

## CHAPTER TEN

# Marx on Alienation and the Good

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In this chapter I aim to connect discussion of the good with a critique of our present form of living. That can be done, I think, by looking at Marx's early writings. His notion of alienation and his understanding of the human life-form underwrite an idea of the good that which can be used to criticize our current mode of production.

In his section on alienated labour in the 1844 manuscripts, Marx seems to give four descriptions of how human beings are alienated under capitalism. The first and second description seem to describe a concrete situation:

1. the factory worker's being alienated from the product which she produces in her factory-work (Marx 2015, 84f), and
2. her being alienated from the work she does while on her factory shift (ibid., 87).

However, the third and fourth seem to be more abstract:

3. the worker's being alienated from being a *Gattungswesen*<sup>1</sup> (ibid., 88-89) and
4. her being alienated from the other humans (ibid., 92).

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1 The word *Gattungswesen* is often translated as "species being", even though "genus-being" might be more accurate given the Feuerbach/Hegel background. For comparison see Khurana (2022a). As I am unsatisfied with either translation, I will use '*Gattung*' and '*Gattungswesen*' as such and not translate them.

In my text I will start by presenting the first two descriptions of alienation (I) and present a problem that may arise if one tries to understand them by themselves (II). Afterwards I want to look at the descriptions three and four (III), to show that the first two can only be made sense of when thought about through the understanding of three and four (IV).

What I want to show is that *alienation* describes a relation between humans gone wrong; being alienated from an object and being alienated from your own activity means nothing else than being alienated from other humans. And that means relating to the other in a bad way. Finally, after explaining how this is connected to the idea of a human life-form, I want to show that Marx's term *alienation* implicitly shows that seeking the good means seeking the good of humans as *Gattungswesen*, as humans living together (V). I aim to show that *alienation* is not only a tool to criticize the living conditions under capitalism but a way into reflection on the good.

## I.

As a start I will highlight Marx's first and second descriptions of alienation from the 1844 manuscripts. In the first the factory worker is alienated from the product which she produces in her factory-work. For example, the factory worker works in the shoe factory of the factory-owner. The result of her work - the shoe - is not her shoe: it belongs to the factory-owner, who owns the material, leather, rubber that the shoe is made of, and the tools and sewing machines.

In short, the first description of alienation that Marx gives us is the alienated relation between the worker and the product of her labour.

Marx's use of the term *labour* (in German: *Arbeit*) is not exclusive to wage-labour under capitalism. I read Marx's term *labour* as the human form of being productive, where producing a product is understood in a broad sense. One can make a shoe, producing the shoe - making the object - or one can make a part of a forest into the resource *wood* by building a fence around it. Marx speaks of *Vergegenständlichung* (ibid., 84), which translates as objectification. The act of labour is an act of objectification. That means roughly that the way humans act in and on the world is a way of making the world their object.<sup>2</sup> The alienated form of labour under capitalism still falls under this

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2 In his reading of alienation Christian Schmidt traces Marx's notion back to Hegel's notion of appropriation in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (2023, 368f).

definition, although under capitalism, the worker's performing her labour is an act of objectification in an alienated way. The product, the objectification of her labour, is not her product. The objectification of the labour is the realization (*Verwirklichung*) of labour, but with capitalist labour the worker doesn't realize herself, she de-realizes (*entwirklicht*) herself. Producing the product in this way means alienating herself. The product of her work is alien to her. But Marx says even more: the product *confronts her with hostility* (ibid., 84f). Labour as objectification is a process in which a producer produces a product. In the alienated form, the product is not the producer's product; it is external and that makes it hostile. So far I have not explained why the product's being external to the producer makes it hostile towards her. I will get back to this after looking at the second description of alienation.

Here Marx takes a look at the act of labouring itself. The factory worker is making the shoe, but she is not making the shoe because she wants or needs a shoe; she didn't decide that shoemaking was the kind of labour that she wanted to engage in today. She is making the shoe that will be the factory owner's shoe because the factory owner told her so and because she is buying the use of her labour-power for a time.

