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Sense of the Social Man: Rousseau and
Marx on Alienation

By

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Introduction:

The terms *Entfremdung* and *Entäußerung* themselves evoke images, suggesting the division of things, which inherently fit together naturally, or the creation of a state of conflict among things that should naturally be in harmony.¹ *Entfremdung* (Alienation) is central to Karl Marx's critique of capitalist society, arguing that under capitalism, workers become alienated from the products they produce, their own essence, and from each other. Rousseau, writing in the 18th century, offered a radical critique of social inequality and pointed out that man, in his natural state, was free. Still, society's evolution had corrupted this natural freedom and equality. His solution was collectivity, surrendering some freedom to a general will for the common good, providing a foundation for a just society. Rousseau's idea of freedom profoundly influenced subsequent political philosophy, providing a framework for understanding the balance between individual liberty and social obligation. Rousseau and Marx's political theories evoke greater feelings and have had more of an effect on social revolutions than the theories of any other modern thinkers. Rousseau and Marx both contributed to the notion of alienation it is to what ways their concepts of freedom and alienation converge or diverge by delving into the historical and ideological transformation that marks the transition from Enlightenment critique of society to revolutionary socialism, the philosophical underpinnings of their conceptualization of the individual and society that I will discuss.

The observation that the social theories of Rousseau and Marx correspond closely is visible in Rousseau's conception of property in the *Discourse on Inequality* and Marx's *Economic and*

¹ Rahel Jaeggi and Frederick Neuhouser, eds., *Alienation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

Philosophical Manuscripts. Marx presented new forms of interpretation of inequality and alienation. His critique of capitalism, whereby workers become estranged from their labour, reflects engagement with Rousseau's ideas on natural human freedom and the corrupting influence of society. However, Marx shifts the focus from political and moral inequality to economic and material conditions, arguing for a communist society where labour fulfills human potential rather than capitalist profit.

A central theme from Marx concerns the relation between the alienated agents and their material and social circumstances. When people experience alienation, the issue is how they manifest the internal inclinations associated with them. Marx pushes for direct interaction in individuals' everyday lives, necessitating changes in material and social conditions to enhance the possibility of fulfilment. Ideals often manifest in a mediated form since they are fundamental to people's motivations. Their impact diminishes when they cannot be expressed directly due to hostile conditions. Marx views the need to overcome alienation as a practical rather than a theoretical one- to alter societal and material circumstances contributing to the prevalence of alienation.²

In Marx's account of communist society, he anticipated that bonds would bring men together through equality and moral liberty. Both saw man alienated from human nature by force under modern social-economic systems through the exercise of legal and political authority.³ Society, for Marx, was not founded upon the law but the law upon society, which arose from the material

² Pablo Gilabert, "Alienation, Freedom, and Dignity," *Philosophical Topics* 48, no. 2 (2020): 51–80.

³ Robert Wokler and Christopher Brooke, "Rousseau and Marx," in *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Bryan Garsten (2012).

mode of production. Their accounts of the defective characteristics of class society, conceptions of man's self-estrangement, views of the dehumanizing effects of the division of labour, and perspectives on the suffering caused by social inequality correspond. For Rousseau, every step of advancement of civilization had, in reality, been a step towards the alienation of our fundamental liberty.⁴

The main difference between them is that Rousseau's principles were articulated in a political frame of reference, operating in a civic, political domain of a thought which connects to the general will, public good, and the idea of being a citizen, emphasizing such terms as sovereignty. Though Marx was just as concerned with liberty as Rousseau, he conceived the context of human emancipation in another way. In the passage of *Capital*, Marx believed that freedom can only begin when labour is no longer determined by external purposes, pushing certain enlightenment ideals beyond the merely political to the material and economic domain. Nathan Rotenstreich mentions in his discussion "Between Rousseau and Marx" that for Marx, man is both the producer of his condition and the subject of it. The circumstances are both products and shaping factors. Rousseau identified a dual nature of action and inaction within the realm of the state, while Marx translated this concept into the realm of economics and societal life.⁵ In other words, Rousseau saw this duality encapsulated in constitutional terms, while Marx viewed it through a material and sociological lens. Both share the common theme of the interplay between action and inaction. However, they differ in how they apply these concepts across various spheres and their interrelationships.

⁴ *Discourse sur l'inégalité*, in *OC*, vol. 3, p. 171 [DI 167]

⁵ Nathan Rotenstreich, "Between Rousseau and Marx," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, no. 4 (1949): 717–719.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx identifies four results of alienated labour: alienating the worker from the product of his labour, from his own activity, from species-being, and from other human beings.

“In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labour estranges the species from man... Estranged labour turn thus (3) Man's species being, both nature and his spiritual species property, into a being alien to him, into a means to his individual existence. It estranges man's own body from him, as it does external nature and his spiritual essence, his human being. (4) estrangement of man from man. If a man is confronted by himself, he is confronted by the other man.”⁶

Alienation is thus perceived as a disruption in the connections an individual holds or is supposed to hold with themselves and their surroundings. The impoverishment and meaninglessness of the world and its powerlessness in relation to the world signify Marx's conception of alienation. And that it is our activities and products, social institutions, and relations that we have produced that turned into an alien power. Even if the term itself is absent, Rousseau's work contains key ideas about theories of alienation in the sense of social-philosophical relations. Known for his profound impact on the Enlightenment, he presents ideas about the nature of society, an individual's role within it, and the concept of the 'general will.' The general will express the common interest, but the will of all expresses the sum of private interests. Rousseau's response to the social problem proposes preserving individual diversity while upholding shared societal norms required by communitarianism, a concept

⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

defended by liberalism and skeptics of mass society. Rousseau distinguishes civil freedom and conditions of possibility from moral freedom.⁷

“Rousseau's aim ... is not to show how the chains can be abolished and natural freedom recovered in society, for political society requires constraints and natural freedom consists in the absence of all such constraints. His aim is rather to show how the necessary constraints of political society can be legitimate and thereby compatible with, if not natural freedom, then an essential human freedom, nevertheless.”⁸

