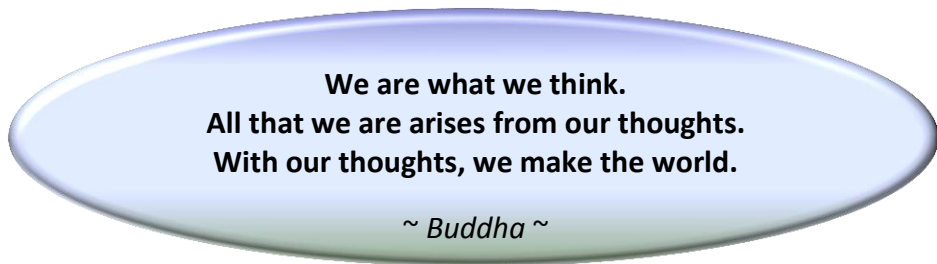


### III. What Shapes Culture?

#### III.2 Social Psyche & Culture



‘We Are What We Think.’ This is the other extreme in the paradigm of explanations of culture. While environmental determinism postulates that our physical environment shapes our collective psyche, proponents of this view believe that it is our collective mind, our ideas about the physical world, that prompt our actions and, therefore, shape our culture. One idea that underlies all others is the concept of **value**.

#### ‘Value’ – the Foundation of Culture

Value is the *meaning (usefulness)* of something to a person/group of people. It is at the heart of all our judgment (generalization/ **evaluation**). Value judgments are at the core of every culture; they make the patterns in the ‘webs of significance’ we spin.

It is the ability of the human mind to figure out the *value* of things that enabled us to use and invent tools: ‘Man wants the stick, the ape wants the fruit,’ wrote Vygotsky. ‘The ape does not want the tool. It does not prepare it for the future. For the ape it is a means to satisfy an instinctive wish. **The tool requires abstraction from the situation. The tool is connected with meaning (of the object)**’ (Vygotsky: 1925).

Every value judgment presupposes abstraction from the thing, idea or situation that is judged (i.e., *How would you evaluate this verbal gem?* ☺).

As all meanings, ‘value’ has no independent physical existence; it is the construct of the human mind (or minds). Being a relative concept (‘one man’s junk is another one’s riches,’ they say), ‘value’ perceptions can be easily manipulated by pulling the economic strings of supply and demand, and by persuasion.

However, food, clean water and air, shelter – all the things that are basic to our survival are valued in all human societies. To satisfy their basic human needs, people in every society must cooperate to produce enough food, drink, shelter and other material things necessary for survival. It is that simple:

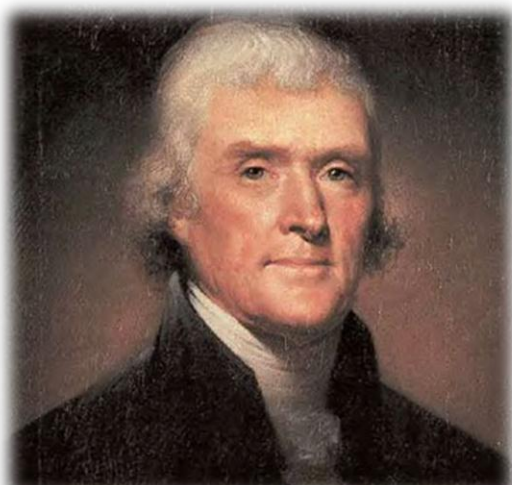
**To survive, people must consume** (air, food, water, shelter, energy, etc.)

**To consume, they must produce.**

**To produce enough to survive, people must cooperate:** no man can survive alone –  
“Together, we stand; divided, we fall.”

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True cooperation is impossible without an **exchange** of ideas; as a matter of fact (ASAMOF), any kind of voluntary exchange is only possible between rational beings. It follows, therefore, that ideas (abstract thought) shape human culture and move human development forward.



## 2.1 Society – a ‘series of exchanges’

**Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836)**, the French philosopher and political economist (who, in fact, coined the term *ideology*, the science of the formation of ideas) claimed that human society was nothing but a ‘series of exchanges.’ In Chapter I of his treatise *Of Our Actions*, he claims that living in society is the natural state for man:

“... We are ... so organized, that we form judgments of that which we experience, of that which we feel, of that which we see; in a word, of all which affects us; we distinguish the parts, circumstances, causes and consequences thereof; and this is to judge of it. It is then impossible that we should not soon be aware of the **utility** we may derive from the succour<sup>1</sup> of our fellow beings ... It is this also which always, and everywhere, produces the admirable and wise invention of a language ... more capable of detailed explanations, than that of any other animal. **It is then the social state, which is our natural state.**”

He then considers the social state ‘under its economical relation, relatively to our most direct wants, and to the means we have of satisfying them,’ pointing out that ‘man alone makes exchanges’:

“...Now what is society, viewed under this [economic – OT] aspect? I do not fear to announce it. **Society is purely and solely a continual series of exchanges.** It is never anything else ... Exchange is an admirable transaction, in which the two contracting parties always both gain; consequently, society is an uninterrupted succession of advantages, unceasingly renewed for all its members ...

... **Man alone makes exchanges**, properly speaking ... We clearly see certain animals execute labours which concur to a common end, and which to a certain point appear to have been concerted; ... but nothing announces that they really make formal exchanges. The reason, I think, is that they have not a language sufficiently developed to enable them to make express conventions; and this, I think, proceeds ... from their being incapable of sufficiently decomposing their ideas, to generalise, to abstract, and to express them separately in detail, and in the form of a proposition; ... Man, on the contrary, who has the intellectual means ... is naturally led to avail himself of them, to make conventions with his fellow beings. They make no exchanges, and he does. Accordingly, he alone has a real society; for **commerce is the whole of society, as labour is the whole of riches**” (Ibid.).

<sup>1</sup> Succour – help given to someone in need or in danger (OALD).

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

This ‘continual succession of exchanges,’ argued De Tracy, gives man ‘**three very remarkable advantages**’:

**First**, the labour of several men united is more productive, than that of the same men acting separately ... [Examples given: defence, work, requiring great force/ coordination]

**Secondly**, our knowledge is our most precious acquisition ... Now no man is in a situation to see everything, and it is much more easy to learn than to invent. But when several men communicate together, that which one has observed is soon known to all the others, and it is sufficient amongst them that one is found who is very ingenious, in order that precious discoveries should promptly become the property of all. Intelligence then will increase much more rapidly, than in a state of insulation, without calculating that it may be preserved, and consequently accumulated from generation to generation; and still without counting, what is clearly proved by the study of our understanding, that the invention and employment of language and its signs, which would not take place without society, furnish our minds with many new means of combination and action.

**Thirdly**, and this still merits attention: when several men labour reciprocally for one another, everyone can devote himself exclusively to the occupation for which he is fittest, whether from his natural dispositions or from fortuitous circumstances; and thus he will succeed better. The hunter, the fisherman, the shepherd, the labourer, the artisan,—doing each a single thing—will become more skilful, will lose less time, and have more success. This is what is called the **division of labour** ...

**Concurrence of force, increase and preservation of knowledge, and division of labour; these are the three great benefits of society”** (Destutt de Tracy: Of Our Actions, Ch. I).

What a society knows and thinks is seen as the determining factor in what it does and how it produces everything it needs for survival. Economic relations and practices are fundamental in shaping the nature of social exchanges, but so are man-made laws and regulations. For example,

#### **The role of laws & regulation in society**

Most people today find the idea of selling other human beings repugnant. But ... why? Before December 1865 (less than 150 years ago!), when the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment officially ended slavery in the United States, it was a legal and routine practice in the Southern United States. People’s attitudes and beliefs are formed in the course of enculturation. What is and isn’t allowable differs from one society to another. Social and political forces affect all aspects of our life, influencing our decisions and actions (you don’t practice medicine without a license; you don’t sell body parts or drugs – these actions are against the law. But many people do sell alcohol; that’s not against the law, if you have a permit). Social attitudes also influence us (you don’t charge your friends interest on their loans; you don’t charge your children for their food, etc.). What happens in a society is usually the result of the interplay of economic, political and legal forces, in the context of the environment and history. Everything in human

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

life revolves around those 'series of exchanges,' which is why economy is often seen as the foundation of the entire social structure.

Exchanges, however, are not always the 'admirable' transactions, 'in which the two contracting parties always both gain'; this is due to the relative nature of *value*, which opens it to manipulation.

#### Idea of Value – Manipulated

##### *Ajahn Punṇadhammo*

Ajahn

Punnadhammo, an Aussie Buddhist thinker, explores the mechanism of commercial and financial manipulation in his excellent article '*Economic Delusions*' (the excerpt in the box on the right is there just to whet your appetite - please read the full text of this article in **Appendix III Reading 4**).

People value both material things and spiritual/ moral qualities. Thus,

The financial markets reflect the cumulative result of millions of individual decisions. Regarding decisions, The Buddha said that they should never be made on the basis of greed, anger, fear or delusion. It is obvious how greed and fear have poisoned the well, but I would like to focus on something a little deeper, how delusion has worked in creating the present financial collapse.

Specifically, the whole scenario demonstrates the truly amazing power of mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) in human history. Money itself is an abstraction. At some point in the distant past people agreed to believe that this shiny rock was worth those two cows, even though the real, utilitarian value of a cow is considerably more than the real, utilitarian value of a shiny rock. Paper money is an even more refined level of abstraction. This piece of paper with the queen's face, or a spooky eye-in-the-pyramid design or whatever it might be, is said to represent so many shiny rocks, which are worth so many cows. (Eventually, they dropped the fiction about the shiny rocks.)

#### ➤ **Material values**

refer to physical things that can satisfy the basic (and not so basic) human needs (i.e., money and all the things it can get you - houses, land, gold, silver, cars, etc.).

#### ➤ **Spiritual or moral values** refer to people's attitudes and beliefs.

There is no clear division between the two kinds of values, though – material wealth can be used to obtain 'food for the mind' as well as for the body; education, in turn,

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

can provide material benefits/ value. **The physical and the psychological in human cultures and societies are intertwined and inseparable.**

The more basic the human needs, the more *wanted* or *valuable* the things become to those who want them (people often risk life, limb and honour to escape physical pain or deprivation). Scarcity of supply also increases the demand and, therefore, the price (perceived value) of the goods.

Some spiritual values are universal – honesty, friendship, kindness, etc. are valued in most societies; and, because everybody has the same basic human needs, even more material things are universally valued (i.e., sources of energy - oil, gas, coal; precious metals, such as gold and silver; food and water, etc.).

