

6 | Producing the Social Labor-Power

Human Capital Revisited

As we have been stressing, the dominant neoclassical microeconomics assumes a labor force whose productive characteristics are not altered by the goods and services it consumes, that is, that its size and other productive qualities are “exogenous” to the microanalysis of ultimate consumer demand. Naturally, this assumption is dropped in many exercises in applied economics, as in development theory or productivity studies, but it is retained in fundamental “micro.” There appeared to be a breakthrough on this particular point in the late 1950s and early 1960s when human capital theory aroused a certain amount of interest, and that interest has since entered the economics mainstream. But here, too, the theory was policy oriented and has not challenged the foundation principle that the nature of final demand is not itself altered by the workings of the economy, not even, paradoxically enough, by investments in human capital. Nevertheless, the subject is not without interest to our present task.

The professional legitimacy of human capital theory was crowned with the publication in 1965 of Gary Becker’s *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*. Becker was primarily interested in investments in human capital that took the form of discretionary investments made by private persons and/or families, primarily for education.

In his pioneering undertaking, Becker analyzed the relationship between prospective increases in an individual’s wages and prior investments in further education. The investment is analyzed in equations expressing in the general case how a greater net return will come later to the educational “investor” as a result of present education and/or training. The analysis is extremely theoretical, even to the extent that the equations relate not the costs but instead years of schooling to the

promised higher returns from investment. Becker applied his analysis to a range of postulated situations, including most prominently the age of the worker; the level, duration, and vocational specificity of the education; and sociological categories such as race and gender. The analysis and results are quite straightforward; there are no surprises. In the general case—"all things holding equal"—further years of education will lead to an increase in net earnings over time. The microeconomic individual acts rationally in deferring earnings or paying out of pocket educational costs with a view toward earning a net higher income over time.

As indicated, Becker's methodology links economic rewards to years of schooling, not its costs. His relative lack of interest in costs undoubtedly reflected the time in which his book was composed. Through the mid-1960s, dramatically increasing numbers of students sought higher education, their job and pay prospects were to remain unusually good (at least until the early 1970s), and apparently educational costs had not yet begun to inflate (as they would subsequently do), so there seemed to be a wealth of corroborating evidence, which didn't need citing, that years of education correlated with multiplied income. At the present writing, however, one would need a more nuanced approach, almost surely requiring price modeling, to take account of the various costs and opportunities associated with the different courses/channels.¹

It is much to Becker's credit that he provided an interesting and powerful start in modifying wage theory toward greater realism by going beyond the idea that the differential productivity of workers was based on natural endowments rather than phenomena subject to further economic investigation. Becker's simplifications, however wrong some of them may appear now, were, I think, a factor in the rapid acceptance of human capital theory in mainstream economics. He seemed to show that no real alteration was needed in the neoclassical paradigm to bring social services such as education, which have an ostensible nonmarket character, into market analysis. As already suggested, his work has had an important effect on policy questions and virtually none on fundamental micro. Oddly enough, this paradox has helped rather than hindered the acceptance of his work, the normal intellectual conservatism of the economics discipline thus being led to view his contribution in a favorable light.²

More important for our purposes, Becker's work assumes a conventional analysis in which wages equal marginal product. Capital investment will bring higher wages and that implies increased marginal product. This is a most elegant analysis for it fits well with the idea that an increase in the educational attainments of the work force will correlate with a more productive economy.³

The tension between the modified workforce of human capital theory and the static one of the Jevons/Walras micro is obviously unsatisfactory. A more useful, less paradoxical theoretical result can be found if we approach human capital questions by analyzing the production of the social labor-power along the same lines as the production of commodities generally.

To (Re)produce Labor-Power

To produce or, alternatively, to reproduce labor-power is simply to increase productive services in some part of the social labor-power, that is, to increase its capacity to produce further services in persons or “things” or, indeed, itself.