Focusing particularly on understanding Marx on Alienation, I try to cast light on the similarities and differences between Marx and Rousseau. Highlighting how Rousseau's ideals concerning natural freedom permeate Marx's critique of the dehumanizing effect of capitalist society, He is pushing it beyond what the Enlightenment tradition follows. Rousseau represented the general will to overcome the antagonistic unfreedom between people, while Marx pushed it into the material realm. I will orient myself in the body of scholarship surrounding the discussion between Rousseau and Marx, as well as the primary writings of the two thinkers. Nathan Rorenstreich, in “Philosophy and Phenomenological Research,”⁹ attempts to highlight Marx's dependence upon Rousseau, pointing out the transformation that took place in the transition from Rousseau to Marx. Jaeggi Rahel also gave a brief history of the concept of alienation, pointing to Rousseau as the first to critically discuss the deformation of human beings by society. I will be focusing primarily on Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality Among Men*, *The Social*

⁷ David R.Hiley, *The Individual and the General Will: Rousseau Reconsidered*

⁸ John Charvet, *The Social Problem in the Philosophy of Rousseau*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

⁹ For this I will be reading texts from Nathan Rorenstreich, his discussion of between Rousseau and Marx, transition from Rousseau to Marx, Phillip J.Kain in “Rousseau, the General Will and Individual liberty” discusses German philosophical tradition distinguishment of a *Gemeinschaft* and a *Gesellschaft*; Richard a.Brosio in “Chapter three: Adam Smith's theory of capitalism: the critiques of Rousseau and Marx” analyzed the commonalities and differences of them; Robert Wokler, in his view, Marx failed to see, or acknowledge how closely connected were his idea and Rousseau's, that the social theories of Rousseau and Marx corresponds closely, can see this through Rousseau's conception of property in the *Discourse on Inequality* with that of Marx in economic and philosophical manuscript.

Contract, which are essential for understanding Rousseau's ideas on society, general will, and insights into views on human nature, inequality, the development of society, human nature, and education. For Marx, I will focus on the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and *Das Kapital*.

I intend to explore the intellectual relationship between Rousseau's social and political philosophy and Marx's development of the concept of alienation, particularly within the context of human rights and labour. Both men paid heavy emphasis on the concept of "man as social animal" and the "sociability of man." I hope to bridge the historical and theoretical gaps between these two influential thinkers, situating their ideas within the broader discourse of human rights and social justice. By drawing parallels and contrasts between Rousseau's vision of a just society and Marx's critique of the alienating effects of capitalism, I also wish to highlight their enduring relevance in contemporary debates on human rights and labour laws. Additionally, the research will engage with modern interpretations of both thinkers, utilizing secondary sources to provide a broader perspective on the evolution of human rights philosophy. This approach will shed light on a deeper understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of modern human rights concepts. Through evaluating Rousseau's influence on Karl Marx, I wish to connect the implications of the two thinkers to our understanding of alienation in different realms.

Section 1:

To understand how Rousseau's ideals concerning natural freedom permeate Marx's critique of the dehumanizing effect of capitalist society, it would be crucial to note Rousseau's belief that every step of advancement of civilization had, in reality, been a step towards the alienation of our fundamental liberty. Both believed that modern social structures had separated humanity from its fundamental stage and forced people to become legally and politically obligated to various economic exploitation, through the corruption of private property and capitalist profits.

1.2 Evolution of man in the society:

The idea of a "state of nature" has previously been used by Hobbes, Locke, and other thinkers to demonstrate how their political theories related to a fundamental truth about human nature. Despite all the tools these state-of-nature theorists use to trace the roots of morality, Rousseau famously criticizes them by saying, "Not one of them has got there." Their depictions of the natural man are based on contemporary people, complete with all of the modern world's accoutrements, vices, and cravings. If we really think of natural man as a self-sufficient entity, we will realize that, despite being isolated, his existence is everything from "nasty, brutish, and short." Furthermore, a person so rudimentary cannot hardly be deemed bad. For the same reason that he is unaware of good, he is also unaware of evil, for they are naturally good.¹⁰

In every animal, Rousseau discerns nothing but a sophisticated mechanism endowed by nature with senses to maintain itself and protect against threats. The same attribute is in the human body, albeit with a distinction: whereas nature entirely governs the actions of animals,

¹⁰ David Bromwich, "Rousseau and the Self Without Property," *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, 2008

humans possess free will and contribute to their decisions. Animals operate by instinct, while humans act based on their liberty. Consequently, animals are bound to follow prescribed rules without deviation, even when doing so could be advantageous, whereas humans frequently stray from their guidelines to their own detriment.¹¹ Humans act out of liberty and free will as animals act differently. This shows the crucialness of liberty for men. When men become slaves, when they are alienated and unfree, what are any differences from animals. Rousseau acknowledges the importance of sociability but, at the same time, criticizes the corruptness that comes with it.

The *Second Discourse* started with the premise that man is naturally good and followed his evolution from the beginning of time to his current, morally repugnant, and oppressed existence. The *Second Discourse* began with the state of nature and illustrated how man evolved from original goodness to contemporary depravity and lack of freedom, in contrast to the first discourse, which began with the immoral condition of slavery and traced its origins to the state of nature, the second shows that the principles found in the first may be used to infer the current status of civilized society. its goal is to unravel the impact of modern society on human nature, both psychologically and politically. Rousseau argues that the evolution of humanity is intricately linked to the rise of inequality among individuals.

The savage lives within himself; sociable man, always outside himself, is capable of living only in the opinion of others and, so to speak, derives the sentiment of his own existence solely from their judgment." (Part II)¹²

¹¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

¹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

This leads to a comprehensive explanation of the creation of the modern man and a scathing critique of the prevailing unequal political structures. In this discourse, Rousseau identifies the flaws in contemporary political systems, a concern he later addresses in his work, the *Social Contract*. His key concept revolves around modern individuals being ensnared in an ever-expanding web of needs, where external validation holds immense sway. This influential idea echoes in Hegel's concept of civil society and Marx's portrayal of the alienated worker.

