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ESTRANGEMENT: THE CONSEQUENCES OF BEING COERCED INTO SELLING ONE'S LABOR POWER

Before it can be shown how Marx's theory of estrangement derives directly from his concept of human nature, we must first examine how Marx perceived some other aspects of social life. This examination will then be helpful in understanding Marx's theory of estrangement.

Throughout his work, Marx emphasized that, although some individuals may have some choice as to the persons or institutions to which they sell their labor power, under a system of wage labor it is capital that commands labor. The observation that capital has more power than labor is manifest by the fact that the capitalist as the agent of capital has more alternatives than the worker.

Wages are determined through the antagonistic struggle between capitalist and worker. Victory goes necessarily to the capitalist. The capitalist can live longer without the worker than can the worker without the capitalist (CW, 3, p. 235; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 471).

... it is just the capacity of the capitalist to direct his capital into another channel which either renders the worker, who is restricted to some particular branch of labour, destitute, or forces him to submit to every demand of this capitalist (CW, 3, p. 236; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 472).
Marx was even more distressed by capital's apparent power to seriously threaten even the worker's physical survival:

[T]he worker has the misfortune to be a living capital, and therefore an indigent capital, one which loses its interest, and hence its livelihood, every moment it is not working. . . . As soon, therefore, as it occurs to capital (whether from necessity or caprice) no longer to be for the worker, he himself is no longer for himself: he has no work, hence no wages, and since he has no existence as a human being but only as a worker, he can go and bury himself, starve to death, etc (CW, 3, p. 283; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 523).

[1]n those cases where worker and capitalist equally suffer, the worker suffers in his very existence, the capitalist in the profit on his dead mammon (CW, 3, p. 237; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 473).

In view of such an account of the power of capital, we should not be surprised by Marx's categoric statement that “Capital is thus the governing power over labour” (CW, 3, p. 247; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 484). However, the agents of capital—the capitalists—do not possess this governing power on the basis of personal or human qualities, but merely because they own capital with its inherent power to purchase anything and everything. The capitalist's power “is the purchasing power of his capital, which nothing can withstand” (CW, 3, p. 247). Thus, whereas in earlier societies people were herded together to engage in forced labor, capital manages to accomplish the same coordination of labor power through the exchange of free labor (MEW, G, p. 427).

Capital represents

a coercive relation, which compels the working class to do more work than the narrow round of its own life-wants prescribes. As a producer of the activity of others, as a pumper-out of surplus-labour and exploiter of labour-power, it surpasses in energy, disregard of bounds, recklessness and efficiency, all earlier systems of production based on directly compulsory labour (C1, p. 293; MEW, 23, p. 328).

Capital not only governs labor in society as a whole, but also has command over labor during the act of production. “Personified capital, the capitalist
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takes care that the labourer does his work satisfactorily (ordentlich) and with the proper degree of intensity” (C1, p. 293; MEW, 23, p. 328; translation mine).

At first, it may appear that the worker is a free agent and that capital is not coercive. Indeed, the worker himself sells his labor power to the capitalist and engages in a contractual relationship with him. After the deal is made, however, it is discovered that the worker was no “free agent,” that the time for which he is free to sell his labour-power is the time for which he is forced to sell it, that in fact the vampire will not lose its hold on him “so long as there is a muscle, a nerve, a drop of blood to be exploited” (C1, p. 285; MEW, 23, p. 319).

In fact, the worker was in the bondage of capital even before he appeared as a “free agent” of his labor power. As part of an unending cycle, all he can do is sell his labor power over and over again. It is the capitalist process of production itself which, based on the fact that the worker does not own his product of labor, “incessantly hurls back the labourer on to the market as a vendor of his labour-power, and that incessantly converts his own product into a means by which another man can purchase him” (C1, pp. 541-542; MEW, 23, p. 603). The capitalist process of production incessantly forces the worker “to sell his labour-power in order to live, and enables the capitalist to purchase labour-power in order that he may enrich himself” (C1, p. 541; MEW, 23, p. 603). This process keeps the worker in constant bondage, and in the case of child labor, even the formality of a voluntary sale disappears (MEW, 23, p. 603).

WAGE LABOR: THE COERCION TO GIVE UP ONE'S WILL AND CONTROL OVER ONE'S BODY

In return for his continued physical existence, the worker is compelled to repeatedly sell his labor power as one would sell any other commodity. But since labor power cannot in reality be separated from the locus of this power—a human being with distinct qualities and needs—the individual as the locus of labor power is also treated as any other commodity. Not only does capital coerce the individual to become a commodity in that he or she is forced to sell his labor power, but also once the labor is sold, the individual worker possessing this power loses control over it. Once sold, labor power
is the property of capital, property for which the locus of this power (the worker) receives a sum of money in return. However, labor power cannot become the property of capital without the locus of this power, for the time contracted, also becoming the property of capital. As is the case with any other commodity, the capitalist owner of labor power has the right to subject this power to his will. Having this right, however, implies that the individual, who is the source of labor power, no longer is allowed to exert his/her will over their own power, since the individual cannot be separated from the labor power he/she puts out. If labor power becomes a commodity so must the individual putting out this labor power.

