CHAPTER FOUR

ALIENATION AND HUMAN EXISTENCE
Man, in Marxian view, is the sole and the ultimate standard the absolute, in terms of which all else is to be judged. Marxian ethics is thus primarily a promethean ethics of human liberation from inhuman conditions. The story of servitude of man in all past human history is a story of alienation of man from his true, creative and generic self. Thus alienation is a concept which implies the negation of the creative self of man. There is the true generic self or the "essence of man" on one hand and alienated self or the "existence" on the other. The concept of alienation is grounded in this distinction between the essence and the existence, between the true universal human nature and the transformed and estranged human nature. There is a contradiction between the two and as such a moral situation is clearly perceivable in the human condition.

The central theme of Marx's thought is the transformation of alienated labour into productive, free labour, which has for its basis the process and reality of alienation. Alienation as an ethical concept derives its force and appeal from the moral assumption of a universal human essence. This notion of essential humanity
in its universal reality logically leads to the inference that social conflict does not correspond to the true nature of man. Alienation refers to the conditioned mode of man's being in contradistinction to the unconditioned and therefore the perfect original nature of man.¹

As a high priest of human dignity, Marx has brought-forth a cult of the perfectibility of man. And man's dignity itself demands the overcoming of all those conditions in which he is a debased, dehumanized and alienated being. By postulating the reality of alienated human condition, Marx is in a way creating an aura of logical necessity for getting rid of the moral and logical distinctions between the "ought" and the "is", between the human essence and human existence.²

It may be observed that the concept of alienation has dominated the contemporary literature and history of sociological thought. The modern connotations of the word alienation can be traced back to the central themes of the classics of Hegel, Feuerbach and Karl Marx.

¹This view has been enunciated by Daniel Bell. See, Daniel Bell, "The Rediscovery of Alienation", The Journal of Philosophy, XVI (Nov. 1959).

It is necessary to survey briefly the semantic development of the word in order to understand fully the meaning and content of the same in its Marxist connotation. The term alienation as used in English immediately indicates its source, the Latin "alienatio", which itself is rendered from the Greek word "LXXOilwbis". The same term as a norm in its Latin rendering "alienatio" occurs in the works of St. Augustine. Plotinus also describes the relationship between contemplation and the soul's loss of itself. When it is immersed in pure contemplation, it loses itself and achieves alienation.

It is from this rendering of the term alienation as the soul's immersion of itself in the divine that St. Augustine derives his "alienatio mentis" -- act of alienation from the senses. It was deemed as an act of elevation to the divine realm, an achievement of union with God. Richard of St. Victor speaks of alienation as the elevation of the mind wrought by divine transfigurations, unattainable by human effort. He related the concept to the fact of divine grace.

There is also a version that alienation found its first expression in the western thought in the concept of

idolatory in the Old Testament. The essence of what the prophets call idolatory is that the idols are the work of man's own hands — they are things, and man bows down and worships that which he has created himself. In doing so he transforms himself into a thing by transferring the attributes of his own life. He has become estranged from his own creation, life force and wealth of potentialities. Instead he submits himself to life frozen in the idols.\(^1\)

This has particular significance to Marxist concept of alienation as Marx also speaks of idolatory in the sense of money worship or fetichism of commodities. As in religion man is governed by the products of his own brain, so in capitalist production he is governed by the products of his own hands.\(^2\) In fact, Marxism strives for the fulfilment of a prophetic aim — the destruction of the idols, in economic sphere as well as in political, religious and legal spheres.

The thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries criticized their age for its increasing rigidity, emptiness and deadness. In Goethe's thought the concept of creativity is as much of a cornerstone as in Hegel or

\(^1\)Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 44.

Marx. And the whole existentialist philosophy from Kierkegaard on is a movement of protest against the dehumanization of man in industrial society. Alienation is a kind of relinquishment of man from himself.

But the person who gave it a definite formulation was Hegel. To him the history of man was at once the history of man's alienation—Entfremdung. As for Marx, so for Hegel the concept of alienation is grounded in the distinction between essence and existence.\(^1\) It is based on the assumption that man's existence is alienated from his essence and from his potentialities. Hegel ceases to look at alienation as an act of achievement. For him it is a defiance of the substantive characteristics. In a second context Hegel uses the notion of alienation for the philosophy of nature. Nature is understood as the idea estranged from itself. He speaks of nature in the sense of powerlessness Ohnmacht— as lacking the power to contain the rigour of concepts. Nature as the domain of alienation is a necessary step in the development of the idea, though it does not connote the elevated sphere or achievement as had been suggested by the former meanings of the word alienation.

The concept of alienation as "Entfremdung" also

occurs in the works of Ludwig Feuerbach as we have seen already. He once again goes back to the old usage of the word as an achievement of the realm above man. Yet this achievement is accomplished not by transcending the actual human realm but by way of a fictitious projection of what is human. The divine realm is nothing but the amplified and projected human realm. The object is but subject himself.¹

Marx agrees with Hegel that alienation is an actuality defying the human potentiality and thus its essence. It is a situation not of elevation but of degradation. While for Hegel it arose out of incongruity between potentiality and actuality, for Feuerbach it amounted to fulfilling a void and was only to be understood as disguised human nature. Hegel had presented

¹This view of alienation has been held by thinkers like Karl Barth, Paul Tillich and Martin Buber and has strong affinity to Feuerbach's view of alienation.

See also,


(c) Rotenstreich, "On the Estatic Sources of the Concept of Alienation", The Review of Metaphysics, XVI, 3 (March, 1963), p. 554.
history as a process of the self alienation and self realization of God in the person of mankind. Feuerbach explained this as a mystified revelation of the universally self-estranged condition of man himself in the life of religion, thereby giving it a religious interpretation.

Marx on the other hand construed the Hegelian philosophy of history as a revelation of the self estranged condition of mankind in the economic life. Marx and Feuerbach both availed of Hegel's category of alienation and applied it universally to the collective life of man. Feuerbach located the neurotic process in religion, which saw the phenomenon of human self worship. Marx located it in economics, which he saw as a practical religion of money worship. As a consequence the one found self alienation to be the essence of Christianity, the other found it to be the essence of Capitalism. For Marx it was a total perversion of the human position turning the subject into its own object.¹ He traced it back to the very rhythm of human historical existence. For Marx, self-alienation and its conquest always remained the supreme concern and the central theme of his thought.²

²Robert Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, p. 238.
gave a moral orientation to his socio-economic analysis within the framework of history.

Marx explained the rootedness of alienation in the basic anti-thesis between labour and capital. Unlike Hegel, for whom man was alienated from himself in proportion to the degree in which he still fell short of being one with the Absolute, Marx held that man is alienated from himself as a consequence of historically conditioned striving for Capitalistic absolute. Hegel only rationalized alienation while Marx recognized it in the historico-social reality of man's existence. In the historical process man loses his human essence, becomes 'Unmensch' and is ruled by 'Unmenschliche Macht' i.e. inhuman force. The ensuing revolutionary movement of emancipation may be seen as a direct moral continuation of this latent recognition of the fact of alienation in Marx. It symbolizes a whole theory of moral rebellion against all those forces which condemn man to servitude.¹

Marx defined alienation as a fact of political economy — a phenomenon of economic life. For him labour and capital were not only economic categories but also anthropological postulates imbued with value judgements. There are two aspects of labour; there is the alienated

¹Ibid., p. 240.
labour which gives rise to private property and capital and there is the free creative labour which is the true expression of human life and essence. The first kind of labour Marx seeks to abolish and second he wants to realize. The passage from one to another is the passage from "is" to "ought". In its second context, labour is the self-expression of man's individuality and his mental qualities. It is in its essence a self-activity and not a commodity.

In Marx's definition labour is an abstract universal which in the historical process, symbolizes man's productive powers.¹ When the labourer cooperates systematically with others, he strips off the fetters of his individuality and develops the capabilities of his species.² Marx postulates labour as the primary force in historical development. It is the conscious, practical life activity whereby man distinguishes himself from the brute and develops himself back into a generic being -- man's nature both human and social is expressed through labour. Through it nature appears as man's work and his realization. The object of labour is accordingly the realization and

¹Abram L. Harris, "Utopian Elements in Marx's Thought", Ethics, LX, 2 (Jan., 1950), p. 90.
expression of generic life because man not only reproduces himself intellectually as in consciousness but in reality and sees himself in a world created by himself.¹

What Marx revolts against is not so much the unequal distribution of wealth as against the perversion of labour into forced alienated and as such meaningless labour which turns man into a "crippled monstrosity". His central criticism is against the lifelong submergence of man in one type of labour which dehumanizes him, turns him into a slave and takes away all the significance and dignity of being human. For Marx says in this respect:

"A forcing-up of wages ... would therefore be nothing but better payment for the slave, and would not conquer either for the worker or for labour their human status and dignity." ² (Italics mine).

Marx considers this kind of labour as an inhuman activity which alienates man from the ideal of total man,³ and which does not allow man to act in accordance with

¹Engels says in this connection that Labour has created man himself and is the basis of the transition from ape to man and as such responsible for his entire cultural evolution.


²Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 81.

his real needs and tastes. This ideal of a true man as the "generic being" is characterized by human quality of creative and free activity.\(^1\)

Any alienation can be overcome if one knows what conditions it socially and what determines its functioning, in the psychological make up of the individuals\(^2\) and applies matching remedies. For Marx, it is fundamentally a case of economic alienation which provides a base for all other forms of alienation. Hence it is a problem of property, of capital, of labour and their mutual relationships which simultaneously condition the social relations in a particular epoch of history. Thus the process and reality of alienation are explained by Marx in terms of two basic categories i.e. the labour and the private property, the latter being the product of the former.

Man according to Marx must always wrestle with nature. He must do this because the means of life afforded by nature are scarce. Hence the expenditure of labour independent of all forms of society, becomes an eternal nature imposed necessity for the existence of the human race. Without which there can be no material exchange

\(^1\)Adam Schaff, "Alienation and Social Action", *Diogenes*, No. 57 (Spring, 1957), p. 73.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 78.
between man and nature and therefore no life.\textsuperscript{1}

The production of labour Marx calls as the process of objectification which being the loss of object \textit{is} nothing but self-estrangement itself.\textsuperscript{2} Through alienation, the powers of man are separated from him and objectified in external things. Marx conceives self-alienation as a process of self-production constantly repeated and renewed in which man transforms himself and the outer world, thereby transcending the anti-thesis between himself and nature.

That means that the process of production or objectification is inconceivable apart from nature. There is a necessary relation between the worker and the nature.\textsuperscript{3} The worker, according to Marx:

"Can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material on which his labour is manifested, in which it is active, from which and by means of which it produces."\textsuperscript{4}

The worker puts his life into the object, but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. The

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alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently as something alien and hostile — a force that confronts him.

Industrial society is distinguished not only for objectification of social relationships, but also for an increasing division of labour and specialization. Man as he works becomes fragmented. His sense of belongingness to the whole is lost, he becomes a tool, a small accessory to the huge apparatus. And as this division of labour makes a man's role more limited, so his field of vision becomes more one-sided; the more ingenious the work process, the less intelligent is the work required and more acute the individual's alienation from the whole.

Marx has this to say in this respect:

"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 range. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. With the increasing value of the world of things proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men. Labour produces not only commodities: it produces itself and the worker as a commodity."

On the basis of his study of political economy and its functioning Marx shows how the worker sinks to

1Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 69.
the level of commodity and "... becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities ... in inverse proportion to the power and magnitude of his production."\(^1\)

The concept of objectification explains the relationship between the money system and the process of alienation,\(^2\) between private property and avarice, capital and landed property, value and the devaluation of men and between monopoly and competition. The objectification is the realization of labour through the loss of the reality for the labourer.\(^3\)

Man's alienation is expressed in the fact that man's forces, products, creations — all those things that are extensions of man's personality and should serve directly to enrich it — are split off from man and acquire independent status and power and turn back on him to dominate him as his master. Marx in his elaborate

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 67.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 68.
\(^3\)In this context Marx says: "... so much does labour's realization appear as a loss of reality that the worker loses reality 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 ... so much does the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement that more objects the worker produces the fewer can he possess and the more he falls under the dominion of his product — Capital." Ibid., p. 69.
analysis of labour under capitalism goes much beyond the structure of economic relationships to the actual human content. Relations such as do exist between capital and labour are in fact human relations attendant on man's social existence.

The first explicit statement of the process of reification is made by Marx in his early writings. The essence of the theory is that the capitalist society makes all personal relations between men take the forms of objective relations between things. Marx expounds this process in his *Capital* as the fetishism of commodities. The system of capitalism relates men to each other through the commodities they exchange. The social status of individuals, their standard of living, the satisfaction of their needs, their freedom and their powers are all determined by the value of their commodities. The human attributes become a function of money — the general substitute for commodities.

Marx thus exposes a historical fact in the materialistic character of the prevailing social order in which an uncontrolled economy legislates over all

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human relations, and then passes on to a criticism of
the prevailing relations between consciousness and social
existence. Marx expounds a theory of human misery which
springs from the prevailing mode of labour rooted in the
very essence of modern society. All in all, the totality
of economic relations, laws and institutions make up a
historical form within which men carry on their lives
and which determine human existence.

Alienation is allowed to go on unchecked in the
garb of political economy according to Marx. Man falls
into servitude. He becomes a slave of his object first
in that he receives an object for work and then in that
he receives means of subsistence. He is obliged to exist
first as a worker and second as a physical subject:

"The extremity of this bondage is that it is only
as a worker that he continues to maintain himself
as a physical subject, and that it is only as a
physical subject that he is a worker." (Italics
in original).

This is a complete appropriation of the universal human
essence.

1Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 30.
3Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 71.
4Marx elaborates the relationship between labour
and worker "...labour produces for the rich, wonderful
things - for the worker it produces privation, it produces
palaces... but for the worker, hovels. It produces beauty
- but for the worker, deformity... and ... workers it
turns into machines." Ibid., p. 71.
The first aspect of alienation, as we have seen, refers to the relation of worker to the product of his labour as an alien power. The second aspect refers to the relation of labour to the act of production within the labour process. It is the relation of the worker to his own activity which too is an alien activity not belonging to him. Man becomes a mere cog, a flesh and blood appendage to a steel machine and is as such dehumanized. This activity, alienated from his universal essence is sheer suffering for the worker, emasculating his physical and mental energies and his personal life. It is an activity of the self turned against the self which neither depends on nor belongs to him.

The product of activity of the worker is alienated because in the very act of production the worker is estranging himself from himself. "The product" says Marx, "is after all but the summary of the activity, of production." Therefore, if the product of labour is alienation -- activity of production itself must be active alienation. It is, in other words 'alienation of activity'.

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the object merely a summing of the estrangement or the alienation of the activity of labour itself.

Thirdly, Marx speaks of alienation from the species life "It turns for him the life of the species into means of individual life. An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour and from his life activity and from his species life is that man gets estranged from man. The alienation from man's specie nature implies the alienation of one man from another and of each one of them from man's essential nature. As such if a man is alienated from himself, he is simultaneously alienated from other men as also from the universal human essence. It is basically for three reasons that Marx raises a voice against the alienated labour in the capitalistic society. First, the labourer is condemned to work not as a free agent but out of almost humiliating necessity. In other words his activity as a worker does not issue out of his basic urges and desires. Second, it leads to that evil of evils which is called private

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1 Marx, Ec. Phil. MS., p. 74.
2 Ibid., p. 77.
3 See (a) Eugene Kamenka, Marxism and Ethics, pp. 19 f. (b) Roger Garaudy, Karl Marx, p. 60.
property, money or capital which according to Marx is the very root of all human perversions. Third, while the labourer works himself to death, he and his work are not given the recognition and dignity that is due to them. The worker being a human agent and not merely a machine.

Marx explains under the general law of capitalist accumulation the relation between dead and living labour in terms of the principles of "being" and "having". The true being of man is crystallized in "having" i.e. the living labour of the worker is crystallized into commodities. In the hands of the owner of the means of production, dead labour accumulated in the form of capital represents the principle of having, becomes alien to the being who produced it and as alienated power of humanity, rules supreme over the faceless, soulless workers. Under the non-human laws of having, alienated man loses his being, his essence. He has become an object — a thing.

We have seen how Marx first confronts alienation as a fact of political economy of bourgeois morality. Having analysed the factual situation, Marx then tries to analyse the actual causes of alienation. What constitutes alienation? There are three causal factors analysed by him in this respect. The first is the labour extraneous
to the worker. He feels outside of himself in work because it does not belong to his essential being and as such he does not affirm himself but rather denies himself in it. It does not make him happy but discontented. He does not develop his physical and mental energy but rather mortifies his mind and body. Secondly, his labour is not voluntary but rather coerced. This nature of work has arisen from sheer compulsion. It is not the fulfillment of a genuine human need but merely a means to satisfy needs extraneous to it and as such it is forced labour.

The estranged character of this kind of labour comes up clearly in the fact that when there is no compulsion labour is shunned like a plague. Hence such an alienated, external labour is one of 'self-sacrifice' and of 'self-mortification'.

Third factor the 'otherness' of labour as explained by Marx in fact is akin to the first and issues out of it. The nature of "external character of the labour" makes the labourer feel that it is not his own, but someone else's. The worker loses the sense of belonging which is so very essential for the harmonious equilibrium of

1Marx-Engels, German Ideology, p. 81.
2Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 72.
3Ibid., p. 72.
his mind and the prime condition of a fulfilled state of human nature. This sense of otherness or belonging to another brings about the "loss of the self." The nature of worker's activity which is in the process of being self-estranged and self-alienated loses its spontaneous character. It does not flow from his inner being but is forced out of his animal body. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal because in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. He thus converts his life activity, his essential being into a means for existence.

Thus says Marx we have analysed the concept of estranged, alienated labour -- hence analysing merely a fact of political economy. What is implied by this whole analysis is the discovery of moral facts. For, in Marx's ethical theory the analysis of socio-political and economic relations is a precondition for his ethical theory upon which he constructs the theory of moral relations. His own ethics, therefore, is based on a criticism of un-ethical relations operating under the cover of political economy. He gives it a concrete expression by saying:

1Ibid., p. 73.
2Ibid., p. 68.
"In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labour tears from him, his species life."¹ Marx protests against such a degradation of the natural and the spiritual properties of the spontaneous and free activity of man. He revolts against the accumulation of capital through the accumulation of surplus value and the system of monopoly² which presupposes private property, division of labour and a whole system of money relations.

Political economy proceeds from the fact of private property, but it does not explain its true nature to us. We are only given to understand certain abstract formulae and material processes through which private property actually passes which then assume the status of laws. But the whole process as it occurs under private property places the worker under the control of a hostile and alien power. To Marx this whole gamut of political economy is nothing but abominable immorality, because it is the alienated essence of mankind. The product of labour and activity do not belong to the labourer but to an alien power. This alien power is "of the capitalist³ or what one chooses to call the master

¹Marx, Fr. Phil. MSS., p. 76.
²Ibid., p. 57.
³Ibid., pp. 73-79.
of labour" who as an economic agent is the embodiment of this alien power which rules labour and which makes for the unfreedom of the worker. It prevents the development of relations of the essential humanity between the labourer and the capitalist. It places one under the service and yoke of another:

"The whole human servitude is involved in the relation of the worker to production, and every relation of servitude is but a modification and consequence of this relation." 3

Marx conceives capital as "man wholly lost to himself as living capital and therefore capital with needs — one which loses its interest, and hence its livelihood, every moment it is not working." 4 The worth of worker, his life his existence is nothing more than a commodity. When he has no work, he has no wages and hence no existence as a human being. "The existence of capital is his existence, his life, as it determines the tenor of his life in a manner indifferent to him." 5 All human needs in the worker are reduced to one need as

1 I d i , p. 30.
3 Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 82.
4 Ibid., p. 84.
5 Ibid., p. 85.
Marx says himself:

"... to maintain him whilst he is working in so far as may be necessary to prevent the whole race of labourers from dying out."¹

(Italics in original).

Marx thus holds the whole process of capitalistic production responsible for producing a spiritually and physically dehumanized man and therefore for the immorality of producing an 'abstract existence' of man as a mere workman or a "commodity" who falls everyday from his 'filled void' into the 'absolute void' — into his social and therefore actual non-existence, contrary to his original consciousness and flow of life.

In the nature of things the product of labour ought to belong to the labourer himself and to no one else, but in a capitalistic order of society it is the capitalist who enjoys the fruits of labour. As such the hostility between the capitalist and labourer is firmly built in the structure of capitalist society. The estrangement therefore in its multifarious aspects is only too inevitable. It leads through socio-economic mechanisms inescapably to the pernicious institution of private property which in turn further aggravates the alienated condition.²

¹Ibid., p. 85.
²Ibid., p. 93.
Though private property appears to be the source and cause of alienation it is in fact at the same time the inevitable consequence of the same. On one hand it is the product of alienated labour, on the other, it is also the means of alienation of labour. It is the consequence of anonymous social mechanisms and of the fact that human social relations are not the subject of conscious human control, and at the same time, it generates those social mechanisms themselves.

The second social mechanism, of which Marx speaks, is the division of labour which also is directly responsible for the moral impoverishment and degradation of the individual man. It is a necessary pre-requisite of any more or less developed form of social production. It is a convenient and useful means — a skilful deployment of human powers for social wealth. Marx speaks of the extreme significance of the analysis of the division of labour since he finds in it the perceptibly alienated expressions of human activity and of essential human power as a species activity and power. It is the

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1 Cf. Robert Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx, p. 140.
3 Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 135.
4 Ibid., p. 134.
expression of social character of labour within the framework of estrangement.\(^1\) It follows logically from the postulate of private property. If labour therefore is the essence and expression of human activity within alienation, division of labour too is nothing but the estranged, alienated positing of human activity as a real activity of the man as a species being.

Division of labour is the primary force that drives the process of wealth production. It is based on the human propensity to exchange and barter the human talents, conditioned by the use of reason and speech etc.\(^2\) Marx criticizes this exchange of human faculties as being motivated by self-interest and egoistic tendencies. "The motive of those who engage in exchange is not humanity but egoism".\(^3\) (Marx's Italics). He explains the diversity of talents as a product of division of labour rather than the cause of it. It is carried on without any consideration for the talents of individuals and the interests of the whole. It takes place entirely according to the laws of capitalistic commodity production. Under these laws, the product of labour i.e. the commodity

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 129.  
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 133.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 133.
seems to determine and dictate the nature and end of human activity. Each man has a "particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape."\(^1\) It drags the individual into toil and drudgery.

The social division of labour implies a process of separating various economic activities into specialized and limited fields. The entire differentiation takes place under the dictates of commodity production in capitalistic form and is accelerated by the progress of technology. Marx explains it as one of the chief factors in historical development until now. It characterizes all forms of class society.

Two of the important features of its historical forms are first that it is compulsory from the point of view of production and capital irrespective of their interests and abilities of individuals who are distributed among different branches of production on the basis of essentially uncontrollable social determinants like birth and wealth etc. Secondly, it presupposes a sharp division between mental and material labour,\(^2\) — thus setting apart two internally connected moments of work namely the moment of setting the objective and the moment of

\(^1\)Marx-Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 44.
\(^2\)Ibid., p. 43.
its realization. 1

The division of labour specializes some definite abilities of individuals at the cost and degradation of certain others — thus changing the majority of labour into a monotonous torment just for mere physical subsistence. It brings about not only the competition of men with men but also of men with machine, 2 thus reducing man to the status of a machine, ruining the mind and body to the inevitable extinction of his self. It not only shatters his reality but also cripples him intellectually and morally. It is a disguised moral bondage 3 which deprives him of a true human existence. 4

Alienation is a disintegration of man's personality both in socio-economic as well as moral spheres. It is something artificial because it is not given ontologically with the physical and mental being of man. If this money worship had not been existing, the human relations would

2 Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 25.
3 Ibid., p. 43.
have been on a much higher ethical level. Man would be cleansed of greed, envy, ruthless competition etc. It corrupts human relations and as such the authenticity of man's being i.e. his moral self.

The process of self-alienation no more remains at the individual level. It becomes a class phenomenon. The owning class as well as the proletarian class exhibit the same human self-estrangement. But the owning class feels well and confirmed in it i.e. the accumulation of capital knows it to be its own power and possesses in it the appearance of human existence; the proletarian class feels itself annihilated in the same, sees in it, its own impotence and the appalling reality of an inhuman existence. The pitiful helplessness of labour as alien to the worker deposits in society a volcanic force i.e. capital which in its torrential flow swallows not only the labourer but also all the moral virtues of society.

The sense of total alienation and moral impoverishment veers the dispossessed class into total despair, into nihilism. As Franz Kafka has also written about it, "It defiles and degrades not only the work but above all the human beings."

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1Quoted IN Ernst Fischer, The Necessity of Art, p. 83.
It is against this depravity and dehumanization that all the class contradictions are directed. It is against this fragmentation and disintegration\(^1\) that the revolt of the masses is aimed at, for brazen, divisive, all embracing denial of human nature and dignity.\(^2\) It is a call for the creation of new social conditions in which men are not the slaves of their own production but its masters.

It is amply clear from Marx's analysis of labour as the essence of private property through which he penetrates into the immoral practices of economic regime and its processes, that his primary concern is to know what can be done to eliminate so much of dehumanization and alienation. Marx could see with amazing clarity how alienation leads to the perversion of all human values. By making economic profit and its values as the supreme concern, man fails to develop the truly moral values including the personal values of enrichment of good conscience and virtue for Marx says:

"... how can I live virtuously if I do not live? And how can I have a good conscience if I am not conscious of anything? It stems from the very nature of estrangement that each sphere


applied to me a different and opposite yardstick — ethics one and political economy another, for each is a specific estrangement of man and focuses attention on a particular round of estranged essential activity, and each stands in an estranged relation to the other. ¹

Marx criticizes the ethics of political economy for being the ethics of acquisition² and existential egotism,³ of self-denial, the denial of life and all human needs.⁴ He calls it the science of asceticism for which the highest moral ideal is the worker and not the man. As we have seen in the earlier chapter Marx's concept of socialism is a logical outcome of his concept of man. It is a protest against the alienation of man.⁵

As long as man cannot be himself, as long as he is forced to play out a social role cast for him by the system, he cannot become the subject of ethics. His morality is not the expression of his humanity, but is rather a reaction to his inhuman condition. Individuals

¹Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 121.
²Ibid., p. 120.
³Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 53.
⁴Marx, Ec. Phil. MSS., p. 119.
are not ethically culpable because their actions are not free but instead forced upon them by the conditions of their life. When man recognizes the inhumanity of his condition, he leaves behind the field of class moralities and enters upon the truly human ethics where he stands upon the threshold of freedom and adopts the universal standards compatible with the universal human essence, thereby bridging the gulf between "is" and "ought".

For Marx, therefore, the transcendence of alienation seems to be the highest moral ideal in which man regains his lost self, his lost dignity and lost humanity. True morality for him is one free of external compulsions and one which arises when man is truly free from the fear of need, from divisive classes and interests and from private property. In Marx's conception, good is a higher, more real type of existence,¹ in which human life by a kind of logical necessity corresponds to the true human essence. In which the natural existence has become his human existence -- the consummated oneness in substance of man and nature -- the true ressurrection in which naturalism of man and humanism of nature are brought to fulfilment.

Marx upholds the Kantian principle of man as an

¹Eugene Kamenka, Marxism and Ethics, p. 25.
end in himself and never as a means when he says that man's essence must never become a means for individual existence not even his own. He looks at the transcendence of alienation as a condition of freedom and creativity in which man freed from his chains of bondage and poverty engages himself upon the task of reconstruction. In which man develops his senses, powers and attributes, for the development of human powers alone opens the doors to the realm of freedom. Man sheds the fetters of servility and comes back to his real self.

This transcendence of alienation which Marx identifies with communism he calls as the 'riddle of the history solved' — as reintegration or return of man to himself as a social human being. So much was the overcoming of alienation a cherished moral ideal of Marx that his entire vision of a perfect human existence and human society emerged from it. All his thoughts and actions are subordinated to this supreme moral principle which for him is the best embodiment of reverence for life and the absolute uniqueness of human essence and the ideal human existence.

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1Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 54.

It is not an ethicist alone but also a social philosopher who has ultimately got to come to grips with the fundamental problems of what good life is. It is another thing that this intricate concept does not lend itself to consensus. However, Marx too like any other social philosopher was very much concerned with the understanding and exposition of what he thought was good life. His jargon of political economy and his seemingly existential idiom that of self-alienation both bend in the service of the dignity of the individual. The concept of self-alienation borrowed though from other thinkers was specifically a mode of depicting the situation of the mass of labourers who were grinding under the heavy heels of capitalism.

It is essential, therefore, to examine Marx's theory of self-alienation to be able to understand the ethical significance of his thought. That Marx was first a moralist, and economist afterwards is a question which we have considered elsewhere. What is significant for the purpose of this chapter is to see as to how far Marx can go with the help of the concept of self-alienation to explain the total moral situation of man.

It is one thing if Marx was making an analysis of his own times and giving barely an account of the moral situation of his day which he directly relates to the
capitalistic system. Though, it is a moot question whether or not the industrial progress of mankind would have reached a take off point if it were not for the initiative of the capitalist the world over. Without condemning capitalism whole sale it is easy to see that the plight of labour in his times was pretty hard, to say the least. But if Marx was ambitiously propounding a moral theory and a line of action for humanity for all ages to come he was, as we shall try to point, in great error.

In the first instance there is no necessity in history that it should move exactly after the concepts set in motion by Marx. This is evident from what has happened since Marx wrote his monumental works. With the explosion of knowledge, wide scale innovation, an abundance of technical skill and not the least, ever growing concern and political consciousness of the "political animal", a variety of socio-political experiments have come into operation. Despite the understandable and even inherent antagonism of the capital and labour it is both theoretically and practically workable that they co-operate with each other in reconstructed situation to the benefit of each other. In a mixed economy or with the social control of all capital, it is feasible today to plough back the gains of the capital into the larger sectors of society.
There is no reason why under these circumstances labour could not be a partner and share with capitalism all its exploits. The whole new innovation in political economy, in welfare state or socialistic democracies is a pointer in this direction. As such it is not possible to accept that Marx's general laws hold good for all times.

Marx's revolt against capitalism is in the fond hope that labourers' energies, independence and initiative will be released with the liquidation of capitalism. It sounds very attractive and how one wishes it were to come true but it is highly doubtful if Marxian society can deliver all that is promised, since the political mechanism to destroy capitalism is either anarchic or totalitarian; there are more chances of the labourer being frozen tight in the mould of the state. On the other hand, in a welfare state where the labourer has all the political rights, his freedom and economic conditions are likely to rise far above the subhuman standard that Marx had in mind.

The participation of the labourers in management and the proportionate sharing of the wealth produced by them are the factors which are giving rich dividends and are certainly outside the pale of Marxian ideology. To be sure, the participation of the labourers and the management does not, unlike in Marxian thought, rule capital out of court. Indeed, it aims at greater accumulation of
wealth not only for the benefit of the individual but for the welfare of society in general. Add to this a variety of legislation for social control of finance by the state and a number of taxes on the income and capital and the picture emerges clear that the guarantee of economic affluence and freedom can under no circumstances be held out by a single ideology.

Thoughtful political innovation and experimentation, commensurate with the total cultural conditions of a society are necessary pre-requisites of an affluent and good society. It is not out of place to mention that those who in practical politics attempted to follow Marxian concepts in all their purity found it difficult to keep step with them and had necessarily to either adapt those concepts drastically to the new situation or depart from them completely. The communistic world in the final analysis is a Kaleidoscope of hybrid ideas where no original ideas of Marx are to be seen in their original purity.

So much is Marx after the blood of capitalism that he has a special pleasure and genius for creating a fixed mansion of capitalism which would not easily undergo any change — so that he can again and again return to it to give his hard hammer blows. It is, indeed a tragedy that having erected this colossal and invincible mansion
in his imagination, Marx sits down before it helplessly and thinks that this will not blow away easily until physically destroyed by nearly the whole mass of society.

