KARL MARX

2nd Edition

Allen W. Wood

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

2

THE HUMAN ESSENCE

1 The species being

In Chapter 1, I have tried to defend the proposal that in the context of Marx's philosophy we should understand alienation as the condition of people who either experience their lives as meaningless or themselves as worthless, or else would do so if they were not duped by consoling illusions. But Marx also holds, as we have seen, that alienation is real or practical, that it is not an illusion or state of mind, but is rooted in people's actual conditions of life. Apparently, then, if we are to understand the causes of alienation, we must both know in at least a general way what men and women require in order to lead meaningful lives, and also see what it is about existing social conditions that frustrates these requirements. It will be the business of the next three chapters to investigate Marx's views on these points.

Human beings have many needs. There are many conditions which must be met if they are to survive, and to live in health, security and comfort. These conditions (or at least some portion of them) may also be prerequisites for a meaningful life and a sense of self-worth. But meaning and self-worth still seem to be goods over and above these others, and moreover to be distinctively human goods. Animals may feel pleasure and pain, they may lead lives which are contented and happy, or full of suffering, fear and disquiet. But only a man or woman is capable of experiencing life as something full or empty, worthwhile or worthless, meaningful or meaningless. Marx thus calls an alienated life a 'dehumanized' life, and opposes such a life to a 'human' mode of life, a life led in a manner befitting human nature or corresponding to the 'human essence'. It seems evident, then, that Marx's conception of what is required for a meaningful human life is closely tied to his conception of a life lived in correspondence to the

human essence. Marx's theory of alienation thus rests on views of some sort about human nature.

It is sometimes denied that Marx has any concept of human nature at all, on the ground that for him the nature of men and women depends on historical circumstances and alters along with them. Marx also explicitly says, in the sixth thesis on Feuerbach, that 'the human essence is no abstraction inhering in the single individual. In its actuality it is the ensemble or social relationships.'[1] But these views do not necessarily entail a rejection of the idea that there is something distinctive about human beings which marks humankind off from the rest of nature, and perhaps even helps to make intelligible the sort of variation and development which the human essence undergoes in history. The sixth thesis on Feuerbach does not deny that there is a 'human essence' shared by individuals, but only asserts that this essence is inextricably bound up with the social relationships in which those individuals stand, and must be understood in light of them. In any case, it is undeniable that Marx, in his later as well as his early writings, often speaks of the life of wage laborers as 'dehumanized', and of future communist society as a genuinely 'human' one. And Marx does have quite a bit to say about the human essence which serves, in at least a general way, to back up his judgments of this sort.

Following Feuerbach, Marx describes the human being as a *Gattungswesen*, a term which can be translated either as 'species being' or 'species essence'. The term itself is derived from Hegel, and it is used by Feuerbach and Marx to signify several different but related things.[2] To begin with, in virtue of the ambiguity just mentioned, *Gattungswesen* is a term which can be naturally applied both to the individual human being and to the common nature or essence which resides in every individual man and woman. Or again, very significantly for Feuerbach and Marx, it can be applied to the entire human race, referring to humanity as a single collective entity or else to the essential property which characterizes this entity and makes it a single distinctive thing in its own right. The main intention of both philosophers in using the term, in fact, seems to be to imply that there is some sort of intimate connection between each man or woman and all other human individuals, and that the source of this connection is the fact that the qualities which constitute the essence of each individual are somehow bound up with those which are essential to the whole species, considered as a single collective being. To understand the meaning of *Gattungswesen*, as Feuerbach and Marx employ it, is to understand what they take these connections to be.

Certainly the most obvious thing Feuerbach and Marx mean in calling man a *Gattungswesen* is that human beings live in societies, and the mode of life of each individual is essentially dependent on interaction or intercourse with others. Especially in Feuerbach, there is sometimes a deliberate allusion to the etymological connection between *Gattung* ('genus' or 'kind') and the act of mating – the words *Gatte* and *Gattin* are also poetic words for 'husband' and 'wife.'[3] The allusion itself is derived from Hegel, but in Feuerbach its principal aim is to express the giddy idea that love-making is the archetypal expression of human interdependence. For Marx, however, and especially for Marx after 1845, the term *Gattungswesen* is often equivalent to (even replaced by) *Gemeinwesen* ('community' or 'commune') or *Gesellschaft* ('society').[4] The stress in Marx is on the idea that human beings are essentially connected to their species because the human being is by nature a 'herd animal' or 'social animal', an animal who dwells with others of the same kind and survives by living and working in some sort of cooperative relationship with them. (This cooperative character pertains for Marx to all societies, and is if anything stronger in capitalist society than in any previous one. Individualist ideologies may mask or falsify the social relations of capitalism, but cannot do away with them.)

In other passages where Marx speaks of the human being's 'species being', however, what he has in mind cannot be merely the fact that men and women are social beings. Marx says that the human being is a species being 'in that he makes his own species his object', and 'behaves toward, is conscious of or relates to (*verhält sich zu*) himself as to the present, living species.'[5] In these remarks, the emphasis seems to be on the *consciousness* which men and women have of their interdependence, or of conduct that is consciously oriented to this interdependence. The terminology Marx uses to describe this species-relation or species-consciousness is extremely abstract, and there are several different possible interpretations which may quite naturally be put on his words. It seems to me, in fact, that Marx probably has several different things in mind, and expresses himself as he does in order to convey the idea that these things are all bound up with one another.

In the first place, Marx is referring to the fact that any man or woman not only belongs to the human species, but is also aware of doing so, and that this awareness itself is a distinctly human characteristic. No doubt some other animals recognize members of their own kind as potential mates, helpers or rivals, but it is doubtful that any of

them have a concept of their own species as such, or of themselves as members of a species or kind. But in Marx's view, it is essential to being human at all that we do have some conception of the human species, that we 'make our species our object,' and have an awareness of ourselves as members of this species.

For both Feuerbach and Marx, the human being's species being is bound up very closely with the fact of our own self-consciousness, as well as with our characteristically human intellectual abilities. Feuerbach believes that it is our consciousness of our own species nature which makes it possible for us to be conscious of the species nature of other things, and hence that our species being is the foundation of our ability to form universal concepts. There are some passages in Marx which may be read as endorsing this thesis.[6] Neither philosopher, however, presents any real argument in favor of the thesis, and I confess that I see no way in which one could be made out. Prima facie, in fact, the truth would seem to be just the opposite, that it is the human ability to form universal concepts which makes it possible for people to know themselves as members of a species.

