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Marx’s Evaluation of the Condition of Man in Precapitalist Societies

Marx illustrated his theory of estrangement by analyzing the nature of capitalist society, and he defined human nature in order to show how capitalism prevents man from living according to his nature. Based on the analysis of production and life under capital, he was able to demonstrate the various ways in which individuals are prevented from living according to their nature and from making use of the abilities they are endowed with by nature. However, because Marx’s effort was devoted primarily to obtaining a better understanding of the principles governing capitalist society, it cannot necessarily be concluded that his theory of estrangement could not also be valid in the analysis of noncapitalist social formations. Thus, it remains to be investigated whether Marx’s theory of estrangement contains properties that also can apply to noncapitalist societies. Of course, since Marx does not generally talk about estrangement in noncapitalist societies, this assessment will have to be based on inference.

The Delineation of the Capitalist Mode of Production

Since commodity production seems to be a reality in various social formations, the question arises as to what exactly distinguishes capitalist production from noncapitalist production. Marx contends that the level at which commodities are produced distinguishes the two.
The product appears as a commodity in the most varied organisms of social production. Consequently what characterises capitalist production would then be only the extent to which the product is created as an article of commerce, as a commodity, and hence the extent also to which its own constituent elements must enter again as articles of commerce, as commodities, into the economy from which it emerges.

As a matter of fact capitalist production is commodity production as the general form of production. But it is so and becomes so more and more in the course of its development only because labour itself appears here as a commodity . . . . For this reason capitalist production (and hence commodity production) does not reach its full scope until the direct agricultural producer becomes a wage-labourer (C2, pp. 119-120; MEW, 24, pp. 119-120).

Capitalist production is distinguished from the outset by two characteristic features.

*First.* It produces its products as commodities. The fact that it produces commodities does not differentiate it from other modes of production; but rather the fact that being a commodity is the dominant and determining characteristic of its products. This implies, first and foremost, that the labourer himself comes forward merely as a seller of commodities, and thus as a free wage-labourer, so that labour appears in general as wage-labour. . . The *second* distinctive feature of the capitalist mode of production is the production of surplus-value as the direct aim and determining motive of production. Capital produces essentially capital, and does so only to the extent that it produces surplus-value. (C3, pp. 881-882; MEW, 25, pp. 887-888).

Under capital, the nature and basis of authority are clearly distinct from those in noncapitalist production. As a consequence, although the extraction of surplus value is not unique to capital, the form in which it is extracted differs from that in noncapitalist production.

The authority assumed by the capitalist as the personification of capital in the direct process of production, the social function performed by him in his capacity as manager and ruler of production, is essentially different from the authority exercised on the basis of production of means of slaves, serfs, etc. (C3, p. 881; MEW, 25, p. 888).
THE CONDITION OF MAN IN PRECAPITALIST SOCIETIES

Under capital, the worker is subject to the authority of the capitalist as a result of exchange, and not as a result of human bondage and political or theocratic domination.

Whereas, on the basis of capitalist production, the mass of direct producers is confronted by the social character of their production in the form of strictly regulating authority and a social mechanism of the labour process organised as a complete hierarchy—this authority reaching its bearers, however, only as the personification of the conditions of labour in contrast to labour, and not as political or theocratic rulers as under earlier modes of production—among the bearers of this authority, the capitalists themselves, who confront one another only as commodity owners, there reigns complete anarchy within which the social interrelations of production assert themselves only as an overwhelming natural law in relation to individual free will (C 3, p. 881; MEW, 25, p. 888; see also MEW, G, pp. 367-368).

COMMUNITIES IN WHICH PROPERTY WAS HELD IN COMMON

If capitalist society is characterized by primarily commodity production, earlier noncapitalist social formations are characterized by the absence of systematic commodity production. The question arises as to what types of exchange exist in societies "based on property in common"—societies of the form of "a patriarchal family, an ancient Indian community, or a Peruvian Inca State." First, however, it must be noted that Marx distinguishes between various types of exchange. For example, he states that savages often do not exchange one particular use value for another; instead, "a chaotic mass of articles are offered as the equivalent of a single article" (C 1, p. 91; MEW, 23, p. 102). Barter differs from the type of exchange often found with savages as well as from the type of exchange characteristic in capitalist society.