These are historically conditioned quasi services, not integral ones. In a modern economy a worker’s or potential worker’s skill, technique, knowledge, and so on are effectively social, not individual acquisitions. They require as complements a measure of physical and energy resources, a stock of goods and equipment, and an organization or institutional setting that the worker cannot provide independently. Also included are the level of technology and science, the peculiarities of the economic system, the prospective distribution of income and work, and the character and function of various mentoring institutions such as schools, institutes, family, “peer culture,” apprenticeship, and so forth. Thus, whatever training, teaching, or acculturating the potential worker receives he or she receives it in a context already more or less fully defined in its several social-material dimensions. Young people have to find their way through ready-made channels in a ready-made social-material world.

One must accordingly stress the fact that modern production routines are social in nature, which is to say that no single worker is likely to be able to take in hand the production of significant commodity services from primitive start to final completion. Training, learning, and so on are normally directed toward the trainee/learner working as a complementary producer within some part of that setting.

In short, producing or reproducing productive services in workers of all kinds, including Managers, is a phenomenon itself located within the social labor-power. It comprises, essentially, a modification and often an expansion of that the social labor-power in terms of the number, variety, potency, and novelty of the services located within it. From the terms of discussion, the social labor-power has the unique quality that it is self-altering and can be self-expanding.

With this prefatory material in mind, we can examine the elements of the productive relationship within which labor-power is produced. The elements of this productive relationship include (1) the commodities consumed in the process by the learner/trainee; and (2) the characteristics of the institution, usually a family, educational institution, and/or “apprenticeship,” as for on the job learning, within which the learning or training takes place. For a modern economy, the university is the central institution around which most of the others pivot, so we have (3) the labor of a mentor or mentors and, of course, (4) the labor expended by the trainee or student. Under this point I would stress that the labor of the student is qualitatively different from that of the worker and that the labor of the worker is in at least one highly significant respect best understood as a sharply constricted, even distorted form of studentlike labor.

Varieties of Constrained Consumption

About point 1, all one really need add to our earlier discussion is that most of the commodities are consumed most of the time under some form of constraint imposed upon the consumer.

There are a few commodities that are bought from the private sector and then consumed by consumer/purchasers, which instance the free choice celebrated in the doctrine of consumer sovereignty. At the other extreme, elementary schooling is nearly universally compulsory. It is possible to distinguish several other consumption modes between these extremes that are only partially constrained—not free, not compulsory—and materially enter into the production of the social labor-power. Around a typology of constraint, we can thus observe the following varieties.

Unconstrained Choice

As indicated, the Jevons/Walras micro assumes consumer sovereignty, a claim that comprises the further claims that (a) all consumer spending is essentially discretionary and (b) that for every consumer the marginal utility of money is equal, that is, differences of income are irrelevant in the analysis.⁴

Obviously, some consumer consumption takes this form, as when we spontaneously buy an ice cream cone on a summer day. The purchase is readily imagined as (a) fully discretionary as to choice and (b) inexpensive enough that both the wealthy person and the poor one can more or less ignore the cost. On the other hand, even under this rubric of uncon-

strained choice, as we move from cheaper to dearer commodities, the differences in the marginal utility of different consumers' money begins to exert its effect. Thus, even within the category of nominally free choice, we are dealing with a range of constraint values moving from "zero" to "appreciable." Obviously, the different courses would tend to occupy overlapping but different segments along the axis.

Legal Compulsion

We are so accustomed to conceiving of consumption as a free choice phenomenon that we overlook just how much consumption is de facto compulsory. The most obvious candidate is public elementary and secondary education, which is compulsory for the age group six to sixteen in most cases. As with Social Security, even those who forego the consumption of the public service are obliged by law to contribute to its costs. Less dramatic but no less important from the point of view of labor-power production are public fire and health services; police and roads; in most cases water, sanitation, and sewage services; and so forth. In dollar terms these are not small numbers, and in fact in a modern economy they may encumber a third to half of all private income.

In addition, most of these services are consumed within administrative relationships, which add a further dimension of constraint to the processes of consumption. As was argued earlier, their constraining power normally lessens as we go from the lower to the higher courses.