The worker is thus forced (1) to sell his labor power and (2) to give up his command over it once it is sold. Even if the terms of employment are attractive, this principal condition does not change. Thus, Marx writes: “The raising of wages excites in the worker the capitalists’ mania to get rich, which he, however, can only satisfy by the sacrifice of his mind and body” (CW, 3, p. 238; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 474). And since the worker is forced to become a commodity by being coerced into selling his labor power as if it were any other commodity and giving up his control over it once it has been sold, the stage is set for him to be treated as a thing, as a machine with the capacity to perform certain tasks and also subject to the owner’s will. “Since the worker has sunk to the level of a machine, he can be confronted by the machine as a competitor” (CW, 3, p. 238).

The worker therefore serves a will that is not his own. Furthermore, he is treated as a commodity and, like a machine, acts in behalf of a will outside himself. This is not the case if the worker is not coerced into selling his labor power. “So far as the labour-process is purely individual,” writes Marx,

one and the same labourer writes in himself all the functions, that later on become separated. When an individual appropriates natural objects for his livelihood, no one controls him but himself. Afterwards he is controlled by others. A single man cannot operate nature without calling his own muscles into play under the control of his own brain. As in the natural body head and hand wait upon each other, so the labour-process unites the labour of the hand with that of the head. Later on they part company and even become deadly foes” (C1, p. 476; MEW, 23, p. 531).
And in the *Grundrisse*, Marx says that

in the production process of capital labour is a totality—a combination of labours—whose individual component parts are alien to one another, so that the overall process as a totality is *not* the *work* of the individual worker, and is furthermore the work of the different workers together only to the extent that they are (forcibly) combined, and do not (voluntarily) enter into combination with one another. The combination of this labour appears just as subservient to and led by an alien will and an alien intelligence—leaving its *animating unity* elsewhere . . .” (G, p. 470; MEW, G, pp. 374-375).

In summary, it may be noted that under capital, unlike slavery, “the worker is not a condition of production, only work is” (G, p. 498). That is, only the cost of labor power is considered in the decision-making processes of the agents of capital. The fact that the individual, as the locus of this power, also has needs remains ignored. In addition, capital coerces the worker by appropriating his will: “The presupposition of the master-servant relation is the appropriation of an alien will . . .,” and this relation is “reproduced—in mediated form—in capital” (G, pp. 500-501; MEW, G, p. 400).

In order to elaborate on the fact that coercion alone makes wage labor possible, it will be fruitful to examine the parallels Marx sees between wage labor and other forms of coerced labor resulting in slavery, serfdom, and the like.

Insofar as wage labor is subject to an alien will it resembles slavery: “A man is continually compelled to sell his labour-power, i.e., himself to another man . . .” (C2, p. 444; MEW, 24, p. 438). Marx’s analogies to slavery further illustrate this point:

The Roman slave was held by fetters: The wage labourer is bound to his owner by invisible threads (C1, p. 538; MEW, 23, p. 599).

The essential difference between the various economic forms of society, between, for instance, a society based on slave labour, and one based on wage labour, lies only in the mode in which this surplus-labour is in each case extracted from the actual producer, the labourer (C1, p. 209; MEW, 23, p. 231; see also MEW, 24, p. 385).
The more they [the workers] wish to earn, the more must they sacrifice their time and carry out slave-labour, completely losing all their freedom, in the service of greed (CW, 3, p. 237; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 473).²

The analogy between wage labor and slavery is an apt one. Engels concisely summed up some of the parallels between wage labor and slavery, showing that the slave can have a better existence than the worker, since the slave's biological existence is guaranteed, while the worker's is not. A slave is the property of his master, who has an interest in keeping his slave producing; the worker is forced to sell his labor power on a daily and hourly basis. However, the worker's labor power is purchased only when it is needed; consequently, the worker's existence is threatened. Capitalism secures only the existence of the proletariat as a class, and not the existence of the individual worker (Engels, MEW, 4, p. 366).

Man under capital is forced to sell his labor power and is forced to subordinate his will to an alien will; as Marx's analogies with slavery point out, this condition is tantamount to slavery. The difference is that under capital slavery is a mediated form of slavery while, earlier, slavery was based on direct domination. Armed with this knowledge as well as knowledge of Marx's theory of human nature, it is now possible to address the question of estrangement. As will be apparent, Marx's theory of estrangement rests directly on the postulates outlined so far.