The direct barter of products attains the elementary form of the relative expression of value in one respect, but not in another. That form is \( x \text{ Commodity } A = y \text{ Commodity } B \). The form of direct barter is \( x \text{ use-value } A = y \text{ use-value } B \). The articles A and B in this case are not as yet commodities, but become so only by the act of barter. The first step made by an object of utility towards acquiring exchange-
value is when it forms a non-use-value for its owner, and that happens when it forms a superfluous portion of some article required for his immediate wants (C1, p. 91; MEW, 23, p. 102).

Capitalism systematically produces more commodities than the producer needs and, more importantly, it produces directly for exchange. Unlike a barter economy under which products become commodities only through the act of exchange, under capital products immediately become commodities.

In the direct barter of products, each commodity is directly a means of exchange to its owner, and to all other persons an equivalent, but that only insofar as it has use-value for them. At this stage, therefore, the articles exchanged do not acquire a value-form independent of their own use-value, or of the individual needs of the exchangers (C1, pp. 91-92; MEW, 23, p. 103).

If, however, individuals consistently barter, exchange becomes a regular social process and the desire for foreign use values becomes an every day phenomenon.

[1]n the course of time, therefore, some portion at least of the products of labour must be produced with a special view to exchange. From that moment the distinction becomes firmly established between the utility of an object for the purpose of consumption, and its utility for the purposes of exchange. Its use-value becomes distinguished from its exchange-value. On the other hand, the quantitative proportion in which the articles are exchangeable, becomes dependent on their production itself. Custom stamps them as values with definite magnitudes” (C1, p. 91; MEW, 23, p. 103).

Marx postulates that exchange begins at the point where the community stops (MEW, 23, pp. 25, 102-103, 187). That is, it exists between communities. If members of two different communities engage regularly in direct barter, their products become commodities on a regular basis, although they may not be commodities from the very outset of their production. However, “as soon ... as products once become commodities in the external relations of a community, they also, by reaction, become so
in its internal intercourse." The communities based on common property to which Marx referred had not yet become subject to this process. In their internal relations, products had not become commodities because the communities' external relations consisted of an exchange that at best was infrequent and erratic. While no set pattern had emerged, some exchange may have occasionally occurred.

[T]hose small and extremely ancient Indian communities, some of which have continued down to this day, are based on possession in common of the land, on the blending of agriculture and handicrafts, and on an unalterable division of labour, which serves, whenever a new community is started, as a plan and scheme ready cut and dried. . . . The chief part of the products is destined for direct use by the community itself, and does not take the form of a commodity. Hence, production here is independent of that division of labour brought about, in Indian society as a whole, by means of the exchange of commodities. It is the surplus alone that becomes a commodity, and a portion of even that, not until it has reached the hands of the State, into whose hands from time immemorial a certain quantity of these products has found its way in the shape of rent in kind. (C1, p. 337; MEW, 23, p. 378).

It is now possible to return to our original question as to what type of exchange exists with societies "based on property in common." According to Marx, commodity production does not exist within such communities, and there is no or only minimal barter between the members. This does not mean that some individuals do not produce more than they need for themselves. On the contrary, there are surplus products, some of which are exchanged with other communities (barter), some given as tribute to government, and the rest distributed among the members. Strictly speaking, this distribution of products internal to the community "based on property in common" is a form of exchange, since the surplus of "A" may benefit "B" and inverse, or the products of one type of manufacture may benefit those who manufacture a different product (MEW, 23, pp. 378-379). The decisive point is that this process occurs without the products becoming commodities, either by being exchanged in barter fashion or, worse, by being produced for a market in which exchange value and use value have already become distinguished as separate forms of value. According to which criteria, then, are products exchanged in communities "based on
property in common?" To my knowledge, Marx does not answer this question. Engels, however, says in *Anti Dübring* that both work and products for consumption are distributed according to tradition and needs (MEW, 20, p. 288). Implicitly, Marx makes the same assertion when discussing the Inca Indians: "[T]ransportation played a prominent role in the land of the Incas, although the social product neither circulated as a commodity nor was distributed by means of barter" (C2, p. 152; MEW, 24, p. 152).

COMMUNISTIC SOCIETIES BASED ON THE GENTILE ORGANIZATION

It is useful to know how Marx views societies that have no products to be exchanged or that do not exchange with other communities. As is well known, both in his views and his techniques of reasoning Marx relies heavily on the work of L. H. Morgan. Morgan's method is one of evolutionary prediction in reverse. Instead of predicting the state into which a given society will evolve, a state about which we have no information whatsoever, knowledge about the history of societies is used to infer the type of society from which they evolved. For example, information on tribal societies is used to infer the social organization from which these tribal societies evolved. Thus, the attempt is made to construct a view of society and its organizational structure for a period in human history for which we have no living examples.