One could argue that the historical evolution of this constrained consumption in developed countries was guided by the desire on the part of capitalist Elites to assure the production of a better work force—better, that is, because its altered social-productive characteristics would better lend themselves to the capitalist use and be accompanied by sociocultural attitudes supporting a relatively cooperative relationship between capital and labor. By and large that is a supportable thesis, but we need not rely on it here.⁵ It is enough to say that without these kinds of highly constrained consumption we would be dealing not with developed economies but with the "underdeveloped" kind. Thus, the category of legally compulsive consumption exists within a complementary productive and social-productive relationship with modern capitalism. Without it we do not have modern capitalism; we have some earlier variety, that is, a variety that like the capitalism of Marx's time more or less took its workers as it found them. As a corollary to this last point, this is again one of those areas in which necessary productive investment, here in labor-

power, has already been largely socialized, even though its product is often predominantly advantageous to the private sector.

Contractual Constraint

In a modern economy there are goods and especially services that employees are contractually constrained to accept and presumably use. Two of the most important of these are company- and union-sponsored medical and retirement plans. Here the constraint is often sweetened by the employer, who makes a contribution or matches one from the employee. (This is almost always only a cosmetic change in the form that the wage payment takes, not a net increment to the wage.) In many, probably most, cases the individual has no choice but to contribute to the plan—however cosmetically this may be disguised—and, of course, to make use of the benefits. Here, too, the benefit reaches the beneficiary through an administrative relationship, with the latter adding its extra degree of constraint to the situation. Historically speaking, plans such as these were introduced by employers in order to stabilize their work forces, and in some cases, such as Ford Motor Company's old Sociology Department, the intent was to improve employee productivity by improving employee "morals" (Lacey 1986: 131ff.).

Social Constraint

There are important and diverse areas of consumer spending and consumption that are socially constrained. One of the most obvious and important is the ownership of a private automobile. There are large sections of the country in which alternate transportation is simply not available for going to work, the store, school, and so on. This is clearly true of most rural areas. Again some of this social constraint "just happened." But there is also the notorious case of GM buying up Los Angeles' public transport system and then tearing it down so as to force the use of the private car. Modern marketing strategies aimed at sales to young people have a different twist; they exploit the desire of adolescents to "fit in." Marketers in music, clothing, and accessories try to establish norms for appearance and ownership that socially constrain children, young persons, and their families to spend money they might devote to other things. Educators, especially at the secondary level, often complain that these money pressures, translated into young persons working long hours at low-wage jobs, are a serious impediment to their education.

More widely and only a bit less successfully, marketers, by engineering markets, try to socially constrain consumer/purchasers to buy their wares. At the personal level, for the individual consumer/purchaser these skewed markets impose pressures to buy but they can be resisted. There is only mild constraint here, not outright compulsion. At the social level, these engineered markets have a differential impact on various consumers; it is, for example, an advertising industry “truism” that poorly educated consumers buy the more expensive name brands in the supermarket because they would be embarrassed to be seen buying house brands, which, they have been convinced, are of lower quality and carry less esteem.⁶

Conditional Constraint

One may buy a commodity in the free choice mode but then, as we showed in our initial analyses of sale/purchase, that choice may obligate the consumer/purchaser to engage in a whole series of further expenditures on such items as for repairs and insurance for the car, discs for the stereo, or maintenance of state of the art technology with one’s PC and operating system. The choice to pursue higher education has much the same character, as once one has set out on that course changes in credentialing standards may obligate one to seek a higher degree at greater expense than one had originally intended.

There are three important implications of even this brief review of the range of constraint.