Marx says that an act of production that produces something which is external to the producer must be an act of exposure (ibid., 87). The worker produces an external product, a shoe that isn't hers. An act of exposure is described further as a kind of labour by which the worker is not affirming herself but negating herself. Other images he uses are *not feeling at home while working, not feeling well, the act of labour not belonging to her being, not having free energy*, or a line with which a lot of working people can identify: *if she doesn't have to do the labour, she immediately stops* (ibid., 88).

In short: it is forced labour. Not only does the product of labour under capitalism not belong to the worker: the act of labour itself, the use of labour power, also does not belong to the worker. It belongs to someone else.

In alienation 1 the product is alienated. Marx says that this makes the worker alienated from the outside world (*entfremdet von der sinnlichen Außenwelt*) (ibid., 85f), alienated from the object (*entfremdet von der Sache*) (ibid., 89).<sup>3</sup>

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3 The worker becomes alienated from the outside world because "The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world. It is the material in which his labour realizes itself, in which it is active and from which and by means of which it produces" (ibid., 86, translated by the author).

In alienation 2 the activity is alienated. Marx says that human living is nothing else than activity.<sup>4</sup> Human lives are themselves activities of those humans, and so the human who is engaged in an alienated activity is alienated from herself, alienated from the subject. What I want to get into focus is the relation between subject and object here. In labour, in objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) the human does not just make an object; in being productive and being defined as the one that she is through being productive, she also makes herself. Description one and two of alienation are thereby describing two perspectives on the same production process.

## II.

I argue that one is not able to understand these two descriptions of alienation, the alienation from the product/object and the alienation from the production/subject without understanding Marx' description 3 and 4, which describe the alienation from the *Gattungswesen* and the other humans.

If one nevertheless tries to understand 1 and 2 independently, and tries to change the organisation of production to realize an unalienated production, then there is a possibility of conceiving a false plan for doing so. I will now describe such a false plan with an example.

If one understands alienation to be, in essence, the distorted relation between a worker and their product, or between a worker and their act of producing, then one might suggest that to get rid of alienation, these relationships need to be altered. In the alienated state, the product is not the worker's product, and so it would be a logical step to suggest that the product should instead be made the worker's own.

Or that when the worker leaves the factory and starts their own little business – on Etsy for example – producing their own shoes, then their labouring would no longer be forced. The worker would neither be alienated from the outside world, nor from herself. The produced shoe would not confront the Etsy shop owner with hostility.

This solution is at best an apparent one, though. Sadly, if the worker gets rid of her boss and become her own boss, then the products might be theirs to sell, but their labouring is still alienated, and so is the product which she produces. The labour is still forced.

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4 “[...] denn was ist Leben als Tätigkeit [...]” (ibid., 89).

To see why that is the case, I will take a look at forced labour. Forced labour is further described by Marx as the labour that does not satisfy a need, but it is a means to be able to satisfy a need that lies outside of it (ibid., 88). The labour thereby is forced by something outside of it. The Etsy shop owner is producing a shoe, but that shoe is not made to satisfy the producer's need for a shoe. Its production is a means to satisfy another need, paying rent and buying food with the money made from selling the shoe.

According to Marx, in the classless society<sup>5</sup> labour itself would become humans' first need; and being a need itself, labouring thereby would satisfy a need directly (ibid., 125f).

The Etsy shop owner who has to produce one product in order to sell it, to be able to buy the things that satisfy her needs, still stays alienated from her product. And even if a self-employed worker can decide whether to work in the morning or at night, her labour is still not free. Even if in a more indirect way, her labour is still for sale.<sup>6</sup>

The solution to alienation in 1 and 2, understood as a distorted relation between worker and product and worker and act of production, cannot be making the product and the act of production the worker's own. The problem seems to not be just that product and act of production are not hers, but that they are somebody else's.

To shed more light on this I will turn to description 3 and 4 of alienation in the 1844 manuscripts. I want to get into view how the relation between the worker and her product and the worker and her production are connected to the relation between the worker and the others.