In this context, it is not important to assess whether the method used by Marx, as well as Engels and Morgan, is appropriate. Nor is it imperative to discuss whether Marx was correct in his inferences concerning the original condition of societies. What is important is to note some of his views on this subject, since they will be helpful in assessing his theory of estrangement.

Unfortunately, Marx's thinking on societies in the original condition is available only in a rather incomplete and sketchy form. Through Lawrence Krader, however, some of Marx's views in the *Ethnological Notebooks* have become available to a larger circle. Largely with the help of the *Notebooks*, an attempt is made here to extract those Marxian views that may have a bearing on the interpretation of his theory of estrangement. Even so, the *Notebooks* do not give us a complete account of his thinking on societies in the original state. To escape this limitation, some use of Engels' writings will be made on this subject. Certainly it would be better
to have Marx’s complete views, but under the circumstances, it is better to
“supplement” Marx’s thinking on the subject rather than rely solely on
the Ethnological Notebooks. This procedure is justified (1) because Engels
had access to Marx’s notes on Morgan and used them for his book on the
origin of the family, and (2) because in view of their intimate friendship
and their mutual cooperation until Marx’s death, Engels’ views can be
assumed not to have deviated significantly from those of Marx in this
respect. As Engels tells us in his foreword, Marx intended to write a
book on the family similar to the one Engels wrote shortly after Marx’s
death in 1883. A close exchange of ideas must have taken place, and there
is no evidence that the two disagreed significantly concerning communist
societies based on the gentile organization.

According to Engels (MEW, 21, p. 71), Marx often said that the key
to understanding our own primitive age can be found among the American
Indians. This primitive age at first consisted of life in the form of hordes,
a form of human life that Marx thought could not be found anymore and
that was “far below the lowest savage now living” (EN, p. 125). Sexual
relations at this level are characterized as “promiscuous intercourse” and
“the ruder flint implements found over part of the earth’s surface, and not
used by existing savages, attest extreme rudeness of man’s condition” (EN,
p. 125). After man emerged from this primitive habitat, he commenced as
a fisherman to spread over continental areas (EN, p. 125). Thus, the first
stage of the family was formed. It was the consanguine family which “recog­
nized promiscuity within defined limits” (EN, p. 125). Further organiza­
tion into gentes (kinship) occurred within which brothers and sisters were
prohibited from marrying, although monogamy had not been established
and sexual access was not limited to one partner. Gens, the general name
for organizational forms in which kinship was derived from one ancestral
mother—since as a result of promiscuity the father was not known—were
democratically organized. The council of the gens with the Iroquois was
the instrument of government and had supreme authority over gens.

[E]very adult male and female member had a voice upon all questions
brought before it; it elected and deposed its sachem and chiefs . . . it
condoned or avenged the murder of a gentilis, it adopted persons into
the gens. It was the germ of the higher council of the tribe, and of that
still higher of the confederacy, each of which was composed exclusively
of chiefs as representatives of the gentes . . . . All the members of an
Iroquois gens personally free, bound to defend each other's freedom; equal in privileges and personal rights. Sachem and chiefs claiming to superiority; a brotherhood bound together by the ties of kin. Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, though never formulated, were cardinal principles der gens and those the unit of a social and governmental system, the foundation on which Indian society organized (EN, p. 150; translation mine where necessary; see also EN, p. 162).

Marx notes that "[i]n this lower and middle ethnical period democratic principles were the vital element of gentile society" (EN, p. 172; translation mine where necessary). The sachems, who were the counselors of the people, were required to make unanimous decisions concerning all public questions. Such unanimity was essential to the validity of every public act (EN, p. 170; see also EN, pp. 165-166 and MEW, 21, p. 21).

Marx also notes that all the members of an Iroquois gens were personally free. Thus, even

[Military questions usually left to the action of the voluntary principle. Theoretically each tribe at war with every other tribe with which it had not formed a treaty of peace. Any person at liberty to organize a war party and conduct an expedition wohin he wollte. He announced bis project by giving a war-dance and inviting volunteers . . . When a tribe was menaced with an attack, war parties were formed to meet it in much the same manner. Where forces so raised were united in one body, each under its own war-captain and their joint movements determined by a council of these captains (EN, p. 162).

