

Karl Marx

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5 Wages of Labor

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. Combination among the capitalists is customary and effective; workers' combination is prohibited and painful in its consequences for them. Besides, the landowner and the capitalist can make use of industrial advantages to augment their revenues; the worker has neither rent nor interest on capital to supplement his industrial income. Hence the intensity of the competition among the workers. Thus only for the workers is the separation of capital, landed property, and labor an inevitable, essential and detrimental separation. Capital and landed property need not remain fixed in this abstraction, as must the labor of the workers.

The separation of capital, rent, and labor is thus fatal for the worker. The lowest and the only necessary wage rate is that providing for the subsistence of the worker for the duration of his work and as much more as is necessary for him to support a family and for the race of laborers not to die out. The ordinary wage, according to Smith, is the lowest compatible with common humanity, that is, with cattle-like existence.

The demand for men necessarily governs the production of men, as of every other commodity. Should supply greatly exceed demand, a section of the workers sinks into beggary or starvation. The worker's existence is thus brought under the same condition as the existence of every other commodity. The worker has become a commodity, and it is a bit of luck for him if he can find a buyer. And the demand on which the life of the worker depends, depends on the whim of the rich and the capitalists. Should supply exceed demand, then one of the constituent parts of the price – profit, rent or wages – is paid below its *rate*, [a part of these] factors is therefore withdrawn from this application, and thus the market price gravitates [towards the] natural price as the center-point. But **(1)** where there is considerable division of labor it is most difficult for the worker to direct his labor into other channels; **(2)** because of his subordinate relation to the capitalist, he is the first to suffer.

Thus in the gravitation of market price to natural price it is the worker who loses

most of all and necessarily. And 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 labor, destitute, or forces him to submit to every demand of this capitalist.

5 The accidental and sudden fluctuations in market price hit rent less than they do that part of the price which is resolved into profit and wages; but they hit profit less than they do wages. In most cases, for every wage that rises, one remains *stationary* and one *falls*.

The worker need not necessarily gain when the capitalist does, but he necessarily loses when the latter loses. Thus, the worker does not gain if the capitalist keeps the market price above the natural price by virtue of some manufacturing or trading secret, or by virtue of
10 monopoly or the favorable situation of his land.

Furthermore, *the prices of labor are much more constant than the prices of provisions. Often they stand in inverse proportion.* In a dear year wages fall on account of the decrease in demand, but rise on account of the increase in the prices of provisions – and thus balance. In any case, a number of workers are left without bread. In cheap years wages rise on account of the rise in
15 demand, but decrease on account of the fall in the prices of provisions – and thus balance.

Another respect in which the worker is at a disadvantage:

The labor prices of the various kinds of workers show much wider differences than the profits in the various branches in which capital is applied. In labor all the natural, spiritual, and social variety of individual activity is manifested and is variously rewarded, whilst
20 dead capital always keeps the same pace and is indifferent to real individual activity.

In general we should observe that in those cases where worker and capitalist equally suffer, the worker suffers in his very existence, the capitalist in the profit on his dead mammon.

The worker has to struggle not only for his physical means of subsistence; he has to struggle to get work, i.e., the possibility, the means, to perform his activity.

25 Let us take the three chief conditions in which society can find itself and consider the situation of the worker in them:

(1) If the wealth of society declines the worker suffers most of all, and for the following reason: although the working class cannot gain so much as can the class of property owners in a prosperous state of society, *no one suffers so cruelly from its decline as the working class.*

(2) Let us now take a society in which wealth is increasing. This condition is the only one favorable to the worker. Here competition between the capitalists sets in. The demand for workers exceeds their supply. But:

In the first place, the raising of wages gives rise to overwork among the workers. The more they wish to earn, the more must they sacrifice their time and carry out slave-labor, completely losing all their freedom, in the service of greed. Thereby they shorten their lives. This shortening of their life-span is a favorable circumstance for the working class as a whole, for as a result of it an ever-fresh supply of labor becomes necessary. This class has always to sacrifice a part of itself in order not to be wholly destroyed.

Furthermore: When does a society find itself in a condition of advancing wealth? When the capitals and the revenues of a country are growing. But this is only possible:

(a) As the result of the accumulation of much labor, capital being accumulated labor; as the result, therefore, of the fact that more and more of his products are being taken away from the worker, that to an increasing extent his own labor confronts him as another man's property and that the means of his existence and his activity are increasingly concentrated in the hands of the capitalist.

(b) The accumulation of capital increases the division of labor, and the division of labor increases the number of workers. Conversely, the number of workers increases the division of labor, just as the division of labor increases the accumulation of capital. With this division of labor on the one hand and the accumulation of capital on the other, the worker becomes ever more exclusively dependent on labor, and on a particular, very one-sided, machine-like labor at that. Just as he is thus depressed spiritually and physically to the condition of a machine and from being a man becomes an abstract activity and a belly, so he also becomes ever more dependent on every fluctuation in market price, on the application of capital, and on the whim of the rich. Equally, the increase in the class of people wholly dependent on work intensifies competition among the workers, thus lowering their price. In the factory system this situation of the worker reaches its climax.