1. A not insignificant degree of constraint is the norm in consumers’ consumption.

2. As a rule, this constrained consumption is a form of productive consumption under one or more of the rubrics described in chapter 3. This is true whether it is a legal compulsion to go to school, the social constraint to own a car and accept liens against future wages to keep it in repair, or the contractual obligation to accept the company medical plan. Sometimes the productive relationship has a dual nature, as when we buy a PC for use in school. On the one hand, the consumption of the PC is directly productive of labor-power of improved characteristics, and those new labor-power quasi services will in time normally enter into tomorrow’s production of commodities. On the other, the PC itself is a commodity consumed, as we have seen, within a system of conditional constraints under the aegis of the producers/sellers, accompanied by wage liens, fructive of further purchases of commodities such as disks and printers, and so forth.

3. To the degree that the production of new labor-power services enters or will enter into the production of other commodities, including even the consumption of public services, it is socially manifest that it is ancillary to the commodity system and part of the circuit of productive capital. The point is not that, say, unemployment insurance was designed to complement commodity production (although it was). The point is that through the complementary effects it has in altering the productive characteristics of the social labor-power, unemployment insurance becomes a constitutive part of any wider producing relationships that the worker or family is a part of or will subsequently enter into. Thus, we should see compulsory public elementary and secondary education, much public health expenditure, expenditure on fire and sanitation services, and so on as ancillary to commodity production and to that extent subsumed within private sector commodity-producing relationships.

Further, because public sector services are socially universal, commodity producers in the so-called private sector can incorporate their distribution into their own marketing strategies. Banks, for example, now provide that one's Social Security check can be directly credited to one's account. On-line companies provide course aids, even term-paper "drafts," keyed to various high school curricula. In this sense we can designate such publicly funded and delivered services as commodity complements.⁷

The Institutional Production of Labor-Power

We can view the educational system of a modern economy from any number of perspectives, but here we should view it primarily as a labor-power (re)producing institution. Into it as raw material enter virtually the entire population of the country, whereby they are sorted, differentially trained, acculturated, and credentialed primarily into the different courses and occupations. Appropriate to such a mammoth productive undertaking, the system employs an equally mammoth labor force and is among the main consumers of producer goods as diverse as electricity and books, construction materials and luncheon foods, security personnel and yellow buses.

Seen in this economic light, and contrary to its self-image, especially at the university level, its production of knowledge, however important in itself, is an ancillary function, ancillary not to its immediate teaching functions but to the production and expansion of the productive powers of the social labor-power.

I grant that in the United States especially it sounds odd to so describe the educational system. We are more used to thinking of the system not as a system at all. At its lower levels, for example, the principle of local control results in an apparent crazy quilt of different programs, requirements, and standards, one extreme of which is marked by continuing controversies about not teaching evolution—either in the biology classroom or, in the sex education classes, where abstinence is the byword. Even at the level of higher education, there are Ivies in the picture side by side with the sort of junior colleges that specialize in filling job slots for the more influential local employers. Yet out of the apparent confusion—erratic “tracking,” academic and commercial degrees, local control, state monitoring, public admonishment, and federal largesse, public versus private, secular versus religious, union versus management, competing textbook behemoths, elite institutions and degree mills, high-powered technical institutions and relaxed finishing schools for both sexes, meritocracy rewarded and privilege confirmed—the whole does behave as a system at least to the degree that it has been sensitively responsive over time to the changing needs of the wider productive mechanism.⁸

Four observations support the interpretation that we are dealing with a more or less coherent “productive system.” One, as befits an economy that exhibits rapid technological and business institutional change, every level of the U.S. educational system tends to spend more per student on the high flyers than on the low. In a real sense, both technologically and even morally, lower performing students are a byproduct of a system that winnows them out in the process of identifying those who will gain the higher or more prestigious degrees and go on to staff the ranks of the cadre or the Elite.⁹

Second, as in other areas of (at least) the U.S. economy, a considerable amount of “coarse planning” is carried out. By this I mean that autonomous institutions cooperate with one another to produce not necessarily a single product but more commonly a coordinated production and distribution system for a group of complementary products. A similar example of this sort of institutional cooperation is provided by the airlines, aircraft suppliers such as Boeing, engine suppliers such as General Electric, the communications industry (electronic booking and flight control), the travel industry (marketing), and the electronics industries for various ancillary equipment.¹⁰

Probably the best way to describe the process of coarse planning in the world of education is to point out that many organized publics and institutions are normally consulted on virtually all educational decisions and

departures. This may take the prosaic form of local business executives on the boards of community colleges or of chief executive officers (CEOs) of nationally and internationally famous firms serving in the same capacity on the boards of the most influential private and state universities. It may take the form of the great foundations funding educational or cultural initiatives. It may take the form of a diverse list of firms and organizations asked to participate in a prestigious presidential commission on technology or even just to testify before the legislature on educational bills. Or, equally important, it may take the form of the close links that as a rule are maintained between the university, the professional association, and the end user of a particular degree, whether it be in electrical engineering or law. The result of such multifaceted “planning” has been that the services of the social labor-power have been modified over time to produce the requisite skills and knowledge, in the requisite numbers and “more or less coherently,” for the economy.

Third, we again meet the phenomenon that Gramsci called “Americanism.” This provides a common frame of reference for all those voices under point 2. In this country at least, no educational program or institution can stand entirely outside the Americanist framework, that is, cannot take cognizance of the economic values and labor-power needs of the corporate productive framework. There can be different interpretations of the point in U.S. history when Gramscian Americanism became so dominant and of why it continues with unabated strength, but that it has such strength and influence is beyond doubt. I think it is a prime factor in supplementing coarse planning because it provides a directing rationale for every teaching institution to devise for itself some useful role within the Americanist framework. No government planning office is necessary here, no educational czar, merely a willingness to fit usefully into the “system.” Maverick institutions exist, although they typically face the double scourge of state educational displeasure and a limited ability to raise money from the wealthy. It is, however, important to emphasize that a system feature of a modern economy is that institutional cooperation and integration, absent government compunction or common ownership, play a very big and necessary role. The United States is much more accurately called a cooperative than a competitive economy. What this means in practice is that Elites from the public and private sectors become commingled on the boards of the big firms as well as on those of research institutes, hospitals, nonprofits, educational institutions, foundations, and so forth. Many such Elite men and women move back and forth from executive posts or consultantships in the different institutions. This is one of the central phenomena that constitute the Elite course.

The fourth factor concerns the very direct links between educational institutions and the different courses/channels. As already argued, the different courses first take shape within the educational system. The key switching points occur there as well, and the more elaborate training of the higher courses preoccupies a system weighted empirically at the university level. Here I think we see further confirmation of the fact that the primary commodity form of labor-power is comprised of the several courses and not of the precise occupations and *métiers*. Let me put it this way: a university, for example, provides more than just the precise training needed to qualify a student for, say, electrical engineering. Many, perhaps even most engineering graduates, like lawyers, will not work throughout their lives as engineers or lawyers per se. One's technical specialty is often only an entry point to industry and may be used for just a short while before the employee is promoted to other, often managerial positions. This is especially, perhaps uniquely, true for persons with higher education. In a related vein, university training represents not only the acquisition of a body of knowledge or skill and its consequent credentialing; it also represents a process of acculturation to the higher courses. Thus, what is almost certain is that the graduate, no matter what his or her job, will spend his or her life within one of the two higher courses. Much of the university's actual training, certainly its credentialing, and even a good part of its acculturating prefigure this outcome.¹¹

Mentors and Learners

Under the category of mentoring I include the actual work of care giving, teaching, counseling, socializing, training, and so forth, which enters into the production of some part of the social labor-power—from birthing classes through postgraduate training.