2 Species consciousness and alienation

More defensible and more relevant to Marx's aims, however, is the idea that there is some intimate connection between species consciousness and self-consciousness. But 'self-consciousness' here should not be understood in an austere, epistemologist's sense, as the subject of the Cartesian *cogito* or the Kantian 'unity of apperception'. We ought rather to think of the consciousness people have of themselves in having what is sometimes called a 'self-image' or 'self-conception'.[7] Every normal human being after a very early age has some sort of idea of who he or she is, some conception which represents (more or less accurately) what we call 'self' or 'identity' (in the sense in which people undergo 'identity crises'). Many different things about me may go into my self-conception, including my perception of my physical appearance and social status, my beliefs about my character traits, past deeds, present abilities and possibilities, and my awareness of my intentions, aspirations and hopes. The particular components of an individual's self-conception, and their relative importance to that individual (both actual and perceived importance) may vary greatly from person to person and culture to culture. But the fact of being self-conscious in this sense, of having some perceived identity or self, does not vary. All but the most incapacitated men and

women have this consciousness of self, while it is doubtful that any nonhuman creature has it. Thus we may plausibly regard self-consciousness, in this sense, as a trait distinctive of the human species, and hence as 'species consciousness' in that sense.

But we may also regard self-consciousness as tied closely to 'species consciousness' in the sense of consciousness of the human species as a natural kind or a collective entity. For not only does a man or woman have an individual self-conception, but because each person is aware of membership in the human species, he also 'makes his own species his object', that is, has a conception of it as well. First, a human being is conscious of the species (collectively) in the form of society. Human beings are social (or species) beings not only in living with and depending on others of their kind, but also in being (in some degree) conscious of the social relationships in which they stand to these others. And second, human beings also have a conception of their humanity itself, of the human condition which they share with all other members of their species, a conception of what it means to be human. Each man and woman is conscious of engaging in a mode of life which is specifically human, however much it may differ from the lives of other human beings.

Further, an individual's self-conception is closely bound up in self-consciousness with a conception of the human species. Because I am aware of myself in the context of my society and understand my mode of life as an essentially human one, I also understand myself, my individual self-conception, both in terms of my place in society and in relation to my own conception of humanity. This has to be at least part of Marx's meaning when he says that the species being 'relates to himself as the present, living species', and 'relates to the species as his own essence'. Marx means that my conception of myself always involves my view of what the human species is and can be; it is essentially my conception of the way my life fits into the larger life of society, and the manner in which it serves to actualize the possibilities of the human species.

Of course if we say that every human being has both a self-conception and a conception of humanity or the species essence, it must not be supposed that either of these conceptions is necessarily clear or explicit, or that it can always be put into words by the individual in question. Marx says that 'the human being practically and theoretically makes his own species his object.' It is Marx's view, I think, that some sort of species consciousness is ingredient in each person's practical dealings with the world, even where the content of

this consciousness has not been made theoretically explicit. No doubt both people's individual and their species self-conceptions come to be more explicit (if not more faithful to reality) in societies where there are priests, poets and philosophers whose job it is to produce interpretations of species consciousness for public consumption. Yet in Marx's view even in the simplest and most primitive societies there is some consciousness of self, nature and the human community 'interwoven in the material activity of men'.[8]

There are some reasons for thinking that the possibility of alienation is closely related to the essentially human trait of self-consciousness. To experience oneself or one's life as worthless or worthwhile, as meaningless or meaningful, seems to presuppose some conception of what is felt to be worthwhile or worthless. For this reason, only a being who has some sort of self-conception seems to be capable of either an alienated or a fulfilled life. Further, the possibility of alienation, at least for Marx, is closely bound up with the human trait of species consciousness. Marx often speaks of alienated life as one in which human beings fail to 'affirm' (*bejahen*), 'confirm' (*bestätigen*) or 'actualize' (*verwirklichen*) themselves. A human life which is self-affirming, self-confirming and self-actualizing is a meaningful life; a self which affirms, confirms and actualizes itself is a self which has worth, and recognizes the worth it has. But Marx also indicates that to affirm, confirm and actualize oneself is to affirm, confirm and actualize one's essence, that is, the human species-essence. The measure of this self-actualization, of an individual's satisfaction of a 'natural vocation' (*natürliche Bestimmung*), is 'the extent to which the human being as *species being*, as a human being, has become himself and grasped himself'.[9] Alienation is thus conceived by Marx as a separation and estrangement of individuals from their *human* essence. Their 'being does not correspond to their essence', is not 'in harmony' with it; their lives are not lives in which 'the human essence feels itself satisfied'.[10]

Thus in the remark that 'the human being makes his own species his object,' the term 'object' seems to mean not only 'object of awareness' but also to bear the sense of 'goal' or 'purpose'. It is my humanity or 'species essence' which determines my 'natural vocation', which sets the goals whose pursuit and fulfillment will constitute a meaningful life for me. The extent to which I have fulfilled my vocation, moreover, depends also on the extent to which I consciously recognize and affirm my human essence, the extent to which I have 'grasped myself as a human being', and my actions have taken on a 'self-conscious human form'.[11]

3 Self-actualization

But what is it to 'grasp' and 'affirm', to 'confirm' and 'actualize' the human essence? What sort of life does this involve?

Part of Marx's purpose in speaking of my self-affirmation, self-actualization and so forth as the affirmation and actualization of my 'human species essence' is to emphasize the human value of community, and the other-directed character which any fulfilling human life must have. To 'produce as a human being,' Marx says is 'immediately in the expression of my life to have created your expression of your life, and therefore to have immediately *confirmed* and *actualized* in my individual activity my true essence, my *human*, my communal essence (*Gemeinwesen*)'.[12] Since my self-actualization is the actualization of my human essence, and since my human essence is a species essence or a community (*Gemeinwesen*), I cannot truly actualize myself or my individuality without also actualizing the self or individuality of others. My own good, the worth of myself and the meaningfulness of my life, thus requires (because it partly consists in) my achievement of the same good for others.