(c) In an increasingly prosperous society only the richest of the rich can continue to live on money interest. Everyone else has to carry on a business with his capital, or venture it in trade. As a result, the competition between the capitalists becomes more intense. The concentration of capital increases, the big capitalists ruin the small, and a section of the erstwhile capitalists sinks into the working class, which as a result of this supply again suffers to some extent a depression of wages and passes into a still greater dependence on the few big capitalists. The number of capitalists

having been diminished, their competition with respect to the workers scarcely exists any longer; and the number of workers having been increased, their competition among themselves has become all the more intense, unnatural, and violent. Consequently, a section of the working class falls into beggary or starvation just as necessarily as a section of the middle capitalists falls into the working class.

Hence even in the condition of society most favorable to the worker, the inevitable result for the worker is overwork and premature death, decline to a mere machine, a bond servant of capital, which piles up dangerously over and against him, more competition, and starvation or beggary for a section of the workers.

The raising of wages excites in the worker the capitalist's mania to get rich, which he, however, can only satisfy by the sacrifice of his mind and body. The raising of wages presupposes and entails the accumulation of capital, and thus sets the product of labor against the worker as something ever more alien to him. Similarly, the division of labor renders him ever more one-sided and dependent, bringing with it the competition not only of men but also of machines. Since the worker has sunk to the level of a machine, he can be confronted by the machine as a competitor. Finally, as the amassing of capital increases the amount of industry and therefore the number of workers, it causes the same amount of industry to manufacture *a larger amount of products*, which leads to over-production and thus either ends by throwing a large section of workers out of work or by reducing their wages to the most miserable minimum.

Such are the consequences of a state of society most favorable to the worker – namely, of a state of *growing, advancing* wealth.

Eventually, however, this state of growth must sooner or later reach its peak. What is the worker's position now?

(3) “In a country which had acquired that full complement of riches both the wages of labor and the profits of stock would probably be very low [...] the competition for employment would necessarily be so great as to reduce the wages of labor to what was barely sufficient to keep up the number of laborers, and, the country being already fully peopled, that number could never be augmented.” [Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, Vol. I, p. 84.]

The surplus would have to die.

Thus in a declining state of society – increasing misery of the worker; in an advancing state – misery with complications; and in a fully developed state of society – static misery.

Since, however, according to Smith, a society is not happy, of which the greater part suffers – yet even the wealthiest state of society leads to this suffering of the majority – and since the *economic system* (and in general a society based on private interest) leads to this wealthiest condition, it follows that the goal of the economic system is the *unhappiness* of society.

- 5 Concerning the relationship between worker and capitalist we should add that the capitalist is more than compensated for rising wages by the reduction in the amount of labor time, and that rising wages and rising interest on capital operate on the price of commodities like simple and compound interest respectively.

Let us put ourselves now wholly at the standpoint of the political economist, and follow him in
10 comparing the theoretical and practical claims of the workers.

He tells us that originally and in theory the *whole product* of labor belongs to the worker. But at the same time he tells us that in actual fact what the worker gets is the smallest and utterly indispensable part of the product – as much, only, as is necessary for his existence, not as a human being, but as a worker, and for the propagation, not of humanity, but of the slave class of workers.

- 15 The political economist tells us that everything is bought with labor and that capital is nothing but accumulated labor; but at the same time he tells us that the worker, far from being able to buy everything, must sell himself and his humanity.

Whilst the rent of the idle landowner usually amounts to a third of the product of the soil, and the profit of the busy capitalist to as much as twice the interest on money, the “something more” which
20 the worker himself earns at the best of times amounts to so little that of four children of his, two must starve and die.

Whilst according to the political economists it is solely through labor that man enhances the value of the products of nature, whilst labor is man’s active possession, according to this same political economy the landowner and the capitalist, who *qua* landowner and capitalist are merely
25 privileged and idle gods, are everywhere superior to the worker and lay down the law to him.

Whilst according to the political economists labor is the sole unchanging price of things, there is nothing more fortuitous than the price of labor, nothing exposed to greater fluctuations.

Whilst the division of labor raises the productive power of labor and increases the wealth and refinement of society, it impoverishes the worker and reduces him to a machine. Whilst labor
30 brings about the accumulation of capital and with this the increasing prosperity of society, it

renders the worker ever more dependent on the capitalist, leads him into competition of a new intensity, and drives him into the headlong rush of overproduction, with its subsequent corresponding slump.

5 Whilst the interest of the worker, according to the political economists, never stands opposed to the interest of society, society always and necessarily stands opposed to the interest of the worker.