A modern economy draws virtually everyone into its web, no matter how seemingly isolated, and extracts from that person some work meaningful for the economy per se. This goes far beyond the statistician's category, the labor force participation rate. That index only gives the percentage of persons in the (paid) labor force for the significant employment years, normally ages sixteen to sixty-five. In a modern economy that rate has tended to climb, reflecting mainly the increased participation of adult women and now of teenagers generally. It is a useful figure, but it vastly underrepresents the work of adult women. What has most deeply changed and what is grasped in the concept of the social labor-power is not merely that women have, as it were, left the nursery for

the office and mill, but that the office and mill have invaded the nursery, integrating its functions with their own and on their own terms. In an eminently practical way, today even the work of the mother of a very young infant is part of the social labor-power. Invariably, the style of mothering will be affected by norms promulgated in her course/channel by the wider society; she may make use of the medical profession and its institutions, and the birth may be assisted by socialized commodities in the form of the hospital, its support services, and especially its work force. Invariably, too, a host of commodities will be consumed even in the first weeks and months of the child's life. The earliest family or personal decisions about what sort of life the child is to have will be taken in light of an existing social and economic fabric and so on.

The work of mentoring, of every sort and of every kind, is nowadays deeply affected by the economy. That is why the mentor course does not in reality represent a single life course as does, for example, that of a Regular or even a Marginal. Insofar as there is course/channel continuity between the generations, each course supports and uses different kinds and durations of mentoring in different institutional settings. Aside from the dominant Americanist ethos, probably the most important point in common is that for all of the courses purely private labor in the home is being replaced everywhere by mentors whose mentoring is complementary to that of the labor-power-producing institutions and who productively consume commodities to prepare and shape tomorrow's labor-power. In short, the modern division of labor also incorporates all the different kinds of mentors in its ranks, including mothers.

When we turn to the productive labors of learners we can see right away that the contemporary concept of "human capital" can't really be taken literally; it has mostly metaphorical and ideological meanings. It is only a metaphor because, unlike the investor in securities, whose labors are perhaps limited to the rigors of depositing checks, the investor in human capital has to go out at some point and exercise that acquired capital for forty hours a week, fifty weeks a year, for at least a couple of decades. Ideologically speaking, the concept of a human "capital" expresses the fetish claim that we are all property owners and capitalists, thus marking the final end of the historical class conflict so wickedly championed by that scruffy German.¹²

Insofar as a young child is doing work that will even indirectly fit him or her into a life course, the child's efforts are a part of the social labor-power. Crudely, the modern division of labor by course that directly makes possible the mass production and distribution of modern commodities also indirectly enables capital to absorb into its reproductive cir-

culits virtually the entire population of a country no matter at what a person's stage in life or even what he or she is doing at the moment. Marx's old charge that the "cash nexus" replaces every sort of human relationship is, in a modern economy, quite literally true.¹³

The productive relationship between the learner and the mentor has some similarity to that of the worker and the manager. Both, of course, are catalytic ones in which complementary services and efforts combine to create an entirely new commodity, in this case an altered, expanded labor-power in the learner.

But, the qualitative roles of the learner as learner and worker as worker are radically different, at least in the present organization of the economy. In learning, a quantum of knowledge or skill is passed from mentor to learner, which results in new or expanded abilities in the learner. We expect, indeed demand, not a modest net increment in the final commodity but a substantial multiple. The learner's effort should lead to a comprehension of the subject that goes well beyond what was directly imparted. To use an old-fashioned example, one wants the geometry student to not merely memorize some theorems and proofs from Euclid's *Elements* but to understand them, even to the extent of being able to produce corollaries or analogous theorems. The example is out-of-date, but the point is germane; learning normally (or at least hopefully) involves a quantum leap or multiplied result in the services of the learner beyond what is literally "given" to him or her by the mentor. Ideally, after learning the learner should be able entirely to dispense with the mentor. One could even say that learning is the quintessential characteristic of the social labor-power in that it occurs within every activity.