Rousseau suggests that society plays a vital role in shaping our humanity, yet it also has the potential to degrade us from our natural state. In their natural state, humans exist in solitude without communication or societal norms, have minimal interaction, and lack self-awareness about morality. In the state of nature, humans were solitary, self-sufficient, and inherently good, living a life guided primarily by instinct and simple needs. In Rousseau's context, the concept of “species being” refers to this original, pure form of humanity. Rousseau states these inherently unsocial beings are guided by two principles that precede rational thought.

“one of them interests us deeply in our own preservation and welfare, the other inspires us with a natural aversion to seeing any other being, but especially any being like ourselves, suffer or perish.”¹³

The original state of humanity was characterized by independent individuals, not united as a collective, Rousseau observed a shift in societal dynamics as soon as mutual assistance became necessary. He identified the inception of an economy of privilege in the pursuit of convenience, which leads to the disappearance of equality when one individual gains an advantage by stockpiling resources. This pursuit of privilege ultimately gave rise to a desire for luxury, a constant quest for recognition, an increase in trade for goods that symbolize status, and the

¹³ Ibid.

generation of increasingly sophisticated and artificial desires. According to Rousseau, there is the beginning of an economy of privilege.

“from the moment it appeared an advantage for one man to possess enough provisions for two, equality vanished.”¹⁴

Following technological advancements, innovations occurred at a rapid pace, marking the initiation of a significant transformation known as the ‘first revolution.’ During this period, the establishment of huts and villages, the inception of family structures, and the development of language to a level of sophistication comparable to modern standards took place. Notably, while private ownership was limited, communal utilization of land for hunting and gathering purposes was predominant. In the second part of the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau posited that the individual who first laid claim to a parcel of land likely initiated a chain of events leading to crimes, conflicts, fatalities, calamities, and atrocities. As society develops, this natural goodness becomes obscured by the constructs and demands of social living. Humans begin to see themselves not as independent beings but as members of a collective, judged and defined by their relations and status within that collective. This societal evolution fosters comparisons, jealousy and pride, driving a wedge between individuals and their inherent nature.

The first man who enclosed a piece of ground declared ownership of it by proclaiming, “This is mine,” and individuals accepted this claim; this is the true originator of the civil society.¹⁵

This individual’s act can be viewed as the inception of private land ownership and the utilization of agricultural surplus, which Rousseau identified as the primary factors

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

contributing to societal inequality. The onset of labour and property marks a critical shift from the state of nature.

1.3 Labour, Luxury and Alienation:

Initially, labour is merely a means to satisfy personal needs directly connected to the labourer's survival and well-being. However, as agriculture and metallurgy developed, labour became more structured and specialized, leading to the accumulation of property and the consequent idea of ownership and legacy. As agriculture and other forms of labour become more specialized around the concept of property, individuals' connection to their labour's products further diminishes. The act of cultivating the land naturally ensued after its appropriation, leading to a subsequent advancement of the established principle.¹⁶ This progression illustrates how labour, initially a means of direct subsistence, becomes a complex social act tied to economic and status advancement, leading labour's purpose from survival to economic gain into a social tool, and disconnecting the labourer from the intrinsic value and immediate benefits of their work.

The division of labour is a permanent institution as people get used to greater luxury as a result of technological advancement. The lives of the society and each are significantly impacted as soon as metallurgy and agriculture are deemed essential endeavours. The majority of people lose their freedom since the division of labour now affects society as a whole. If the majority of the community wants to continue existing, they must adopt the lifestyles made necessary by the division of labour. Julia SimonIngram, drawing from Max Horkheimer and

¹⁶ Ibid.

Theodor Adorno's critique of reason and enlightenment, emphasizes the growth of domination and the emergence of bourgeois capitalist society. Horkheimer and Adorno's analysis of mass culture accentuates the increasing alienation and draws parallels between bourgeois ideology and totalitarianism. They argue that what was once considered the domain for self-expression of the bourgeois individual has become an extension of domination and alienation in the capitalist marketplace.¹⁷ Furthermore, the bourgeois ideology draws in parallel to totalitarianism; enlightenment was an era of increased technological domination and points to frightening parallels between late industrial capitalism. The emphasis on the individual in capitalist ideology paradoxically leads to the manipulation and domination of alienated individuals as a collective. That ideology permeates every aspect of individuals' lives, leading them to "willfully" participate in their own domination, ultimately rendering individuality as an illusion perpetrated by the culture industry.

The enjoyment of privilege breeds a love of luxury, an incessant need for honours and distinction, a great expansion of commerce in products that serve only to accentuate distinction, and, to complete the circle, the production of ever-more-refined and manufactured "needs." The most crucial and challenging aspect of morality is the ability to distinguish between actions that seem honourable and those that are truly virtuous. It is common for these qualities to be distinct from one another, and in our society, many actions perceived as virtuous may actually contain more vice than those that are criticized. A recurring theme in Rousseau's writings is the detrimental influence of property and culture on moral judgment and self-perception.

Transforming labor into a means of gaining wealth and status rather than satisfying immediate

¹⁷ Julia Simon-Ingram, "Alienation, Individuation, and Enlightenment in Rousseau's Social Theory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (1991).

needs causes laborers to become increasingly disconnected from the products of their labor, which now serve primarily as commodities for exchange or symbols of status. This shift illustrates a form of alienation where individuals no longer engage in labour for survival but for economic and social advantage, losing touch with the direct benefits and personal fulfillment their work originally provided.

He warned against the corrupting impact of prioritizing material possessions and societal norms over authentic expressions of self. Rousseau's critique extended to art and science, culture and technology and the convenience valued by society for progress.¹⁸

"It is thus that man, who had hitherto considered only himself, finds that he must act on different principles, and consult his reason before listening to his inclinations." (Part II)¹⁹

The rational calculation in relationships marks a departure from genuine human connections. To calculate actions based on social strategies and personal gain marks the drive away from natural instincts, like compassion and empathy. All man possesses a personal will that diverges from or conflicts with the collective will he holds as a member of society. His individual interest may guide him in a manner distinct from the community's shared interest. Fueled by property and competition, personal interest diverges from communal interest, leading man to act in ways that conflict with the welfare of others, exacerbating feelings of isolation and disconnection from the community and highlighting the loss of genuine human connection in favour of relationships defined by economic and social status.