Since the Iroquois were organized according to the principle of consanguinity, it can be inferred that they practiced a communistic life-style. Marx remarks that "communism in living seems to have originated in the necessities of the consanguine family" (EN, p. 115). Although a certain office may have passed from father to son, it does not follow that there was hereditary succession. As shown above, the Iroquois members of the gens had the power to elect and recall their representatives. If succession from father to son occurred, it was "by the free consent of the people." According to Marx, hereditary succession came "from force (usurpation)" (EN, p. 173).

On this level of social and economic development, with regard to the labor time required for individuals to insure subsistence propagation of
the species, Marx comments in the *Grundrisse* that “[in] the lowest stages of production . . . few human needs have yet been produced, and thus few to be satisfied. Necessary labour is therefore restricted, not because labour is productive, but because it is not very necessary” (G, p. 398; MEW, G, p. 302). Although few products are being produced at this level of development, it does not follow that there is no surplus. However, “in the less productive stages of exchange, people exchange nothing more than their superfluous labour time; this is the measure of their exchange, which therefore extends only to superfluous products,” while under capital “the existence of necessary labour time is conditional on the creation of superfluous labour time” (G, p. 398; MEW, G, pp. 301-302).

Certainly, Morgan’s description of communism associated with consanguineous kinship relations appealed to Marx in many ways. Yet, it would be wrong to conclude that Marx “approved” of life at this stage of development and proclaimed it to be the ideal human condition. Already in the *Manuscripts*, he shows a certain kind of contempt for the “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, p. 295; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 535). He states his objections to primitive communism more precisely in *Capital*:

[T]hose ancient social organisms of production are, as compared with bourgeois society, extremely simple and transparent. But they are founded either on the immature development of man individually, who has not yet severed the umbilical cord that unites him with his fellowmen in a primitive tribal community, or upon direct relations of subjection. They can arise and exist only when the development of the productive power of labour has not risen beyond a low stage, and when, therefore, the social relations within the sphere of material life, between man and man, and between man and nature, are correspondingly narrow (C1, pp. 83-84; MEW, 23, pp. 93-94).

In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels elaborates on this theme.

[T]he gentile constitution in its best days, as we saw it in America, presupposed an extremely sparse population over a wide area. Man’s attitude to nature was therefore one of almost complete subjection to a strange incomprehensible power, as is reflected in his childish religious
conceptions. Man was bounded by his tribe, both in relation to strangers from outside the tribe and to himself; the tribe, the gens, and their institutions were sacred and inviolable, a higher power established by nature, to which the individual subjected himself unconditionally in feeling, thought, and action. However impressive the people of this epoch appear to us, they are completely undifferentiated from one another; as Marx says, they are still attached to the navel string of the primitive community (OF, p. 88; MEW, 21, p. 97).

For Marx, the communistic primitive community is not the ideal state of existence, although in some respects it was attractive to him. If, at one time, these primitive societies were communistic, however, what factors contributed to the decay of this communism? In the following pages, again with the help of Engels' writings, an attempt is made to reconstruct Marx's thought concerning the historical developments that led to the "fall from the simple moral greatness of the old gentile society" (OF, p. 88) and started the process of civilization for these societies.

Engels comments that the organization of the Iroquois people was doomed to collapse and that the highest form of their social organization—the confederacy of tribes—already marked the beginning of its collapse. As evidence, he cites the Iroquois' attempts to subjugate others and the fact that war was common and only later mitigated by self-interest (OF, p. 87; MEW, 21, p. 97). The more profound source of decay lay elsewhere, however. According to Marx, the differences in the distribution of personal property were primarily responsible for the beginning crack in the foundations of communism. Marx's examples are not necessarily drawn from the Iroquois, however, since Marx's assumption is that the slightly more developed social forms from which the examples are often drawn were at one time also communistic. Consequently, evidence of the emergence of personal property is not confined to the Iroquois, and according to Marx and Engels, can also be found in the history of other societies. In the German Ideology, Marx and Engels propose the idea that "real private property began with the ancients, as with modern nations, with movable property" (CW, 5, p. 89; MEW, 3, p. 61). And in his Ethnological Notebooks Marx notes that at the stage only slightly higher in development than that of the Iroquois there is a

great increase in personal property and some changes in the relations of persons to land. The territorial domain still belonged to the tribe in common; but a portion now set apart for support of the govern-
ment, another for religious uses, and a still more important portion—that from which the people drew its subsistence, divided among the several gentes, or communities of persons who resided in the same pueblo. . . . Individual ownership of houses and lands excluded by communal property of lands by gentes or communities of persons, joint-tenement houses and mode of occupation by related families . . . . Their land is held in common, but after a person cultivates a lot he has the personal claim to it which he can sell to one of the community. (EN, p. 132; translation mine where necessary).