### III.

As I said at the beginning, Marx formulates alienation in version 3 as the human being alienated from their *Gattungswesen*. But what does *Gattungswesen* mean? I will quote a sentence from the Paris manuscripts of 1844 that, I think, contains the key features of *Gattungswesen*.

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5 The relevance of class and the classless society will be explained later in the text.

6 This concern was anticipated, according to Gourevitch (2014), by c19th American labour movements, who came to argue that to be a free worker required collective ownership of the means of production, rather than everyone owning their own means of production.

The human is a *Gattungswesen*, not only in practically and theoretically making the *Gattung*, both his own and that of the other things, his object, but – and this is simply another expression of the same thing – but also in that he relates to himself as the present, living *Gattung*, by relating to himself as a *universal*, and thereby free being.<sup>7</sup>

I read *Gattungswesen* as the practical self-conscious life of humans. Humans are self-conscious. Humans, Marx says, make themselves, their own *Gattungswesen* into their object. *Gattungswesen* is a self-relation, it is not the knowledge of something other, it is the knowledge of oneself.<sup>8</sup>

This self is further described in the quotation as the present living *Gattung*. The *Gattung* of humans is not an abstract essentialist form, but rather it is living and concrete. Humans don't relate to themselves as to a human *an-sich*, or the idea of a human. They relate to themselves as the concrete living humans that they are. Human living is relating to oneself as living; relating to oneself means livingly relating to a living being. Marx uses the word present (*gegenwärtig*) to point out that humans' relation to themselves is not an empirical, but a practical relation. They don't relate to themselves as something they know from the outside, by looking at it, or hearing about it. Their knowledge of themselves is not a knowledge of a fact in the world. In living they relate to themselves as living - here and now. Their knowledge of themselves is practical.

The quotation further says that the human relates to herself as a universal and thereby free being. Marx's term "universality" is an intersubjective term. Humans don't make themselves their object as individuals acting alone, but do it together. I know myself by knowing you and by your knowledge of myself and *vice versa*. Together we form the present living *Gattung*, and thereby every one of us is formed by the present living *Gattung*, but also every one of us is forming the present, living *Gattung* itself. Humans relate self-consciously to each other, the form of their *Gattung* is them-in-their-mutual-relating.<sup>9</sup> That

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7 "Der Mensch ist ein *Gattungswesen*, nicht nur indem er praktisch und theoretisch die *Gattung*, sowohl seine eigne als die der übrigen Dinge zu seinem Gegenstand macht, sondern - und dieß ist nur ein anderer Ausdruck für dieselbe Sache - sondern auch indem er sich zu sich selbst als der gegenwärtigen, lebendigen *Gattung* verhält, indem er sich zu sich als einem *universellen*, darum freien Wesen verhält" (Marx 2015, 89, translated by the author).

8 Even though Hegel is not using the term *Gattungswesen*, he writes about how different living beings can be distinguished by their different relating to their genus. For a detailed discussion on that see Khurana (2022a and 2022b). See also Karen Ng's forthcoming work on *Species-Being: Ethical Life Between Humanity and Nature*.

9 I thank Alec Hinshelwood for this formulation.

is what Marx means when he says humans are universal, act universally and are thereby free.<sup>10</sup>

The universality is the relation to themselves and the world that is made possible by their being self-conscious. In the quotation Marx also says that humans make the *Gattung* of other, non-human things their object. Human's theoretical knowledge is also gained mutually.

It is very important that *Gattungswesen* doesn't describe the being of a particular human, as a particular human. It is the being of the human as such. So not all particular humans have a *Gattungswesen*, a nature, and together they are *Gattungswesen* plural. Rather, *Gattungswesen* is singular.

I will try to make this clearer by quoting a different short passage only a page further than the one quoted before. In this passage Marx writes about the alienated *Gattungswesen*.