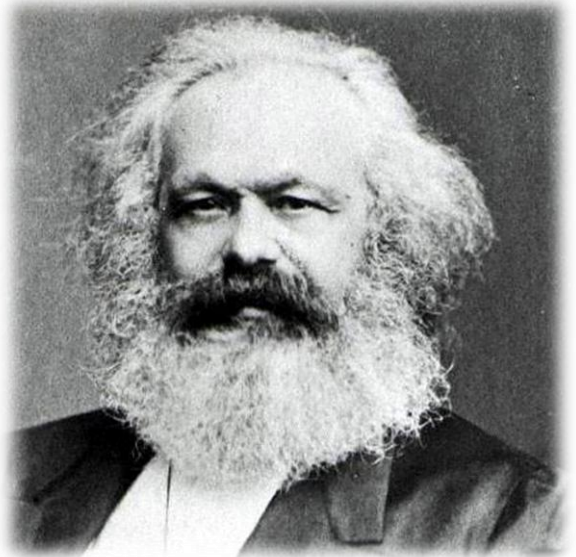
Economy is the system of value generation and exchange in a society. All societies have collectively developed their value systems whose 'webs' form the structure of social relations in each society.

## 2.2 Dialectical view of society: *Marxist Theory*

Dialectics views complex systems as a whole, in their interconnectedness, change and evolution.

**Karl Marx (1818–1883)**, the German philosopher, sociologist and economic historian, viewed human society as a complex, interconnected union of all its physical and psychological aspects;

he viewed society and culture ***dialectically***, as a dynamic balance of opposing forces locked in the evolutionary spiral of historical transformation. These 'opposing forces' generate social change through the tension and struggle between them.



Marx believed that the basis of the social order in every society is the production of economic goods to satisfy human needs. What is produced, how it is produced, and how it is exchanged determine the differences in people's wealth, power, and social status. Society is the sum total of **social relations** connecting its members, not just a 'series of exchanges.'

According to Marxist theory, every society is defined by its **mode of production** (i.e., the *way of generating value*).

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

#### **Mode of production = productive forces + relations of production**

The mode of production is a combination of

- **Forces of production:** these include **human labour** and **the means of production** (i.e., tools, equipment, buildings and technologies, resources, land, etc.).
- **Relations of production:** these include relations between
  - People, as well as between social classes, and
  - People and *means* of production (assets, tools). The property, power and control relations governing society's productive assets are usually codified in law.

The social relations of production make up the social economic structure, which determines how incomes, products and assets will be distributed. Think about it: in the family, who usually decides how to distribute family income? Those who get it - the breadwinners! On the level of the society, the **ownership of the means of production** (land, assets, equipment, capital, etc.) empowers the owners to appropriate produced wealth.

For example, if you own a 25-seater bus, you can start a transport business, turn it into a PMV, and, if luck is on your side, you will make a lot of profit on top of your expenditures (vehicle repair & maintenance, cost of petrol, the driver's wages, etc.) – you will feel that the profit is rightfully *yours*, because **you own** the vehicle.

Social relations of production do not automatically result from ownership of the means of production: you may own land rich in gold or diamonds, you may even own a whole mine operation, with all the equipment and infrastructure, but without the miners and technical experts willing to work for you, you will not be able to run the production on your own.

In *Das Kapital* (1897), Marx illustrates the concept of relations of production with reference to Edward Gibbon Wakefield's theory of colonisation:

...Wakefield discovered that in the Colonies, property in money, ... machines, and other means of production, does not as yet stamp a man as a capitalist if there be wanting the correlative — the wage-worker, the other man who is compelled to sell himself of his own free-will. He discovered that capital is not a thing, but a social relation between persons, established by the instrumentality of things. Mr. Peel, he moans, took with him from England to Swan River, West Australia, means of subsistence and of production to the amount of £50,000. Mr. Peel had the foresight to bring with him, besides, 3,000 persons of the working-class, men, women, and children. Once arrived at his destination, “Mr. Peel was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river.” Unhappy Mr. Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English modes of production to Swan River!

– Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. I, ch. 33, [www.marxists.org](http://www.marxists.org)

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

Unhappy Mr. Peel! ☺ Why was he, with all his wealth, left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river?

**Mode of Production determines the nature of social 'exchanges.'**

So: people must consume to survive, but to consume they must produce, and in producing, they necessarily enter into relations which exist *independently* of their will (i.e., to survive, you must get a job, which puts you into the employer-employee relationship, etc.).

Each historical mode of production reproduces the relations of distribution corresponding to it, and so shapes the whole organization of society (social order):

**The mode of production largely shapes the nature of**

- ❖ the mode of distribution,
- ❖ the mode of circulation, and
- ❖ the mode of consumption.

**All of them *together* form the 'economic order' of the society.**

Thus, the entire social system is based on the manner in which people relate to one another in their continuous struggle to survive.

**"The first historical act is...the production of material life itself ... This is, indeed, a historical act, a fundamental condition of history"** (Marx: 1894). In other words, **all life is based on the fulfilment of survival needs**. The struggle to meet basic human needs shapes the entire social life – and it is as true today as it has been throughout history.

Humans are 'perpetually dissatisfied animals.' Our struggle against nature does not cease when our basic needs are gratified – we always want more. People must cooperate in order to produce enough food and other things they need to survive. Every society is, therefore, built on an **economic base** (the mode of production). Social organization (the 'socio-economic order') varies from society to society and from era to era.

What de Tracy called one of the 3 'remarkable advantages' of organised exchanges, **division of labour, causes the formation of social classes**; over time, these classes

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?



develop different material interests, they become “antagonistic” or mutually exclusive.

This conflict of class interests drives socio-economic development, just as swings of the pendulum move the hands of the clock.

"Legal relations as well as the form of the state are to be grasped neither from themselves nor from the so-called general development of the human mind, but have their roots in the material conditions of life..."

(Ibid.)

Marx's thinking contrasts sharply with de Tracy's and that of **Auguste Comte<sup>2</sup> (1798–1857)**, for whom man's progress resulted from the evolution of ideas.

Marx took man's economic conditions, the various ways in which people organized themselves in order to gain a livelihood, as primary:

**The anatomy of civil society is to be sought in political economy.**

Karl Marx

Marx did not think that the qualitative change of social systems through time could be explained by factors outside of society, i.e., geography or climate. He did not believe that novel ideas could emerge in the absence of economic stimulus, either. **Ideas are not prime movers**, according to Marx; they are the reflections of the material interests that impel men in their dealings with others. Therefore, the emergence and influence of ideas, he argued, depend on something that is not an idea—they are generated by material interests.

**It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but ... it is their social existence that determines their consciousness.**

Karl Marx

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<sup>2</sup> Comte was a French philosopher, a founder of *sociology*. He called for a scientific approach to society. Comte influenced the work of Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill.

Comte attempted to introduce a cohesive "religion of humanity" which, though largely unsuccessful, was influential in the development of various Secular Humanist organizations in the 19th century. He also created and defined the term "altruism" 27/07/2011 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste\\_Comte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auguste_Comte)

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

Marx's unique contribution to our understanding of human society lies in identifying **the forces of production as the most powerful variable influencing the rest of the social system.**

#### **The Whole Is More than the Sum of Its Parts**

Marx viewed society *dialectically*, as a structurally integrated *whole*. No part of that whole – be it legal codes, systems of education, art, or religion – can be understood on their own, in isolation from the rest. Dialectics demands that we must examine all the parts in relation to one another and in relation to the whole. Although historical phenomena were the result of the interplay of many factors, all of them were dependent on the economic base.

**Political, legal, philosophical, and artistic development all depend on the economic. But they all react upon one another and upon the economic base.**

Karl Marx

Thus, Marx did not discount the power of ideas; he argued that the **forces of production** (which determine the social relations of production/ economic relations) are **the most important factor** in shaping the entire society. Political ideology, religion, art – they are all part of the 'ideological superstructure' which, in its turn, also influences the "economic base":

**It is not the case that the economic situation is the sole active cause and that everything else is merely a passive effect...There is, rather, reciprocity within the field of economic necessity which, in the last instance, always asserts itself.**

Karl Marx

**Forces of production** are, as we remember, the **means of production** (technology) and **human labour** (work patterns that people use to exploit their environment in order to meet their needs).

**Relations of production** are the social relationships people enter into by participation in economic life. The relations of production are the relations men establish with each other when they utilize existing raw materials and technologies in the pursuit of their productive goals.

While Marx begins with the forces of production, he quickly moves to the relations of production that are based on these forces. For Marx, **the relations of production are the key to understanding the whole cultural superstructure of society**; the relations of production (economic organization) are the foundation of the whole social culture.

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

According to Marx, we are born into societies in which property relations have already been established. These property relations determine the social classes, each with opposing interests and ideology. Just as we cannot choose our parents, so we have no choice as to our social class ['social mobility' was not a significant factor in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.] Therefore, once a man is born into a social class, once he has become a feudal lord or a serf, an industrial worker or a capitalist, his behaviour, his attitudes and beliefs are all 'pre-determined' by his class.

In the preface to *Das Kapital* Marx writes: "Here individuals are dealt with only as ... personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class interests."

Different positions in the class structure evoke different class interests. Such differing interests flow from objective positions in relation to the forces of production. Marx does not deny the influence of other factors in human behaviour, but he considers class roles as its primary determinants. These class roles influence people, irrespective of whether they are conscious of their class interests or not.

**Division of labour** gives rise to different socio-economic classes, which leads to differing interests, giving rise to different political, moral, ethical, philosophical, religious and ideological views. These differing views express existing class relations and tend to either consolidate or undermine the power and authority of the dominant class.

**The ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas;  
the class which is the dominant material force in society is  
at the same time its dominant intellectual force.**

Karl Marx

The class, which controls the means of material production, also controls the means of 'mental production.' This is done through control over the media, educational curricula, grants and such (he, who pays the piper, dictates the tune). Because it owns and controls the forces of production, the social class in power uses the non-economic institutions to uphold its authority and position. Marx believed that religion, the government, educational systems, and even sports are used by the powerful to maintain the status quo.

Although they are hampered by the ideological dominance of the elite, the oppressed classes can, under certain conditions, generate counter ideologies to combat the ruling classes. When that happens, it is a sign that the existing mode of production has been played out; Marx terms these moments "revolutionary."

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

Each social order is marked by continuous changes in the forces of production (that is, technology and human labour). Marx argued that every economic system except socialism produces forces that eventually lead to a new economic form. The process begins with the forces of production. At times, the change in technology is so great that it is able to harness new means of satisfying human needs. New classes (and interests) based on control of these new forces of production begin to rise.

At a certain point, this new class comes into conflict with the old ownership class based on the old forces of production. As a consequence, it eventually happens that "...the social relations of production are altered, transformed, with the change and development...of the forces of production."

In the feudal system, for example, the market and factory emerged but were incompatible with the feudal way of life. The market created a professional merchant class, and the factory created a new proletariat (or class of workers). A new class structure emerged, with its own division of wealth and power based on new economic relations. Feudalism was replaced by capitalism; land ownership was replaced by factories and the ownership of capital. Why? Because new technologies proved to be more effective in generating value than serf labour; consequently, the 'entrepreneurs' became wealthy and powerful, displacing the impoverished 'aristocracy.'

