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Marx went on to present his theory of alienation by looking at what he believed were the four broad relations that are formed within the context of human laboring activity.²⁵² These relations are conceived by Marx as relations (i) with the product of labor; (ii) with laboring activity; (iii) with the human species; and (iv) relations with other human beings. Since he thought that alienation breaks the fundamental link human beings have to their self defining qualities, he went on to identify four distinct types of alienation: (i) alienation from the product of labor; (ii) alienation from productive activity; (iii) alienation from the human species; and (iv) alienation from fellow human beings.²⁵³

Alienation from the Product The first type of alienation discussed by Marx is product alienation. This takes place, said Marx, when human beings become estranged from the things they produce and lose control over their product. But how can the worker lose control over what they produce? To answer this question, we can briefly look at production in feudal society. In a feudal society, production is carried on for purposes of existence so that what is produced is consumed directly to satisfy material needs without the product entering into circulation for purposes of buying and selling. By the very fact of their material labor, workers thus form relations with what they produce since what they produce has immediate use value, belongs to them directly, and they consume it to satisfy their economic needs. In this case, the product of labor directly satisfies their material needs and this sustains their life and existence. In addition, what the laborer produces in feudal society not only has immediate

252 For a different conception of these relations see Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man*, p. 137.

253 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 106

use value, but it affirms their relationship to themselves in their own productive powers because it sustains their life and existence.

In modern society, by contrast, this situation is reversed. To begin with, production is for exchange rather than immediate use, and what is produced by the worker must enter into the medium of exchange called the market. In this sense, the worker loses control over the product of their labor since the product belongs to the owner of the means of production where it is put into circulation for purposes of purchase and sale. Product alienation thus occurs when the product no longer belongs to the worker and circulates in the medium of exchange where it appears to be detached from the laborer who creates it. In thus circulating in the system of exchange, the product now confronts the worker as something alien and unrelated to the worker's existence. At this point in the production process the worker no longer has control over what they produce and, since the ownership over the means of production is concentrated in another class, both the product of labor and the labor itself confront the worker externally as a thing not of their own making.²⁵⁴

Marx went on to argue that product alienation alters the individual's social relation to what they produce and to the natural world. Whereas in feudal society workers receive subsistence and self definition from the product, in industrial society the worker is alienated from what they produce because both the product and the means of production no longer belongs to them but are owned privately by the capitalist. To this extent, alienation appears in the form of the worker's separation from both the product and the means of production. Under such circumstances, the product of labor may be said to stand over and against the worker because the worker never engages the means of production directly since it is mediated both by the ownership of another class, and by the necessity for purchase and sale of the product in the system of exchange.

As the means of production become the property of only one class in society, human labor and the product of labor stand over and against the worker as an alien thing. This happens, Marx thought, in two distinct ways. First, since human labor is mediated by a system of ownership in which the worker is forced to sell their labor to the capitalist in exchange for a wage, they no longer own or have control over their labor as they once did in feudal society. Second, as result of the fact that the product enters into the system of exchange, the product creates no use value for the worker either in the form of direct subsistence or self definition.²⁵⁵

In addition to this, Marx thought that product alienation breaks the connection workers form in identifying with the product they produce. In feudal society, according to Marx, what the laborer produced affirmed the relationship they had to their own productive powers because 'labor is realized in its object or product.'²⁵⁶ To this extent, the product of labor is always the 'summary of the activity of production' so that the product constitutes a source of self-identification.²⁵⁷ As exchange becomes

²⁵⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 110

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 108.

the dominant social relation, however, product alienation becomes greatest when the worker cannot use the product they produce.

Alienation from Productive Activity The second form of alienation discussed by Marx is alienation from productive activity. In this type of alienation human beings lose control over the capacity of their laboring activity to affirm their being and define their self-existence. But in order to understand what Marx meant by this term, it will be useful to look at a concept he used frequently throughout his work called a ‘social relation.’ Historically, the term social relation is primarily used by Marx by to describe the relationship that is formed between the individual and the outer world in the labor process, and to pinpoint the way in which human beings are essentially connected to existence and to the external world through their laboring activity. Understood in this sense, individuals are connected to existence by their labor in two broad ways: first, it connects them to themselves to the extent that they receive self affirmation from it in the form of material satisfactions; second, it connects them to others and to the social world in that by their laboring activity they form relations with history and society. Looked at from this point of view, every relation created by human labor can be viewed from two distinct vantage points: from its relation to itself, and from relations external to itself.²⁵⁸ Marx went on to describe alienation from productive activity in the following way:

First, the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor.

Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification. Lastly, the external character of labor 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. As a result, the worker no longer feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal. Certainly eating, drinking and procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions.

But abstractly taken, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions.²⁵⁹

257 Ibid., p. 110.

258 S. Hook, *From Hegel to Marx*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1936, p. 23.

259 Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 110–11.