Here Marx is referring to the Laguna Pueblo Indians whom he states are an example of the stage of development slightly higher than the one of the Iroquois.

Of the Mogui Village Indians, he remarks that they “now have flocks of sheep, horses and mules and considerable other personal property” (EN, p. 132; translation mine where necessary). On this level, Engels points out that, in contrast to the lowest levels of development, a steady surplus may be produced, facilitating a regular exchange and a division of labor that is not based merely on sex, age, and physical strength (OF, p. 150; MEW, 21, p. 160).¹ Citing Marx, Engels maintains that “the property differences within one and the same gens . . . transformed its unity of interest into, antagonism between its members.” These property differences were also accompanied by “greed for riches” (see also EN, p. 128) and transformed the whole gentile constitution, with its roots in the people, in gens, phratry, and tribe, into its opposite:

[F]rom an organization of tribes for the free ordering of their own affairs it becomes an organization for the plundering and oppression of their neighbors; and correspondingly its organs change from instruments of the will of the people into independent organs for the domination and oppression of the people (OF, p. 150; MEW, 21, p. 160).

According to Engels, at this point in history the threshold of civilization was reached (OF, p. 150).²

MARX'S USE OF THE TERM “PRIVATE PROPERTY”

In his Ethnological Notebooks, Marx does not, to my knowledge, use the term “private property.” As we have seen, however, he does use the terms
"property" (Eigentum), "objects of ownership" (EN, pp. 127-128), "personal property," and "individual ownership" (EN, p. 132). These terms are used in the context of describing how the original communism was undermined by the unequal accumulation of products by individuals. These may not have been isolated individuals, but in contrast to the previous form of communistic ownership, it was personal property and a form of private property. This may also have been Engels' reason for occasionally substituting the term Privateigentum (private property) with Sondereigentum (separate ownership of) for his later editions of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (see MEW, 21, pp. 58, 156), while in his first edition he used Privateigentum with no qualification. The substitution allowed him to emphasize that it was not Privateigentum in the sense known today, but neither was it communal property anymore. The following passage from Engels illustrates this point:

But to whom did this new wealth belong? Originally to the gens, without a doubt. Private property in herds must have already started at an early period, however. . . . What is certain is that we must not think of him as a property owner in the modern sense of the word. And it is also certain that at the threshold of authentic history we already find the herds everywhere separately owned (Sondereigentum) by heads of families, as are the artistic products of barbarism—metal implements, luxury articles and, finally, the human cattle—the slaves (OF, p. 48; MEW, 21, p. 58).

For Marx the term Privateigentum seems to refer primarily to property as appropriated in the city-states of Rome and Greece, under feudalism, and under capitalism. This can be said despite the fact that Marx, in the *German Ideology*, says that "real private property began with the ancients, as with modern nations, with movable property" (CW, 5, p. 89; MEW, 3, p. 61). On the contrary, his emphasis on real private property can be seen as a conscious distinction from the way he commonly uses the term "private property," namely, to designate the ownership of the means of production, be it in the form of feudal landholdings or machinery under capital. Thus, in the *Manuscripts*, Marx maintains that feudal property in land was the beginning of the domination of private property and that it was the root of private property (MEW, EB 1.T., pp. 505-506). In the *Manuscripts* he also states that
only at the culmination of the development of private property does this, its secret, appear again, namely, that on the one hand it is the *product* of alienated labour, and that on the other it is the *means* by which labour alienates itself, the *realisation of this alienation* (CW, 3, p. 280; MEW, EB 1.T., p. 520).

As a result of the private ownership of the means of production, it is possible to coerce others into giving up their product of work, or a portion of it, in return for a wage. This, in turn, perpetuates the ability of some to compel others to sell their labor. The owners of the means of production are able to maintain their property and accumulate more only if surplus labor can be extracted from others, whose existence depends on earning a wage.

The term "private property" is also used in Marx's *Theories of Surplus-Value* in such a way as to designate clearly the private ownership of the means of production.

