

THE GRUNDRISSE

KARL MARX

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THE GRUNDRISSE

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Contents

PREFACE	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
1. General Introduction	16
2. Critique of Bastiat and Carey	47
3. Money as a Symbol of Alienation in Capitalist Society	59
4. Social Power and the Individual	65
5. Alienation, Social Relationships and Free Individuality	70
6. General and Specific Labour	74
7. Individuals and Society	77
8. Capital and Labour as Productive and Unproductive	78
9. Capital as a Productive Force	85
10. The Contributions of Labour and Capital to the Production Process	87
11. Capital as a Revolutionary, but Limited, Force	94
12. Alienated Labour and Capital	96
13. Property as the Right to Alien Labour	103
14. Exchange Relationships in Feudal and Capitalist Society	106
15. The Universalist Tendencies Inherent in Capitalism	119
16. Labour as Sacrifice or Self-realisation	123
17. Individual Freedom in Capitalist Society	128
18. The Labour Process and Alienation in Machinery and Science	132
19. The Position of Labour in Capitalist and Communist Society	141
20. Free Time and the Production Process in Capitalist and Communist Society	144
21. Leisure and Free Time in Communist Society	148
22. Productive Power in Capitalist and Communist Society	150
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	153
INDEX	155

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process of development is itself established and understood as a prerequisite. But it is necessary also and above all that full development of the productive forces should have become a *condition of production*, not that determined *conditions of production* should be set up as a boundary beyond which productive forces cannot develop.

16 Labour as Sacrifice or Self-realisation

From *Grundrisse*, pp. 504–8

Marx here comments at length on Adam Smith's negative attitude to work as being always a burden. In this extract Marx presents a different picture of work as the fulfilment of man's most profound capacities. He also attacks Smith on the ground that the price of goods cannot be determined by labour if labour is viewed solely as a sacrifice.

A. SMITH's view is that labour never changes its value, in the sense that a determined quantity of labour is always a determined quantity for the worker, i.e. according to A. Smith, it is a sacrifice which is quantitatively of an equal size. Whether I receive more or less money for an hour's work (depending on its productivity and other circumstances), I have worked for one hour. What I have had to pay for the result of my labour, for my wages, is always the same hour of working time, no matter how variable its result. 'Equal quantities of labour, at all times and places, may be said to be of equal value to the labourer. In his ordinary state of health, strength and spirits; in the ordinary degree of his skill and dexterity, he must always lay down the same portion of his ease, his liberty, and his happiness. The price which he pays must always be the same, whatever may be the quantity of goods which he receives in return for it. Of these, indeed, it may sometimes purchase a greater and sometimes a smaller quantity; but it is their value which varies, not that of the labour which purchases them. . . . Labour alone, therefore, never varying in its own value, is alone the ultimate and real standard by which the value of all commodities can at all times and places be estimated and compared. It is their real price; money is their nominal price only.'¹ 'Thou shalt labour by the sweat of thy brow!' was Jehovah's

¹ A. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. E. Cannan (London, 1904) p. 37.

curse that he bestowed upon Adam. A. Smith conceives of labour as such a curse. 'Rest' appears to him to be the fitting state of things, and identical with 'liberty' and 'happiness'. It seems to be far from A. Smith's thoughts that the individual, 'in his normal state of health, strength, activity, skill and efficiency', might also require a normal portion of work, and of cessation from rest. It is true that the quantity of labour to be provided seems to be conditioned by external circumstances, by the purpose to be achieved, and the obstacles to its achievement that have to be overcome by labour. But neither does it occur to A. Smith that the overcoming of such obstacles may itself constitute an exercise in liberty, and that these external purposes lose their character of mere natural necessities and are established as purposes which the individual himself fixes. The result is the self-realisation and objectification of the subject, therefore real freedom, whose activity is precisely labour. Of course he is correct in saying that labour has always seemed to be repulsive, and forced upon the worker from outside, in its historical forms of slave-labour, bond-labour and wage-labour, and that in this sense non-labour could be opposed to it as 'liberty and happiness'. This is doubly true of this contradictory labour which has not yet created the subjective and objective conditions (which it lost when it abandoned pastoral conditions) which make it into attractive labour and individual self-realisation. This does not mean that labour can be made merely a joke, or amusement, as Fourier naïvely expressed it in shop-girl terms. Really free labour, the composing of music for example, is at the same time damned serious and demands the greatest effort. The labour concerned with material production can only have this character if (1) it is of a social nature, (2) it has a scientific character and at the same time is general work, i.e. if it ceases to be human effort as a definite, trained natural force, gives up its purely natural, primitive aspects and becomes the activity of a subject controlling all the forces of nature in the production process. Moreover, A. Smith is thinking only of the slaves of capital. For example, even the semi-artistic worker of the Middle Ages cannot be included in his definition. However, my immediate concern is not to discuss his philosophic view of labour, but only its economic aspect. Labour considered purely as a sacrifice and therefore as establishing a value, labour as the price to be paid