In the above quotation Marx stated that alienation from productive activity breaks the connection the worker has to the self affirming and self defining aspects of their laboring activity, and it does this in three broad ways. First, to the extent that the worker sells their labor in exchange for a wage, their labor is external to them in that it belongs to another during the course of the workday. The external character of labor exists, according to Marx, when the worker cannot dispose of their labor as they see fit, and when they are compelled to sell it to the capitalist in exchange for a wage. Because the worker loses control over their laboring activity in this case, their labor does not ‘affirm’ them because the labor no longer belongs to them. This type of alienation takes place in industrial society when the worker’s movements are not their own, but are directly controlled by a superior who clocks and tabulates their movements for purposes of measuring their efficiency and controlling the outcome of their labor. When workers lose control over their laboring activity and cannot control their own body movements while being told ‘how to work,’ Marx argued that they only feel ‘at home when they are not working,’ and when ‘they are working they are not at home.’²⁶⁰ In this respect, labor is external in that it confronts the worker in a alien form that they do not recognize. This has a double impact. While the labor of the worker belongs to someone else, workers ‘only feel human outside their work, and in their work they feel outside themselves.’²⁶¹ This is labor which has as its end the loss of the worker, since the worker’s labor operates on them independently of their will, purpose and desire.

Second, alienation from productive activity reverses the individual’s relationship to themselves and their own productive powers. Under these circumstances, the labor of the worker does not hold out the direct satisfaction of their material needs as it once did in feudal society since what is produced enters into the medium of exchange. This, said Marx, converts the worker’s activity into nothing more than a means to satisfy their human need, so that the sole purpose of life becomes that of fulfilling needs. This alienates individuals from the capacity of their labor to define their essential being since, in capitalism, labor is performed only to fulfill immediate economic needs. Under these circumstances, the laborer can only understand work as springing from internal needs and thus labors only to satisfy their physical necessities. This type of alienation is experienced when the worker simply lives from pay check to pay check and is never able to catch up, but rather always falls behind. In this condition, the worker comes to believe that the maintenance of their individual existence is the single and solitary aim of their life activity. On this basis, the worker thus lives solely to acquire the means of living.²⁶²

Third, alienation from productive activity reverses the individual’s relation to their own physical body. While in feudal societies productive activity defined the sphere

260 Ibid.

261 Ibid, p. 111.

262 Ibid.

of free actions in all functions, in capitalism productive activity is free only in those functions which workers share with animals such as eating, sleeping, drinking and procreating, since only these functions are free and unsupervised. In their human laboring functions, therefore, workers feel themselves to be like animals, since ‘what is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.’²⁶³ In this case, individuals are alienated from their physical bodies because they are no longer able to dispose of their labor as freely as if it were their private property. Under these circumstances, those functions they share with animals such as eating, drinking, sleeping and procreating constitute a ‘reversal of human and animal functions’ because the ‘activities which human beings share with animals appears more human than those activities which mark them off as human beings.’²⁶⁴

Since their productive activity no longer belongs to the worker, their defining relation to themselves and their powers are reversed: ‘activity becomes suffering; strength becomes weakness; action becomes emasculation’ and in this state the worker can no longer depend on their own activity for their life.²⁶⁵ Marx believed that alienation from productive activity thus breaks the most important social relation of all, the active connection human beings have to themselves.

Alienation from Species Activity A third type of alienation discussed by Marx is alienation from the human species. In species alienation, Marx believed that human beings are alienated from their own species-being and from their own species activity. But, in order to be clear on Marx’s meaning here, this category of alienation requires further explanation. Marx thought that human beings live in an active relation to the outside world and because of this he believed that they have human qualities which mark them off from other species. In the main, he thought that the chief qualities separating human beings from the animal world was a characteristic he referred to as ‘conscious mental being,’ and he thought this had to do with the ability human beings had to take themselves into account, reflect on their circumstances and be conscious of themselves in history.²⁶⁶

In contrast to this, Marx thought that animals have only physical being, but not conscious being. Because animals do not have conscious being, he thought that their life activity was qualitatively different from human life activity. Accordingly, Marx took the view that species alienation breaks the connection which human beings have to their conscious mental being in two fundamental respects: first, because it turned laboring into a physical act, it revoked the advantage nature had given to human beings over animal life by converting conscious being into physical being during the act of labor.

263 Ibid.

264 Ollman, *Alienation*, p. 140.

265 Ibid.

266 Marx, *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, pp. 113–14. Marx says that ‘conscious life activity distinguishes human beings immediately from animal life activity ... to the extent that human beings contemplate themselves in a world that they create.’

Second, by converting conscious being into physical being, it made human labor like the labor of animals by reducing labor to physical being over mental being. In this type of alienation, human nature is turned against itself in that human beings become creatures of their physical activity and their physical existence.