The original unity between the worker and the conditions of production (abstracting from slavery, where the labourer himself belongs to the objective conditions of production) has two main forms: the Asiatic communal system (primitive communism) and a small-scale agriculture based on the family (and linked with domestic industry) in one form or another. Both are embryonic forms and both are equally unfitted to develop labour as *social* labour and the productive power of social labour. Hence the necessity for the separation, for the rupture, for the antithesis of labour and property (by which property in the conditions of production is to be understood). The most extreme form of this rupture, and the one in which the productive forces of social labour are also most powerfully developed, is capital. The original unity can be re-established only on the material foundation which capital creates and by means of the revolutions which, in the process of this creation, the working class and the whole society undergo (TS, 3, pp. 422-423; MEW, 26.3, pp. 414-415).

And in *Capital*, Marx mentions that the "legal view of free private ownership of land, arises in the ancient world only with the dissolution of the organic order of society, and in the modern world only with the development of capitalistic production" (C3, p. 616; MEW, 25, p. 629).
In summary, Marx reserved the term "private property" to designate private ownership of the means of production, and he used other terms to designate the privately accumulated products which were not means of production. Thus, the personal and unequal accumulation of herds and other objects which undermined the communism of the gens cannot be considered to be means of production. Accordingly, he used the term "personal property" rather than "private property." Unfortunately, Marx's death prevented him from showing how unequally accumulated personal property led to the ownership of the means of production (private property). Hence, Engels' work on the origin of the family and private property assumes an important place in the interpretation of Marx's thought.

NOTES

1. Similarly, Marx writes about the Russian community that owned large parts of land in common and combined work in agriculture with handicraft. Those communities were not engaged in commodity production and adjusted their craft activities to the agricultural seasonal production schedule. Craftmanship complemented agricultural production (MEW, 24, pp. 243-244). Thus the Russian community, too, was quite resistant to being torn apart by commerce. In this context Marx says that

The obstacles presented by the internal solidity and organisation of pre-capitalistic, national modes of production to the corrosive influence of commerce are strikingly illustrated in the intercourse of the English with India and China. The broad basis of the mode of production here is formed by the unity of small-scale agriculture and home industry, to which in India we should add the form of village communities built upon the common ownership of land, which identically, was the original form in China as well. In India the English lost no time in exercising their direct political and economic power, as rulers and landlords, to disrupt these small economic communities. English commerce exerted a revolutionary influence on these communities and tore them apart only in so far as the low prices of its goods served to destroy the spinning and weaving industries, which were an ancient integrating element of this unity of industrial and agricultural production. And even so this work of dissolution proceeds very gradually. And still more slowly in China, where it is not reinforced by direct political power. The substantial economy and saving in time afforded by the association of agriculture with manufacture put up a stubborn resistance to the products of the big industries, whose prices include the faux frais of the circulation process which pervades them. Unlike the English, Russian commerce, on the other hand, leaves the economic groundwork of Asiatic production untouched (C3, pp. 333-334; MEW, 25, p. 346. See also C1, p. 333; MEW, 23, p. 372).
2. It would, of course, be incorrect to assume that the increase in personal property emerged from one day to the next. Marx notes that "the objects of ownership increase, of course, in every 'successive ethnical period'. . . . The growth of property is thus closely connected with the increase of inventions and discoveries, and the improvements of social institutions which mark the several ethnical periods of human progress" (EN, p. 127; translation mine where necessary). Nevertheless, a significant unequal accumulation of personal property occurred primarily at the stage of "barbarism," to use Morgan's terminology, which was adopted by Marx and Engels. Concerning the decay of the Greek gens, Engels shows how changes in inheritance patterns led to unequal accumulation on the part of individuals. The fact that specific individuals of a household rather than the community of gentiles inherited the possessions of individuals after the death of individuals (see EN, p. 128) was crucial for the future of communism based on gens. Engels writes:

Thus in the Greek constitution of the heroic age we see the old gentile order as still a living force. But we also see the beginnings of its disintegration: father-right, with transmission of the property to the children, by which accumulation of wealth within the family was favored and the family itself became a power as against the gens; reaction of the inequality of wealth on the constitution by the formation of the first rudiments of hereditary nobility and monarchy; slavery, at first only of prisoners of war, but already preparing the way for the enslavement of fellow-members of the tribe and even of the gens; the old wars between tribe and tribe already degenerating into systematic pillage by land and sea for the acquisition of cattle, slaves and treasure, and becoming a regular source of wealth; in short, riches praised and respected as the highest good and the old gentile order misused to justify the violent seizure of riches (OF, pp. 96-97; MEW, 21, p. 105).