¹⁸ David Bromwich, "Rousseau and the Self Without Property," *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, 2008

¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

1.4 Alienation from the self:

As individuals become more embedded within the structures and hierarchies of society, they move further from their natural state. When individuals distance themselves from their true selves out of fear of self-criticism, they may inadvertently diminish their self-worth. Seeking validation from others not out of genuine care but to bolster their self-image reflects a lack of self-acceptance.²⁰ Rousseau highlights the psychological alienation that accompanies social evolution. Individuals no longer value themselves based on their own intrinsic worth but on their perceived value within the social hierarchy, leading to a profound sense of estrangement from their species being.

In his letter to d'Alembert, Rousseau contended that even the most skilled artists often sacrifice truth for theatrical effect, highlighting the tension between artistic representation and genuine expression. The theatre is seen as potentially strengthening the national character, augmenting natural inclination, and intensifying passions. Theatre can reinforce existing morals and manners, being beneficial for the good and detrimental for the vicious. The central point is the theatre's influence on the audience's sentiments and judgments towards moral beings. The *Second Discourse* examines how the arts, sciences, and social institutions contribute to the emergence of inequality and the corruption of human nature. The discussion of dissoluteness, indecent sentiments, and vices in the context of the arts reflects the broader themes of societal decay and moral corruption.

²⁰ Ibid.

The discussion of the theatre and its influence on society suggests that the artist, particularly in the context of the theatre, may experience a form of alienation from their work, highlighting the challenges faced by authors and playwrights in depicting morals and manners that may be perceived as alien to the audience, thus leading to the need for the artist to align their work with public sentiment and tastes, indicating a potential disconnect between the artist's creative expression and the eventual work. Cautioned against allowing societal constructs to dictate individual identity, emphasizing the importance of preserving the intrinsic essence of the self beyond external attributes or societal standards, which corresponds to Marx's critique of the alienation of the workers by their own work, which allows the object to dictate individual identity, workers are alienated from family, society, and sometimes even from what they produce. Rousseau believed that society should not interfere with the fundamental aspect of human identity. While society can facilitate interactions and collaboration among individuals, it cannot alter or enhance the core essence of self-maintaining, which is that individuals should use societal structures for interactions while preserving an inward self.²¹ Furthermore, Rousseau also delves into the potential consequences of the theatre on the labour and leisure of the citizens, suggesting that the introduction of new amusement, such as the theatre, may undermine the traditional pursuits and interests of the people, potentially leading to a sense of alienation from their previous activities.

Rousseau shares the first principle of self preservation with Hobbes and Locke, but what differs is that he does not draw conclusions from it. The quest for self preservation involves no hostility towards others or competition at this stage. The second principle- pity- is a sentiment, not a rule

²¹ Robert N. Bellah et al., "Rousseau on Society and the Individual," in *The Social Contract and The First and Second Discourses*, ed. Susan Dunn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 266–287.

of reason. Rousseau believes it is “accidents” which pressure men to take the first steps toward the development of society. The perfectibility which natural man had received as potentialities could never be developed by themselves. One of the most important accidents is the rise in population. The task that was simple with a small population of men became increasingly challenging as their numbers grew. Necessity served as the driving force behind creativity, resulting in the creation of tools such as hooks and lines and bows and arrows. This same necessity compelled individuals, who typically preferred solitude, to form temporary associations that lasted only as long as the need persisted.²² Sociability is critical, but it is also only as one becomes more social and dependent on others that their sense of strength and courage diminishes, giving way to feelings of weakness, fear, and timidity. This reliance on lifestyle further erodes men’s mental resilience.²³ Marx, in his Economic Manuscript, also makes the case that when we are slaves of others and products, we alienate ourselves when we become weak. The devaluation of the worker is directly proportional to the increasing value of the products they create. This alienation is manifested in feeling outside of themselves in work, experiencing coercion and forced labour, and being estranged from their own physical and mental energy.

1.5 Social Contract, a new form of Alienation?:

The agreement of society does not erase natural disparities but replaces them with a morally and legally upheld equality that overrides nature’s arbitrary distinctions. Rousseau recognizes that individuals are born with varying levels of strength, intelligence and other attributes that create natural inequalities. These differences are factual and cannot be completely eradicated by

²² Ibid.

²³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men* (1755).

any form of social or political organization. The *Social Contract* aims to transform the landscape of these natural disparities by introducing a form of equality which is not about making all physically or intellectually the same but ensuring consideration under the law. What is crucial is the override of arbitrary distinctions. Natural distinctions can often appear arbitrary from a societal point of view. For example, the fact that one person is born into a wealthy family while another is not does not provide a moral basis for different treatment under the law. The *Social Contract* overrides these distinctions by setting a common standard of treatment that applies to all individuals. It is meant to enhance the well being of the entire community, ensuring collective welfare takes precedence over individual advantages. Thus, while natural disparities remain, their impact on social and legal standing is minimized, aiming to create a more equitable and just society.

Rousseau concludes book one of *The Social Contract* by stating:

“I shall end this chapter and this book with a comment that ought to serve as the basis of the whole social system. It is that rather than destroying natural equality, the fundamental compact on the contrary substitutes a moral and legitimate equality for whatever physical inequality nature may have placed between men, and that although they may be unequal in force or in genius, they all become equal through convention and by right.”²⁴

Asserting if a group of individuals with self-interests come together for mutual gain is considered a social tie, then forming a social connection can only come about through a kind of acknowledgment of others that is not based on our reliance on them- a form of acknowledgment that cannot be broken down into individual self-interest. This concept is exemplified in Rousseau’s differentiation between the will of all and the general will. The former represents a combined will that can be broken down as simply the total of individual wills. The latter, on the

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (n.d.).

other hand, is a unified will that remains inherently collective. Equality, in this context, is crucial for engaging in an agreement. It signifies a type of acknowledgment and agreement that needs to be assumed when considering the shift from a personal will that is individual to a common will that is universal. Mutuality, in this sense, is a type of shared intentionality held by individuals but cannot be reduced to them. Mutuality is built upon a communal awareness of others as potential participants in collaborative endeavours.²⁵ Although Rousseau never used the word alienation as Marx did, he recognized that sociability is a weakness in man, driving man away from their natural state. However, in the end, a solution is still collectivity. Property and luxury enslave humans and alienate men; it is by collectivity that can be solved.

