

out production as human beings” suggest an idealized conception of human nature. Marx employs the term “species-being” (*Gattungswesen*) to describe this essence. According to him, the defining characteristic of human species-being is the conscious ability to produce and transform material conditions, including the socio-economic structures that govern existence. Capitalism, however, disrupts this capacity by severing individuals from the products of their labor, from their social fabric, and from their intrinsic nature as species-beings. This disconnection engenders a pervasive sense of alienation and dissatisfaction in both life and work.

By acting on the external world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway. We are, therefore, confronted with a double result: (1) the production of material objects, which satisfy our needs, and (2) the development of human powers in the process of producing. Without production, neither the object of labor nor its subject [the worker] would exist. Labor is the primal condition for the humanization of nature, the condition for the existence of [human beings] as producers of their own material life (Karl Marx 1844).

Discussions about human nature and essence are inherently fraught with challenges. They often serve as crude templates for what real human beings should ideally be, invariably excluding certain groups in the process. Every articulation of what it means to be human implicitly names those who do not qualify, thereby marginalizing them. This limitation is not unique to Marx but is a general vulnerability in such discourses.

Nonetheless, the concept of essence serves a pragmatic function when analyzing trends and their probable outcomes. It allows for the categorization of trends as either revealing a “true essence” or leading us away from it, functioning as a normative rather than ontological concept.

Marx’s errors are all traced down to emphasis on productive labor as central to human essence. It paints a picture of humanity eternally engaged in ceaseless production, forever bound by the constraints of scarcity. Marx overlooks the evident reality that human production is mediated by tools and, subsequently, machines. The human experience varies significantly between one who manually digs a ditch and another who operates heavy machinery. The loss of certain skills is as integral to human existence as their acquisition. In this light, alienation from labor can be liberatory in the long term, even if it feels oppressive in the short term to those navigating a transitional phase. We may shed layers of false humanity tied to productive labor, only to uncover an indelible core that defines us.

Marx’s mistake in equating human essence with productive labor is not an isolated instance. Humanity has long been captivated by its own transformative abilities, primarily

because these skills were essential for survival. While this illusion has evolutionary utility, it casts our species’ progression in a less favorable light. This skewed perspective, rooted in the notion of labor, distorts our understanding of human advancement. Let us examine one aspect of progress.

3 From *homo habilis* to *homo liberatus*

The trajectory of human evolution is marked by a paradoxical and yet profound relationship with technology. AI and other advancements are poised to “end us” only in the sense that they will transform us into a different, perhaps happier, species. These technologies promise to dismantle our obsessive preoccupation with productive labor, liberating us from an outdated conception of human essence and ushering in a new one. The increasing sophistication of our tools will not only render *Homo habilis* obsolete but also facilitate the emergence of *Homo liberatus*.

In this transformation, robotics plays a crucial role, particularly in the automation of manual labor. Just as the washerwoman in Marx’s example could be liberated from the drudgery of her work by the introduction of washing machines, advanced robotics could free countless individuals from repetitive and physically demanding tasks. This liberation extends beyond the factory floor, with the potential to revolutionize agriculture, construction, transportation, and various other sectors, allowing humans to focus on more creative and intellectually stimulating pursuits.

This transformation is fraught with a paradox: the perceived erosion of abilities. As we increasingly offload mundane tasks to automation and AI, there is a growing sentiment that we are relinquishing essential skills that once defined our human essence. The ability to physically interact with and manipulate our environment, a defining characteristic of *Homo habilis*, appears to be waning. Yet, interpreting this shift as a loss or alienation from our essence is a limited viewpoint. Instead, this should be seen as an unburdening, a liberation from the constraints of manual labor that allows us to channel our energies into more intellectually stimulating, creative pursuits. This repurposing of abilities is what truly characterizes *Homo liberatus*.

Consider the act of writing, traditionally viewed as a quintessentially human skill involving the creation of intentional, structured discourse with complex conventions. This skill is now bifurcating into what is suitably called “the mechanics” of writing and the higher-order skill of original, discerning thought. The former is increasingly delegable to machines, while the latter remains inherently human.

Stephen Wolfram, a renowned computer scientist and mathematician, expressed perhaps one of the most profound observations about the large language model technology: