

THE POVERTY OF PHILOSOPHY ABSTRACTS FROM: CHAPTER TWO

Karl Marx

Economic categories are only the theoretical expressions, the abstractions of the social relations of production. M. Proudhon, holding this upside down like a true philosopher, sees in actual relations nothing but the incarnation of the principles, of these categories, which were slumbering — so M. Proudhon the philosopher tells us — in the bosom of the "impersonal reason of humanity".

M. Proudhon the economist understands very well that men make cloth, linen, or silk materials in definite relations of production. But what he has not understood is that these definite social relations are just as much produced by men as linen, flax, etc. Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist.

The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with the material productivity, produce also principles, ideas, and categories, in conformity with their social relations.

Thus the ideas, these categories, are as little eternal as the relations they express. They are *historical and transitory products*.

There is a continual movement of growth in productive forces, of destruction in social relations, of formation in ideas; the only immutable thing is the abstraction of movement

— *mors immortalis*. [From Lucretius's poem *On The Nature of Things*: "mortalem vitam mars immortalis ademit" ("mortal life has been usurped by death the immortal").]