for things and thus giving them a price according as they cost more or less labour, is a purely negative definition. In this way Mr Senior was able, for example, to make capital into a source of production *sui generis* in the same sense as labour a source of production of value, since the capitalist too is making a sacrifice, the sacrifice of abstinence, for, instead of directly consuming his produce, he is enriching himself. A pure negative accomplishes nothing. When the worker takes pleasure in his work – as, certainly, Senior's miser takes pleasure in his abstinence – the product loses nothing of its value. It is labour alone that produces; it is the only substance of products considered as values.¹ This is why working time (supposing it is of the same intensity) is the measure of value. The qualitative differences among workers – in so far as they are not the natural ones of sex, age, physical strength, etc., and express, fundamentally, not the qualitative value of labour, but its division and differentiation – are the result of historical processes. For the great majority of workers, these differences disappear again, since the work that they perform is simple; work that is of a higher quality, however, can be measured by economics in terms of simple labour. To say that working time, or the quantity of labour, measures values, means only that labour and values are measured by the same standard. Two things can only be measured by the same standard when they are of the same nature. Therefore products can only be measured by the standard of labour (working time) because they are by nature made from labour. They are objectified labour. As objects they may assume forms that show they were produced by labour and that finality has been imposed on them from the outside. This does not always

¹ Proudhon's axiom that all work leaves a surplus shows how little he understands the position. What he denies to capital, he allows to be a natural property of labour. The point is rather that the working time necessary for the satisfaction of absolute necessities leaves some free time (which varies at the various stages of the development of the productive forces), so that surplus produce can thus be created if surplus labour is done. The object is to terminate this relationship, so that surplus produce itself can become necessary, and finally material production can leave everyone surplus time for other activities. There is no longer anything mystical about this. Originally the spontaneously developing association (the family) existed at the beginning together with a corresponding division of labour and co-operation. But then needs were slight in the beginning, and only developed with the productive forces. [Marx's footnote.]

occur; it is not possible to see objectified labour in an ox, nor in the products of nature that man reproduces. These forms, however, have nothing in common with each other; they exist as something constant so long as they have an existence as an activity measured by time, which can thus also be used to measure objectified labour. We shall examine later how far this measurement is linked to exchange, and to labour that is not yet socially organised, as a definite stage of the social productive process. Use value is not connected with human activity as the source and creation of the product, it aims at producing an object that is useful for man. In so far as the product has a measure of its own, it is measured in terms of its natural properties – size, weight, length, capacity, measure of usefulness, etc. But as an effect, or as the static form of the force that has created it, it is measured only by the volume of this force itself. The measure of labour is time. Simply because products *are* labour, they can be measured by the measure of labour, by the working time, or the quantity of labour consumed in them. The negation of rest, as a pure negation, as an ascetic sacrifice, accomplishes nothing. An individual may mortify the flesh and make a martyr of himself from morning to night, like the monks, but the amount of sacrifice that he makes will get him nowhere. The natural price of things is not the sacrifice made to obtain them. This is reminiscent of the pre-industrial era, in which riches were to be obtained by sacrifices to the gods. There must be something else besides the sacrifice. Instead of speaking of a sacrifice of rest, one might speak of a sacrifice of laziness, of lack of freedom, of unhappiness – in fact, the negation of a negative condition. A. Smith considers labour from the psychological point of view, in relation to the pleasure or opposite that it gives to the individual. But in addition to being a feeling concerning his activity, work is something else: in the first place, in relationship to other people, for the mere sacrifice of A would be no use to B. Secondly, there is the worker's own particular relationship towards the object that he is making, and towards his own talents for work. Work is a positive, creative activity. The standard by which work is measured – i.e. time – naturally does not depend on its productivity. The measure consists of a unity, whose aliquot parts express a certain quantity. It certainly does not follow from this that the value of labour is constant; it is so only in so far as

equal quantities of labour have the same unity of measurement. Pursuing this analysis further, we find that the values of products are measured by labour, not the labour actually employed, but the labour that is necessary for their production. Thus the condition of production is not the sacrifice but the labour. The equation expresses the condition of its reproduction given in the exchange, in other words, the possibility of renewing productive activity created by its own product.

Moreover, if A. Smith's idea of sacrifice correctly expresses the subjective relationship of the wage-earner to his own work, it still will not yield what he wishes it to – namely, that value is determined by means of the time worked. From the worker's point of view, even one hour of work may represent a great sacrifice. But the value of his work does not in the slightest depend on his feelings; nor does the value of the hour he has worked. A. Smith admits that this sacrifice may sometimes be bought more cheaply, sometimes more dearly; in which case one is struck by the fact that it must always be sold at the same price. In this also he is illogical. Further on, he declares wages to be the standard by which value is measured, not the quantity of labour. To go to the slaughter is always the same sacrifice for the ox; this is no reason for beef to have a constant value.