But my actualization of their good must also be 'immediate'. This means, I think, that it must be something done consciously and for its own sake and not unintentionally or as a mere means to some other end. Part of the alienation of capitalist society for Marx consists in the fact (so celebrated by Adam Smith) that in this society people serve the interests of others while consciously pursuing only their own.[13] For Adam Smith, as commodity producers we serve others' interests because we must do so as a means to obtaining our own good; for Marx, we can achieve our own good only by pursuing (among other things) the good of others for its own (or their own) sake. Commodity production, however, according to Marx, frustrates the human good by imposing an indirect, egoistic form on our pursuit of the good of others:

> I have produced for myself and not for you, just as you have produced for yourself and not for me. . . . That is, our production is not production by the human for the human, i.e. not *social* production. Thus neither of us as human has a relation of enjoyment to the product of the other. We are not present as human beings for our reciprocal production.[14]

But the social or communal nature of the human being is only part

of what Marx means when he insists that my self-actualization is the actualization of my human essence. He means also that a genuinely human mode of life is one which manifests or exemplifies certain things, and that what these things are is determined by my essence. Marx's language at this point is the Aristotelian language of potency and act. A 'human' mode of life is one which involves the 'development' (*Entwicklung*), the 'exercise' (*Betätigung*), and thereby the 'actualization' (*Verwirklichung*) of the 'human essential powers' (*menschliche Wesenskräfte*). According to *The German Ideology*, communists maintain that 'the calling, vocation and task of human beings is to develop themselves and all their capacities in a manifold way.'[15]

Not only Marx's language, but also this thought is at this point profoundly Aristotelian. For both philosophers a fulfilling human life consists in the development and exercise of our essentially human capacities in a life of activity suited to our nature. Of course, as Aristotle himself pointed out, to conceive of the human good as 'activity in accordance with excellence' is only to provide a sketch or outline of the good, which needs to be filled in if it is to be informative.[16] As we shall see in the next chapter, however, Marx quite consciously abstains from filling in his notion of self-actualization beyond a very minimal point, and even insists that he is unable to say much more than he does about the sort of life and the sort of society in which the human essence can be actualized. Pages 26–43 below will investigate what Marx does say about the essential capacities of human beings, and will attempt to identify what is distinctively Marxian in his conception of their content.

We are now in a position to replace our provisional conception of alienation as a lack of a sense of meaning and self-worth with a more fundamental and characteristically Marxian one. Alienation in our provisional sense might conceivably have any of a wide variety of causes, and be symptomatic of any of a number of ills. But as Marx sees it, the systematic cause of the fact that people in bourgeois society cannot sustain a sense of meaning or self-worth (or can do so only with the aid of illusions) is that they find themselves in conditions where their need for self-actualization is frustrated, where they are unable to develop and exercise their essential human capacities. The alienation Marx finds in capitalist society, then, is the condition of being unable to actualize oneself, unable to develop and exercise the powers belonging to one's human essence. More basic than consciousness of alienation (the lack of a *sense* of meaning and self-worth)

is real alienation: the failure (or inability) to actualize one's human essential powers. This means that for Marx whether I lead a fulfilling and meaningful life or a wretched and alienated one is not ultimately a matter of whether my conscious desires are satisfied, or of how I think about myself or my life. Rather, it is a matter of whether my life in fact actualizes the potentialities which are objectively present in my human essence, whether I fulfill my 'natural vocation' as the human being I am. If we take the liberty of identifying a meaningful and self-actualized life for Marx (as for Aristotle) with *happiness*, then we must say that Marx holds what Richard Kraut has called an 'objective' conception of human happiness.[17] (This is of course not to deny that for Marx people do naturally tend to desire consciously what objectively fulfills their essence.)

Marx's diagnosis of capitalist alienation identifies human fulfillment with self-actualization, and identifying an alienated, unfulfilled life with one in which the need to develop and exercise our essential powers is frustrated. Marx's diagnosis of alienation is thus vulnerable to any objections which might successfully challenge these identifications. For this reason, it may be worthwhile to consider briefly some objections of this sort which have been put forward by John Plamenatz in his thoughtful book, *Karl Marx's Philosophy of Man*. Plamenatz ascribes to Marx an ideal of self-realization similar to that held by John Stuart Mill: 'the striving to excel, the setting up for oneself of aims difficult to achieve because they make large demands on the self, the proving of one's worth to oneself and others by conspicuous achievement'.[18] Plamenatz is wary of Marx's apparent presumption that a good and satisfying life consists in the unhindered pursuit of self-realization so conceived:

> We must not take it for granted that the more there is of this self-realization the more likely it is that people will find ways of life that satisfy them. Striving for excellence and happiness, though they are not incompatible, do not run easily in harness together. If happiness is what we want, there are perhaps better ways of getting it than by living strenuously and making large demands of ourselves.[19]

> It can happen that the type of society in which this ideal comes to be widely accepted frustrates people in their pursuit of it. Social conditions may encourage them to believe that they ought to aim high and yet make if difficult for them to

> form firm and realistic aims, and so produce in them the sense that they are aimless and lost. . . . Or though able to form clear and firm ambitions, they may lack the means, material and cultural, to pursue them with much hope of success.[20]

These two passages contain different ideas. The first passage says that self-realization cannot be identified with happiness because a life of striving for excellence may be a dissatisfied life, even when the striving meets with considerable success. The second says that pursuing the ideal of self-realization may lead to aimlessness or frustration because social conditions may make it difficult for people to define and realize concrete aims which accord with this ideal. The second passage seems to agree with Marx that people may be alienated because social conditions prevent them from realizing themselves. But Plamenatz's point seems to be that people's lostness and hopelessness may sometimes be due partly to the very fact that they espouse the goal of self-realization. And this he takes to be a defect in the goal itself.

To take the second criticism first: there is an important difference between holding that human fulfillment *consists* in self-realization and recommending to people that they pursue 'self-realization' as a goal. I think there is good evidence that Marx holds the former view, but little or no evidence that he holds the latter. It is a truism among moralists that we seldom achieve happiness when we make it our goal. Likewise, it may be that we seldom succeed in actualizing ourselves when we pursue the 'ideal of self-actualization', but rather achieve self-actualization by developing and exercising our powers in the course of pursuing other meaningful aims. Marx believes that capitalist social conditions inhibit the formation of such aims and hinder their pursuit. Hence, Plamenatz's perceptive observation is no criticism of Marx. It fits very well with his diagnosis of capitalist alienation that in capitalist society the 'ideal of self-actualization' should be widely accepted but that people should have no clear idea how self-actualization is to be achieved.

The first of the two passages from Plamenatz does appear directly to challenge the claim that happiness or fulfillment consists in self-actualization, since it holds that people may achieve a good measure of self-actualization and still be dissatisfied with themselves and their lives. But Plamenatz's criticism depends on the assumption that self-actualization for Marx involves a 'striving for excellence' which makes

great demands on the self and pins one's sense of self-worth to high (perhaps unrealistic) hopes for individual achievement. This assumption is without basis in Marx's texts. Of course, a highly individualistic and competitive society may encourage excessive aspirations of this sort in its members, and thus contribute to their alienation. But once again, this confirms Marx's diagnosis and does not contradict it.