"The economic structure of capitalist society has grown out of the economic structure of feudal society. The dissolution of the latter sets free elements of the former."

Like feudalism, capitalism also carries the seeds of its own destruction. It brings into being a class of workers (the proletariat) who have a fundamental antagonism to the capitalist class, and who will eventually band together to overthrow the regime to which they owe their existence.

**The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.**

Karl Marx

According to Marx, ever since human society emerged from its primitive and relatively undifferentiated state, it has remained fundamentally divided between classes who clash in the pursuit of their class interests.

Under capitalism, there is an antagonistic division between the buyers and sellers of human labour, between the exploiters and the exploited. Relationships between men are shaped by their position in regard to the forces of production, that is, by their access to scarce resources.

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

Conflicting class interests are the central determinant of social processes, they are the engine of history. The potential for class conflict is inherent in every society that has a division of labour.

With growing *class consciousness*, qualitative change in the social order (revolution) becomes possible. For class consciousness to develop, people must be able to communicate effectively, spreading their ideas (ideology); they must form functioning organizations that will promote their ideology and coordinate their actions. For a revolutionary situation (point of qualitative change) to arise, these conditions must be met:

- A network of communication
- Critical mass
- Common enemy
- Organization
- Ideology

In revolutionary periods, some representatives of the dominant class shift allegiance, Marx believed: “Some of the bourgeois ideologists, who have raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole, will go over to the proletariat.”

### **Alienation**

For Marx, the history of mankind is both the history of our increasing control over nature and, at the same time, the history of the increasing alienation of man.

**Alienation** is a condition in which men are dominated by forces of their own creation, which then confront them as an alien power. It occurs when people no longer recognize their society and social institutions as human creations that can be changed by human beings. Alienation makes people feel powerless and isolated. They look at social institutions as beyond their control, and consider them oppressive.

For Marx, all major spheres of capitalist society – religion, state, economy – were marked by alienation. He viewed alienation in the workplace as particularly important, because it is work that defines us as human beings. Marx insisted that labour was the essence of man. All other species are **objects** in the world; man alone is the **subject** – they consciously act upon the world, shaping their lives, cultures, and themselves in the process.

Alienation under capitalism means that man is alienated in daily activities—in the very work by which they earn a living. Marx believed that workers in the capitalist system get alienated from the object of their labour, the very process of production, from themselves and from fellow human beings:

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

"Work is external to the worker...it is not part of his nature; consequently he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself... In work, the worker does not belong to himself, but to another person ... This is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something alien, not belonging to him ...as an activity which is directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him."

Alienated man is also alienated from the human community. "Each man is alienated from others...Each of the others is likewise alienated from human life." The society is thus perceived as uncontrollable and hostile; people end up as aliens in the very environment they have created.

Marx's analysis of capitalism is thus the analysis of social alienation which results in individuals (and classes, both workers and capitalists) losing control over their own existence in a system subject to economic laws over which they have no control.

### **Alienation in the Capitalist Society**

Under capitalism, the worker has little responsibility in the work process. Workers don't own the tools with which the work is done, they do not control the process or the pace of production, and they certainly do not own the final product. Workers don't set the organizational goals or make decisions.

The worker is therefore reduced to a minute part of a process, a mere cog in a wheel. Work becomes an enforced activity, not a creative or satisfying one. It becomes the means of survival, it is no longer an expression of the individual; it is a means to an end. For Marx, the source of this alienation is in the "relations of production," that is, capitalism, the fact that workers work for someone else.

Some argue that it is not capitalism as such, but the detailed division of labour that causes alienation. Others say, alienation is the psychological price we pay as we play our specialized roles in the modern industrial society. But even these critics concede that capitalism is a powerful force in promoting this detailed division of labour.

For Marx, alienation was a philosophical and moral critique of the situation imposed on man by capitalist *relations of production*, not by the *forces of production* (technology + workers).

Capitalist societies are dehumanizing because the social relations of production prohibit men from achieving the freedom of self-determination that the advance of technology has made possible. If not for capitalism, the new technology could be used to free men of boring repetitive labour, rather than enslaving men. According to Marx, when men realize how capitalism robs them of their freedom (economic and social), then social change (revolution) will become inevitable.

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

#### **Social Change**

The process of social change is central to Marxist theory. The development of productive forces is seen as the root of social change. In the process of transforming nature, however, men also transform themselves:

**"Men begin to distinguish themselves from animals as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence."**

In contrast to all other animals who can only passively adjust to their physical environment, man is active in relation to his surroundings. Humans alone fashion tools with which to transform their physical world. They can do that only in cooperation with others:

**Men "who every day remake their own life in the process of production can do so only in association with others."**

These associations (relations of production) are critical in understanding social life. In their struggle against nature to gain their livelihood, men create specific social organizations that reflect the existing forces of production. All of these social organizations, with the exception of those prevailing in the original state of primitive communism, are characterized by social inequality. As societies emerge from primitive communism, division of labour leads to the emergence of social classes. These classes have differential access to the forces of production and, therefore, to power.