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Under capital, the worker is forced to sell his labor power in return for a wage, which then allows him to purchase commodities necessary for his sustenance. The worker then does not produce his sustenance directly. Nor does he own the means to do so. He is thus forced to sell his only asset—his labor power. According to Marx, this process implies that the original connection of the means of production with the individual exerting labor power has been dissolved. As a result, "the mass of the people, the labourers, have, as non-owners, come face to face with the non-labourers as the owners of these means of production" (C2, p. 31; MEW, 24, p. 38).³ The workers not only lack the means to transform and manipulate nature in the process of production, but they also have no claim to the product of their labor. They produce the product for and in behalf of an alien will.
For the labor power expended, they are compensated not with the product of their labor but with a sum of money, a wage. Marx therefore concludes that the worker is estranged in two principal ways. He who is coerced into selling his labor power, and labor under the domination of an alien will is estranged from (1) the product of his labor, and (2) the act of production.

**ESTRANGEMENT FROM THE PRODUCT OF ONE’S LABOR**

As shown earlier, man differs from the animals in being a conscious being, and on the basis of such criteria Marx determines what human nature is. The criteria themselves, if they are to determine in an ahistorical way what human nature is, are derived from a comparison of man with animals. Thus, unlike animals, man by nature is able to confront his product of labor freely, while the animal’s product belongs immediately to its physical body (CW, 3, pp. 276-277). The nature of man is thus to confront his product of labor freely. Man not only has the natural faculty to make his “life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness” (CW, 3, p. 276), but he is also by nature able to confront the product of his labor both consciously and freely. This product, of course, is again an integral part of his environment and, thus, again an object of man’s will and conscious life activity. For Marx, then, man has the faculty, given to him by nature, to act consciously upon nature as such as well as upon the products of his labor.

Under capital, man is not allowed to live according to his nature. Since he must sell his labor, his own product of labor ceases to be an object of his will and consciousness. Rather, under capital the product of a worker’s labor becomes the object of a will that is alien to him/her. For Marx, this condition is unnatural, for *by nature* the human producer has the faculty to freely and consciously confront the product of his labor and subject it to his will. The capitalist mode of production prevents the producer from subjecting his product of labor to his will as he has by nature the faculty to do. In this context, Marx speaks of the estrangement of man from the product of his labor (CW, 3, p. 274). Referring to the worker, he speaks of “the estrangement, the loss of the object, of his product” (CW, 3, p. 273), “the estrangement of the object of labour” (CW, 3, p. 274), and so forth.

The producer’s inalienable ability to subject the product of his labor to his own will is denied, and instead, the workers’ products are subject to a
will alien to the producers, the will of the capitalists who appropriate the product of labor. Hence, the worker cannot dispose of his product. And since it is subject to an alien will, his own product confronts him as "something alien, as a power independent of the producer" (CW, 3, p. 272). This, Marx says, is a fact of political economy (CW, 3, p. 271). While "the product of labour is labour which has been embodied in an object, which has become material," and while "labour's realisation is its objectification," under "these economic conditions this realisation of labour appears as a loss of realisation for the workers; objectification as loss of the object and bondage to it; appropriation as estrangement, as alienation" (CW, 3, p. 272; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 511-512). To this Marx adds: "So much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that the more objects the worker produces the less he can possess and the more he falls under the sway of his product, capital" (CW, 3, p. 272; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 512).

The greater the worker's product "the less is he himself" (CW, 3, p. 272).

The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power on its own confronting him. It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien (CW, 3, p. 272; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 512).

The relationship of the worker to the product of his own labor is therefore one in which the worker is dominated by his very own product. This condition goes against the individual's nature, since human beings have the capability to appropriate their own product as well as subject it to their will. The political economy under capitalism forcibly prevents the worker from doing this. Such a political economy is based on processes, although manmade, that result in man not living according to his human nature.

THE WORKER'S ESTRANGEMENT FROM THE ACT OF PRODUCTION AND FROM HIMSELF

Marx asks the following question: "How could the worker come to face the product of his activity as a stranger, were it not that in the very act of production he was estranging himself from himself?" (CW, 3, p. 274;
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MEW, EB 1. T., p. 514). He postulates that "in the estrangement of the object of labour is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the activity of labour itself" (CW, 3, p. 274; MEW, EB 1. T., p. 514).

We have seen that the worker is coerced into selling his labor power and that, once his labor power is sold, he himself becomes subject to an alien will. He is forced to do so because he does not have any other means by which he could produce his livelihood; he does not own any other means but his labor power—that is, he does not own the means of production. In Capital, Marx emphasizes that, historically speaking, individuals "became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production" (C1, p. 669; MEW, 23, p. 743). The lack of ownership of the means of production is therefore directly related to wage labor and is the reason why, under capital, the worker is coerced into subordinating himself to an alien will. This same lack is directly related to and expressive of the fact that the worker is prevented from appropriating the product of his own labor, since the means of production are in themselves nothing but the product of labor. Although the worker is the capitalist's "personal source of wealth," he is "devoid of all means of making that wealth his own" (C1, p. 535; MEW, 23, p. 596). The capitalist's personal source of wealth of course, also includes the means of production he owns (see C1, p. 535 and MEW, 23, p. 595). In addition, it is particularly the product of man's labor as represented in the means of production which, subject to an alien will, is turning into an alien power. Capital, constant and variable, confronts the worker "as the totality of the objective conditions of labour," "as alien property," and as time proceeds the "conditions of labour confront the individual worker in an ever more gigantic form" (TS 3, pp. 352-353; MEW, 26.3, pp. 344-345). In this context, it is therefore possible to speak of the "alienation of the conditions of production" (TS 3, p. 530; MEW, 26.3, p. 519).