Plamenatz's objection is faulty at a deeper level. For Marx, alienation consists in a kind of frustration or self-dissatisfaction. But it does not follow that every form of self-dissatisfaction is alienation. Probably some degree of discontent and dissatisfaction with oneself is part of any serious striving after worthwhile goals. But we may be dissatisfied with ourselves and our achievements, in the sense of having a strong desire to improve upon them, without failing to recognize their worth or to take satisfaction in it. I fear that Plamenatz has confused (as J.S. Mill would say) the notion of happiness (or human fulfillment) with the very different notion of mere contentment. Perhaps there can be no fulfillment or happiness without some discontent, and wretches who are contented simply because they have no desire to develop their essential human powers are the more and not the less wretched for their contentment. (This is the element of truth in Nietzsche's contemptuous portrayal of the 'last men' who boast that they have 'invented happiness' because they are 'no longer able to despise themselves'.)[21]

According to some of Marx's cruder critics (Plamenatz is not one of these) Marx depicts communist society as one in which all sources of conflict, tension and discontent have melted away. And these critics suggest (quite properly) that such a picture is not only fantastic but also unattractive. Marx does hold that communism will do away with alienation, with the systematic social causes of unfulfilled, wasted human lives. And he does think that change and development in post-capitalist society will occur through conscious, collective human decisions rather than through destructive class struggles. But it is a caricature both of Marx's conception of humanity and his vision of communist society to suppose that he either predicts or desires a static society in which all sources of human discontent have been done away with.

4 Human essential powers

According to Marx, men and women are natural beings, part of the system of nature. Because of this, a human being is also what Marx

calls an 'objective being'. This means, to begin with, that a human being is 'a conditioned and limited being like animals and plants', that men and women are confronted by real, corporeal objects outside and alongside them, and their very survival depends on their relation to these objects. But it is not only the natural conditions of subsistence which make human beings 'objective beings'. By describing human beings in this way, Marx means also to be saying something about the sort of attitude it is healthy and proper for people to take toward their lives, and about the relative importance for human life of the various powers men and women have and the corresponding activities in which they engage. Because a human being is for Marx wholly a natural being, a healthy human life is not one which turns 'inward' after the manner of the religious ascetic or the philosophical contemplative; it is rather one which adopts an outward, worldly orientation, and affirms both material nature and the relation of men and women to the natural world of which they are a part. The human essential powers, therefore, are chiefly the human being's 'objective essential powers', which 'exist in him as tendencies and faculties, as drives (*Triebe*)'. 'The objects of man's drives', says Marx, 'exist outside him, as objects independent of him. But these objects are objects of his need, objects which are indispensable and essential to the exercise and confirmation of his essential powers.'[22] The exercise of the human essential powers is thus at the same time their 'objectification', the establishment of an essential relation between human beings and the external objects of their need.

Perhaps we are disposed to think of this relation of men and women to the objects of their drives or needs chiefly as consumption: as the using up of natural objects, or at least the expenditure of their useful properties, in order to stay alive and to satisfy people's various wants. Marx, however, does not think of it only in this way, but also, and more inclusively, as the relation of laborers to the objects they create, the process of production. In the *Grundrisse*, he argues that production and consumption are two essential aspects or 'moments' of a single process or act.

To begin with, Marx claims (in good dialectical fashion) that each of these two categories is 'immediately its opposite', which in this instance seems to mean that each can, from a certain point of view, be regarded as a special case of the other. Production is a case of consumption because the process of production always uses up raw materials and tools as well as the powers, energies and lifetime of the laborer. Consumption is a case of production because through it 'the

human being produces his own body', and by satisfying his various wants reproduces his own powers as a laborer.

Consumption and production are also 'identical' in that they 'mediate' or reciprocally condition and determine each other. People produce in order to consume, and consume in order that they may be able to produce. The manner and content of their production and consumption, moreover, mutually influence each other. What people produce depends on their needs, and the sort of consumables that satisfy them. But needs are also directly created by production, both because people's needs are just the requirements for sustaining the mode of productive life in which they engage, and because human needs and wants themselves are influenced by what is there for them to consume. Consumption, as Marx puts it, 'is itself mediated as a drive by its object'.[23]

Production and consumption, therefore, are 'moments of one process'. The concept of consumption, however, distinguishes those aspects of it which involve the satisfaction of needs, adjoined to the human life process, the fulfillment of the indispensable requirements for it to continue and to be the sort of life process it is. Production, however, indicates not just the external means by which consumption is made possible, but even more the activities which constitute the human life process itself, the actual exercise of the human essential powers. Production, as *The German Ideology* says, involves 'a determinate activity of individuals, a determinate way of expressing their life, a determinate *mode* of life for them. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are coincides with *what* they produce and *how* they produce.' Consequently, Marx insists that production includes consumption, is the 'encompassing moment' of the whole human life process.[24]

Human beings are essentially productive beings, then, because they are essentially objective beings and because productive activity is the encompassing moment of their essential objectivity. But this argument may very well leave us unpersuaded that production is the most essential human function. For surely there are other 'objective' powers besides productive ones. Our powers (for example) of rational deliberation, or scientific inquiry, or aesthetic expression and enjoyment all possess an 'objective orientation' and all seem to be at least as distinctively human as our powers of production are. Why not identify the human function with their exercise rather than with production, or at least include them along with production in our conception of the essential human powers? As we shall see presently, however,

Marx's notion of production is not intended to exclude these other powers. On the contrary, rational self-determination is an essential ingredient of the 'free human production' he looks toward in post-capitalist society; and science and art seem to serve as his chief models for the forms which production will take in the post-capitalist 'realm of freedom', where 'labor has become not merely a means of life but life's first need', and where men and women for the first time 'truly produce' because they 'produce in freedom from physical need'.[25]

But then why does Marx insist on calling fulfilling human activity by the name 'production' and treating these various human functions all as forms of 'labor'? At certain points, the suggestion seems to be that labor is 'fundamental' to all human activity because people could not survive without engaging in it.[26] But this provides no very good reason for regarding labor as the 'encompassing moment' of human activity (for there are other human functions, such as eating and sleeping, which are also 'fundamental' in the sense that they are required for human survival). And it provides no reason at all for applying the terms 'labor' or 'production' to 'true production' which goes on precisely in 'freedom from physical need'.

Marx gives no real argument for identifying labor or production as the most basic or essential human function. But I think he may have been persuaded of this identification by considerations drawn from his materialist conception of history. According to this conception, the basic determinant of social life and historical development is the relentless tendency of human beings to develop and exercise their capacities to dominate nature and creatively shape it to satisfy human wants and express human aspirations. Marx proposes to render intelligible the structure of human societies, the nature of their institutions, the forms of their art and culture, ideas and values, by tracing all these things back to the character of the productive powers human beings possess and the basic historical tendency of these powers to expand. Marx takes production to be the fundamental and encompassing human function because human beings, in practice, acknowledge it to be of fundamental importance to the character of their lives. And he believes the development and exercise of productive powers is man's most basic aspiration because it shows itself in human history to be such. His justification for this belief consists in whatever empirical evidence there is that the materialist conception of history is a correct conception.