Alienated labour not only (1) alienates nature from the human and (2) alienates the human from himself, from his own acting function, from his activity of life; because of this it also alienates the human from the *Gattung*; it converts the *Gattung*-life into a means for his individual life. Firstly, it alienates *Gattung*-life and individual life, and secondly it converts the latter, in its abstraction, into the end of the former, also in its abstract and alienated form.

For in the first place labour, *activity of life*, *productive life* itself appears to the human only as a *means* for the satisfaction of a need, the need to sustain physical existence. But productive life is *Gattung*-life. It is life-creating life. The whole character of a *Gattung*, its *Gattung*-character, lies in the kind of its activity of life, and free conscious activity constitutes the *Gattung*-character of the human. Life itself appears only as a *means of life*.<sup>11</sup>

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10 It is rather dark why Marx uses the notion *free* here. In Hegel the term is central and centrally linked to, though not exhausted by, the idea of the good of individuals who bear rights. Given that Marx rejects the idea of rights, his notion of freedom must differ from the Hegelian one.

11 "Indem die entfremdete Arbeit dem Menschen 1) die Natur entfremdet, 2) sich selbst, seine eigne thätige Funktion, seine Lebensthätigkeit, so entfremdet sie dem Menschen die *Gattung*; sie macht ihm das *Gattungsleben* zum Mittel des individuellen Lebens. Erstens entfremdet sie das *Gattungsleben* und das individuelle Leben und zweitens macht sie das letztere in seiner Abstraktion zum Zweck des ersten, ebenfalls in seiner abstrakten und entfremdeten Form. Denn erstens erscheint d[em] Menschen die Arbeit, die *Lebensthätigkeit*, das *produktive Leben* selbst nur ein *Mittel* zur Befriedigung eines Bedürfnisses, des Bedürfnisses der Erhaltung der physischen Existenz. Das produktive Leben ist aber das *Gattungsleben*. Es ist das Leben erzeugende Leben. In der Art der Lebensthätigkeit liegt der ganze Charakter einer species, ihr *Gattungs*-charakter, und die freie bewußte Thätigkeit ist der *Gattungs*charakter d[es] Menschen. Das Leben selbst erscheint nur als *Lebensmittel*" (Marx 2015, 90, translated by the author).



Not being alienated would mean being the *Gattungswesen* in being the individual one and being the individual one in being the *Gattungswesen*. In unalienated form that means that one is only the individual one because that individual is *Gattungswesen*, and that individual is *Gattungswesen* because it is the individual one. Both are included in the other. When she is alienated, the individual one splits being individual from being a *Gattung*. And as Marx says, in a second step she makes the *Gattung*, the living with others, relating to others, into a means of being the individual. Life itself, which is the *Gattung*, as he says, appears only as a means of life. Unalienated life, living as a *Gattungswesen* would mean to live life-creatingly – creating the life of the *Gattung*.<sup>12</sup> That can easily be misunderstood as if in the unalienated form it would be the other way around: that the individual life would be the means for the *Gattung*-life. But that is not the case. In unalienated form, the *Gattung*-life and the individual life are not alienated from each other. They are the same.<sup>13</sup> The *Gattung*-life is the form of the individual life. And this form is a relation between the individuals.

In conclusion, humans, in sharing the *Gattungswesen* — which is a living form of relation, a relation that means making oneself and the world their object, not alone but mutually, through each other — in being *Gattungswesen*, relate to each other. This relation is the relation of living through each other. That is why the 4th way of defining alienation in the manuscripts reads: the worker is alienated from other humans. I hope by now it is clear that 4 is implicit in 3.<sup>14</sup> Being alienated from the *Gattungswesen* is being alienated from the other human. Our form is our relation to each other, being alienated from that form thereby is being alienated from each other. Now I want to go back to the descriptions 1 and 2. I want to show how these two also describe a manifestation of a bad relation between humans.

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12 That does not mean that in the alienated live there is no life creating. It means that the life that is created is an alienated life is one that is split. The unalienated life would be life-creating in the unalienated sense, creating the life of the *Gattung* and of the individual in unity.