Given relative scarcity, whatever economic surplus has been accumulated, will be taken by those who have attained dominance through their ownership or control over the forces of production. The exploited and the exploiters have confronted one another from the beginnings of recorded time:

**"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."**

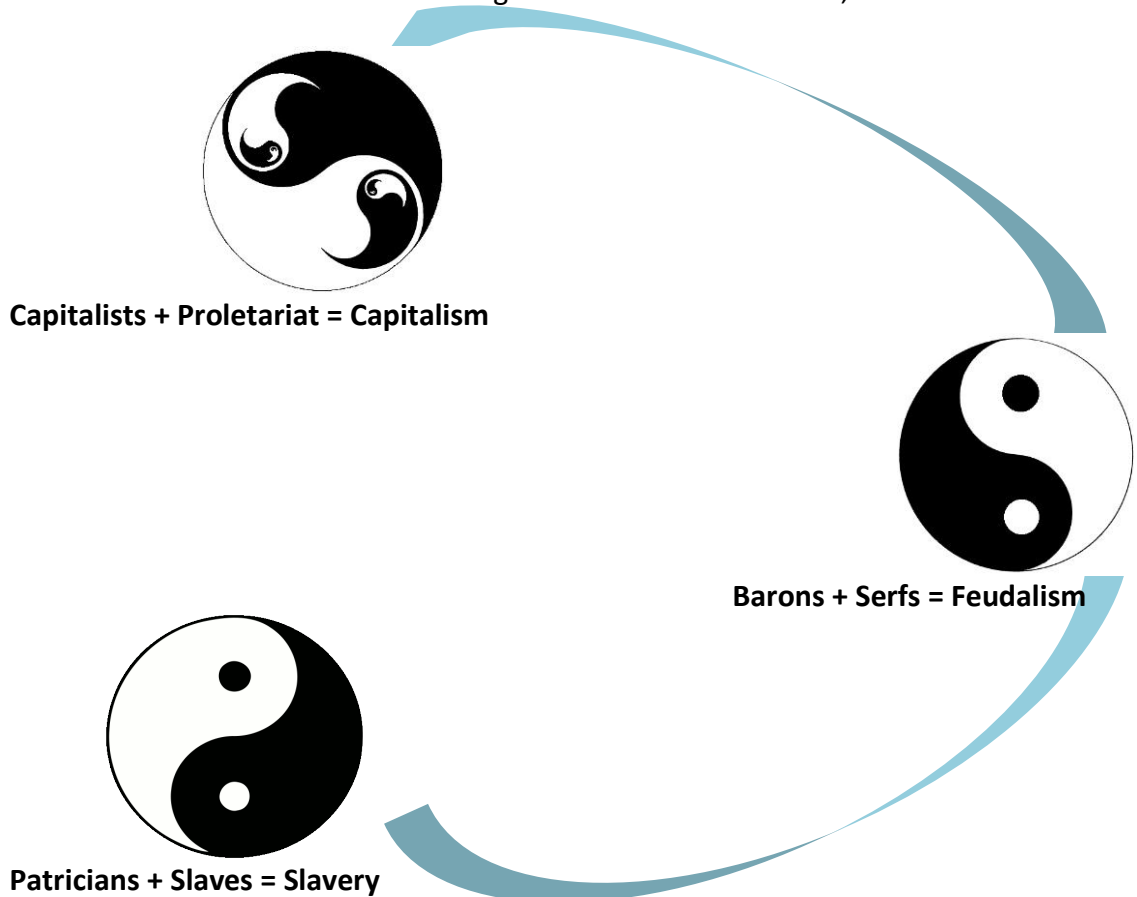
Marx distinguished the following Relations of Production (social orders) that succeeded each other in the process of history:

- ❖ **Primitive communism**
- ❖ **Asiatic**
- ❖ **Ancient**
- ❖ **Feudal**
- ❖ **Bourgeois**

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

The Asiatic, characterized by the subordination of all workers to the state, has never developed in the West. Ancient society was based on slavery; Feudal society – on serfdom; Bourgeois society – on the sweat of the wage earner. Each of these came into existence through antagonisms that had developed in the previous social order:

Marx explains social change through the resolution of contradictions in the socio-economic relations of production: the dominant social class of ‘exploiters’ (**thesis**) is opposed by its opposite, the ‘exploited’ (**antithesis**). When a new social class (antithesis) gains dominance, tensions between them are resolved in a new synthesis, in which it becomes the thesis which generates a new antithesis, and so on:



No social order ever disappears before all of the productive forces, for which there is room, have been developed; and new relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society.

Karl Marx

Class antagonisms specific to each particular ‘social order’ led to the emergence of classes whose interests could no longer be asserted within the framework of the old

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social order. The continued growth of new productive forces is eventually hampered by the existing relations of production.

In the case of capitalism, the prediction is that the existing relations of production (private ownership) will eventually hamper further development of industrial production – there will be no profit in their further expansion, though social need will remain.

The masses will become impoverished amid exorbitant wealth for the few and the unfulfilled potential to supply the many. When this happens, the new class, which represents a novel productive principle, will break down the old order, and the new productive forces will be unleashed to create the material conditions for further material advance. In other words, the proletariat will rise to take control of the forces of production away from private owners and employ them to meet the needs of all.

### **The Socialist Revolution**

Marx predicted that capitalism would ultimately be transformed by the actions of the proletariat into socialism. The bourgeoisie is constantly creating more powerful forces of production. Wealth is getting more and more concentrated. Labour is viewed as just another cost to be reduced in industry.

In attempts to maximize profits, capitalists automate factories or send jobs to ‘third world’ countries to be done by cheaper labour without the costs of government regulation or the interference from labour unions. The proletariat are forced to accept lower wages or, worse, become unemployed. In Marx’s terms, they become “pauperized.”

The capitalists are attached to private ownership of the means of production and therefore to a grossly unequal distribution of income and wealth. Poverty spreads, as capitalists move to maximize profits.