According to the political economists, the interest of the worker is never opposed to that of society: (1) because the rising wages are more than compensated by the reduction in the amount of labor time, together with the other consequences set forth above; and (2) because in relation to society the whole gross product is the net product, and only in relation to the private individual has the
10 net product any significance.

But that labor itself, not merely in present conditions but insofar as its purpose in general is the mere increase of wealth – that labor itself, I say, is harmful and pernicious – follows from the political economist's line of argument, without his being aware of it.

15 In theory, rent of land and profit on capital are *deductions* suffered by wages. In actual fact, however, wages are a deduction which land and capital allow to go to the worker, a concession from the product of labor to the workers, to labor.

When society is in a state of decline, the worker suffers most severely. The specific severity of his burden he owes to his position as a worker, but the burden as such to the position of society.

20 But when society is in a state of progress, the ruin and impoverishment of the worker is the product of his labor and of the wealth produced by him. The misery results, therefore, from the *essence* of present-day labor itself.

Society in a state of maximum wealth – an ideal, but one which is approximately attained, and which at least is the aim of political economy as of civil society – means for the workers *static*
25 *misery*.

It goes without saying that the *proletarian*, i.e., the man who, being without capital and rent, lives purely by labor, and by a one-sided, abstract labor, is considered by political economy only as a *worker*. Political economy can therefore advance the proposition that the proletarian, the same as any horse, must get as much as will enable him to work. It does not consider him when he is
30 not working, as a human being; but leaves such consideration to criminal law, to doctors, to

religion, to the statistical tables, to politics and to the poor-house overseer.

Let us now rise above the level of political economy and try to answer two questions on the basis of the above exposition, which has been presented almost in the words of the political economists:

(1) What in the evolution of mankind is the meaning of this reduction of the greater part of mankind to abstract labor?

(2) What are the mistakes committed by the piecemeal reformers, who either want to raise wages and in this way to improve the situation of the working class, or regard equality of wages (as Proudhon does) as the goal of social revolution?

In political economy labor occurs only in the form of *activity as a source of livelihood*.

“It can be asserted that those occupations which presuppose specific talents or longer training have become on the whole more lucrative; whilst the proportionate reward for mechanically monotonous activity in which one person can be trained as easily and quickly as another has fallen with growing competition, and was inevitably bound to fall. And it is just *this* sort of work which in the present state of the organization of labor is still by far the commonest. If therefore a worker in the first category now earns seven times as much as he did, say, fifty years ago, whilst the earnings of another in the second category have remained unchanged, then of course both are earning *on the average* four times as much. But if the first category comprises only a thousand workers in a particular country, and the second a million, then 999,000 are no better off than fifty years ago – and they are *worse off* if at the same time the prices of the necessities of life have risen. With such superficial *calculation of averages* people try to deceive themselves about the most numerous class of the population. Moreover, the size of the *wage* is only one factor in the estimation of the *worker's* income, because it is essential for the measurement of the latter to take into account the certainty of its *duration* – which is obviously out of the question in the anarchy of so-called free competition, with its ever-recurring fluctuations and periods of stagnation. Finally, the *hours of work* customary formerly and now have to be considered. And for the English cotton-workers these have been increased, as a result of the entrepreneurs' mania for profit. to between twelve and sixteen hours a day during the past twenty-five years or so – that is to say, precisely during the period of the introduction of labor-saving machines; and this increase in one country and in one branch of industry inevitably asserted itself elsewhere to a greater or lesser degree, for the right of the unlimited exploitation of the poor by the rich is still universally recognized.” (Wilhelm Schulz, *Die Bewegung der Production*.)

“But even if it were as true as it is false that the average income of *every* class of society has increased, the income-differences and *relative* income-distances may nevertheless have become greater and the contrasts between wealth and poverty accordingly stand out more sharply. For just because total production rises – and in the same measure as it rises – needs, desires and claims also multiply and thus *relative* poverty can increase whilst

absolute poverty diminishes. The Samoyed living on fish oil and rancid fish is not poor because in his secluded society all have the same needs. But in a state *that is forging ahead*, which in the course of a decade, say, increased by a third its total production in proportion to the population, the worker who is getting as much at the end of ten years as at the beginning has not remained as well off, but has become poorer by a third.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 65-66)

But political economy knows the worker only as a working animal – as a beast reduced to the strictest bodily needs.

“To develop in greater spiritual freedom, a people must break their bondage to their bodily needs – they must cease to be the slaves of the body. They must, above all, have *time* at their disposal for spiritual creative activity and spiritual enjoyment. The developments in the labor organism gain this time. Indeed, with new motive forces and improved machinery, a single worker in the cotton mills now often performs the work formerly requiring a hundred, or even 250 to 350 workers. Similar results can be observed in all branches of production, because external natural forces are being compelled to participate to an ever-greater degree in human labor. If the satisfaction of a given amount of material needs formerly required a certain expenditure of time and human effort which has later been reduced by half, then without any loss of material comfort the scope for spiritual activity and enjoyment has been simultaneously extended by as much.... But again the way in which the booty, that we win from old Cronus [Greek God associated with time.] himself in his most private domain, is shared out is still decided by the dice-throw of blind, unjust Chance. In France it has been calculated that at the present stage in the development of production an average working period of five hours a day by every person capable of work could suffice for the satisfaction of all the material interests of society.... Notwithstanding the time saved by the perfecting of machinery. The duration of the slave-labor performed by a large population in the factories has only increased.” (Schulz, *op. cit.*, pp. 67, 68.)