13 This is the point in which Marx's notion *Gattungswesen* differs from that of Hegel. Marx criticizes Hegel; he thinks that Hegel's *Logic* involves, in the end, an opposition between "general" and "particular" which ruins the idea of *Gattungswesen*. See Marx (1992, 155).

14 Marx says that "the human is alienated from her *Gattungswesen*" means that the human is alienated from the other. See Marx (2015, 92).



## IV.

According to Marx's description 1 of alienation, the relation between worker and her product is alienated. The alienation is described as the worker's production resulting in something that is not hers. But the alienation between the worker and her product cannot be solved by making the product hers. The problem is not that it is not hers, the problem is that it is somebody else's.

The relation between the person owning the product, in this case the factory owner, and the worker who produces the product is the problem. Private property is a relation between people and not a relation between people and things. In relations of private property humans are alienated from their *Gattungswesen* and therefore alienated from each other.<sup>15</sup> The worker who produces a product under conditions of private property as a result is alienated from her product.

To understand that, we have to take a closer look at the relation between the worker and the factory owner. Both the worker and the factory owner have needs that underlie their activities. The worker needs money, and therefore she works, the factory owner needs cheap labour power, and therefore she employs the worker.

Both exchange things (money and the use of labour-power), and *via* that exchange they satisfy each other's needs. But it is important to point out that they are not satisfying each other's needs as an end in itself. They satisfy each other's needs as a pure means in order to satisfy their own needs.<sup>16</sup> Now we can finally understand why the product of the labour of the worker is external and Marx says that it thus becomes hostile towards her. The needs of the worker and the factory-owner are independent from each other, in the sense that their actions are not directed towards the satisfaction of each other's needs. As Marx said in the quotation cited before, the *Gattung*-life, the living with others in its alienated form, has turned into a pure means to the individual life. The worker and the factory owner engage in a shared *Gattung*-life, but they only do so as a means to their individual life. That is the way that their relation to each other (and their *Gattungswesen*) is alienated. Now we can finally

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15 This also goes the other way around: they are alienated from each other and therefore alienated from their *Gattungswesen*.

16 This problem is one that comes up in every exchange. The exchange described here is a special one, though, given that there is a hierarchy or disbalance in power between the factory-owner and the worker, which results in the factory-owner exploiting the worker. I will not at this point look further into the special case of exploitation. For my argument it is enough that the factory-owner and the worker engage in exchange.

understand why the product of the labour of the worker is external and that it thereby becomes hostile towards her. It is a symbol of the factory-owner who takes something away from the worker. The more the worker produces, the more things are external to her, the more things she produces that belong to somebody else and that somebody else will not share with her. That means that by working she produces a world from which she is excluded – a hostile world. That humans in the alienated state use each other as means doesn't merely mean that they don't support each other enough. In creating their own worlds in the economic forms of private property, they create worlds that exclude the others and are thereby hostile to them.

In the alienated relation between humans, everybody is looking out for their own individual life. My needs are my needs and your needs are your needs. I might instrumentally satisfy your needs, but only as a means for you to satisfy mine. The alienated relation between people means that each is only trying to satisfy their own needs, and understands their needs as being independent from those of the others. That means that they see their life as being independent from the life of the other.

The same goes for Marx's description 2 of alienation. That my labour is alienated from me is not a problem that I can solve by working on my relationship to my labouring. My labour and I are alienated because I have to sell the use of my labour-power to you. Because I am alienated from you.

The worker's end is her individual life, her individual survival, the factory-owner's end is her individual life, her individual profit. One needs a worker, the other needs the money to buy food and pay her rent, so she sells the use of her labour-power to the factory-owner and thereby alienates her labour from her needs. She is not active because she wants to be active, she is active because she wants to be able to eat.<sup>17</sup>

In unalienated form the satisfaction of your need would no longer be a mere means to the satisfaction of mine; it would be an end in itself, it would be my need too.