Similarly, Engels comments at the end of his chapter on the Iroquois:

[T]he power of this primitive community had to be broken, and it was broken. But it was broken by influences which from the very start appear as a degradation, a fall from the simple moral greatness of the old gentile society. The lowest interests—base greed, brutal appetites, sordid avarice, selfish robbery of the common wealth—inaugurate the new, civilised, class society. It is by the vilest means, theft, violence, fraud, treason—that the old classless gentile society is undermined and overthrown (OF, p. 88; MEW, 21, p. 97).

Krader suggests that "in Marx's conception the office of the chief had been opposed to the collectivity within it not only in the period of the dissolution of the gens and tribe, but before, since, contrary to Morgan, the chief was elected only in theory" (EN, pp. 37, 42). Krader cites Marx's excerpts on Maine as evidence:

[T]o Maine, . . . the quite natural function of the chief of the gens, furthermore of tribe, natural just because he is their chief (and theoretically always "elected"),
appears as "artificial" and "mere administrative authority," whereby, from
the archaic point of view, it is exactly the arbitrariness of the modern *pater
familias*, as the private family, which is "artificial" (EN, p. 309; translation
mine where necessary).

Marx's remark "theoretically always 'elected'" does not warrant the conclusion
that the chief was "elected only (my emphasis) in theory" and that Marx perceived
the office of the chief to be in opposition to the collectivity. To be certain about
this, one would need additional information, but such evidence was not found in
Engels or Marx, nor does Krader cite additional evidence. Moreover, in the quoted
excerpt on Maine, Marx does not seem to directly evaluate whether the office of
the chief was in opposition to the collectivity. He merely states that theoretically
the chief was always elected. However, he indirectly evaluates the extent to which
the chief's position was not arbitrary when he asserts that the position of the modern
paterfamilias was artificial. Marx seems to make the point, against Maine, that,
since the chief is in theory always elected, his position, contrary to that of the
paterfamilias, was not arbitrary and artificial. If anything can be concluded, it
would be the opposite of what Krader concluded, namely, that the office of the
chief was not necessarily in opposition to the collectivity.

Krader may also put a somewhat misplaced emphasis on Marx's thinking on
right and obligation:

Hegel had conceived the political relation as the balance of right and obliga-
tion; in this matter, Marx had followed him. . . . In the community the balance
of right and obligation is a traditional development, whereas in the polity
the balance must be redeveloped by appeal to force, to reason, to sentiment
on disposition, and the like; in the latter case the balance becomes artificial,
as a device of civilization (EN, p. 67).

However, Engels writes that for the community, that is, the gentile communistic
organization before it reached the threshold of civilization, the distinction between
rights and duties cannot be made.

This simple organization suffices completely for the social conditions out of
which it sprang. It is nothing more than the grouping natural to those condi-
tions, and it is capable of settling all conflicts that can arise within a society
so organized. War settles external conflicts; it may end with the annihilation
of the tribe, but never with its subjugation. It is the greatness, but also the
limitation, of the gentile constitution that it has no place for ruler and ruled.
Within the tribe there is as yet no difference between rights and duties: the
question whether participation in public affairs, in blood revenge or atone-
ment, is a right or a duty, does not exist for the Indian; it would seem to him
just as absurd as the question whether it was a right or a duty to sleep, eat,
or hunt (OF, p. 144; MEW, 21, pp. 132-133).
The question, then, is not one of a balance of right and obligation as Krader, without citing Marx, suggests. Rather, it is one of the existence or nonexistence of the notions of right and obligation. If, in the absence of other evidence, we can take Engels' view as a proper reflection of what Marx thinks on this topic, it must be concluded that Marx did not think of life in the gentile communistic organization as one in which rights and obligations are balanced, be it through traditional development or not. One would have to perceive of life in such a society as subject to no other means of social control than public opinion, and also outside the realm of any definition of what is right and what is obligation. Hence, the question of balance between right and obligation would not even enter into the picture. It is Engels' view that public opinion was the only means of coercion. For him, "the gentile organization had grown out of a society which knew no internal contradictions, and it was only adapted to such a society. It possessed no means of coercion except public opinion" (OF, p. 154; MEW, 21, p. 164).