While the formation of societies was necessitated by conflicting private interests, it was the harmony amongst these interests that made their establishment feasible. Societal cohesion is rooted in what is mutually beneficial to these diverse interests, as, without a unifying factor, the existence of a society would be untenable. Consequently, the governance of a society should revolve exclusively around this shared interest. The fundamental premise is that the general will arises from an ongoing mindset within each individual in a community, prompting them to inquire, "What serves the greater good?" as opposed to the self-centred query espoused by Locke, "What do I stand to gain?"²⁶ By redefining freedom in alignment with the general will and compelling our resistant individual selves to adhere to the general will's mandates, we are essentially compelled to be free. According to Rousseau's metaphysical framework, the

²⁵ David R. Hiley, "The Individual and the General Will: Rousseau Reconsidered," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7, no. 2 (April 1990): 159-178.

²⁶ Ibid.

general will does not arise organically as a natural will because, in this paradigm, will is fundamentally individualistic.

To Rousseau, there are three kinds of freedom: natural, civil, and moral. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau proposes civil freedom is the type acquired in a civil society as opposed to the state of nature. This involves the relinquishment of natural freedom to gain the protections and benefits of living in a society governed by the rule of law. Arguing that civil freedom is superior to natural freedom in it replaces the law of the strongest with a more equitable system of justice guided by the general will. This form is not about unbounded liberty but about participation in self-governance, where the laws one obeys are those that one has a hand in creating. Aligning with his famous formulation.

"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. One believes himself the others' master and yet is more of a slave than they."²⁷

The socialization process imposed by the legislator sets standards of comprehension that individual wills must adhere to. The new will, representing meaning and purpose, becomes a vessel for instilled myth- specifically, the myth of social and moral liberty. Rousseau's evaluation of alienation in the wider sense is rooted in his belief that it is necessary for the establishment of a just and equitable society, as it serves as a counterbalance to the potential abuse of despotic power and the inequality that arises from it. Rousseau's definition of alienation in the context of the rights of man encompasses the subordination of individuals to a system of impersonal forces through the social compact, which he sees as essential for the establishment of a just and equitable society. This concept of alienation is closely linked to his views on liberty

²⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (n.d.).

and equality and seeks to address the arbitrary and corrupting nature of social relationships and the potential abuse of power.

The concept of the social contract serves to establish equality by requiring individuals to relinquish all possessions to the community and then have them redistributed back to each individual. The general will, as defined by the willingness to abide by self-imposed universal laws, is at the core of this agreement. By entering the social contract, individuals are guided toward their ultimate fulfillment and released from the burdens of necessity. Rousseau's *Second Discourse* reveals the internal coherence of his body of work, with recurring themes that remain largely consistent throughout his later works. This discourse serves a dual purpose in Rousseau's philosophy, functioning in conjunction with his first discourse to provide an analytical-synthetic proof that validates his core arguments.

1.6 Rousseau and Marx on the use of “Alienation”

In his works, Rousseau does not confer the word alienation as Marx had. Indeed, he used the word in his first contract as a solution to the problem of the tension he found in *The First and Second Discourse* of how to find a form of association to how can one identify an institute that safeguards and preserves the interests and possessions of each member collectively, ensuring that every individual, while unified with the group, retains autonomy and freedom of action? Rousseau gave the solution in the *Social Contract*, which was supposed to produce

“The total alienation of each associate with all his rights to the whole community”²⁸

²⁸ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (n.d.).

Although Marx and Rousseau use the word alienation differently, Rousseau's proposed resolution to the social dilemma entails the potential to uphold individual diversity, a stance that aligns with the principles advocated by liberalism and critics of mass society, all while adhering to the essential shared social values mandated by communitarianism. The natural form of internal unity and self-sufficiency is distinguished from the corrupted form of self-interestedness that arises from culture. Self-interestedness is what alienates men; even when a group of men work together towards a common goal, it is only the will of all, not the general will. Transforming individual natural rights and liberties into a collective framework governed by the general will present an antidote to the forms of alienation presented in *The Second Discourse*. When individuals agree to alienate themselves under the social contract, they do so with the understanding that they become integral parts of a larger whole. Each of us puts his person and all of the self and capabilities to the collective, guided by the collective decision that reflects the general will.

Section 2:

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx offered a comprehensive analysis of the alienated state of humanity. It becomes evident that he identifies alienation as a significant issue in capitalist societies. His writings delineate various manifestations of alienation within society and establish a clear hierarchy, with economic alienation as its foundation. Marx observed that the increasing accumulation of capital leads to its greater consolidation, resulting in the augmentation of capital's authority and the estrangement of social production conditions, which corresponds to Rousseau's idea that it is luxury, technological advancement that significantly influences people's lives and the majority of people loses their freedom since the division of labour now affects society as a whole.

The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844* delves into the concept of wages of labour, where Marx argues that wages are determined through the antagonistic struggle between capitalist and worker, with victory favouring the capitalist. He highlights the detrimental separation of capital, landed property, and labour for the workers, and discusses the impact of competition, the need for subsistence wages, and the consequences of supply exceeding demand. Furthermore, he addresses the concept of profit of capital, detailing the basis of capital and the factors influencing the rate of profit. Marx identified four main characteristics of alienation: man's alienation from nature, from himself, from his 'species being', and from other men.

In the economic sphere, these characteristics manifest as the alienation of the worker from the product of their labour, the devaluation of the world of men in proportion to the increasing

value of the world of things, and the transformation of human relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man-produced things that have become independent of man and govern his life. The growing accumulation of capital implies its growing concentration, leading to the alienation of the conditions of social production personified in the capitalist from the real producers. Rousseau's concept of equality and his moralizing approach to the dehumanizing effects of alienation, which persisted throughout the eighteenth century, provides a foundation for understanding the evolution of the concept of alienation.