At the end of section (I) I pointed out that being alienated from the product/object and being alienated from the production/subject are two perspectives on the same thing. In *Vergegenständlichung* the subject and the object are *vergegenständlicht*. But because the human being is a universal being, a *Gattungswesen*, we partake in this *Vergegenständlichung* together – even in alienated

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17 In Marx's *Kapital* there is a further description of the forces of capital that explain how the worker-product relation becomes so distorted. See the chapter *Die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation* (Marx 2013, 741–802).

state. That means that description 1, 2, 3 and 4 are all different perspectives on the same process.

At the end of the *Excerpts from James Mill*, Marx gives a glimpse of what an unalienated relation between humans might look like. This unalienated relation will give the direction to the idea of the good.

Let's say that we had produced as human beings: each of us would have *doubly affirmed* ourselves and the other in their production. 1. In my *production* I would have *objectified the peculiarity* of my *individuality* and therefore I would have both enjoyed an individual expression of life in doing so as well, I, while looking at the object, would have known my personality as an *objective and sensuously perceptible force beyond all doubt*. 2. In your consumption or use of my product I would immediately have the enjoyment, both in my knowing of that I satisfied a *human* need with my work, that means, that I had objectified the human nature and thus had made a fitting object for a need of another *human* being. 3. I would have been for you the *mediator* between you and the *Gattung*, so would have been known and experienced by you as an addition to your own being and as a necessary part of yourself. Thus, I would know myself to be confirmed both in your thoughts and your love. 4. As well as I would have the enjoyment in knowing that I have immediately created your expression of life with my individual expression of life, that is in my individual activity I immediately *confirmed* and *realized* my true nature, my *human, communal being*.

Our productions would be as many mirrors from which our being would shine towards each other. The relation thereby becomes mutual: from your side be done what is done from mine.<sup>18</sup>

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18 "Gesetzt, wir hätten als Menschen produziert: Jeder von uns hätte in seiner Produktion sich selbst und den anderen *doppelt bejaht*. Ich hätte 1. in meiner *Produktion* meine *Individualität*, ihre *Eigentümlichkeit vergegenständlicht* und daher sowohl während der Tätigkeit eine individuelle *Lebensäußerung* genossen, als im Anschauen des Gegenstandes die individuelle Freude, meine Persönlichkeit als *gegenständliche, sinnlich anschauliche* und darum *über allen Zweifel erhabene* Macht zu wissen. 2. In deinem Genuss oder deinem Gebrauch meines Produkts hätte ich *unmittelbar* den Genuss, sowohl des Bewusstseins, in meiner Arbeit ein *menschliches* Bedürfnis befriedigt, also das *menschliche* Wesen vergegenständlicht und daher dem Bedürfnis eines anderen *menschlichen* Wesens seinen entsprechenden Gegenstand verschafft zu haben, 3. für dich der *Mittler* zwischen dir und der *Gattung* gewesen zu sein, also von dir selbst als eine Ergänzung deines eigenen Wesens und als ein notwendiger Teil deiner selbst gewusst und empfunden zu werden, also sowohl in deinem Denken wie in deiner Liebe mich bestätigt zu wissen, 4. in meiner individuellen Lebensäußerung unmittelbar deine Lebensäußerung geschaffen zu haben, also in meiner individuellen Tätigkeit unmittelbar mein wahres Wesen, mein *menschliches*, mein *Gemeinwesen bestätigt* und *verwirklicht* zu haben. Unsere Produktionen wären ebenso viele Spiegel, woraus unser Wesen sich entgegenleuchtete. Dies Verhältnis wird dabei wechselseitig, von deiner Seite geschehe, was von meiner gesch[ieht]" (Marx 1985, 443-463, translated by the author).