But even supposing that Marx's theory of history is correct, is this any reason for him to hold that production is man's basic function in

the sense that what makes human life fulfilling and worthwhile is the development and exercise of human productive powers? The fact (if it is a fact) that people do something does not entail that they should do it, or that it is good for them to do it. If Marx reasons as I have suggested, does this not amount to Mill's infamous fallacy of equating the desirable with the desired? And does it not in addition commit the cruder fallacy of equating what people desire with whatever they in fact do?

Yet I do not think it is so obvious that Marx reasons badly if he reasons as I have described. For then, with Mill, he does not equate the desirable with the desired, but rather holds that the best evidence we can produce that something is desirable is that people do naturally and normally tend to desire it. And, with Aristotle, he holds that the desires which it is correct to ascribe to an agent are not only (or necessarily) those which the agent may consciously avow, but those which best make its behavior intelligible.[27] But human history (on Marx's theory) is best made intelligible in terms of the fundamental human aspiration to develop and exercise the productive powers of society. Consequently, we have good evidence for regarding this as the fundamental or chief human good.

Of course, there is still room for doubting whether the materialist conception of history by itself provides ample justification for this conclusion. Marx's theory of history might show that the development and exercise of productive powers is *one* thing people pursue, but it does not show that this is their only important goal, nor does it imply anything definite about the priorities among their different goals. (For instance, it does not preclude the possibility that people have other goals which are always preferred to productive development whenever they conflict with it, but which conflict with this goal so infrequently that they never endanger a materialist account of history.) Or again, it can be objected that the argument moves too quickly from supposed facts about collective human behavior on the broad canvas of history to conclusions about the goals and welfare of individuals. It is one thing to discover a certain historical tendency or (if such a notion can be tolerated) a collective human aspiration, and quite another thing to ascribe this aspiration to individuals and to say that their good consists in fulfilling it. If the argument I have suggested is to work, these difficulties (and perhaps more besides) will have to be met. But my defense of Marx's identification of production as the essential human function was somewhat speculative to begin with, and there is no space here to develop it further.

3

HUMAN PRODUCTION

1 Conscious life activity

So far we have seen that Marx holds production to be both the most fundamental and the most encompassing of human activities. But we have not yet seen that there is anything distinctively human about it. Other living things also have powers whose exercise is characteristic of their species, and enables them to survive by relating them to the objects they need within their natural environment. Some animals even 'produce' in the sense that they generate useful substances from their bodies, or gather or form objects in their environment so as to make these objects more serviceable to themselves: they store up food, secrete honey, spin webs, dig burrows, build nests, dams or hives. The productive powers of men and women may be different from those of other living things, more varied and more extensive; but it is not yet clear that they are powers so wholly different that humans can be called 'laboring' or 'productive' beings in a sense that other things cannot.

Marx attempts to identify the distinctive feature of human labor or production in *Capital*:

> A spider conducts operations which resemble those of a weaver, and a bee through the construction of its wax cells puts many a human architect to shame. But what above all distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that he has already built the cell in his head before he builds it in wax. At the end of the labor process a result comes about which was already present ideally in the representation of the laborer at its beginning. He not only works a change in form on something natural; he at the same time actualizes in something natural his own purpose, and he knows this purpose as

> determining the kind and mode of his action, and as something to which he must subject his will.[1]

Marx's view is that human labor or production is to be distinguished from the life activities of other animals because it involves a certain kind of consciousness and purposiveness which animal behavior does not. In the remarks just quoted, however, this view is not well expressed. It may be true that the labor of weavers and architects involves conscious desires, plans and purposes in a way that the activities of spiders and bees do not. But the human being is not the only animal who acts from conscious purposes and intentions. Surely Engels is correct when he says that the behavior of many non-human animals exhibits not only conscious purposiveness, but even adherence to a conscious plan.[2]

Marx expresses himself better in the Paris writings. There he makes the distinctive feature of human activity not the human being's consciousness of his purpose, but his consciousness of his activity itself. 'The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from this activity.' A human being's activity, on the other hand, 'is not a determination with which he immediately fuses'. Unlike the animal, 'the human being makes his life activity an object of his will and consciousness.' Thus for Marx 'conscious life activity is the human species character'; it is 'what distinguishes humans from animal life activity'.[3]

Obviously 'conscious life activity' is very closely-connected with the human attributes of self-consciousness and species consciousness which we examined earlier. Just as each man and woman has in practice some sort of individual and species self-conception, so people also have some conception of their own activity or practice itself. They see themselves, as no animal can, in relation to their mode of life, and they are capable of judging this mode of life as a human or inhuman one, as a life which suits them or not. In a way, therefore, 'consciousness' is after all what distinguishes human beings from other animals on the Marxian theory. The important thing to Marx, however, is that this consciousness is always a feature of *practice*, or an ingredient in it. 'Consciousness', as *The German Ideology* puts it, 'can never be anything other than conscious being, and the being of human beings is their actual life process.'[4] This is for Marx an important qualification, as we will see in Chapter 8, for it amounts to a rejection of what Marx calls 'ideology' or 'idealism', the view that the course of human history is determined by people's ideas. For Marx, on the contrary,

socially prevalent ideas are always prevalent because of the function they fulfill relative to social practice.

Another distinctive feature of human labor or production according to Marx and Engels is the use of tools or 'means of labor', 'a thing or complex of things which the laborer sneaks in between himself and the object of labor, and which serves him as the conductor of his activity to his object'.[5] In part, the use of tools is a distinctive feature of human activity simply because human beings have proven themselves cleverer than other animals at exploiting their environment, and have, unlike any other animal, come to make use of things in varied and historically changing ways. For Marx, in fact, the historical development of the means of labor are in a sense the clue to human history as a whole. For in his view 'the history of industry is the open book of the human essential powers.' The means of labor 'are not only the measure of the development of the human powers of labor, but also the indicator of the social relations within which labor goes on'.[6]

More precisely, however, what characterizes the human labor process for Marx is not just the use of tools but also their creation or fabrication, and for this reason he endorses Benjamin Franklin's definition of the human being as 'a tool-making animal'.[7] There is a connection between the deliberate or conscious creation and use of tools and the fact that human labor alone is a conscious life activity. Only human beings, it seems, can properly have the concept of a tool, and thus make or use tools with an explicit consciousness of so doing, because only people have a concept of their own laboring activity, through which they can distinguish it from other natural processes, and consciously set it over against them. The tool, according to Engels, implies specifically human activity because it implies a reciprocity or 'reaction' (*Rückwirkung*) of the human being on nature.[8] It is only because people have a concept of their own activity as distinct from other natural processes that they can come to regard objects outside their bodies as complicit in their labor, standing on the human rather than the natural side of the interaction between man and nature. Through the use of tools, says Marx, 'something natural itself becomes an organ of [the human being's] activity, which he adds on to the organs of his own body, adding to his natural stature in spite of the Bible.'[9]

The development or 'self-genesis' of the human being in history is for Marx fundamentally an expansion of the human being's productive powers. And it is laboring activity itself which in his view brings about this development. 'While [the human being] works on nature

and changes it, he simultaneously changes his own nature. He develops the potencies slumbering in it, and subjects the play of its powers to his own sway.'[10] Because human labor is the conscious exercise of man's power over nature, people can and do make a conscious effort to transmit, acquire and expand their powers. Not only do individual men and women develop their laboring skills by exercising or practicing them, but society as a whole, as the powers of labor develop, devotes an increasing share of its collective labor time to the development of technology, of new powers of humanity over nature.

