with Mandel (1971:161-163) who says that only with German Ideology did Marx view estrangement in the context of the division of labor.

2. We disagree with Plamenatz (1975:150) who maintains that Marx "does not even make it plain what kind of division of labour it is that produces alienation." Plamenatz's objections to Marx's treatment of the division of labor and its centrality to "estrangement" can be overcome by making a distinction between a voluntary and involuntary (that is, "estrangement-producing") division of labor.

3. Knecht (1975:144-145) appropriately remarks that under capital even the capitalist is subject to the independent and impersonal forces brought about by exchange, thus implying that the capitalist is also subject to an involuntary division of labor. This is in agreement with Marx's view that the capitalist is also estranged.

To argue that Marx always thought estrangement would result from the involuntary nature of the division of labor is to disagree with those (for example, Dawydow, 1964:58, 61) who maintain that only with the German Ideology did Marx view the voluntary division of labor as a solution to estrangement. Similarly, Tucker (1965:185) is mistaken when he claims that only with the German Ideology was the "alienated self-relation . . . transformed into a social relation of production, and this was given the name 'division of labour.' "

5. We do not mean to say that Engels’ views accurately describe the present political and economic system of present-day socialist countries. Rather, we mean that Engels touches upon the main issue involved. Thus, the issue is not whether the Soviet Union is capitalistic, but whether the means of production in that country have been “socialized” in such a way as to maintain an involuntary division of labor, that is, inequality and class relationships. For further discussions, see Bettelheim, 1976; Chavance, 1977; Sweezy, 1977a, 1977b; and Szymanski, 1977.

6. By quoting Engels here, it is unlikely that Marx’s theory of estrangement will be misinterpreted, since Marx supported and cooperated with Engels in writing Anti-Dübrink and is himself the author of a chapter. (See also Engels’ preface for the edition of 1885; MEW, 20, p. 9.)

In his Critique of the Gotha Program, Marx also points to the necessity of abolishing class differences:

Instead of the indefinite concluding phrase of the paragraph—“the removal of all social and political equality”—it ought to have been said that with the abolition of class differences all the social and political inequality arising from them would disappear of itself (CGP, pp. 15-16; MEW, 19, p. 26).

Abolishing inequality is not Marx’s only goal. For example, in the Manuscripts he makes a distinction between crude communism and “true” communism. Crude communism stands for that phase in which private property has become abolished, but in which society has not eliminated coercion and the bare leveling of everyone’s position:

Communism is the positive expression of annulled private property—at first as universal private property. . . . This type of communism—since it negates the personality of man in every sphere—is but the logical expression of private property, which is this negation. General envy constituting itself as a power is the disguise in which greed re-establishes itself and satisfies itself, only in another way. . . . Crude communism is only the culmination of this envy and of this levelling-down proceeding from the preconceived minimum. It has a definite, limited standard. How little this annulment of private property is really an appropriation is in fact proved by the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and crude man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it” (CW, 3, pp. 294-295; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 534-535).

The first positive annulment of private property—crude communism—is thus merely a manifestation of the vileness of private property, which wants to set itself up as the positive community system (CW, 3, p. 296; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 535-536).
In addition to Engels' passage, we have also been able to demonstrate that Marx himself in his own writings was not endorsing just the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production. We thus have been able to strengthen our argument that the division of labor is the central criterion deciding whether or not estrangement exists.

7. In retrospect, it may be maintained that Marx and Engels were overly optimistic with respect to the ease with which class society could be abolished after the abolition of private property. This optimism is not, however, to be taken as evidence for the thesis that, for Marx and Engels, estrangement necessarily is abolished with the abolition of the private ownership of the means of production.

8. We do not endorse Ollman's view that Marx's theory of estrangement maintains its full meaning and analytical power only in the context of capitalism, a society dominated by market relationships. Rather, we reiterate that a distinction must be made between estrangement as such and the consequences of such estrangement. Because man is estranged, his life begins to be determined by forces he does not fully control. These forces at first appear in the form of personal domination and later in impersonal form, as exchange becomes universal. Regardless of the nature of the consequences, man remains estranged for Marx as long as an involuntary division of labor exists. It is our view that Marx only illustrated his theory of estrangement when analyzing capitalist society. Even by giving examples as to how man is prevented from living according to his nature under capital, his theory of estrangement does not become a theory bound to capitalism. Marx could have illustrated his theory just as well by choosing examples from feudalism, but this would have defeated his political intentions. Of course, new conceptualizations are needed for the study of the consequences of estrangement in "communist" countries and of the processes that continually prevent man from living according to his nature.

But Marx's theory of estrangement need not be "adapted" since an involuntary division of labor remains an involuntary division of labor, although the coercion manifests itself in various forms and complexities.

9. Or to argue from an ethical point of view as Ollman seems to think.

10. It is inappropriate to speak of estrangement from nature under primitive communism—as does Krader (1975:237-238, 271-272). Although Marx does view primitive man as dominated by nature, his theory of estrangement refers only to social forms of domination. However, Marx holds that the division of labor under primitive communism was voluntary; hence, the absence of estrangement. To our knowledge, Marx also does not mention estrangement when referring to societies under primitive communism, although he views primitive communism as by no means ideal.

11. Only the consequences of estrangement can be viewed in quantitative terms. Thus, the fact that man does not fully control his life-situation—the fact that he is estranged—may result in more wealth for some and more misery for others; a feeling of strength in the bourgeoisie and a feeling of debasement in the proletariat. In contrast, estrangement as such remains a constant for all who are subject to an in-
voluntary division of labor, as much as nonestrangement is the condition for man under communism where Marx envisioned a voluntary division of labor to exist.

12. An event that has been "prepared" by the course of previous history, throughout which the consequences of estrangement are seen to have developed in such a way as to make communism realizable.

13. If "estrangement" is to be used in this way, it would be advisable either to drop the term altogether or to distinguish it clearly from Marx's use of the term.