This aspect of the mentor/learner relationship is in sharp contrast to the manager/worker relationship under which other commodities are produced. There the manager imparts to the worker little more than the rote "elements" of the job. The worker certainly should not learn enough to be able to dispense with the services of the manager entirely, no matter how "cooperative," "team-oriented," or "decentralized" the work relationship. The knowledge and the skill to translate on-the-job knowledge, experience, and hence learning into a full competence on the part of the worker so as to be able to dispense with the manager to some greater or lesser degree—this of all things is to be avoided in the manager/worker productive relationship, but it is the distinct—or at least ideal—desideratum when we consider the producing relationship that we call learning. If we consider productive interchange with others and nature as intrinsically a learning experience, then it is a perversion of work to constrict

learning within it and to prevent work from having a socially cumulative learning character.¹⁴

We treat learning in the general case as already explained, as an expansion of the potential productive services of the learner. Sometimes this is abetted by a mentor, but in research, also a form of learning, the key energy and direction may arise predominantly from the individual researcher or researchers alone. In both cases, from the standpoint of labor-power production we see a self-expansion of labor-power, an expansion that goes well beyond—in both the qualitative and quantitative senses—the aggregate sum of its social, social-material, and physical inputs. This is the true “surplus value” of a modern economy.

For the individual learner, this expansion consists only of quasi services, that is, productive services that will have to be combined with others to produce usable commodities. From the standpoint of the entire the social labor-power, however, it implies an expansion in the range and number of its own services and underlines the central idea that the social labor-power is itself a self-expanding phenomenon. This self-expansion will prove to be the key to unraveling the contradiction, preeminent in our capitalist economy, between value and price.

Labor-Power as Commodity

Four different kinds of commodities enter into the production process of non-labor-power commodities, to wit, the labor services performed by the prototypical manager and prototypical worker, producer commodities of various sorts that are consumed in the process, and the services of organization, coordination, and of course investment by the institution or institutions within which the particular production processes are carried out.

One can employ the same productivist schema for the commodity production of labor-power in the individual and of course of the social labor-power. There are the labor services exerted by mentor and the learner. That process is accompanied by the consumption of commodities, which from the nature of the case are producer commodities and in great part occur within and under the influence of the Americanist institutional network.

The same commodity production of labor-power can be viewed as an overlapping series of sale/purchase states in which the learner traverses a channel located within the network of Americanist institutions, some of which produce labor-power and some of which consume it in their own production processes. Obviously, there are differences, for example,

between producing a lathe and a bachelor's degree and between using that lathe and that college graduate. Nevertheless, both are dominantly marked by commodity form.

One could argue that the positions of the learner and employee are different if for no other reason than that the learner is the payer while the worker is paid. But if we credit our morphology of constrained forms of consumption in this chapter and of the analysis of consumer goods in chapters 3 and 4, much of what we pay and/or are paid, in every setting, simply passes through us in ways prescribed by constraints promulgated by others, not by our untrammelled will. And of course they add further to the productive services of the social labor-power.

The course of a modern person's life is not simply a set of discrete events. The terms *course* and *channel* have been coined here to bring out the reality that a modern society and economy really do impose a channel on life that differs at many, many crucial points from the other courses followed. If there is "coarse planning" in the production of the social labor-power the degree of coarseness is not particularly set to make sure that I'll be an assembler in an electronics factory and you will teach at Harvard. There are many switching points between the different courses, and they are taken advantage of by legions of individuals. But for most people, whether socially mobile or immobile, it doesn't matter; most of the time our economy and society act to keep them within socially prescribed courses and channels. In a modern economy and society, we "coarse plan" courses, one's generic place in the economy.

In our discussion of the nullity of final consumption as a modern category of analysis we saw that non-labor-power commodities never, or only rarely, exit the circuit of productive capital. The latter has manifestly taken on a true process character no longer interrupted by "the Market." Insofar as the nurturing, socialization, education, and utilization of modern producers of all kinds occur within one of the several courses, a parallel conclusion may be drawn, namely, that the social labor-power is produced, used, and reproduced more or less entirely within the productive circuit of capital. This covers the production of the person as potential producer, the ways in which he or she is actually used within the productive apparatus, and, through the dual system of liens and courses, how he or she will continue to participate as a nominal "consumer." Here, too, we find a process phenomenon that is not significantly interrupted by either the Market or its sociological reflex, the "open or individualist society."