2.2 Worker and the Object:

"The object that labor produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer."²⁹

Marx articulates the fundamental estrangement that occurs between workers and the products of their labour under capitalist production. As the worker generates more wealth and output grows in magnitude and influence, the less he is valued, the less valued, transforming him into a cheaper commodity. There is a direct relationship where the worth of human beings diminishes as the value of material goods increases. Labour not only produces commodities but reproduces the worker himself as a commodity. This situation illustrates that labour creates something foreign, existing independently of its creator. The product of labour is essentially labour that has been encapsulated within an object. The fulfillment derived from labour turns into its opposite under these economic conditions. Objectification is crucial, that workers engage with it through their work, which yet is the very process estranging him from his own creation. The worker relies on nature, the sensory external world, as the essential material where his labour is realized and

²⁹ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

through which he produces. Although nature provides the necessary resources for his work, it also offers the basic means for his physical survival.

However, as the worker engages more with nature through his labour, he paradoxically finds himself increasingly deprived of life's necessities in two ways: firstly, the natural world gradually ceases to be a resource that belongs to him for his labour; it no longer serves as his means of sustaining his work. Secondly, it stops serving as a means of life in the direct sense, no longer providing for his physical needs. In both scenarios, the worker becomes subjugated by his outputs: he becomes dependent on receiving work and thus turns into a servant to his labour, and he is also dependent on receiving the means to sustain his physical existence. This dynamic confines him to the role of a worker and, more fundamentally, as a physical being striving to survive. This results in a profound alienation because the products of their labour become 'alien objects' that exist outside their control and often beyond their reach. The commodities they produce stand over and against them as symbols of their own exploitation—they signify a relationship where the worker is dominated by the creations of their own hands. Marx argues that this scenario turns the products—things that should be a testament to human creativity and labour—into forces that control and subjugate the worker. The worker becomes increasingly alienated economically, emotionally, and intellectually as the products of their labour reinforce their own economic and social powerlessness within the capitalist system.³⁰

Vogel argues that contemporary discussion often portrays humans as “alienated from nature,” attributing this to the scientific-technological project’s treatment of nature as inert, leading to

³⁰ Ibid.

destructive environmental practices. However, Vogel suggests that Marx's account of alienation provides a different perspective, emphasizing the failure to recognize the human origin of objects produced by labour as the essence of alienation.³¹ By highlighting the sociality of the environment and emphasizing that it consists of human objects transformed and reshaped through labour, it is argued that overcoming alienation requires recognizing and asserting conscious social control over production. Alienation arises from the failure to recognize the human origin of objects produced by human activity, leading to the objects becoming alien and independent powers over and against humans. The importance of recognizing the sociality of the environment and understanding it as humanized nature and promoting the explicit assertion of conscious social control over production.

"The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object."³²

In creating a world of objects through his personal activity and his work on inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being by treating the species as his own essential being. There is no doubt that animals also produce for nests, but they produce for what is immediately needed for themselves or their young, while man produces universally. An animal's product belongs to its physical body. Man forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty. However, the labourer invests his physical and mental energies into the production of goods, yet instead of these objects serving the worker, they belong to someone else—the capitalist. As a result, the

³¹ Steven Vogel, "Marx and Alienation From Nature," *Social Theory and Practice* 14, no. 3 (1988): 367–387. Robert Wokler and Christopher Brooke, "Rousseau and Marx," in *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Bryan Garsten (2012).

³² Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

labour process becomes something external to the worker, not a natural expression of human creativity or energy but a means of survival dictated by the needs and commands of the capitalist. Labour transforms man's essence, including his natural and spiritual characteristics, into something foreign and merely a means for his individual survival. It alienates man from his own body, from the external natural world, and spiritual human qualities. A direct result of this alienation from the product of his labour is that man becomes estranged from other men. When a man looks at himself, he only sees another one like himself. His condition reflects interactions with others. The way he relates to his work, the product he creates, and to himself is mirrored in how he relates to others and their labour and creations.³³

The worker is alienated because he has no control over the labour process or the conditions under which he works. The work does not fulfill or enrich the worker but instead degrades him to the role of a machine, performing repetitive and monotonous tasks that are disconnected from his intrinsic interests and capabilities. Consequently, labour under capitalism isn't a fulfilling activity; it's a means of existence that workers are forced to endure, which alienates them from their very nature and potential as creative beings. This systematic estrangement not only diminishes the worker's relationship with his product but fundamentally disrupts his connection to the act of production itself, transforming it into something alien and oppressive.

Emphasizing that under alienation, the objects of labour turn into independent and alien forces, achieving a kind of sham self-sufficiency and externality, appearing as a power over and against the producers. The paradigm case of such alienation occurs under the current economic system

³³ Ibid.

when the object produced by the worker is counted as adding to the wealth of the capitalist. This process of "objectification" of the worker's labour leads to estrangement and alienation. Marx explains in the Manuscripts that the relationship between the worker and their labour within the production process is one where the labour feels foreign and not inherently part of the worker.³⁴ This alienation connects to a broader view of human nature which posits that humans are inherently social beings and that labour becomes truly human only when it serves communal needs rather than being motivated by self-interest, such as working solely for a wage. Marx's analysis directs attention to the fact that most of the "objective world" is a world of human objects produced by humans through labour, and alienation occurs when we fail to recognize its humanity, leading it to appear as an alien power over and against us.