Marx contends, then, that "estrangement from the product of one's labour" is directly connected with man's "estrangement from the act of production." As we have just seen, under "the act of production" one should also understand the "totality of the objective conditions of labour," namely, capital in its constant and variable form. Both forms of estrangement always exist simultaneously. Common to both is their source. A will alien to the worker controls the product of labor, and hence the totality of the conditions of production as well, that is, capital in its constant and variable form.
According to Marx's theory of human nature, man by nature has the ability to make "his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness" (CW, 3, p. 276). Man's species-character is his free and conscious activity (CW, 3, p. 276). Under capitalism, however, the conditions of labor are subject to a will alien to the worker, thus preventing the worker from making work a free and conscious activity. Marx points out that "labour is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labour" (CW, 3, p. 274). The act of production is one of coercion, outside the individual worker's control. Thus, the worker is prevented from producing freely and under the guidance of his will and consciousness, and is coerced into producing according to a will alien to him. The worker is estranged from the act of production, which is also saying that he is estranged from himself: "[T]he external character of labour 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" (CW, 3, p. 274; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 514). Man is estranged from himself because his own active functions, his life activity, are not his but someone else's (CW, 3, p. 276). Self-estrangement consists in the fact that the worker's "personal life—for what is life but activity?—is an activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him" (CW, 3, p. 275; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 515). Since man's activity is not his own but someone else's, it becomes a mere means. As we have seen, since man is forced to sell his labor power, it becomes a means to "maintain physical existence" (CW, 3, pp. 274-277; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 514-517).

ESTRANGEMENT FROM NATURE

Like the animals, man depends on nature for his livelihood. However, men begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence, a step which is conditioned by their physical organisation. By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life” (CW, 5, p. 31; MEW, 3, p. 21). Man manipulates nature; he does not merely live off it. He also manipulates nature consciously. Hence, the best of bees differ from the worst architect by the fact that

the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already
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existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own. (C1, p. 174; MEW, 23, p. 193).

Consciousness also allows man to produce "free from need," "in accordance with the laws of beauty," (CW, 3, pp. 276-277), and so on.

The link to nature is cut if workers, against their natural ability, are prevented from manipulating nature according to their will and consciousness, and if in the act of production man is forced to manipulate nature according to an alien will, a will independent of the producer. This point is illustrated in the _Grundrisse_:

> [T]he relation of labour to capital, or to the objective conditions of labour as capital, presupposes a process of history which dissolves the various forms in which the worker is a proprietor, or in which the proprietor works. Thus above all (1) Dissolution of the relation to the earth—land and soil—as natural condition of production—to which he relates as his own inorganic being; the workshop of his forces, and the domain of his will (translation mine).

When the link to nature is not broken, nature is man's inorganic body. Under conditions in which man is not forced to produce under an alien will, "man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature" (CW, 3, p. 276). But under capitalism this is not the case. Marx speaks of man's estrangement from nature (CW, 3, pp. 276-277; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 516-517), which means that man's "inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him" (CW, 3, p. 277). As a result, man is also prevented from seeing, through the act of production, nature "as his work and his reality" (CW, 3, p. 277). Marx goes so far as to say that even man's advantage over animals is transformed insofar as "his inorganic body, nature, is taken away from him" (CW, 3, p. 277).

ESTRANGEMENT FROM THE SPECIES AND FROM MAN

In the earlier discussion of Marx's concept of species, it is concluded that the same characteristics differentiating each individual from animals also designate the nature of the species. In this sense, the human species consists of individuals sharing the same biological characteristics, those characteristics that also define human nature. Beyond that, however, it is shown that the way in which human individuals interact also defines the
species. Hence, human interaction is by nature very different from animal interaction, particularly when it comes to production. For instance, the "need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other... and... the one is capable of producing the object of the need of the other" (G, p. 243; MEW, G, p. 154). According to Marx, this capability is qualitatively very different from that of animals. The species-nature is defined by the biological nature of human individuals comprising it, as well as by the quality of interaction among these individuals.

When Marx says that "estranged labour estranges the species from man" (CW, 3, p. 276), he does not mean that man ceases to be a member of the species. Rather, man remains a member of his species by definition. Under capital, however, the species as a whole is prevented from living according to its natural capability. The individual is therefore prevented from being a member of a "group" (species) which is allowed to pursue life according to its natural capability.