At the same time, capitalist competition eliminates competitors, thus enabling the formation of oligopolies and monopolies that manipulate the market place in terms of price and quality.

Eventually, capitalism will have produced a large class of oppressed people (the proletariat, or the workers) with sufficient class consciousness (awareness of social inequalities), who will be determined to destroy the system. Capitalism, like all of the economic systems before it, carries within it the seeds of its own destruction.

### The Four Contradictions of Capitalism

1. The inevitability of monopolies, which eliminate competition and gouge consumers and workers;
2. A lack of centralized planning, which results in overproduction of some goods, and underproduction of others. This encourages economic crises such as inflation, slumps, and depressions,
3. Automation and ever lower wages which forces the pauperization of the proletariat; and
4. Control of the state by the capitalists, resulting in the passage of laws favouring their class interests, to the anger of the proletariat.

These four contradictions of capitalism increase the probability of the workers becoming aware of their objective interests, of their becoming *class conscious*. Eventually, these contradictions will produce a revolutionary crisis.

Then, Marx says, the proletariat will revolt for the benefit of all; this revolt will mark the end of classes and of the antagonistic character of capitalist society. When this happens, Marx says, “the prehistory of human society will have come to an end,” and harmony will replace social conflict in the affairs of men.”

**Prof. Frank Elwell**<sup>3</sup> of the Rogers State University in Oklahoma, the gist of whose power point presentation on ‘Karl Marx’<sup>4</sup> has been summarized in this section, gave his understanding of Marx’s vision of life after the socialist revolution:

“It appears that the division of labor would not be eliminated, only limited. Man will work in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and read Plato at night. Industrial forces will be harnessed to provide for human needs rather than profit. It is here where the state withers away, here where “from each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs” applies. It could be described as a sort of second coming without Christ. Clearly, Marx’s hopes, dreams, and values have unduly affected his analysis and his vision.”

What do you think of the Marxist theory of social change? Do you think there is a conflict of interests between the owners of the means of production and hired labour? Can you see the signs of polarization of material wealth in the hands of a few?

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<sup>3</sup> Dean/Professor, School of Liberal Arts, Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, RSU;  
<http://www.rsu.edu/faculty/felwell/>

<sup>4</sup> [www.udel.edu/anthro/budani/Marx.ppt](http://www.udel.edu/anthro/budani/Marx.ppt)

## 2.3 'Social Orders' – an outline:

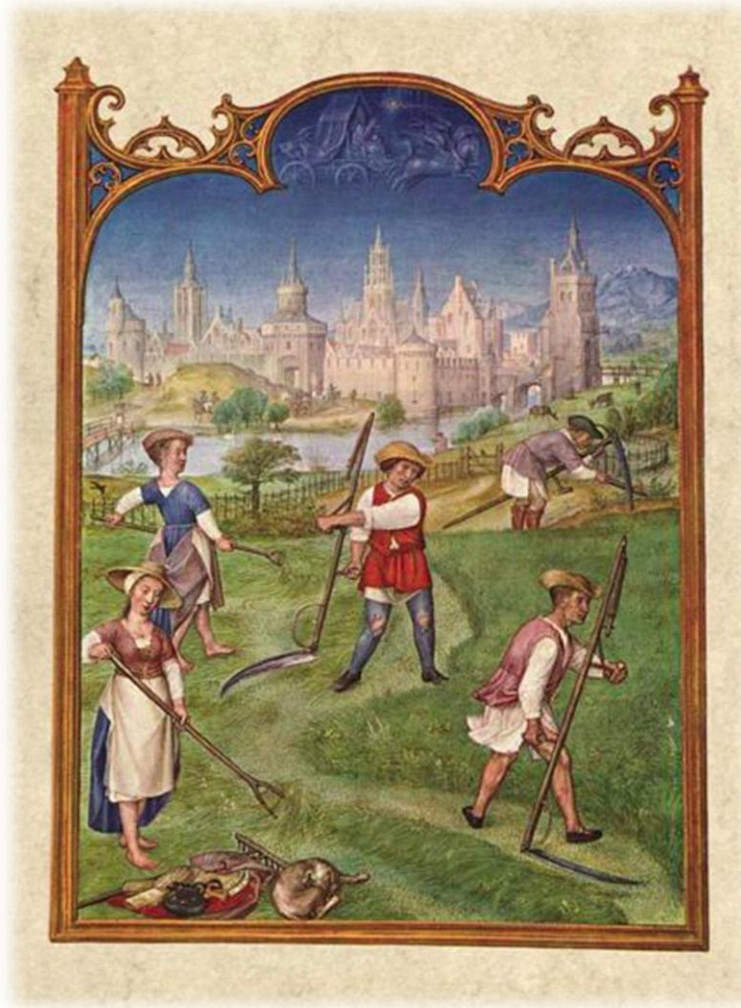
The Marxist classification of socio-economic orders is based on the prevalent social **mode of production (productive forces + economic relations of production)**:

**Primitive communism:** Human society was organized in traditional tribe structures, typified by shared production and consumption of the entire social product. As no permanent surplus product is produced, there is also no possibility of a ruling class coming into existence (classless mode of production). This 'foraging' mode of production still exists in contemporary hunter-gatherer societies. Despite the absence of "man by man" exploitation, these 'primitive democracies' kept man "enslaved to Nature" (due to lack of scientific knowledge).