“The transition from compound manual labor rests on a break-down of the latter into its simple operations. At first, however, only *some* of the uniformly-recurring operations will devolve on machines, while some will devolve on men. From the nature of things, and from confirmatory experience, it is clear that unendingly monotonous activity of this kind is as harmful to the mind as to the body; thus this *combination* of machinery with mere division of labor among a greater number of hands must inevitably show all the disadvantages of the latter. These disadvantages appear, among other things, in the greater mortality of factory workers.... Consideration has not been given ... to this big distinction as to how far men work *through* machines or how far *as* machines.” (*op. cit.*, p. 69.)

“In the future life of the peoples, however, the inanimate forces of nature working in machines will be our slaves and serfs.” (*op. cit.*, p. 74.)

“The English spinning mills employ 196,818 women and only 158,818 men. For every 100 male workers in the cotton mills of Lancashire there are 103 female workers, and in Scotland as many as 209. In the English flax mills of Leeds, for every 100 male workers there were found to be 147 female workers. In Dundee and on the east coast of Scotland as

many as 280. In the English silk mills ... many female workers; male workers predominate in the woolen mills where the work requires greater physical strength. In 1833, no fewer than 38,927 women were employed alongside 18,593 men in the North American cotton mills. As a result of the changes in the labor organism, a wider sphere of gainful employment has thus fallen to the share of the female sex.... Women now occupying an economically more independent position ... the two sexes are drawn closer together in their social conditions.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 71-72.)

“Working in the English steam- and water-driven spinning mills in 1835 were: 20,558 children between the ages of eight and twelve; 35,867 between the ages of twelve and thirteen; and, lastly, 108,208 children between the ages of thirteen and eighteen.... Admittedly, further advances in mechanization, by more and more removing all monotonous work from human hands, are operating in the direction of a gradual elimination of this evil. But standing in the way of these more rapid advances is the very circumstance that the capitalists can, in the easiest and cheapest fashion, appropriate the energies of the lower classes down to the children, to be used *instead* of mechanical devices.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.)

“Lord Brougham’s call to the workers – ‘Become capitalists’. ... This is the evil that millions are able to earn a bare subsistence for themselves only by strenuous labor which shatters the body and cripples them morally and intellectually; that they are even obliged to consider the misfortune of finding *such* work a piece of good fortune.” (*op. cit.*, p. 60.)

“In order to live, then, the non-owners are obliged to place themselves, directly or indirectly, *at the service* of the owners – to put themselves, that is to say, into a position of dependence upon them.” (Pecqueur, *Théorie nouvelle d’économie soc., etc.*)

“Such an economic order condemns men to occupations so mean, to a degradation so devastating and bitter, that by comparison savagery seems like a kingly condition.... (*op. cit.*, pp. 417, 418.) “Prostitution of the non-owning class in all its forms.” (*op. cit.*, p. 421 f.) “Ragmen.”

Charles Loudon in the book *Solution du probleme de la population, etc.*, Paris, 1842, declares the number of prostitutes in England to be between sixty and seventy thousand. The number of women of doubtful virtue is said to be equally large (p. 228).

“The average life of these unfortunate creatures on the streets, after they have embarked on their career of vice, is about six or seven years. To maintain the number of sixty to seventy thousand prostitutes, there must be in the three kingdoms at least eight to nine thousand women who commit themselves to this abject profession each year, or about twenty-four new victims each day – an average of *one* per hour; and it follows that if the same proportion holds good over the whole surface of the globe, there must constantly be in existence one and a half million unfortunate women of this kind.” (*op. cit.*, p. 229.)...

“The numbers of the poverty-stricken grow with their poverty, and at the extreme limit of destitution human beings are crowded together in the greatest numbers contending with

each other for the right to suffer.... In 1821 the population of Ireland was 6,801,827. In 1831 it had risen to 7,764,010 – an increase of 14 per cent in ten years. In Leinster, the wealthiest province, the population increased by only 8 per cent; whilst in Connaught, the most poverty-stricken province, the increase reached 21 per cent. (Extract from the
5 *Enquiries Published in England on Ireland*, Vienna, 1840.)” (Eugène Buret, *De la misère*, etc., t. 1, pp. 36, 37.)

Political economy considers labor in the abstract as a thing; labor is a commodity. If the price is high, then the commodity is in great demand; if the price is low, then the commodity is in great supply: the price of labor as a commodity must fall lower and lower. (Buret, *op. cit.*) This is made
10 inevitable partly by the competition between capitalist and worker, partly by the competition amongst the workers.

