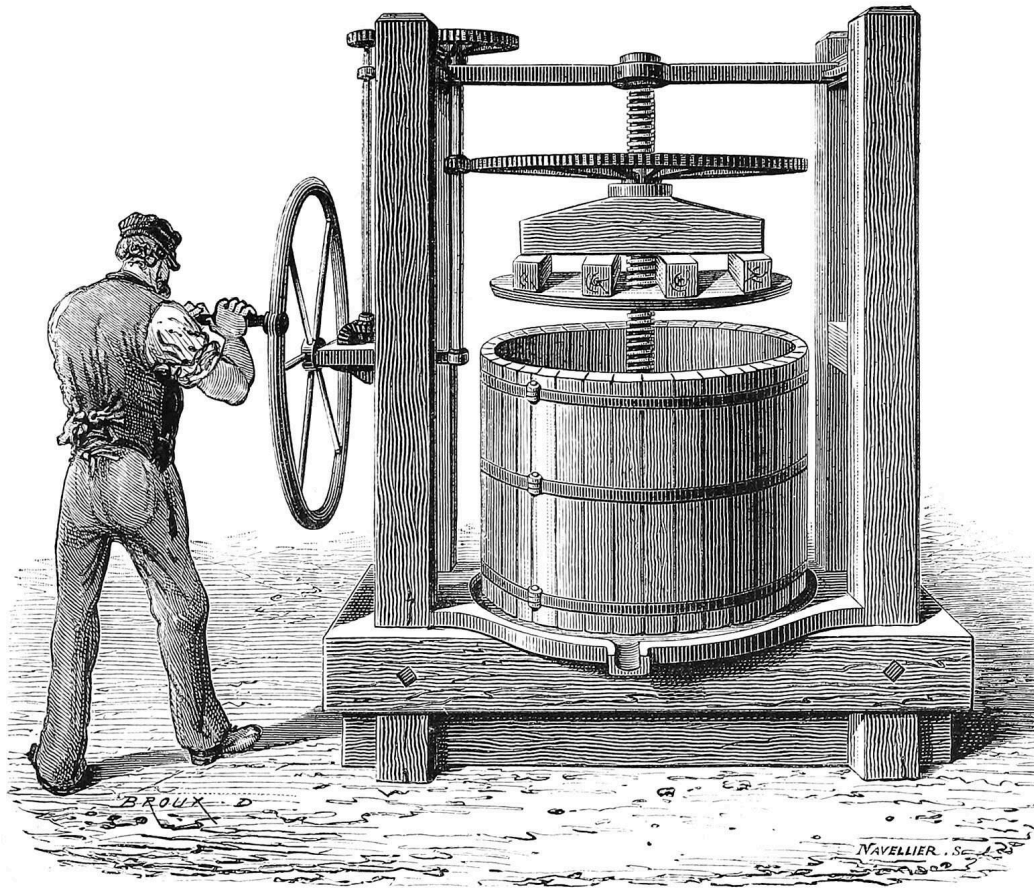


MASS Educational Program

Theories, Concepts, and Key Vocabulary



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Week 2: Alienation, Surplus Labor & Value

01/25/25

Alienation - Therese

For Marx, there's something deeply important about doing what you want—waking up in the morning to pick berries for breakfast, sewing the clothes you're going to wear. This is the opposite of alienation; having a relationship with the things that you produce.

For example; I'm working in a restaurant, and I don't even cook my own food anymore. I'm so busy cooking for so many people that I'm too tired to go home and cook for myself. That's a deep form of alienation—I'm cooking for everybody, yet I don't even get to enjoy the product of my own labor.

Alienation

- **General Definition:** The state or experience of being isolated from a group or activity in which one should belong or be involved.
- **Marxist Definition:** A condition of workers in a capitalist economy resulting from a lack of identity with the product of their labor and a sense of being controlled or exploited.
- Alienation results in workers becoming complacent with their exploitation, as they believe there is no way out.
- When alienated, people lose a sense of community in favor of an individualist mindset.

Two Types of Alienation:

Subjective Alienation

- Labor is meaningless, therefore “my” life is meaningless.
- In the restaurant example, this is the emotional toll working in food service takes on you, seeing people spend 3x your hourly wage on a single dinner
- ‘I'm just a cog in the machine’, loss of control over the activity of producing - it's not self-expression and has no relation to my desires

Objective Alienation

- The cause of subjective alienation; the worker is hindered from essential and built-in human capacities.

- In the restaurant example, this is the fact that he is so exhausted from serving other people food that he can't even make himself dinner,
- People feel like their lives have no meaning because society doesn't let them use their full potential

Capitalism is like a snake eating itself. It extracts workers from capital—when in reality, the workers are the capital.

Collective Ownership is the direct distribution of the fruits of labor to the workers instead of a ruling owner of production (bourgeoisie).

Ways to Combat Alienation:

UNIONS! UNIONS! UNIONS!!!!

- Ensures that the rights of workers are upheld
- Allows workers to be equally and properly compensated for work.
- Combats exploitation of non-union workers.

*Unions are disruptive and terrifying to the bourgeoisie,
which makes them essential.*

Influences on Marxist Ideas

- Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
- Ludwig Feuerbach

Surplus Labor/Value - Naomi

Surplus Labor:

1. **Definition:** The extra value (money) produced by surplus labor, beyond what the workers are compensated for, that goes right to the capitalist.
2. **Example:** The \$20 extra made from the 4 hours of extra (uncompensated) work of candle-making is considered the surplus value, which the capitalist takes as profit into his pocket.
3. **Analysis:** Surplus value represents the exploitation of labor. The capitalist profits from the worker's labor without paying the worker for all they produce, rather by hours.

