Marx, The Alienation of Labor

**Themes**

The reading Alienation of Labor is a selection from the collected works of Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Marx was living in Paris, France during the time he developed and wrote this collection. The collection was not actually published until the 1930's. Basic information about Marx can be found in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, an online database available through the Dacus Library website. Basic concepts:

1. Private property produces a society of capitalists and laborers - those who create products and those who consume the bulk of the products.
2. A detachment between the laborer and the product produced causes alienation of labor for the worker.
3. This alienation of labor expands to include an estrangement from nature, humankind, and life activity.
4. Elimination of private property is the only way to emancipate the laborer.

**Movie**

*Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang, 1927 - Two groups of people exist; the Thinkers, who plan and consume, and the workers, who labor and consume little. The groups rely on each other, but coexist separately. **Paper Topic:** *Metropolis* is a form of “art” illustrating alienation of labor and the coexistence of capitalists and laborers. As a paper and/or oral presentation assignment, have students choose an object of art, in its broadest sense, that defines for them alienation, e.g. movie, music, poem, painting, etc. Explain the art object and why it exemplifies alienation.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Define the terminology as related to Marx’s work: alienation, estrangement, political economy, capitalism, life activity, etc. How can the students relate these terms to themselves?

2. What was the political and economic environment of Europe, the U.S., and Russia in the late 1830's and early 1840's when Marx was influenced by world events and wrote *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*?

3. Based on Marx's definition and today’s economy, what jobs do you, as a student, consider alienating? Why?

4. You have previously discussed readings on education; its purpose and meaning for your future. Now, after reading Alienation of Labor, what criteria are needed in a job or career to keep you from becoming estranged from your chosen position?

5. You have also discussed various community structures and your place in the community. How does Marxism fit with what you consider to be your role in the community?

**More Information**


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<td>6. How does Marx describe a life activity and why is it so important to the human species?</td>
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<td>7. Is elimination of private ownership of property necessary for a true democracy? Why or why not?</td>
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