Pascal Brixel suggested a way of viewing alienation and labour. In "The Unity of Marx's Concept of Alienated Labor," he suggests that Marx simplifies historical labour conditions in his analysis, acknowledging there was never a time when most individuals were self-sufficient property owners producing primarily for their own needs and trading excess goods. This simplification helps illustrate his point about alienation and the nature of labour once it becomes focused on exchange rather than self-sufficiency.³⁵ Initially, Marx describes this early state as a kind of crude, alienated private property situation, where production was selfish and for individual gain. However, he suggests that this type of labour allowed for some form of self-realization despite its flaws. Marx argues that genuine self-realization in labour isn't just about developing and using complex skills but primarily about realizing one's individual goals through productive activity. He contrasts human labour with animal labour in "Capital," emphasizing that

³⁴ Pascal Brixel, "The Unity of Marx's Concept of Alienated Labor," *The Philosophical Review*

³⁵ Ibid.

human labour is unique because it transforms material in accordance with the worker's own purpose and will. Traditional interpretations of Marx often focus on the unfulfilling nature of alienated labour due to its repetitive and skillless nature. However, a deeper issue of alienation is related to how much labour fails to allow workers to actualize their personal intentions in the world, rendering their labour unfulfilling not just in content but in its very nature as an expression of personal freedom and agency.

2.3 Private Property and Capitalist Society:

"The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. The devaluation of the world of men is in direct proportion to the increasing value of the world of things."³⁶

The relationship is not restricted to the standpoint of the worker. The relationship of the worker to labour creates the relationship with the capitalist. Private property thus results from analysis from the concept of alienated labour. It is the cause rather than the consequence of alienated labour. Capitalism inhibits the full development of the worker's potential and creativity. Under capitalism, the laborer's output enriches the capitalist but impoverishes him materially and spiritually. As the worker produces more, his labour, paradoxically, renders him less valuable. This occurs because the capitalist system values the commodities produced over the labourer himself, reducing the worker to a mere instrument in the production process. This reduction strips workers of their ability to exercise and develop their fullest human capacities and creative potential. Instead of labour is a means for personal development and expression, it becomes a means of survival, where the worker must adapt to the mechanical and monotonous tasks that

³⁶ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

dominate capitalist production. Consequently, the worker's potential for growth and creative expression is stifled, as his role is reduced to that of a cog in the capitalist machine. Marx views this not just as economic exploitation but as a profound dehumanization, where the worker is alienated not only from the product of his labour and the labour process itself but from his very essence as a creative and dynamic human being.

Marx emphasized that an individual is inherently a social creature. Even when his actions may not seem directly communal, they are still expressions and affirmations of social existence. The distinction between an individual's life and the life of his species is not stark. In recognizing his species, an individual affirms his real social existence and reflects his actual life in his thoughts. Similarly, the consciousness of the species asserts itself and realizes its generality as a conscious entity. Private property has conditioned us to believe that we only truly possess an object when we have it physically or when it serves our use—such as through consumption, wear, or residence—essentially when it is utilized by us. However, this notion reduces all tangible and intangible experiences to mere tools for sustaining the life of private property, where everything is ultimately aimed at labour and capital formation. Consequently, the natural human senses are alienated, replaced by the mere sensation of possession. This reduction to "absolute poverty" in terms of genuine human experiences is necessary for the external world to capitalize on an individual's inner resources. Overcoming private property, thus, signifies the liberation of all human senses and attributes because they are recognized as inherently human, both subjectively and objectively. This emancipation allows the human eye, for instance, to view its surroundings as humanly socialized objects—created by humans for human purposes, reflecting a collective existence and utility.

To Marx, socialism represents humanity's positive self-awareness, no longer dependent on the elimination of religion, just as genuine life is humanity's positive reality, no longer contingent upon the removal of private property through communism. Communism acts as a progressive step—it negates prior negations—and is, therefore, a crucial phase needed for the forthcoming stage of human liberation and restoration. It serves as the essential structure and driving force for the imminent future.

Pascal Brixel discusses Marx's concept of alienated labour, focusing on the motivational structure of labour under capitalism and its implications for the worker's fulfillment and freedom, delving into the distinction between passive and active egoism, the transition from proto-alienated to alienated labour, and the interconnectedness of the various marks of alienation. By addressing the formal motivational structure of alienated labour, its connection to human flourishing and implications for human nature and social relations draw parallels to Rousseau's critique of the effects of civilization on human nature. In the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau discusses the transition from the state of nature to civil society, highlighting the loss of freedom and fulfillment experienced by individuals as a result of social and economic structure. Similarly, Marx's concept of alienated labour addresses the alienation and unfreedom experienced by workers under capitalism, emphasizing the impact of extrinsic incentives on labour and the resulting detachment from one's own activity and product.

Marx's ideology of alienation of works by highlighting the parallels between the critique of bourgeois ideology, emphasizing the increasing alienation experienced by individuals in the

private sphere of enlightenment resonates with Marx's concept of alienation of workers in capitalist society. The emphasis on equivalence and qualification in bourgeois society³⁷ aligns with Marx's critique of the reduction of all human relationships to monetary terms and the commodification of labour under capitalism. This reduction of human labour to mere commodities leads to the alienation of workers from the products of their labour, from the labour process itself, their own human potential, and their fellow human beings. The domination and suppression of individuals under the guise of rationality in bourgeois ideology is in line with Marx's analysis of how capitalist ideology perpetuates the alienation of workers by promoting false consciousness and obscuring the true nature of their exploitation. The manipulation and domination of alienated individuals as a collective, along with Marx's critique of the alienation of workers within the capitalist system, where they are alienated not only from the products of their labour but also from their own human essence and from each other lead to a sense of powerlessness. This corresponds to Rousseau's idea that the artist perpetuates false consciousness and suppresses true human potential.

The concept of the "Noble savage" and the corrupting influence of civilization and private property have corrupted human nature. The establishment of private property and the division of labor have led to the alienation of individuals from their natural state. Karl Marx, in particular, addresses the concept in relation to labor and the impact of private property on the worker. Both highlight the detrimental effects of alienation on individuals and the broader implications for society of the impact of societal structures on human nature.

³⁷ Julia Simon-Ingram, "Alienation, Individuation, and Enlightenment in Rousseau's Social Theory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (1991).