Where Marx makes a mistake is in not seeing that in the process of history and in obedience to the multifarious demands of new human and technological situations, capitalism could not possibly retain its self identity. Indeed, it had to join other forces in course of time and become different in identity, function and result from what Marx had rigidly identified it with. Marx is in line with the category of philosophers who freeze tight a fluid situation into an ideological tube as it were and then play with this tube day in and day out without regard to the changing situations or the potentialities and tendencies inherent in the moment of history and their response to human vision and aspirations. Marx's condemnation and abuse of the capitalists, so profuse in his writings, in understandable in the context of his total emotional and intellectual make up. But the crucial point suggests itself: how far was Marx justified in blaming the capitalist when he could have better laid the blame at the door of history, for, obviously there is a certain inevitability of historical process which sweeps in its fold man and his institutions. If the capitalist is a helpless creature of history, why transfer
emotional venom from the forces of history on to him.

While Marx covers under the blanket of self-alienation both the labourer and the capitalist, it is worth examining as to when actually the feeling of self-alienation appears, agonizing both the classes. It is by and large correct to maintain that until there was a revolutionary ferment in Europe, both the classes were settled in their mores and had accepted their destiny for granted.

In that era the capitalist would not feel the prick of the conscience for ownership of property, he considered it as his birthright. On the contrary, if the labourer was to be upgraded to a higher social stratum he would rather be shocked because he neither expected it nor did he consider it desirable that he should break from the mass of his fellow labourers. Whatever incipient and unconscious self-estrangement there was in regard to both these classes, was neither much self-conscious nor therefore articulate. In any case it had not found any idiom of either any ideology or a revolution. If self estrangement was abroad, then it would not need the reformers and revolutionaries in thought and action to arouse the consciousness of slumbering mass of labourers, nor would Marx need to heap abuses on the capitalist to awaken them to their self-estrangement and to the call of history.
Self-alienation in pure economic terms has been conceived rather narrowly by Marx, for it does not evolve always out of economic conditions alone however important they may be. Self-alienation is due to a number of other factors. Granted for the sake of argument that ideal economic situation is reached in society in conformity to Marxian definition, yet it is difficult to maintain that self-alienation would have been rooted out of human situation.

Equality of economic conditions in human relations is no guarantee of universal equality, intelligence, creativity and mental health. If lack of creativity and mental health still rule the day it is difficult to believe how self-alienation will not stare people at their faces. Any number of psychological studies in the pathology of human nature testify to the aforesaid point of view. In not having been able to see the psychological causes of alienation in contradistinction to purely economic ones, Marx could at best have one-eyed view of social reality.

Marx equates alienation with the objectification of the self. While it can be maintained that objectification or the externalization of the potential human forces is a necessary precondition of the phenomenon of estrangement, it would be wrong to hold that all objectification is necessarily alienation or that the phenomenon of externalization would always be accompanied by estrangement.
This criticism has also been upheld by Adam Schaff\(^1\) amongst other writers on Marxist theoretical system. While objectification is a necessary phenomenon of the process and existence of man's life, alienation, on the contrary, is only a possible phenomenon in the life of man. And not all the products of man's creation are alienated even though they always have an objective existence.

A recent trend in the criticism of Marxist theory of alienation is gripping the attention of the modern student of Marxism. It is offered by the psychological school of alienation. Men like Erich Fromm,\(^2\) Horowitz,\(^3\) Adam Schaff and others have demonstrated the relation of alienation with the personality structure as well as the social structure and have deduced from there the existence of it in socialistic societies no less than in capitalistic societies. They emphasize the fact of psychological constitution of human mind which has been ignored by Marx. It seems Marx did not take into consideration the dark


recesses of human mind in its original make up e.g. envy, lust for power and greed for money etc. which lead to the states of alienation in spite of economic justice and equality.

It has been argued that the whole philosophy of Marx woven around the concept of self-alienation is nothing, but a projection of the deep-seated self-alienation of Marx himself. That Marx's thought is a projection of an inner drama of oppression, reflecting the dynamics of alienated personality which is enslaved and tormented by its own compulsive aggrandizing tendency against which it is obliged to rebel eventually. But this is going too far in rather explaining away the whole philosophy of Marx which does not bear one to one co-relation with self-alienation of Marx, if any. The whole philosophy of Marx, therefore, cannot be easily dismissed as an enlarged self-alienation of its author.

However, in a way philosophies of all social philosophers can be explained in terms of the psyche of their respective authors. As such, Marx will not be alone in being a subject of psycho-analysis towards comprehension of his social philosophy. In any case we do not have as yet a dependable psychological technique to find out the compulsive elements
of human psyche, contributing to a specific type of social philosophy and as such we cannot depend on a psychoanalytical study to pronounce judgments on certain social philosophies. Philosophically we have to take a social philosophy at its face value irrespective of psychological state of its author.

Even if we, for the sake of argument, accept that Marx was, indeed, a self-alienated man, it stands to reason that he could comprehend the causes of self-alienation with better social perception. In any act of creativity a certain sensitivity subjectively felt, mingles with other factors which together give us a totality of knowledge.

Marx's whole economic analysis is motivated by his profound conviction that man's self-alienation is rooted in economic conditions and as such it is a fact of political economy, but he seems to have created a gospel of the transcendence of alienation which was at best only an escape, a flight from the situation into the realm of communism without entailing any moral responsibility for the liberation of the alienated self. He conceives the oncoming of this communism by revolutionary praxis which would alter the external conditions thereby bringing about a radical social change.