“The working population, the seller of labor, is necessarily reduced to accepting the most meagre part of the product.... Is the theory of labor as a commodity anything other than a theory of disguised bondage?” (*op. cit.*, p. 43.) “Why then has nothing but an exchange-
15 value been seen in labor?” (*op. cit.*, p. 44.)

The large workshops prefer to buy the labor of women and children, because this costs less than that of men. (*op. cit.*)

“The worker is not at all in the position of a free seller vis-à-vis the one who employs him.... The capitalist is always free to employ labor, and the worker is always forced to sell it. The
20 value of labor is completely destroyed if it is not sold every instant. Labor can neither be accumulated nor even be saved, unlike true [commodities].

“Labor is life, and if life is not each day exchanged for food, it suffers and soon perishes. To claim that human life is a commodity, one must, therefore, admit slavery.” (*op. cit.*, p. 49, 50.)

25 If then labor is a commodity it is a commodity with the most unfortunate attributes. But even by the principles of political economy it is no commodity, for it is not the “*free result of a free transaction.*” [*op. cit.*] The present economic regime “simultaneously lowers the price and the remuneration of labor; it perfects the worker and degrades the man.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.) “Industry has become a war, and commerce a gamble.” (*op. cit.*, p. 62.)...

30 Up to the present, industry has been in a state of war, a war of conquest:

“It has squandered the lives of the men who made up its army with the same indifference as the great conquerors. Its aim was the possession of wealth, not the happiness of men.” (Buret, *op. cit.*) “These interests” (that is, economic interests), “freely left to themselves ... must necessarily come into conflict; they have no other arbiter but war, and the decisions
35 of war assign defeat and death to some, in order to give victory to the others.... It is in the

conflict of opposed forces that science seeks order and equilibrium: *perpetual war*, according to it, is the sole means of obtaining peace; that war is called competition.” (*op. cit.*, p. 23.)

5 “The industrial war, to be conducted with success, demands large armies which it can amass on one spot and profusely decimate. And it is neither from devotion nor from duty that the soldiers of this army bear the exertions imposed on them, but only to escape the hard necessity of hunger. They feel neither attachment nor gratitude towards their bosses, nor are these bound to their subordinates by any feeling of benevolence. They do not know them as men, but only as instruments of production which have to yield as much as possible with as little cost as possible. These populations of workers, ever more crowded together, have not even the assurance of always being employed. Industry, which has called them together, only lets them live while it needs them, and as soon as it can get rid of them it abandons them without the slightest scruple; and the workers are compelled to offer their persons and their powers for whatever price they can get. The longer, more painful and more disgusting the work they are given, the less they are paid. There are those who, with sixteen hours’ work a day and unremitting exertion, scarcely buy the right not to die.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.)

20 “We are convinced ... as are the commissioners charged with the inquiry into the condition of the hand-loom weavers, that the large industrial towns would in a short time lose their population of workers if they were not all the time receiving from the neighboring rural areas constant recruitments of healthy men, a constant flow of fresh blood.” (*op. cit.*, p. 362.)

On Alienation

25 We have proceeded from the premises of political economy. We have accepted its language and its laws. We presupposed private property, the separation of labor, capital and land, and of wages, profit of capital and rent of land — likewise division of labor, competition, the concept of exchange value, etc. On the basis of political economy itself, in its own words, we have shown that the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities; that the wretchedness of the worker is in inverse proportion to the power and magnitude of his production; that the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form; and that finally the distinction between capitalist and land rentier, like that between the tiller of the soil and the factory worker, disappears and that the whole of society must fall apart into the two classes — *property owners* and *propertyless workers*.

35 Political economy starts with the fact of private property; it does not explain it to us. It expresses in general, abstract formulas the *material* process through which private property actually passes, and these formulas it then takes for *laws*. It does not *comprehend* these laws —

i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property. Political economy throws no light on the cause of the division between labor and capital, and between capital and land. When, for example, it defines the relationship of wages to profit, it takes the interest of the capitalists to be the ultimate cause, i.e., it takes for granted what it is supposed to explain. Similarly, competition comes in everywhere. It is explained from external circumstances. As to how far these external and apparently accidental circumstances are but the expression of a necessary course of development, political economy teaches us nothing. We have seen how exchange itself appears to it as an accidental fact. The only wheels which political economy sets in motion are *greed*, and the *war amongst the greedy* — *competition*.

Precisely because political economy does not grasp the way the movement is connected, it was possible to oppose, for instance, the doctrine of competition to the doctrine of monopoly, the doctrine of craft freedom to the doctrine of the guild, the doctrine of the division of landed property to the doctrine of the big estate — for competition, freedom of the crafts and the division of landed property were explained and comprehended only as accidental, premeditated and violent consequences of monopoly, of the guild system, and of feudal property, not as their necessary, inevitable and natural consequences.

Now, therefore, we have to grasp the intrinsic connection between private property, greed, the separation of labor, capital and landed property; the connection of exchange and competition, of value and the devaluation of man, of monopoly and competition, etc. — the connection between this whole estrangement and the *money* system.

Do not let us go back to a fictitious primordial condition as the political economist does, when he tries to explain. Such a primordial condition explains nothing; it merely pushes the question away into a grey nebulous distance. The economist assumes in the form of a fact, of an event, what he is supposed to deduce — namely, the necessary relationship between two things — between, for example, division of labor and exchange. Thus the theologian explains the origin of evil by the fall of Man — that is, he assumes as a fact, in historical form, what has to be explained.

We proceed from an *actual* economic fact.

The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The *devaluation* of the world of men is in direct proportion to the *increasing value* of the world of things. Labor produces not only commodities; it produces itself and the worker as a *commodity* — and this at the same rate at which it produces commodities in general.

This fact expresses merely that the object which labor produces — labor's product —

confronts it as *something alien*, as a *power independent* of the producer. The product of labor is labor which has been embodied in an object, which has become material: it is the *objectification* of labor. Labor's realization is its objectification. Under these economic conditions this realization of labor appears as *loss of realization* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object and*
5 *bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*.

So much does the labor's realization appear as loss of realization that the worker loses realization to the point of starving to death. So much does objectification appear as loss of the object that the worker is robbed of the objects most necessary not only for his life but for his work. Indeed, labor itself becomes an object which he can obtain only with the greatest effort and with
10 the most irregular interruptions. 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.

All these consequences are implied in the statement that the worker is related to the *product of labor* as to an *alien* object. For on this premise it is clear that the more the worker
15 spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself — his inner world — becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself. The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence, the greater this activity, the more the worker lacks objects. Whatever the product of his
20 labor is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself. The *alienation* of the worker in his product means not only that his labor 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.

25 Let us now look more closely at the *objectification*, at the production of the worker; and in it at the *estrangement*, the loss of the object, of his product.

The worker can create nothing without *nature*, without the *sensuous external world*. It is the material on which his labor is realized, in which it is active, from which, and by means of which it produces.

30 But just as nature provides labor with the *means of life* in the sense that labor cannot *live* without objects on which to operate, on the other hand, it also provides the *means of life* in the more restricted sense, i.e., the means for the physical subsistence of the *worker* himself.

Thus the more the worker by his labor *appropriates* the external world, sensuous nature, the more he deprives himself of the *means of life* in two respects: first, in that the sensuous

external world more and more ceases to be an object belonging to his labor — to be his labor's *means of life*; and, second, in that it more and more ceases to be a *means of life* in the immediate sense, means for the physical subsistence of the worker.

This in this double respect the worker becomes a servant of his object, first, in that he receives an *object of labor*, i.e., in that he receives *work*, and, secondly, in that he receives *means of subsistence*. This enables him to exist, first as a worker; and second, as a *physical subject*. The height of this servitude is that it is only as a *worker* that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject* and that it is only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker.

(The laws of political economy express the estrangement of the worker in his object thus: the more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more values he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed his product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker; the more powerful labor becomes, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more ingenious labor becomes, the less ingenious becomes the worker and the more he becomes nature's slave.)

Political economy conceals the estrangement inherent in the nature of labor by not considering the direct relationship between the worker (labor) and production. It is true that labor produces for the rich wonderful things — but for the worker it produces privation. It produces palaces — but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty — but for the worker, deformity. It replaces labor by machines, but it throws one section of the workers back into barbarous types of labor and it turns the other section into a machine. It produces intelligence — but for the worker, stupidity, cretinism.

The direct relationship of labor to its products is the relationship of the worker to the objects of his production. The relationship of the man of means to the objects of production and to production itself is only a *consequence* of this first relationship — and confirms it. We shall consider this other aspect later. When we ask, then, what is the essential relationship of labor we are asking about the relationship of the *worker* to production.

Till now we have been considering the estrangement, the alienation of the worker only in one of its aspects, i.e., *the worker's relationship to the products of his labor*. But the estrangement is manifested not only in the result but in the *act of production*, within the *producing activity*, itself. 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? The product is after all but the summary of the activity, of production. If then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation. In the estrangement of the object of labor is merely summarized the estrangement, the alienation, in the

activity of labor itself.

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor?

First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; 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 therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other 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. Just as in religion the spontaneous activity of the human imagination, of the human brain and the human heart, operates on the individual independently of him — that is, operates as an alien, divine or diabolical activity — so is the worker's activity not his spontaneous activity. It belongs to another; it is the loss of his self.

As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in 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, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But taken abstractly, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions.