These developments also bring about other changes in the human essence. By changing both the way in which people spend their productive lives and by accustoming them to new kinds of useful goods, the expansion of laboring capacities also expands and humanizes people's needs and wants. 'The first need satisfied,' say Marx and Engels, 'the action of satisfying it and the acquisition of the instrument of its satisfaction leads to new needs – and this generation of new needs is the first historical act.' The creation of new needs in people spurs them on to find new ways of satisfying their needs, to expand their productive capacities and even to change their social relations in order to facilitate the cooperative exercise of these new powers.[11]

2 Labor as self-affirmation

When Marx says that human beings make their life activity 'an object of volition', it is evident that here again 'object' means (in part) 'goal' or 'purpose'. When men and women labor or produce, they not only aim at the result to be achieved by their labor, but – unlike any other animal – they also regard their life-activity itself as worthwhile, at least whenever they understand it as harmonizing with their human essence. In Marx's words, the human being 'relates to his species powers as objects';[12] human beings do this in two senses: they treat their own exercise of these powers as an end in itself, in addition to the external ends achieved by it; and they consciously develop their productive or laboring capacities, regarding this expansion of themselves as something desirable over and above the new goods and conveniences it procures them.

I think this is what Marx has in mind when he speaks of people not only as 'actualizing', but also as 'affirming' themselves, their individuality or their species essence through labor or production. Because the

human essential powers can be developed, exercised and actualized consciously, and with a conscious awareness that this activity is meaningful and worthwhile, the actualization of these powers can also be an act of self-expression of self-assertion on the part of men and women. It is an act which has meaning for them, in fact, partly because through it they affirm both to themselves and to others their dignity as individuals and the worth of their lives and their humanity.[13]

Marx is very critical of Adam Smith's view that labor must always be a 'sacrifice' on the part of the worker, that equal amounts of labor time confer equal values on commodities because 'in his ordinary state of health, strength and spirits; in the ordinary degree of his skill and dexterity the laborer must always lay down the same portion of his ease, his liberty and his happiness.'[14] Marx readily admits that 'the measure of labor must appear to be given externally, by the purpose to be achieved and the obstacles to their achievement which labor must overcome.' But it does not follow from this that labor must be experienced as unpleasant and confining. For, Marx says, 'the individual "in his normal state of health, power, activity, skill and dexterity" also has a need for a normal portion of labor and the suspension of ease.'[15] The overcoming of obstacles itself, he insists, is not in itself a loss of liberty but rather a *Betätigung der Freiheit*, a manifestation or exercise of freedom.[16]

Marx is perfectly willing to concede, of course, that labor under dehumanizing conditions is experienced as Smith describes it. What Marx is not prepared to admit is that the essential life activity of human beings must necessarily be experienced by them as alienating and oppressive, that the time and energy a person spends working must be experienced as time wasted. It is one of the chief absurdities of alienated labor in Marx's view that wage laborers feel at home with themselves only when they are not working, that they work only when compelled to, that laboring activity 'is not the satisfaction of a need, but merely the means to satisfy needs external to it'. The depth of the workers' alienation, the meaninglessness of their lives, is above all attested by the fact that they spend most of their waking lives engaged in enervating drudgery, merely in order to satisfy the basic requirements for physical survival. Alienated labor, says Marx, 'degrades spontaneous, free activity to a means'; the worker's 'life itself appears only as a means to life', and contains nothing in it which makes sense of the exertion necessary to acquire these means. A life of such labor is therefore a life lost to the man or woman who leads

it, essentially a life (like that of Hegel's unhappy Christian) of 'self-sacrifice' or 'mortification'.[17]

Alienated life activity is for Marx a feature of any condition of servitude or class oppression. But Marx does not think that labor has been equally alienated in all past societies, and it is certainly not his view that the alienation of labor automatically decreases as productivity increases. On the contrary, he appears to regard alienation as something which has if anything tended to increase over most of human history, and which is especially characteristic of modern industrial capitalism.[18]

To understand this, we must keep in mind that human needs and wants vary with circumstances, and expand along with the productive capacities of society. Alienated activity is activity which fails to satisfy the need people have to exercise the human essential powers, to actualize and affirm themselves and their humanity. The degree to which people are alienated is a function of the extent to which their lives fall short of actualizing the human essence, of exercising their essential human powers. These powers, however, are not fixed but historically varying and on the whole expanding. Oppressed people will therefore become more and more alienated the greater the gap becomes between the essential powers belonging to the human species and the degree to which their own lives participate in the development and exercise of these powers. In productively undeveloped societies, alienation may not exist simply because the powers possessed by human beings are so rudimentary as not to permit it. When all members of society must work to full capacity just in order to insure the physical survival of the community, there will be no room for the division between oppressor and oppressed, and no way in which people can survive at all without in effect actualizing all the essential human powers which are available to them. The very poverty of such people can therefore give their lives that sense of contentment and fulfillment which Rousseau and others have favorably contrasted with the alienated lives of more 'civilized' human beings. Alienation reaches its peak when, as in modern capitalist society, an awesome expansion of the productive powers of society is accompanied by a life of poverty and the brutalizing toil of factory labor for the great mass of those who produce.

