

Marx, Economico-Philosophical Manuscripts

Reid Blackman

131-146. Also, "The German Ideology, 164 and 177, and "Comments on James Mill": at
<http://www2.pfeiffer.edu/~lridener/courses/ALIEN.HTML>

"Alienation appears as the true induction into civil life" (145).

What is alienation?

- **Objective element:** The object is separate from you; it is something not-you, something foreign or...(can you guess?)...alien.
- **Subjective element:** Some object – even oneself – is *emotionally* separate from you; there is a *lack of identification*.
 - You need not be conscious of such alienation, though it may manifest itself nonetheless.

What's bad about alienation?

- There are some objects– especially ourselves – with which we ought to identify; lacking such identification leads to (or is a part of) human misery.
- The grounds for that identification should be that, in some objective sense, the object is not separate from you. (Consider this in relation to Rousseau and identification with the General Will).

Bourgeois society, capitalist society, alienates us from:

1. The activity of producing (labor).
2. The product itself
3. Other people.

Crucially, alienation from these three elements is *constitutive* of *self-alienation*.

As for (1): Alienation from the labor, the activity of producing

Objective element

- a. The time is not yours to do with as you will; the boss: "not on my time."
- b. "The worker's spontaneous activity appears as activity for another and as the activity of another" (146). One is an appendage of the owner/master.
- c. One's life *is* the activity one engages in. One here engages in activity that is not self-directed and is someone else's (the boss: "Your ass is mine!"). One thus (partially, temporarily) *loses one's life*. "As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production" (164, The German Ideology).
- d. One's labor does not express one's essence, one's spirit, one's "true self", one's "species-being"; one's act express the will of one's boss. One's own acts are foreign to oneself (137).
- e. Life (in the sense of one's activities) is a mere means to living (in the sense of biological existence) (139).
 - But it should be: Existence should be so that we may express our essence.
 - The high point of bondage lies in the fact that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject* only insofar as he is a *worker*.

Subjective element: a failure to identify with the very actions one performs, and thereby a failure to identify with one's self and with one's own life.

Objection: But don't we have free time after work?

Response: He is free only in his animal functions, and a mere animal in his human function (137).

As for (2): Alienation from the product itself

Objective element

- a. "The worker puts his life into the object; but now it no longer belongs to him, it belongs to the object" (134).
- b. That object, which contains one's life, is literally someone else's; they own it.

Subjective element: there is no identification with the product itself.

- To illustrate the point: consider an object one produces with which one does identify; one says (perhaps with pride) “That’s *mine*.” For example, a painting, a song, a community center one helps to build, a child (?).
- Instead, the object embodies or symbolizes one’s loss of life and one’s powerlessness.

As for (3): Alienation from other people

Objective element

- a. We relate to each other as worker to worker, each cogs in a machine.
- b. We relate to each other as worker to overseer; our interests are opposed. We relate as a slave relates to a master.
 - The worker’s activity is torment for him, it must be pleasure and a joy of life for another.
- c. What gives your need of my article its value, worth and effect for me is solely your object, the equivalent of my object.
- d. “Our *mutual* value is for us the *value* of our mutual objects. Hence for us man himself is mutually of *no value*.”

Subjective element: There is no basis on which we can identify with each other. We are not people pursuing a common good, we are not a community. We are, instead, individuals seeking survival; there is no identification, but rather the motives of self-interest.

- The products we receive from others are just embodiments, symbols, of the other’s self-interest.
- When we exchange goods we confront each other as selfish creatures, each trying to maximize his own good → we try to overpower, deceive, manipulate the other to get what we want.

Proposed solution: Pay the laborer more.

Response: An enforced increase of wages would be nothing but better payment for the slaves, and would have won, neither for the worker nor for the laborer, their human significance and worth (144).

Life Without Alienation

See “The German Ideology,” (177).

From “Comments on James Mill’s *Elements of Political Economy*”:

Let us suppose that we had carried out production as human beings. Each of us would have *in two ways affirmed* himself and the other person. (1) In my *production* I would have objectified my *individuality*, its *specific character*, and therefore enjoyed not only an individual *manifestation of my life* during the activity, but also when looking at the object I would have the individual pleasure of knowing my personality to be *objective, visible to the senses* and hence a power *beyond all doubt*. (2) In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the *direct* enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a *human* need by my work, that is, of having objectified *man’s* essential nature, and of having thus created an object corresponding to the need of another *man’s* essential nature. (3) I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the species, and therefore would become recognised and felt by yourself as a completion of your own essential nature and as a necessary part of yourself, and consequently would know myself to be confirmed both in your thought and your love. (4) In the individual expression of my life I would have directly created your expression of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have directly *confirmed* and *realised* my true nature, my *human* nature, my *communal* nature.

Question: How do we form a society in which we are free from alienation and thus free to engage in life-enhancing activities?

Answer: Freedom requires the abolition of private property = Freedom from servitude requires emancipation of the workers (144).

Someone really should write a manifesto for the working class...