Marx reasoned that the relations individuals form with the external world thus differs from animals in several respects. First, animals live directly off nature and thus do not produce and do not have to create use values by their labor. Human beings, on the other hand, ‘prepare nature to make it palatable and digestible’ and in this sense they must labor upon it to work it up.²⁶⁷ Second, human beings are a species distinct from animals because they have conscious being with which they reflect upon themselves and their purposes in relation to their own powers and to their own future in the world. Third, animals find what they need in nature and need only to satisfy their direct physical needs, whereas human beings must produce and in doing so create an objective world in the form of history, society and civilization. In this, they work up inorganic nature by producing social institutions of various kinds and through this they create social history which survives them as a species. In producing in this way, human beings proclaim themselves to be a species since the object of their labor is the ‘objectification’ of the human species, ‘for they duplicate themselves not only in consciousness, but actually in reality.’²⁶⁸ Since species life was meant to be with others in society and experienced in a collective way, Marx thought that species alienation breaks the existing connection with the species by making all experience individual experience, isolated and separate from the species. In this respect, species alienation reverses the advantage which nature gives to the species because it transforms human consciousness and mental being into solitary physical being. In this type of alienation, human beings find themselves alone in the midst of society as private individuals, and in this case society itself is no longer experienced in its human form.

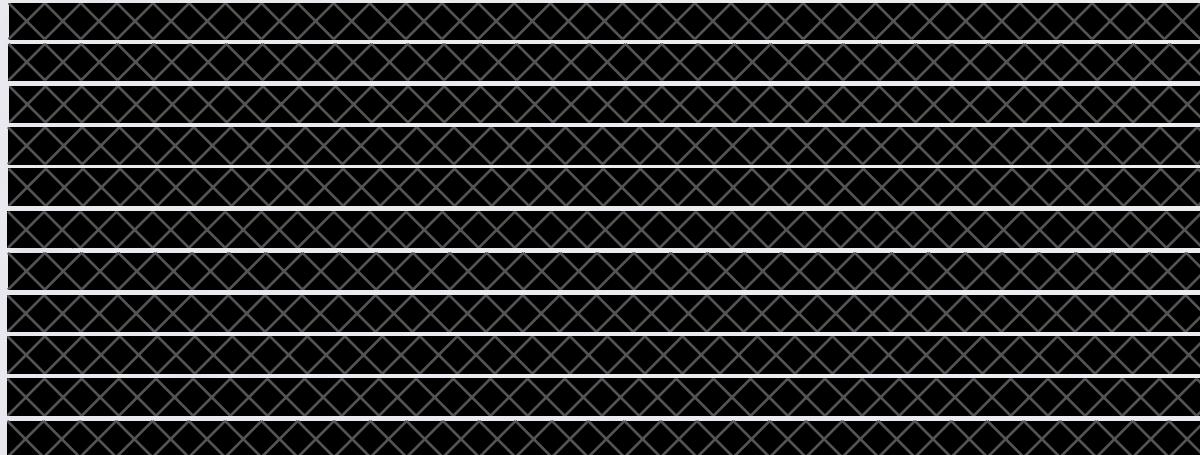
Alienation from Fellow Humans A fourth type of alienation discussed by Marx is alienation from fellow human beings and from the human social community. This comes about, Marx reasoned, when the sole aim of life is competition and all social relationships are transformed into economic relationships and economic transactions. There are two specific senses in which alienation from fellow human beings takes place: first, so far as industrial capitalism compels individuals to be isolated and separate from one another in order to pursue their private interests for economic gain, they enter into competition with each other as private individuals alone and separate. While at one time individuals were essentially collective beings and worked cooperatively, they are now detached individual beings who work separately and live privately. Second, alienation from fellow human beings occurs as society makes only one class the sole benefactor of the product of the labor. Marx argued that during earlier

267 Ibid.

268 Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, p. 114.

periods of history, the product of individual labor was once used directly to provide material needs and sustain life, whereas now it is used to benefit only one class who are able to realize themselves in history.²⁶⁹ This type of alienation takes place, Marx thought, when the product of labor produces ‘wealth and beauty’ for one class, and poverty and deprivation for the worker.²⁷⁰

As human beings are estranged from their product, their productive activity and their own species, so also are they estranged from their relationship to their fellow human beings. In Marx’s view, this category of alienation breaks the social relation which human beings have to each other as part of the human social community.²⁷¹ There are two important senses in which this has occurred. First, so far as individuals are isolated from one another by private competition, they are made into isolated individual beings where they were once collective beings. As universal competition becomes the norm, individuals thus find themselves alone in society. Second, alienation from fellow human beings occurs as only one class in society becomes the sole recipient of the product of the labor. This, said Marx, parallels an earlier period in history when the product of individual labor was only for the ‘gods,’ and the main aim of production was in the service of gods, e.g., temples, pyramids, etc.²⁷² Since in capitalist societies the products of labor do not belong to the worker, only one class are able to realize themselves in history to the extent that they have become the sole benefactors of the products of labor.



271 Ibid., p. 114.

272 Ibid., p. 115.

273 Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, J. O'Malley (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.