Alienation, in Marx's view, can be overcome only when the productive powers of society expand to such an extent that the labor time necessary to satisfy people's basic needs can be reduced to an amount small enough that their activities can be made more flexible, and the

less fulfilling kinds of labor can be more evenly distributed throughout society without condemning the great mass of workers to lives of dehumanizing toil. According to Marx, 'the human being truly produces only in freedom from physical need', so that people can engage in the most genuinely human and self-affirming kinds of labor only in the 'realm of freedom' which lies beyond, but is founded upon, the 'realm of necessity', the labor required to satisfy their basic needs. In this higher kind of labor, says Marx,

> the external purposes [of labor] are stripped of the appearance of mere natural necessity and come to be posited as purposes which the individual himself posits – and so as self-actualization, the objectification of the subject, hence as real freedom, whose action is just – labor.[19]

Marx plainly envisions a society where the life of each individual involves some degree of necessary labor, consisting of relatively simple and mechanical activities which make use of only rather low level capacities, but where each individual's portion of this kind of labor is small enough to leave quite a bit of time for other pursuits, and no individual is condemned to it to the complete exclusion of more fulfilling kinds of activity. Marx makes no real attempt to say just what this free activity will consist in, since he supposes that it will depend on the direction in which emancipated individuals will choose to develop their powers. (His own paradigms for it are drawn from science, art and scholarship.)

What Marx does insist on is that human self-realization is to be found in labor, in production, and by no means 'in mere fun, in amusement, the way Fourier, naïve as a *grisette*, conceives it. Really free working, e.g., composing, is at the very same time the most damned serious, intensive exertion.'[20] Marx's view at this point, it seems to me, is once again essentially the same as Aristotle's. Play or amusement, according to Aristotle, is a form of rest or recreation, which is rightly viewed not as an end in itself but a means to further activity. The good life, for both Marx and Aristotle, consists chiefly in the actualization of one's powers, and includes amusement only as a temporary relaxation needed to keep our powers in good condition.[21] The alienation of capitalist society, as Marx sees it, consists almost as much in its waste of human leisure time in the idle, degenerate and unproductive life of the coupon clipper, as it does in the enervated and degraded life of the overworked producers.

3 Objectification and appropriation

Human beings are, as we saw earlier, 'objective beings', beings which stand in an essential relation to natural objects. They need these objects both for their physical subsistence and in order to maintain a healthy human life style. The human essential powers, therefore, must be, or at least must prominently include, 'objective essential powers', whose exercise consists in or involves the 'positing' of these powers in the form of external objects. The actualization or exercise of the human essential powers thus involves their 'objectification', the creation of humanly useful objects which Marx describes as 'the objectified essential powers of the human being'. 'The product of labor', he says, 'is labor which has been fixed in an object, which has been made real or material (*sachlich*), it is the objectification of labor. The actualization of labor is its objectification.'[22]

Remarks like these are intriguing but largely metaphorical. They need some clarification and qualification if Marx's real doctrine is to be extracted from them. The central metaphor of labor power or activity as 'fixed', 'posited' or 'objectified' in its product is not an especially difficult one. Because human beings are conscious of their activity and value the exercise of their essential powers for its own sake, they are capable of looking upon the changes they work on nature as expressions of themselves. They view the objects they create as a sort of evidence or testimony to the self-actualization of their capacities and the meaningfulness of their lives. This, it seems to me, is what Marx has in mind when he says that the object of labor 'confirms' the worker's individuality or humanity. It is only through contemplating the finished product of my activity that I become truly conscious of the successful exercise of my powers, and thus consciously verify the fact of my own self-actualization. Thus it is only in the object or product of labor that the worker can 'confirm' the meaningfulness of a life which is 'affirmed' in activity itself. Human products, unlike those of animals, are not only means and adjuncts to the life process, but things which, in both their creation and their use, involve the conscious self-expression of human beings, and serve as essential vehicles of their human self-consciousness. Our products, in Marx's words, are 'so many mirrors from which our essence shines forth'.[23]

It is all these ideas which lie behind the metaphor of 'objectified' human power or activity. In their products, laborers consciously confront external things in which the exercise of their essential human powers have become visible and evident. These things confirm and

express both the laborers and their human essence. Hence it is as if the laborer's capacities, activities and individuality themselves had been 'objectified', turned into an object, made material or actual, given a shape in which their full worth can at last be verified and appreciated.

More problematic than the metaphor itself is Marx's apparent belief that it can be applied universally to all human labor. For it is plain that not all labor can be described as 'objectification' in the sense that it directly creates or forms material objects. No doubt this is true of the labor which builds houses, raises foodstuffs, weaves clothing, or manufactures goods of other kinds. But the labor of the transporter, for instance, does not in any but a rather far-fetched sense shape or create the objects with which it deals, and the labor of the physician or the teacher consists rather in services rendered to people than in any effect it has on objects in man's natural environment.

Marx, however, is well aware of all this. He says explicitly that the objectification of labor is not to be conceived of only in the form of labor which 'fixes itself in a tangible (*handgreiflich*) object'.[24] All labor does, however, display or embody itself in an 'object' if that term is understood broadly as any result or state of affairs in the external world which labor has brought about. Worthwhile labor for Marx is always 'objective' in that it involves an 'outward' orientation toward external goals or objects, and especially toward our fellow human beings whose needs and wants labor can satisfy. There is, moreover, a good reason why Marx emphasizes labor which is 'objective' in the narrower sense that it forms or shapes objects in the natural world. For he is especially impressed by the way in which social labor as a whole, especially in modern industrial society, succeeds in transforming or reshaping the human being's whole environment, so that 'he sees (*anschaut*) himself in a world he has created.' Any labor which makes a genuine contribution to society does, directly or indirectly, contribute to this 'world creating' function of social labor, and does in that sense participate in the 'objectification of the human being's species life'.[25]

Marx says that the objects in which men and women objectify themselves become *their* objects, and that human 'behavior or relation (*Verhalten*) to an object is the appropriation of it', the making of it into human 'property'.[26] Terms like 'property' and 'appropriation' naturally make us think of social systems apportioning the possession, control and use of things to individuals and groups, and especially of the moral and legal rights which people may have over things. Some philosophers have held that 'property' and 'appropriation' in

the most basic sense refer to some direct, natural relationship between human agents and the things which are the objects of their will or activity. Locke, for instance, says in a famous passage that the human being makes something his 'property' whenever he 'removes [it] out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in', and 'mixes his labor with it'. Hegel says that I take possession of a thing or make it my property by 'putting my will into it'. Kant uses very similar language in the *Rechtslehre*.[27] Probably it is most natural to take Marx's statements about 'objectification' and 'appropriation' as expressing some kind of agreement with these philosophers. But to identify the exact points of agreement is no easy task.