Marx maintains that "productive life is the life of the species" and that "free, conscious activity is man's species-character" (CW, 3, p. 276). If, however, as is the case under capitalism, man is forced to produce under an alien will and is prevented from appropriating the product of his own labor, the species loses its species character, and individuals, although capable, are prevented from interacting in such a way that the "need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other." Man is estranged from the species. He is forced to interact with other members of the species in a way that goes against the species' natural abilities, since, to the worker, an alien will determines what is produced, and how and for whom something is produced: "estranged labour... changes for him [i.e., man] the life of the species into a means of individual life.... In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labour tears from him his species-life, his real objectivity as a member of the species" (CW, 3, pp. 276-277; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 516-517). Estranged labor thus makes "man's species-life a means to his physical existence" (CW, 3, p. 277). It "estranges the life of the species and individual life, and... makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form" (CW, 3, p. 276; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 516). 

The form of human interaction under capital and wage labor is therefore quite different from what it could be according to the species-nature. Species membership becomes a mere formality, and interaction in productive life (species-life) a mere means to sustain physical existence. For
Marx, it is very obvious that “the proposition that man’s species-nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other” (CW, 3, p. 277; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 517). At yet another place he states:

An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life activity, from his species-nature 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 labour and to himself, also holds of a man’s relation to the other man, and to the other man’s labour and object of labour (translation mine; MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 517-518).9

In the Grundrisse, Marx reiterates this conclusion when he states that universal production on the basis of exchange value “produces . . . the alienation of the individual from himself and others” (G, p. 162; MEW, G, p. 80).

ESTRANGEMENT OF THE CAPITALIST

Here we consider the question as to whether nonworkers—those who are not engaged in production—are also estranged. First, we must remind ourselves that, although the workers are subject to an alien will and power, that will and power is mediated by other human beings. “If my own activity does not belong to me,” asks Marx, “if it is an alien, a coerced activity, to whom, then, does it belong?” His answer is that it belongs “to a being other than myself.” “The alien being to whom labour and the product of labour belongs, in whose service labour is done and for whose benefit the product of labour is provided, can only be man himself” (CW, 3, p. 278; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 518). Capitalists, as the human agents of capital, are also the human agents of the alien power controlling the workers. As members of the nonworking class and subject to constraints such as competition, they represent the alien will to which the workers are subjected. Since the worker is continually forced to resell his labor power to capital, he continually renews his estrangement through his activity which is compelled to follow an alien will. Of course, the capitalist is not compelled to sell his labor for an existence, but he, too, is a member of the species, and his human nature is the same as that of others. Although not forced to sell his labor power, the capitalist is still not a free agent, and, as we have seen, is compelled to live in a situation in which man is estranged from
man. Since the workers are prevented from interacting with others in such ways as their human nature enables them, their interaction with the agents of capital is also marked by estrangement. From the capitalists' point of view, this estrangement is not the result of their own labor activity, as is the case with workers. It is merely a condition that confronts them as a result of their relationship with the workers. Marx elaborates this point when he says:

First it has to be noted 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, . . . 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" (CW, 3, p. 282; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 522).

Although both worker and capitalist are estranged, the estrangement, because of differences in the social position, has a different impact on the two groups. As Marx writes in The Holy Family:

The propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognises estrangement as its own power and has in it the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels annihilated in estrangement; it sees in it its own powerlessness and the reality of an inhuman existence (CW, 4, p. 36; MEW, 2, p. 37).

While the capitalist's existence resembles a human existence, it is nevertheless not what it could be according to the nature of man and the species.

THE CAPITALIST'S RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORKER

As already indicated, "the capitalist, as capitalist, is simply the personification of capital, the creation of labour with its own will and personality which stands in opposition to labour" (TS 3, p. 296; MEW, 26.3, p. 290). It must be kept in mind, however, that for capital to be capital and for the capitalist to be a capitalist, the capitalist must not only possess money. He
must simultaneously have a social situation in which the means and conditions of production are separated from those who produce. Thus, Marx says that

it is not the ownership of money which makes the capitalist a capitalist. For money to be transformed into capital, the prerequisites for capitalist production must exist, whose first historical presupposition is that separation. The separation, and therefore the existence of the means of labour as capital, is given in capitalist production; this separation which constantly reproduces itself and expands, is the foundation of production (TS 3, p. 272; MEW, 26.3, p. 267).

Given the separation of the means and conditions of production from the worker, money can assume the form of capital; through the capitalist as an agent, money in its historically new form is now capable of employing labor. "Capital employs labour,” writes Marx, and “the means of production, the material conditions of labour” (all various forms of capital) are not subsumed by the worker, “but he is a means for them” (TS 1, p. 390; MEW, 26.1, p. 366). On the other hand, the capitalist as the agent of capital, contrary to previous noncapitalist forms of production, “does not rule over the labourer through any personal qualities he may have, but only insofar as he is ‘capital’; his domination is only that of materialised labour over living labour, of the labourer's product over the labourer himself” (TS 1, p. 390; MEW, 26.1, p. 366).

