



Classical Sociological Theory and Foundations of American Sociology

Classical Sociological Theory and Foundations of American Sociology

ALLISON L. HURST

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY
CORVALLIS, OR



Classical Sociological Theory and Foundations of American Sociology by Allison Hurst is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/), except where otherwise noted.

Download for free at <https://open.oregonstate.edu/sociologicaltheory>

Publication and on-going maintenance of this textbook is possible due to grant support from [Oregon State University Ecampus](https://ecampus.oregonstate.edu/).

[Suggest a correction](#)

Contents

Part I. Marx and Engels

1. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 3

PART I
MARX AND ENGELS

I. Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844

[download](#)

“The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth she produces.”

NOTE ON SOURCE: Years after Marx's death, a series of notebooks were finally transcribed and published, first in the Soviet Union in 1927 and in the US in 1959 (just in time for the turbulent '60's). It is here where Marx discusses most fully the well-known concept of alienation. The selections below are taken from the translation freely available on the Marxist Archives website, with minor modifications and condensation.

Introduction – Why this is important and what to look for

In the 1844 manuscripts, written when still a young man, Marx struggled to articulate what was so problematic about the current system of capitalism. These early passages of Marx demonstrate the fundamental problems of social relations under class rule. Rather than focus on the concept of exploitation, or what was economically unfair about the social relationship between capitalist and worker, Marx critiqued the historical development of hired labor and the ways in which this kind of work dehumanizes those who take part in it. We are fully ourselves when we work, but we have socially arranged our work so that it is alien to us, a hostile power at another's command. Marx uses the word alienation (or estrangement) to describe this dehumanization. Take note of the various aspects of alienation discussed by Marx.

We have proceeded from the premises of political economy. We have accepted its language and its laws. 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 that, eventually, the whole of society must fall apart into the two classes – property owners and property-less workers.

Political economy starts with the fact of private property; it does not explain it to us. 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.*

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. 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 bondage to it*; appropriation as *estrangement*, as *alienation*

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 poverty. It produces mansions, but for the worker, shacks. 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, ignorance.

Until now we have been considering the alienation of the worker only in one of its aspects – her relationship to the products of her labor. But the alienation (also known as estrangement) is manifested not only in the result but in the act of production, within the producing activity, itself.

What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor?

First, the fact that labor is *external* to the worker. In other words, it does not belong to her intrinsic nature. In her work she does not affirm herself but denies herself. She does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely her physical and mental energy but instead mortifies her body and ruins her mind. The worker only feels herself outside her work, and in her work feels outside herself. *She feels at home when she is not working, and when she is working, she does not feel at home.* Her 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. Finally, it is not her own work, but someone else's. It doesn't really belong to her but to another.

As a result, therefore, a human being (the worker) only feels herself freely active in her animal functions – eating, drinking, reproducing, or at most in her dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in her human functions she no longer feels herself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.

We have now covered the first two aspects of alienation: first, alienation from the product, and second, alienation from the process. We now have to consider two more.

Humans are a species-being. The life of the species, both in humans and in non-human animals, consists physically in the fact that humans (like other animals) lives on organic nature. Like all animals, humans *live* on nature –nature is our *body*, and we must remain in continuous interchange with it to stay alive. That our physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for we are a part of nature. In estranging from us (1) nature, and (2) ourselves,

Our own active functions, our life activity, estranged labor estranges the *species* from us. It changes for us the *life of the species* into a means of individual life.

For labor, *life activity*, *productive life* itself, appears to us 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 our species-character. Life itself appears only as a *means to life*. This, too, is an aspect of alienation.

The non-human animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its *life activity*. We, however, make our life activity itself the object of our will and consciousness. Conscious life activity distinguishes us immediately from all other animal life activity. It is just because of this that we are the human species (that is our “species-being”). Estranged labor reverses the relationship, what makes us human is something that is a mere means to existence rather than our very existence itself.

In creating a *world of objects* by our personal activity, we prove ourselves a conscious 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 we produce universally. An animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, while this is not true for us.

The object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of our species-life*: for we see ourselves in the world we create. In tearing away from us the object of our production, therefore, estranged labor tears from us our *species-life*, transforms our advantage over other animals into the disadvantage that our inorganic body, nature, is taken from us.

We thus have two more aspects of alienation. The third is alienation from our species-being, that which makes us human. Following from this is the fourth, our alienation from other human beings. The proposition that man's species-nature is estranged from him means that one man is estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature.

Our alienation is realized and expressed only in the relationship in which we stand to other humans. Hence within the relationship of alienated labor each person views the other in accordance with the standard and the relationship in which she finds herself as a worker.

Let us now see, further, how the concept of estranged, alienated labor must express and present itself in real life. 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? To god(s)? Perhaps back in the day, but not now. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over us. 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.

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 relationship 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 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 man*.

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. 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 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.

Questions

1. Think about jobs you have had. Did you feel fully yourself on the job or out of it? Did working satisfy a need, or was it merely a way to get paid? Now think about activities in which you *work* but this is self-directed (playing music in a band, performing a sport, making dinner for a friend). Do you see the difference Marx was drawing here?
2. What makes humans different from other animals? *Do you agree?* How does alienation undercut our species-being?
3. Would it ever be possible to arrange our social relations in a way that labor is not alienated? What would this look like? Try to imagine such an arrangement (this is a helpful exercise as we move forward to reading the *Communist Manifesto*).
4. Marx began this essay by saying that he wanted to uncover the connections between the division of labor, private property, and wealth/poverty. Has he succeeded? Explain.
5. Why is the “emancipation of workers” so important?

Concepts

Alienation (all four aspects)

Species-being

Private Property