Because he treats labor or production as the essential life-activity of human beings, Marx usually regards 'objectification', and hence 'appropriation', as closely bound up with labor. In the Paris manuscripts, however, he sometimes treats the scope of both notions as much broader:

> The human being appropriates his all-sided essence in an all-sided way, as a total human being. Every one of his human relations to the world, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, observing, sensing, willing, acting, loving, in short, all the organs of his individuality . . . are, in their objective relation (*Verhalten*), or in their *relation to the object*, the appropriation of it. The appropriation of *human* actuality, its relation to the object is the *exercise of human actuality*, human activity and passivity or suffering (*Leiden*), for suffering, humanly grasped, is a self-enjoyment of man.[28]

In this passage, Marx seems to be saying that objectification and appropriation take place not only (or even chiefly) in labor or production, but in any relation toward it which is sufficiently 'human' to count as an 'exercise of human actuality' or a 'self-enjoyment of humanity'. The implication of the passage is that in present society we do not genuinely objectify ourselves or appropriate objects because alienation has cut us off from a 'human' form of seeing, hearing, smelling, and so forth. This implication is confirmed by the critique of private property which immediately follows:

> Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or is immediately possessed, eaten, drunk, worn on our

> body, dwelt in, etc., in short, used. . . . Thus in place of all physical and spiritual senses there steps the simple alienation of all these senses, the sense of *having*. . . . The abolition of private property is therefore the complete *emancipation* of all human senses and properties.[29]

Marx's idea here seems to be that the institution of private property somehow renders me (psychologically?) incapable of any self-actualizing or self-enjoying relation to objects except when I directly possess or use these objects, when I experience them (through the alienated 'sense of having') as 'my private property'. Perhaps this idea is related to Marx's belief that all the 'organs of our individuality' are (directly or indirectly) social, so that these organs are stunted and warped when people adopt a form of appropriation according to which one individual's appropriation of an object excludes others from appropriating it. But the idea is difficult to accept. Does Marx really think that the institution of private property renders me incapable of enjoying the sight of a sunset because the sun is not my private property, or the sound of an orchestra because its members are not my employees? Of course, Marx holds that capitalism is responsible for depriving most people of the opportunity for such enjoyments, but his claim in the above passages seems to amount to a good deal more than this. The additional idea is what it is hard to accept. What Marx says also apparently implies that a capitalist's factories are not truly his 'property', because (as a victim of private property) he sustains no 'human' relation to them, while a person who smells a flower or hears the first cuckoo in spring in a truly 'human' way would genuinely 'appropriate' them. Surely this notion of 'property' is too poetic to be useful to social theory.

Fortunately, Marx's use of 'property' and related terms in later writings is not so broad, and is more closely related to the social and economic institutions with which we usually associate it. But even there, Marx treats 'appropriation' as a basic human act, closely associated with labor, and more fundamental in character than any of the social institutions within which productive labor takes place. 'All production', he tells us in the *Grundrisse*, 'is appropriation of nature on the part of the individual within and mediated by a determinate form of society.'[30] But not only does appropriation occur through labor, it is even presupposed by labor. Appropriation through labor is possible only because human society already stands in a natural relation of 'ownership' to the earth and other conditions of labor as

the 'inorganic body' of the human being. 'Property therefore originally means nothing but the relation of man to the natural conditions of production as belonging to him.'[31] Thus the fact that in slavery and serfdom some people are the property of others means for Marx that 'one part of society is treated by another as a mere inorganic and natural condition of its own reproduction.'[32] And the *Grundrisse* represents part of the 'alienation' of wage-labor as consisting in the fact that this form of labor is founded on a 'dissolution' of the laborers' natural relation to the earth and to the instruments of production as their own property, on the fact that the natural conditions of labor are 'the property of another' or 'alien property' (*fremdes Eigentum*).[33] Quite evidently, the failure of wage-laborers to 'appropriate' both the conditions and products of their labor is seen by Marx as an important factor in their alienation. He even treats 'appropriation' and 'alienation' as direct opposites.[34]

In wage labor, however, these opposites seem to be united. Since all labor involves the appropriation by the laborer of the conditions and products of labor, it follows that wage labor must also appropriate them. Yet wage laborers are alienated from, that is, they do not own, the materials, instruments or products of their labor. How is this possible? I think Marx's view is that wage labor does appropriate its conditions and products, but owing to its social form it appropriates them for the non-laborer (the capitalist) and not for the laborers themselves. Wage laborers do objectify their labor, they shape nature to human purposes and bring it under the dominion of human society. But it is the capitalists and not the laborers who have the effective control, the use and disposal, the moral and legal title to what wage labor appropriates. And this is due to the social fact that the laborer's activity is something the capitalist has bought for a wage, which therefore is 'alienated' from the laborers and no longer belongs to them. As Marx puts it in *Capital*: 'Since before [the laborer's] entrance into the process his own labor is alienated from him, appropriated by the capitalist and incorporated in capital, this labor objectifies itself during the process in an alien product.'[35] Owing to its social form, wage labor objectifies itself in a way which does not actualize and confirm the laborer's humanity but sacrifices and alienates it. By contrast, in meaningful and fulfilling (truly 'human') labor, the laborer would have, or at least participate in, the effective control, use or disposal of the activity, conditions and products of labor. 'Labor would thus be true, active property.'[36]

If we keep in mind the resemblance between Marx's idea of

appropriation and the philosophical theories of property in Locke, Kant and Hegel, it is tempting to interpret Marx's view here in terms of the property rights of laborers and the violation of these rights by capital. For these three bourgeois philosophers, labor or the volitional act of appropriation is conceived of fundamentally as an act which makes an object into the agent's private property, which creates a moral right on the agent's part to use or dispose of the object. It is tempting to read Marx in a similar way: laborers, through their natural relation to the conditions and products of their labor, acquire a right to these products. Capital, by appropriating the product for itself, violates this right and does the workers an injustice.

Tempting as this interpretation may be, it is one which Marx will not permit us. To begin with, Marx denies that the basic human act of appropriation implies (as the bourgeois philosophers assume) the institution of private property, or indeed any specific social form of property:

> All production is appropriation of nature on the side of the individual, within and mediated by a determinate form of society. In this sense it is a tautology to say that property (appropriation) is a condition of production. But it is ridiculous to leap from this to a determinate form of property, e.g., private property.[37]

All labor appropriates, but the extent to which it appropriates for the laborer as opposed to others depends on the social forms, the economic relations through which the appropriation is mediated. Further, Marx holds that 'juridical relations' (*Rechtsverhältnisse*), matters involving rights or justice, all 'arise out of economic relations', and constitute no sort of Archimedean point outside, or foundation beneath these relations on the basis of which they might be criticized. Speaking of the exchange process, Marx says: 'The juridical relation of individuals as owners of private property whether developed into the form of law or not, is a relation of wills which mirrors the economic relation. The content of this relation of rights or wills is given through the economic relation.'[38]

It follows from these considerations that although capitalist exploitation alienates, dehumanizes and degrades wage laborers, it does not violate any of their rights, and there is nothing about it which is wrongful or unjust. In Chapter 9, we will examine Marx's reasons for holding this surprising view.