To say that the capitalist is “only capital personified” and that “his soul is the soul of capital” (C1, p. 224) is to imply that the capitalist himself is under certain constraints, and therefore not a free agent himself, since “capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus-value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus-labour” (C1, p. 224; MEW, 23, p. 247). Despite the fact that the capitalist as a person is motivated by the opportunity to retain and consume surplus value (see MEW, 24, p. 387), the capitalist's actions are constrained by the free competition which "brings out the inherent laws of capitalist production, in the shape of external coercive laws having power over every individual capitalist” (C1, p. 257; MEW, 23, p. 286). If, under capital, human life is treated recklessly, it is the result of the total conditions under which capital operates and competes. “Hence,” Marx says, “capital is reckless of the health or
length of life of the labourer, unless forced by society not to be reckless” (translation mine; MEW, 23, p. 285). With regard to the recklessness of capital, he asserts that “looking at things as a whole, all this does not, indeed, depend on the good or ill will of the individual capitalist” (C1, p. 257; MEW, 23, p. 286).

A COMMENT ON MARX’S TERMINOLOGY:

ENTÄUSSERUNG, ENTFREMDUNG, ALIENATION

The word “alienation” is often used as the translation of the German words Entäusserung and Entfremdung. However, use of this word is not consistent. In the Collected Works, Entfremdung tends to be rendered by the English word “estrangement,” while Entäusserung is usually translated as “alienation.” This is exemplified by the sentence “In the estrangement (Entfremdung) of the object of labour is merely summarised the estrangement (Entfremdung), the alienation (Entäusserung), in the activity of labour itself” (CW, 3, p. 274; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 514). Yet, the Progress Publishers edition of Theories of Surplus-Value and Capital (C3, p. 85; MEW, 25, p. 95) renders Entfremdung by the word “alienation,” as exemplified by “This alienation (Entfremdung) of the conditions of production corresponds ...” (TS 3, pp. 296, 530; MEW, 26.3, pp. 290, 519). Similarly, Nicolaus, in Marx’s Grundrisse, translates Entfremdung with “alienation,” while at another place translating Entäusserung with “dispossession” (G, pp. 150, 160-162, 674; MEW, G, pp. 68, 78-80, 566).

We will now consider what German words Marx used to convey the terms “alienation.” While a few examples will have to suffice in this short space, they are sufficiently representative to allow an opinion on the subject. There seems to be evidence that Marx used the term to mean primarily, and possibly exclusively, the German word Entäusserung. Marx translates alienation in James Stuart’s sentence “Labour, which through its alienation creates a universal equivalent, I call industry” (CPE, p. 58) with the word Entäusserung (MEW, 13, p. 44). In the Grundrisse Marx also uses the English word “alienation” interchangeably with and to designate the German word Entäusserung (MEW, G, pp. 722-723).

Because money is the general equivalent, the general power of purchasing, everything can be bought, everything may be transformed into money. But it can be transformed into money only by being alienated (alieniert), because the owner alienates (entäussert) himself from it.
Everything is therefore alienable, or indifferent for the individual, external to him. Thus the so-called *inalienable* (*unveraüßerlichen*), *eternal* possessions, and the immovable, solid property relations corresponding to them, break down in the face of money (translation mine). [When "alienation" renders a German word, the particular German word was put in parentheses. "Everything is therefore alienable" is Marx's own sentence.]

Since there is a discrepancy in the ways in which Marx and some translators used the term "alienation," it is important to see whether and how these differences can be reconciled. The above quotation shows that Marx uses *Entäusserung* and *Veräusserung* (or their derivatives) interchangeably. Both words can describe the situation in which somebody divests (*veräussert, entäussert*) himself of something, be it property in the form of a thing, land, or one's labor power. Marx predominantly uses *Entäusserung*, not *Veräusserung*, to describe this situation and, as we have seen, translates it with the word "alienation."

A well-known Latin-German dictionary of 1844 (Freund), translates the Latin word *alienatio* with *Veräusserung* and *Entäusserung*. It adds that, figuratively speaking, *alienatio* can also be translated as *Entfremdung, Sichentfernen von jemandem*, *Abfall, Abneigung*. The verb *alieno* is similarly translated by this dictionary. Although Marx did use the word *Entfremdung* in the *Grundrisse* and the word *fremd* often throughout his work, he did not apparently use the term "alienation," or any derivative thereof, to mean the German words *Entfremdung* or *fremd*. He did, however, use the term to translate the nonfigurative words *Entäusserung* and *Veräusserung*.