In this passage Marx describes production outside of conditions of private property, “we had produced as human beings” and not as alienated beings that are alienated from what they actually are. Humans’ true nature, their *Gattungswesen*, is their being as a communal being, relating to the other’s living, relating to the other’s needing.<sup>19</sup> Because being a true human, I am no longer alienated from myself, I am also not alienated from my product and my act of production. “In my *production* I would have *objectified the peculiarity* of my *individuality*” and in the product of my action I “would have known my personality as an *objective and sensuously perceptible force beyond all doubt*”. That means that if I am not alienated from the other, not alienated from my *Gattungswesen*, I am no longer alienated from my product and the act of production and that makes me able to relate to my true human self. This chain also works the other way. But the product of my action doesn’t have to be mine in the sense of the Etsy shop owner. In “producing as a human being”, I have produced the product for your consumption, your need moved me to act. Your consumption would give me “immediat(e) [...] enjoyment” (*den Genuss*). This immediate enjoyment would be twofold, on the one hand the enjoyment of satisfying a human need, and on the other the enjoyment of having “*confirmed and realized my true nature, my human, communal being*” by satisfying a human need.

If my need is internal to yours and yours to mine, labour is no longer forced. Because then it is not instrumental anymore, it is a need itself. In being alienated from the other, I am also alienated from my true self. Relating badly to you, means relating badly to myself. But in unalienated labour, my work, my activity is an immediate answer to your need and my need and thereby directly satisfying a need and pleasurable.

The structure of a need is often spelled out in a form of an *in-order-to relation*: *a* needs *x* to *y*.<sup>20</sup> Let’s say: *a* needs to eat in order to be a human. But that sounds as if *a*: 1. is a human and that 2. from being human it follows that *a* needs to eat. But *a*’s being human is actualized in her eating. Her being human, her needing to eat and the eating form the unity of her living activity. Being human means living humanly – by acting.<sup>21</sup> And acting is a result of a need.

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19 For a discussion on the intersubjectivity spelled out in Marx notion of human being and a critique of intersubjectivity in Hegel see Hinshelwood (2024). Hinshelwood shows how Hegel falls into practical solipsism and how Marx tries to solve this.

20 See for example Nancy Fraser (1989).

21 To Marx being human means being active as a human. Such being active can be described as acting or as working (*Tätigsein, arbeiten*). Labour under capitalism is a distorted way of acting.

Human needs are the beginning of our acting. My need, all things equal, is an immediate reason to act. I know my needs in a practical way; my needing and my acting on my needing *is* my living activity. It is my being. What I need is not what I need in order to be me, my needing is who I am.

In the case of the human life-form—what I am—what a human is cannot be described in an empirical way. The human life-form is practically described with the term *Gattungswesen*. But *Gattungswesen* is not an abstract form “that lives in every individual human being” (Marx 2015, 6). Being *Gattungswesen* is an activity. What a human is is determined by the social relations they are in, their essence actualized is the “ensemble of social relations” (ibid.). That is what living through each other comes to. I come to be through your living and you come to be through my living. Not being alienated from my *Gattungswesen* thus describes the relation between humans in this form of living together.<sup>22</sup>

Coming back to my needs, since they are in unity with my being, and my being is dependent on the others, my needs are not distinct from those of the others. Knowing myself and knowing my needs are the same. Both are known practically, by living my human life. Living my human life means our living through each other, therefore my needs are known to me in knowing myself in living with you. In living with you I also know your needs and act on them in the same immediate way that I act on my needs. The notion *Gattungswesen* describes the relation between humans in that their needs are no longer distinct from each other. Your needs are part of my needs and *vice versa*. In the unalienated form, in the form of *Gattungswesen*, which is the human life-form, my needs are your needs; my needs are dependent on your needs and *vice versa*.<sup>23</sup>

A solution to alienation, as a social problem, lies therefore in our relation to each other. In the unalienated state humans live *through* each other. My needs cannot be distinct from your needs; if they are distinct we are alienated from each other and we therefore do not live a truly human life.

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22 Khurana writes the following in a discussion of Aristotle and Thompson’s concept of the form of life: “Man is not only a “social animal” that co-operates to satisfy its own needs, but a “political animal” that determines the form of shared life in social confrontation. This does not mean that it is simply left to our arbitrary and capricious determination of what constitutes our form of life and its material sociality; but it does mean that the realisation of our form of life is dependent on its conscious articulation by us and that material sociality is overdetermined in a particular way by our political sociality” (Khurana 2022a, 380).