We have considered the act of estranging practical human activity, labor, in two of its aspects. (1) The relation of the worker to the *product of labor* as an alien object exercising power over him. This relation is at the same time the relation to the sensuous external world, to the objects of nature, as an alien world inimically opposed to him. (2) The relation of labor to the *act of production* within the *labor* process. This relation is the relation of the worker to his own activity as an alien activity not belonging to him; it is activity as suffering, strength as weakness, begetting as emasculating, the worker's *own* physical and mental energy, his personal life — for what is life but activity? — as an activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him. Here we have *self-estrangement*, as previously we had the estrangement of the *thing*.

We have still a third aspect of *estranged labor* to deduce from the two already considered.

Man is a species-being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species (his own as well as those of other things) as his object, but — and this is only another way of expressing it — also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being.

The life of the species, both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on organic nature; and the more universal man (or the animal) is, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic nature on which he lives. Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art — his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible — so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity. Physically man lives only on these products of nature, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling, etc. The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic* body — both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man's *inorganic* body — nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body. Man *lives* on nature — means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.

In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor estranges the *species* from man. It changes for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form.

For labor, *life activity*, *productive life* itself, appears to man in the first place merely as a means of satisfying a need — the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species, its species-character, is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species-character. Life itself appears only as a *means to life*.

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is *its life activity*. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e.,

that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses the relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his *essential being*, a mere means to his *existence*.

In creating a *world of objects* by his personal activity, in his *work upon* inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as his own essential being, or that treats itself as a species-being. Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty.

It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a *species-being*. This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as *his* work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species-life*: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created. In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him his *species-life*, his real objectivity as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.

Similarly, in degrading spontaneous, free activity to a means, estranged labor makes man's species-life a means to his physical existence.

The consciousness which man has of his species is thus transformed by estrangement in such a way that species life becomes for him a means.

Estranged labor turns thus:

(3) *Man's species-being*, both nature and his spiritual species-property, into a being *alien* to him, into a *means* of his *individual existence*. It estranges from man his own body, as well as external nature and his spiritual aspect, his *human* aspect.

(4) An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labor, from his life activity, from his species-being, 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 labor and to himself, also holds of a man's relation to the other man, and to the other man's labor and object of labor.

In fact, the proposition that man's species-nature is estranged from him means that one
5 man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature.

The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man [stands] to himself, is realized and expressed only in the relationship in which a man stands to other men.

Hence within the relationship of estranged labor each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the relationship in which he finds himself as a worker.

10 We took our departure from a fact of political economy — the estrangement of the worker and his production. We have formulated this fact in conceptual terms as *estranged, alienated* labor. We have analyzed this concept — hence analyzing merely a fact of political economy.

Let us now see, further, how the concept of estranged, alienated labor must express and present itself in real life.

15 If the product of labor is alien to me, if it confronts me as an alien power, to whom, then, does it belong?

To a being *other* than myself.

Who is this being?

The *gods*? To be sure, in the earliest times the principal production (for example, the
20 building of temples, etc., in Egypt, India and Mexico) appears to be in the service of the gods, and the product belongs to the gods. However, the gods on their own were never the lords of labor. No more was *nature*. And what a contradiction it would be if, the more man subjugated nature by his labor and the more the miracles of the gods were rendered superfluous by the miracles of industry, the more man were to renounce the joy of production and the enjoyment of the product to please
25 these powers.

The *alien* being, to whom labor and the product of labor belongs, in whose service labor is done and for whose benefit the product of labor is provided, can only be *man* himself.

If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some *other man than the worker*. If the worker's
30 activity is a torment to him, to another it must give *satisfaction* and pleasure. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man.

We must bear in mind the previous proposition that man's relation to himself becomes for him *objective* and *actual* through his relation to the other man. Thus, if the product of his labor, his labor objectified, is for him an *alien, hostile*, powerful object independent of him, then his

position towards it is such that someone else is master of this object, someone who is alien, hostile, powerful, and independent of him. If he treats his own activity as an unfree activity, then he treats it as an activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion, and the yoke of another man.

5 Every self-estrangement of man, from himself and from nature, appears in the relation in which he places himself and nature to men other than and differentiated from himself. For this reason religious self-estrangement necessarily appears in the relationship of the layman to the priest, or again to a mediator, etc., since we are here dealing with the intellectual world. In the real practical world self-estrangement can only become manifest through the real practical
10 relationship to other men. The medium through which estrangement takes place is itself *practical*. Thus through estranged labor man not only creates his relationship to the object and to the act of production as to powers that are alien and hostile to him; he also creates the relationship in which other men stand to his production and to his product, and the relationship in which he stands to these other men. Just as he creates his own production as the loss of his reality, as his
15 punishment; his own product as a loss, as a product not belonging to him; so he creates the domination of the person who does not produce over production and over the product. Just as he estranges his own activity from himself, so he confers upon the stranger an activity which is not his own.