Since Marx used the word *Entäusserung* to render the English "alienation," it will be useful to consult a Latin-English dictionary for its rendering on the word *alienatio*. Based on the Freund Latin-German edition of 1844, an English edition appeared in 1854 (Andrews), thus indicating how the terms *alienatio* and *alieno* were understood then. In this work, *alienatio* is (1) the transferring of the possessions of a thing to another, so as to make it his property; (2) the transferring of one's self, that is, the going over to another; a separation, desertion. Unlike the German, no distinction is made between figurative and nonfigurative speech, although the conveyed meanings are the same. *Alieno* is defined in this way: (1) To make one person another; to make something the property of another; to alienate, to transfer by sale; to remove, to separate, to make foreign;
(2) (referring to the second rendering of _alienatio_) to withdraw or remove anyone from friendship for or love to anyone, to alienate, estrange, set at variance, to make enemies. Again, no differentiation between figurative and nonfigurative speech is made.

It can therefore be concluded that it is not incorrect to translate both Entäusserung and Entfremdung as “alienation,” but that such a rendering is not optimal. Hence, Entfremdung should be translated as “estrangement” and Entäusserung as “alienation” (see also Schacht, 1971: 80-81), for Marx himself seemed to have reserved the term “alienation” for Entäusserung (Andrews, 1854). There is another reason that would strongly support a differentiation between the two terms. While it is possible to “transfer the possession of a thing to another,” it does not follow that this Entäusserung (“alienation”) designates estrangement (Entfremdung). Marx is objecting to a very particular alienation (Entäusserung), namely, that which allows the previous owner of a thing to be affected in a way that is beyond his control. Thus, Marx assumes that it is human nature, if not interfered with, to satisfy the needs of one individual with the product of another. On this basis, Marx sees human interaction as qualitatively different from that of animals. However, Marx also assumes that it is human nature to alienate (entäussern) a thing such that another individual’s needs may be satisfied, since otherwise all the products would have to be consumed by the producer and could not become the property of another in order that the other’s needs may be satisfied. Under capital, the conditions are quite different. First, labor power is alienated, as a result of which the worker also loses control over his product. Second, since he is coerced into selling his labor power and loses control over the products of his labor, his own product confronts him as an object that is subject to another’s will, an alien will. The producer is estranged (entfremdet) from his product because he was forced to alienate (entäussern) his labor power in return for a wage and the abandonment of control over his product of labor.

It can now be easily seen why a clear distinction should be made between Entäusserung and Entfremdung. Although for Marx they are not mutually exclusive,11 under such social forms as exist, for example, under capital, Entäusserung can and must exist if man is to live according to his nature. Marx’s vision of communism therefore consists of a society in which products are mutually produced and consumed without permitting anyone to become an alien power over anyone.12
NOTES

1. In this respect, it is important to note that Marx promoted a daily limit on working hours. He urged the workers to unite and to push through the appropriate legislation in the form of a class action.

2. Other passages make the same point:

What does the primitive accumulation of capital, i.e., its historical genesis, resolve itself into? In so far as it is not immediate transformation of slaves and serfs into wage-labourers, and therefore a mere change of form, it only means the expropriation of the immediate producers, i.e., the dissolution of private property based on the labour of its owner (C1, p. 713; MEW, 23, p. 789).

The wage-slave, just like the real slave, cannot become a creditor’s slave due to his position. (C3, p. 595; MEW, 25, p. 609).

In *Theories of Surplus Value* and *Grundrisse*, Marx also compares slavery and wage labor, stating that wage labor is based on domination mediated through the market, while slavery or other forms of forced labor are based on direct domination of one part of the society by the other (MEW, 26.3, p. 391; MEW, G, p. 655).

3. Consider also the following quote: “The process, therefore, that clears the way for the capitalist system, can be none other than the process which takes away from the labourer the possession of his means of production.” (C1, p. 668; MEW, 23, p. 742).

4. In chapters 5, 6, and 8 I discussed Marx’s comments on how human beings ever managed to start a process that by its very nature became a detriment to them and prevented them from living according to their inalienable nature.

5. “Conditions of labour” (*Arbeitsbedingungen*) may not adequately convey the meaning of the German word. *Arbeitsbedingungen* are the conditions under which labor is performed. “Conditions,” however, stands for *all* parameters to which labor is subject.

6. Since, before entering on the process, his own labour has already been alienated from himself by the sale of his labour-power, has been appropriated by the capitalist and incorporated with capital, it must, during the process, be realised in a product that does not belong to him. Since the process of production is also the process by which the capitalist consumes labour-power, the product of the labourer is incessantly converted, not only into commodities, but into capital, into value that sucks up the value-creating power, into means of subsistence that buy the person of the labourer, into means of production that command the producers (C1, p. 535; MEW, 23, p. 596).

7. “To which he relates as his own inorganic being” is rendered in the Nicolaus translation as “to which he relates as to his own inorganic being” (G, p. 497). See also Marx’s use of the word “inorganic” in the *Manuscripts* where he seems to use it as an adjective to nature outside man’s organic body (MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 515-
ESTRANGEMENT

516). The same is the case for other passages in the *Grundrisse* (MEW, G, pp. 375, 384–390).