23 That is why Marcuse (*der eindimensionale Mensch*) can refer to “false needs” at present time, while Adorno (*Thesen über Bedürfnisse*) at the same time can state that it makes no sense to distinguish between right and false needs (in the unalienated state). So we can say with Marcuse, that there are false needs today, and we can say with Adorno that there is no way of making a distinction between false and true needs, as human beings in present time.

That is why the social or political solution to being alienated from the product of my work and my working activity cannot lie in that relation itself. It has to lie in my relation to the other human beings. Because property relations are relations between human beings and in the relation of private property humans are alienated from each other, the political solution to alienation lies in the abolition of private property in the means of production. It is such property relation that defines the classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, therefore its abolition is key for realization of the classless society. That is why the classless society in Marx has such relevance, because it is directly connected to the true nature of human beings, as communal beings.

## V.

Finally, I want to say something about the idea of the good which I find to be implicit in the conception of alienation that I just presented.

Following Marx, I think the good cannot be ascribed to a single person; good can only be a relation. There is no meaning to the idea of a good person, but there is meaning to people relating well, and thus relating as human beings. Being human means our relating humanly to each other; being human with and through the other.

According to Phillipa Foot, the human life-form tells us what a good exemplar of a human being is.<sup>24</sup> But because in the case of the humans their life-form doesn't describe a being, the being of the singular human, there is therefore no meaning to the idea of a good human. The life-form of humans describes their form of relation; therefore human goodness lies in human relating.<sup>25</sup> Humans cannot *be* good, but instead they can only relate well. Whereas it is meaningless to say "this is a good human being", it can be meaningful to speak of a good human relation, or *a human that is relating well*.<sup>26</sup>

24 See Foot 2001. Martha Nussbaum also does something in that direction in her capability approach.

25 In the (neo-) Aristotelian understanding, the life-form of humans is described in parallel to that of animals. For example, orcas co-operate in hunting seals. If one orca is not co-operating to hunt, it is seen as a bad exemplar of an orca. Similarly, human co-operation is described as one of the contents of the human life form, and a human who is not co-operating accordingly is seen as a bad example of his kind. In contrast, I think that how humans relate to each other is not one of the contents of their life-form, but the form of their life-form. Humans are self-conscious; their being is always already intersubjective.

26 As shown above, what a human is cannot be described in an essentialist abstract form that is then actualized in every particular, in one better, in one worse. To be able to say that there is

If what is good for me and what is good for you cannot be distinct from each other, in the way described before, then how do we understand the idea of the good? How can we know how not to live an alienated life?

The idea of the good is not something that lies outside of humans and something which they try to reach. I think the good is the human *Gattungswesen* that has properly actualized itself. This is people meeting each other's needs. The activity of togetherness is the good. The act of relating is the good. The idea of the good is the full actualization of the relation between you and me that is *Gattungswesen*.<sup>27</sup>

Following Marx, I think that being a self-conscious living being means to know oneself in a practical way. And knowing ourselves means knowing what is good for us. Humans live together. But I understand this togetherness not in co-operating to serve our own private goods with each other's help. I think we live *through* each other. And we know ourselves and our needs *through* each other. If our current state of living and our way of producing isn't making it possible to live humanly in a good way, then this way of living has to change. The idea of the good lies in our human nature, in us being *Gattungswesen* and points to a future in which our means of production have changed in a way that make unalienated life possible.

In summary, I think we should try to understand human nature in such a social or interdependent way, and this should be a focus of further investigations into human needs and the idea of the good.<sup>28</sup>

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a particular one that is a good one, there would be a standard needed to which the particular could be compared. Our human life-form does not give such an essential standard, though; therefore there is no meaning to the good human exemplar.

27 There lies the main distinction between Marx and Hegel's theory. Marx theory calls for practical political action, and the realization of the idea of the good in our current mode of production is impossible for him. Philosophy for Marx has to become practical. See Marx (1990, 6).

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