**Pre-Slavery (Power of *Violence* – the so-called *Asiatic* mode of production):** So named on the basis of evidence coming from "greater Asia," this pre-slave and pre-feudal social order produced the huge constructions in China, India, Mesopotamia, Egypt, etc. The 'Asiatic' mode of production is said to be the rudimentary form of class society, where a small group extracts social surplus through **violence** aimed at communities within a domain. Exploited labour is extracted as forced labour during a slack period of the year (allowing for monumental construction such as the pyramids, ancient Indian communal baths or the Great Wall of China). Exploited labour is also extracted in the form of goods directly seized from the exploited communities. The primary property form of this mode is the direct religious possession of village communities. The ruling class of this society is generally a semi-theocratic aristocracy which claims to be the incarnation of gods on earth. The forces of production include basic agricultural techniques, massive construction and storage of goods for social benefit (granaries).

**Slavery** is similar to the ***Asiatic*** mode, but differentiated in that the form of property is the direct possession of individual human beings (slaves). Additionally, the ruling class usually avoids the more outlandish claims of being the direct incarnation of a god, and prefers to be the descendants of gods, or seeks other justifications for its rule. Ancient Greek and Roman societies are the most typical examples of this mode of production. The forces of production associated with this mode include advanced (two field) **agriculture**, the extensive use of animals in agriculture, and advanced trade networks.

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?



**Feudalism:** The term that emerged in the 17th century to describe economic, legal, political, social, and economic relationships in the European Middle Ages. Derived from the Latin word *feudum* (**fief**<sup>5</sup>) but unknown to people of the Middle Ages, the term "*feudalism*" refers to the socio-economic system in which the relations between lords and vassals involve the exchange of land for military service. Feudalism in this sense is thought to have emerged in a time of political disorder in the 11th century as a means to restore order, and it was later a key element in the establishment of

strong monarchies. The primary form of property is the possession of land in reciprocal contract relations: the possession of human beings as serfs is consequent to the possession of the land. Exploitation occurs through reciprocal contract (labour for protection). The ruling class is usually 'war lords' – powerful armed men. The primary forces of production include complex agriculture (two, three field, fallowing and manuring) with the addition of non-human and non-animal power devices (clockwork, wind-mills) and the intensification of specialisation in the crafts – craftsmen exclusively producing one specialised class of product.

In the picture above: Fief depiction in book of hours: June, in *Brevarium Grimani*, fol. 7v (Flemish), ca. 1510, source: Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Italy. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fief>

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<sup>5</sup> The fief (alternatively, fee, feoff, fiefdom) or feudum (in Latin), under the system of medieval European feudalism, often consisted of inheritable lands or revenue-producing property granted by a lord to a vassal who held seisin in return for a form of allegiance, usually given by homage and fealty. Not only land but anything of value could be held in fief, such as an office, a right of exploitation (e.g., hunting, fishing) or any other type of revenue, rather than the land it comes from.

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

**Capitalism** : an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decision, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market. The primary form of exploitation is wage labour. The ruling class is the bourgeoisie, which exploits the proletariat. Capitalism may produce one class (bourgeoisie) who possess the means of production for the whole of society and another class who possess only their own labour power, which they must sell in order to survive. The key forces of production include the factory system, mechanised powered production, bureaucracy and the modern state.

Capitalist economic order necessarily leads to the progressive concentration of national wealth in the hands of a few; this situation is described as **plutonomy**:

## Plutonomy



### What Does *Plutonomy* Mean?

Economic growth that is powered and consumed by the wealthiest upper class of society. Plutonomy refers to a society where the majority of the wealth is controlled by an ever-shrinking minority; as such, the economic growth of that society becomes dependent on the fortunes of that same wealthy minority.



### Investopedia explains *Plutonomy*

This buzz word was initially coined by analysts at Citigroup in 2005 to describe the incredible growth of the U.S. economy during that period despite increasing interest rates, commodity prices and an inflated national debt. Citigroup analysts argued that as such an economy continues to grow in the face of contradictory elements, the more important the society's ultra rich become to maintaining such growth. The analysts also believed that in addition to the U.S., Canada, Great Britain and China are also becoming plutonomies.

Read more: <http://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/plutonomy.asp#ixzz1Wx7sUAf8>

**Socialism** is characterized by state ownership of resources and means of production; this economic system is based on individuals' goodwill toward others, not on their own self-interest; elected government regulates the economy (decides what, how, and for whom to produce).

In theory, socialism is an economic system that tries to organize society in the same way as most families are organized, trying to see that individuals get what they need: **"From each, according to their abilities; To each, according to their needs."** Socialism

### Part III. What Shapes Culture?

tries to take other people's needs into account and adjust people's wants in accordance with what's available. In socialist economies, individuals are urged to look out for the other person; if individuals' inherent goodness does not make them consider the general good, the government will force them.

In contrast, a capitalist economy **expects** people to be selfish; it relies on market forces and competition to **direct** that selfishness to the 'general good.' We can see how the fundamental principle of '**Free** Market' is playing out in the US economy, and how these events are impacting the global economy in general.

YOU will do really well for yourself, and for Papua New Guinea as a whole, to give it some thought, and decide whether the Government should:

1. Regulate the economy, to ensure an 'even spread' of the national 'product' or
2. Trust the market forces to curb individuals' greed and "direct that selfishness to the general good."

This is not a simple question: each answer has its pros & cons; however, a lot is riding on the choices that legislators and people around the world eventually make.

#### Appendix III

Reading 2: Temple, O. (2010) SOCIETY – THE FOUNDRY OF HUMAN MINDS

#### **FOOD FOR THOUGHT:**

**Marx condemns capitalism  
because  
it promotes the freedom of the  
individual,  
when the economic system of  
capitalism does not deliver  
individual freedom.**