"[N]atural conditions of production" includes also any raw materials contained on the planet earth (MEW, G, p. 384).

For further elaboration, consider the following passages:

Another presupposition is the separation of free labour from the objective conditions of its realization—from the means of labour and the material for labour. Thus, above all, release of the worker from the soil as his natural workshop—hence dissolution of small, free landed property as well as of communal land-ownership resting on the oriental commune (G, p. 471; MEW, G, p. 375).

It is not the unity of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of an historic process, but rather the separation between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in relation of wage labour and capital. In the relations of slavery and serfdom this separation does not take place;” (G, p. 489; MEW, G, p. 389).

8. Here I disagree with Giddens (1971: 15-16) and Petrović who makes a similar argument (1967: 147). Giddens suggests that estrangement from the species must be seen as “a separation from socially generated characteristics and propensities.” Capitalism, he maintains, has created a potential which, if realized, could bring about Marx’s envisioned society. Such a realization is constantly being frustrated under capitalism, and estrangement is the result.

According to the interpretation given in this study, for Marx estrangement is not the frustrated realization of a potential created by the historical mode of production known to us as capitalism. On the contrary, it may be called the frustrated ability (that is, the inability) to live according to what is human nature—not potential, but factual and empirically verifiable human nature.

Giddens assumes his position in part to avoid and warn against an interpretation that postulates that estrangement results from a separation from what might be called a “state of nature.” Such a postulate may imply certain assumptions concerning man’s goodness, intelligence, creativity, and the like. Clearly, Marx did not believe that estrangement resulted from civilization preventing man from living according to a “state of nature.” Still, Marx holds that estrangement results from the inability to live according to one’s nature. This nature is defined by means of an empirical comparison with animals, and not by projection in the sense that social theorists sometimes have projected a “state of nature.” In his concept of “human nature in general,” there is no nostalgia or anything that might be viewed as historically relative. Hence, Marx’s “human nature in general” cannot be compared with theories on a state of
nature postulated by a Rousseau or Hobbes. Giddens does not make this mistake, but in avoiding it he neglects to see that estrangement results when man is prevented from living according to his nature.

Giddens’ interpretation of Marx’s theory of estrangement is problematic in other ways as well. How can estrangement be the frustrated realization of a socially created potential if it is a precondition for the development of this potential? As will become evident later, all development of the productive powers of man is seen to occur at the expense of estrangement. Only after sufficient development has occurred does Marx see a society without estrangement (communism) as realizable. He gives a partial modification of this position for the case of Russia: see his letter to Sassulitsch (MEW, 19, p. 242) and the preface to the second Russian edition of the Manifesto (MEW, 4, pp. 575-576). Estrangement, however, existed in Marx’s view long before the capitalistic foundations for communism were laid. The period of primitive accumulation may be cited as an example. During this period, wage labor was becoming more universal, and, although Marx would not claim that the foundations for communism had been laid by that time, it can be shown that the wage labourer could subject neither his labor power nor the product of his labor to his own will. In short, he was estranged.

9. “Specie-nature” is my translation of Gattungswesen. See my discussion on pp. 17-22; see also CW, 3, p. 277.

10. The Progress Publishers edition translates wo es nicht durch die Gesellschaft zur Rücksicht gezwungen wird as “unless under compulsion from society” (C1, p. 257).

11. At first, it may appear that Marx did not distinguish between Enttäusserung and Entfremdung in the French edition of Capital, the translation of which he approved. Thus, “Da vor seinem Eintritt in den Prozess seine eigene Arbeit ihm selbst entfremdet, dem Kapitalisten angeeignet und dem Kapital einverleibt ist,” is translated by “Son travail, déjà aliéné, fait propriété du capitaliste et incorporé au capital, même avant que le process commence. On closer inspection, entfremdet here refers to the fact that the worker’s labor power is being taken away from him, even before the process of production can begin, to become the property of capital. Entfremdet therefore carries the meaning of entaussert in the sense that, even before the process of production begins, the worker’s labor power has been alienated from him and has been made the property of capital, that is, the property of the capitalist as the agent of capital (MEW, 23, pp. 596-597: Le Capital: Livre I, p. 413).

Marx sometimes uses the two words alienation and estrangement in conjunction with each other, merely separating them by a comma. This is nothing but a technique to emphasize that, although the meanings of the two words are different, they are not mutually exclusive under capital (see MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 512, 514, 518, 522).

12. Although I have criticised translations that render Entfremdung as “alienation” instead of as “estrangement,” whenever quotes from these sources are used, the translation is not changed so that as much authenticity as possible can be preserved. The reader must therefore remember that when sources other than the Collected Works are quotes, “alienation” could stand for Entfremdung.