Surplus Value:

1. **Definition:** The extra work a worker does beyond what is needed for them to earn a contracted pay that, in theory, is supposed to be enough to meet the individual's most basic needs.
2. **Example:** (In some far away land) Kurt only needs \$20 a day for his basic necessities. At his job, he can make \$20 worth of candles in 4 hours. But his job is 8 hours. The extra 4 hours of work is surplus labor—work done without fair compensation.
3. **Analysis:** Surplus labor shows the disconnect between the laborer's produced work and the compensation they receive. The capitalist economy benefits from this surplus labor, which contributes to the system of exploitation.

$$M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M$$

The M-C-M Formula: No Profits

1. MONEY (M) is used to buy COMMODITIES (C) (product or raw materials) which are then sold for the same amount of MONEY (M). There is no profit made in this equation
2. Example: I spend \$20 on 20 bananas for my neighbors. I sell them at \$1 a banana. I make no profit, but I also lost no money
3. This transaction has no profit incentive, so the capitalist has to find ways to create value

$$M \rightarrow C \rightarrow M'$$

The M-C-M' Formula: No Value Added

4. MONEY (M) is used to buy COMMODITIES (C) (product or raw materials) which are then sold for MORE MONEY (M'). The item stays the same but the capital increased.
5. **Example:** Dropshipping, where people buy commodities in bulk for cheap, often finished products, and resell them for a higher price without altering or adding value to the product.
6. **Analysis:** This model shows the detachment between the human labor that goes into producing a commodity and the profit that capitalists make from selling it, as they can make profit from adding and doing nothing.

$$M \rightarrow C^{(LP, MP)} \rightarrow P \rightarrow C' \rightarrow M' + M\Delta$$

Final Formula: Surplus Value

1. MONEY (M) is used to buy COMMODITIES (C), which include LABOR POWER (LP), and MEANS of PRODUCTION (MP), which go into PRODUCTION (P) to produce the NEW COMMODITY (C') to be sold for MORE MONEY (M', MΔ)
 - a. The item now has human labor and has used tools or machines/other secondary commodities to change/add value, justifying a higher price
 - b. SURPLUS VALUE (Δ) has been added to the final commodity through Labor Power and Means of Production
2. **Example:** The candle company buys the raw materials; wax, string, and cooling rack, then also buys Kurt's labor to dip the string in the wax, and then put them on a rack to cool.

Labor Theory: (*David Ricardo, Karl Marx*)

1. **Definition:** The value of a product comes from the amount of work needed to make it
2. **Example:** more labor to make the product equals a higher value (price) product, and less labor equals a lower price. A super fancy candle is more expensive than a simple one because the ingredients are better and it takes longer for the worker to make.
3. **Analysis:** "Labor is the most important factor in deciding the value of things", The surplus value is the essence of capitalist production and what drives the capitalists to continue to try and match their profits.

Constant Capital:

1. **Definition:** Machines, technology, etc. that can be constantly used, where things can be constantly produced
2. **Example:** A factory that produces cans of food without a single human being working, it's all run by computers and motorized machines/robots.

3. **Analysis:** One of the ways capitalists try to maximize profits, investing in more constant capital, and divesting from viable capital; through layoffs, hiring fewer people, cutting hours.

Viable Capital:

1. **Definition:** Human workers, raw materials, parts of production that require sleep and rights
2. **Example:** Human workers in a food company can only work for 8 hours, and are legally required to be given breaks, and eat, cannot be working 24/7 cranking out products
3. **Analysis:** Another way capitalists try to maximize profits is by outsourcing labor to countries where laws allow for cheaper pay, and longer hours, decreasing the value of the products, a negative feedback loop.
 - a. The bigger and bigger these companies get (because they're trying to max their profits) what happens does the opposite, because then the value of their products decreases because of the less labor power and cheaper materials.
 - b. As profits shrink, capitalists put more pressure on workers which leads to job losses, lower wages, and economic instability because now that people are making less money + getting laid off.
 - c. Worker's hours are extended/stretched with fewer of them working
 - d. Automation allows for a decline in the product, cheapens the product via a decrease in labor power (viable capital), and lowers price.

Actual physical labor power is the most important component to deciphering the value of a commodity

Use Value:

1. **Definition:** Value based on the product's tangible usefulness in reality.
2. **Example:** A well-made jacket is useful no matter how expensive it is. Everyone uses one when it's cold outside. Necessity can vary, for example, a jacket is less needed in a warm climate vs a cold one.

Exchange Value:

1. **Definition:** Value of commodity based on market exchange rate, when it's traded or sold; its value in a market/price lens
2. **Example:** It takes me 4 hours to make a chair, and a cobbler 30 minutes to finish a pair of sandals. I'm not going to trade one chair for one pair of sandals, I'm going to trade probably 8 sandals for my chair, in this scenario.
3. **Analysis:** The labor power in time that went into my chair doesn't exactly equate to the labor power that went into one single pair of sandals. But I also don't need 20 sandals, which is where money comes in as a means of trading

Taxation Is Theft?

Tax is theft and taxation is theft, I can get behind that, taxes can be a little lower or whatever. But if people are looking at taxes all the time and they're not looking at their boss, you got a little backward. Our taxes deplorably right now are going to the military and the army and to genocides around the world. In theory, taxes could be used for public good; high-speed rails, better roads, public transportation, free food programs, etc.

Wage Theft:

1. **Definition:** The wages that the capitalist steals from the worker by taking the extra value a labor produces but not paying them for it
2. **Example:** Therese works at a movie theater, selling 100 tickets per hour. Each ticket sells for \$20, generating, \$2,000 per hour. After costs, the theater keeps \$1,000 in profit. Therese is only paid \$16 per hour, meaning the movie theater boss is stealing \$984 from Therese, an hour.
3. **Analysis:** The worker creates extra value and the employer steals most of it