Man on the morrow of such a revolution would exist
in a state of infinite degradation. Dispossessed of his productive powers, the dehumanized man is motivated by wrath, hatred, envy, greed and lust for power getting ready for a violent annihilation of the enemy. But can such a state of utter moral degradation be the beginning of his radical self-change?

Moreover, communism as the transcendence of self-alienation is more a description of Marx's dream rather than a possibility based on scientific observation of facts. It is a concept which, sociologically speaking, is empty of factual basis and as such of real possibilities. It was born out of Marx's concern for the complete unity of man with himself, with nature and with other human beings. But Marx has overlooked the possibility of other forms of alienation grounded in factors other than economic, arising out of new modes of human existence. The complexity of human nature is unpredictable, for minds are not like machines. While predictions can be made with regard to machines it is not possible to commit on behalf of the complex human minds that they would react in any particular way in given conditions.

Communism as a state of transcendence of alienation is conceived by Marx as an ascent of man from the realm of economic necessity to that of freedom. He calls it the 'riddle of history solved'. It is intriguing how
it is the riddle of history solved when history knows no stopping and moves on inexorably as such, how can it be a final solution of human problems.

Marx's whole concept of alienation hinges upon the factors of division of labour, and private property i.e. capital. Only upon the abolition of forced and as such alienated labour, would the possibility of overcoming the alienated existence arise. But if we subject these various possibilities to a closer analysis we find to our utter disappointment that it is not all that feasible and practical to do it. The division of labour, Marx claims, is a fragmentation of life activity. It is true, perhaps, that mechanical work does bring about a certain amount of alienation of an otherwise essentially total personality, but it may be argued that the new inventions do reduce considerably the work-centred life to one of more leisure. Division of labour leads to better output in terms of production and as such to greater achievement in life as Marx himself maintains. But what Marx objects to is the disregard for the inner abilities, aptitudes and interests of the individual. What he overlooks is that for that very reason division of labour is not only inevitable but also necessary. In other words since the attitudes and interests differ in different individuals, the necessity follows to provide them with the kind of work that suits
their total make up the best.

What is ethically objectionable in the division of labour is the division on the basis of hierarchy and class distinctions. But if the division of labour is planned within the framework of the principle of equality, it is ethically very sound. Society as such is more likely to be conducive to deeper achievement and better personal and social realization on the whole. The work as the essence of life can be a rare source of delight if, while grounded in the abilities, aptitudes and interests of the individual, it is also provided with a goal orientation. It leads to more of personal freedom and individual initiative, more of progress and less of oppression and alienation. It can be made the basis of an efficient and morally sound functioning of any society.

The abolition of labour, Marx advocated, would take on the character of creative leisure and artistic expression. But as the times have proved it, this possibility is very much in the wake of being realized due to the technological advancement taking place within the framework of a greatly modified capitalist economic system, without having to undergo the revolution and the consequent abolition of private property. The possibility of creative leisure and artistic expression has been unlocked by automation and the tremendous creative power of the
atom. It promises a reorientation which gives man considerable relief in leisure, away from the hitherto life of overwhelming work.

It is also relevant to ask as to what use men will make of the unprecedented freedom that they shall have as a result of considerable reduction in hours of work. Marx never entertained this question. It is possible to envisage a state of society when less of work, and a short working day might produce unusual gloom and unhappiness in the absence of proper programme and training for leisure.

Marx gives a philosophical basis to his theory of alienation by setting it against the background of his concept of man in his essential human self, deviation from which he calls as alienation. But like most of the philosophers, Marx's ideal image of man is rather fixed in spite of his consciousness of history of which he makes so much. He retains the ideal image of man and weaves his whole philosophy around it. Were he to take an evolutionary view of man, he would have not only not advanced a fixed and rigid view of species character in human nature in its essential form, but would have also seen many different possibilities and courses of growth of society in a more definite form than he was able to do.
It is in place to mention that it would be wrong reading of history if one drew the unqualified conclusion that but for Marx the masses would not have revolted against the pernicious authority. A closer analysis of history will reveal that while classical and aspirational or revolutionary books like *Capital* have lent hand in moving people on to revolutions, it is nearer the mark to say that revolution would have come, nonetheless, when people's emotions are aroused to the point of servitude and degradation. If Marx was not readily available, they would have found some or invented some other god.

The aforesaid can be justified from our study of contemporary revolutionary streams. Some student revolts, for example, in the recent decades have gone under the ageis of gods like Mao Tse Tung and others. But in quite a large number of student rebellions, it is just the dissatisfaction and the agitation of mind which have not even found the ideological idiom. If one were to confront the students making it a moral issue, they may turn to one with their home spun ethics, justifying what they do. Besides, any number of examples from the history of war can be found to show that the gun was shot first and the reason and the justification came limping behind.
To be sure, then, we cannot live effectively by any fixed moral theory based on socio-political structure, particularly when a socio-political structure keeps undergoing a change and as such has to make various kinds of adjustments. Morality in socio-economic nexus, as Marxian ethics primarily is, has therefore, to be evolutionary to be able to adjust to changing phases of the basic structure.

In the nature of things the rigidity of Marxian ethics, which as it were, is embedded in frozen history is not expected to meet the challenges of new modes of life and fresh aspirations of man. As such it has got to make way for a more comprehensive and more flexible morality which can properly take note of man's freedom and aspirations, on one hand, and the good of society on the other in the fast changing scientific and technological world.