 We have until now considered this relationship only from the standpoint of the worker
20 and later on we shall be considering it also from the standpoint of the non-worker

 Through *estranged, alienated labor*, then, the worker produces the relationship to this labor of a man alien to labor and standing outside it. The relationship of the worker to labor creates the relation to it of the capitalist (or whatever one chooses to call the master of labor). *Private property* is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence, of *alienated labor*, of
25 the external relation of the worker to nature and to himself.

Private property thus results by analysis from the concept of *alienated labor*, i.e., of *alienated man*, of estranged labor, of estranged life, of *estranged raw*.

 True, it is as a result of the *movement of private property* that we have obtained the concept of *alienated labor (of alienated life)* in political economy. But on analysis of this concept
30 it becomes clear that though private property appears to be the reason, the cause of alienated labor, it is rather its consequence, just as the gods are *originally* not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal.

 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 labor, and that on the other it is

the *means* by which labor alienates itself *the realization of this alienation*.

This exposition immediately sheds light on various hitherto unsolved conflicts.

(1) Political economy starts from labor as the real soul of production; yet to labor it gives nothing, and to private property everything. Confronting this contradiction, Proudhon
5 has decided in favor of labor against private property. We understand, however, that this apparent contradiction is the contradiction of *estranged labor* with itself, and that political economy has merely formulated the laws of estranged labor.

We also understand, therefore, that *wages* and *private property* are identical. Indeed, where the product, as the object of labor, pays for labor itself, there the wage is but a necessary
10 consequence of labor's estrangement. Likewise, in the wage of labor, labor does not appear as an end in itself but as the servant of the wage. We shall develop this point later, and meanwhile will only draw some conclusions.

An enforced *increase of wages* (disregarding all other difficulties, including the fact that it would only be by force, too, that such an increase, being an anomaly, could be maintained)
15 would therefore be nothing but *better payment for the slave*, and would not win either for the worker or for labor their human status and dignity.

Indeed, even the *equality of wages*, as demanded by Proudhon, only transforms the relationship of the present-day worker to his labor into the relationship of all men to labor. Society would then be conceived as an abstract capitalist.

20 Wages are a direct consequence of estranged labor, and estranged labor is the direct cause of private property. The downfall of the one must therefore involve the downfall of the other.

(2) From the relationship of estranged labor to private property it follows further that the emancipation of society from private property, etc., from servitude, is expressed in the *political* form of the *emancipation of the workers*; not that *their* emancipation alone is at
25 stake, but because the emancipation of the workers contains universal human emancipation - and it contains this because the whole of human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and all relations of servitude are but modifications and consequences of this relation.

Just as we have derived the concept of *private property* from the concept of *estranged*,
30 *alienated labor* by *analysis*, so we can develop every *category* of political economy with the help of these two factors; and we shall find again in each category, e.g., trade, competition, capital, money only *particular* and *developed* expression of these first elements.

But before considering this phenomenon, however, let us try to solve two other problems.

(1) To define the general *nature of private property*, as it has arisen as a result of estranged

labor, in its relation to *truly human* and *social property*.

(2) We have accepted the *estrangement of labor*, its *alienation*, as a fact, and we have analyzed this fact. How, we now ask, does *man* come to *alienate*, to estrange, his *labor*? How is this estrangement rooted in the nature of human development? We have already gone a long way to the solution of this problem by *transforming* the question of the *origin of private property* into the question of the relation of *alienated labor* to the course of humanity's development. For when one speaks of *private property*, one thinks of dealing with something external to man. When one speaks of labor, one is directly dealing with man himself. This new formulation of the question already contains its solution.

As to (1): *The general nature of private property and its relation to truly human property.*

Alienated labor has resolved itself for us into two components which depend on one another, or which are but different expressions of one and the same relationship. *Appropriation* appears as *estrangement*, as *alienation*; and *alienation* appears as *appropriation*, *estrangement* as *truly becoming a citizen*.

We have considered the one side — *alienated labor* in relation to the *worker* himself, i.e., the *relation of alienated labor to itself*. The product, the necessary outcome of this relationship, as we have seen, is the *property relation of the non-worker to the worker and to labor*. *Private property*, as the material, summary expression of alienated labor, embraces both relations — the *relation of the worker to work and to the product of his labor and to the non-worker*, and the relation of the *non-worker to the worker and to the product of his labor*.

Having seen that in relation to the worker who *appropriates* nature by means of his labor, this appropriation appears as estrangement, his own spontaneous activity as activity for another and as activity of another, vitality as a sacrifice of life, production of the object as loss of the object to an alien power, to an *alien* person — we shall now consider the relation to the worker, to labor and its object of this person who is *alien* to labor and the worker.

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, that the worker's *real, practical attitude* in production and to the product (as a state of mind) appears in the non-worker who confronting him as a *theoretical* attitude.

Thirdly, the non-worker does everything against the worker which the worker does against himself; but he does not do against himself what he does against the worker.

[The first manuscript breaks off here unfinished]