2.4 Human activities and Social context-Alienation from others

"Each man views the other in accordance with the standard and the situation in which he finds himself as a worker."³⁸

The distinctions between industry and agriculture, capital and land, have historically been formed at specific stages in the development of the conflict between capital and labour. Labour retains social significance in representing a real community that has not yet evolved to a stage where it is indifferent to its content or has become completely autonomous. The full liberation of industry and capital is the inevitable progression of labour. The dominance of industry over its agricultural counterparts becomes apparent when agriculture itself becomes a real industry, moving away from relying heavily on the natural productivity of the soil and the labour essentially enslaved workers. Through the tenant farmer, the economic existence of the landowner is validated. In a capitalist society, individuals often perceive each other primarily in terms of their economic roles and value as workers.

In the broader social landscape, the nature of development is such that society shapes humanity just as humanity shapes society. This economic perspective breeds competition and fosters class divisions, as individuals are not seen as multifaceted human beings but rather as economic units or competitors in the market for jobs, resources, and social status. Such a framework diminishes the capacity for genuine human relationships built on mutual respect and understanding. Instead, relationships are often transactional and based on utility, contributing to a pervasive sense of isolation and mistrust among people. Marx highlights that under capitalism, social interactions are corrupted by the underlying competition for survival and advancement, leading individuals to

³⁸ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2007).

view each other as obstacles to their economic well-being rather than comrades or equals. This fundamental estrangement affects societal cohesion and impedes the individual's ability to form authentic community bonds, further deepening the alienation experienced in daily life.

Human activities and pleasures are inherently social, both in their essence and in their existence. Nature becomes meaningful to humans only within a social context, where it acts as a connection to others, forming the basis of human reality and existence. Society is seen as the ultimate synthesis of humanity with nature, presenting a holistic integration of naturalism and humanism.³⁹ This integration extends beyond overtly communal activities and pleasures. The act remains fundamentally social even in individual pursuits, such as scientific endeavours, which might not involve direct interaction with others. The materials, tools, and even language used in such activities are social products. An individual's existence and actions are inherently social activities; what one makes of oneself is crafted for society and with an awareness of one's social nature. Even the theoretical pursuits of an individual reflect and contribute to the communal fabric, despite the abstract nature of general consciousness which can sometimes seem detached or even in opposition to actual societal conditions. The activities and consciousness of individuals are ultimately intertwined with their social existence, shaping and being shaped by the societal structures they inhabit.

Gajo Petrović explores the meaning of alienation and self-alienation, the historical and permanent aspects of alienation, and the foundation of it in human development. Marx's view is that self-alienation involves both alienating something from oneself and alienating oneself

³⁹ Ibid.

from something. Discussing Marx's perspective on the four characteristics of alienation, linking them to man and humanity. Marx pointed out, in the view of political economists, that society functions as a civil structure where every man is essentially a bundle of needs, existing to serve others as they serve him, thus transforming human interactions into utilitarian exchanges. But, they simplify complex human identities, reducing individuals to basic economic categories such as capitalists or workers, effectively removing all unique characteristics. The division of labour shows how labour, as an element of social character within a framework of estrangement, essentially expresses human activity under alienation, making life itself an alienated experience. It is crucial that self-consciousness feels naturally aligned with its other being or external realization.⁴⁰

2.5 Humanization, Alienation from Nature:

The concept of 'humanization' plays a crucial role in recognizing and overcoming alienation from nature; this refers to the process through which humans transform and reshape nature through their labour, making the environment human by remaking nature. alienation from nature, it is essential to explicitly assert the humanness of the environment and acknowledge the naturalness of humans. This involves learning to live in harmony with nature, respecting its laws, and limiting the extent to which humans act to transform it.⁴¹ The recognition of the sociality of the environment is crucial, as it involves understanding the environment as a humanized nature and promoting the explicit assertion of conscious social control over production. This process

⁴⁰ Gajo Petrović, "Marx's Theory of Alienation," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 23, no. 3 (1963): 419–426.

⁴¹ Steven Vogel, "Marx and Alienation From Nature," *Social Theory and Practice* 14, no. 3 (1988): 367–387. Robert Wokler and Christopher Brooke, "Rousseau and Marx," in *Rousseau, the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Bryan Garsten (2012).

allows for the dissolution of the apparent independence and externality of the environment, leading to a new relation to nature and a new kind of humanization.

Marx held the view that moral principles largely originate from an understanding of human nature and what is beneficial for human flourishing. However, he emphasized that morality is not solely dictated by human physiological needs. While his moral philosophy begins with human nature, Marx clarified that he does not confine human nature to purely biological aspects; it encompasses a social dimension as well. In *The German Ideology*, Marx elaborates on this point, indicating that the social context of human life is integral to defining morality.

The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand, as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social, we understand the cooperation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what matter and to what end. It follows from this that a certain mode of production, or industrial stage, is always combined with a certain mode of co-operation, or social stage, and this mode of co-operation is itself a 'productive force'. Further, the multitude of productive forces accessible to men determines the nature of society; hence, the 'history of humanity' must always be studied and treated in relation to the history of industry and exchange.⁴²

Marx believed that at the heart of human existence lies the labour process. This encompasses not only human nature and the environment in which labour is intentionally and consciously carried out but also the individual's relationship with nature and their interactions with others.

⁴² Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, ed. Frederick Engels (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 1996).

Unlike animals like spiders and bees who instinctively weave webs or build cells, humans uniquely plan and envision their work before it becomes a physical reality. For instance, an architect imagines a building before constructing it, which illustrates that humans transform materials and consciously realize their own objectives and designs through labour. This process involves not just a physical alteration of materials but the actualization of a preconceived plan, underscoring human labour's intentional and creative dimensions.⁴³

Understanding the moral implications of any action requires a deep knowledge of how it affects people's recognition of themselves as both social and natural beings who transform their existence through labour. Society is structured in classes that have distinct interactions, particularly evident in the capitalist system, where individuals are primarily categorized as either buyers or sellers of labour power. Marx emphasizes the importance of understanding the specific context, including class and mode of production, to make accurate moral judgments. He asserts that when the true nature of reality is depicted, traditional philosophy loses its relevance because real-life conditions provide the actual basis for understanding. Thus, grasping the historical and societal context is crucial for forming sound moral conclusions. Morality, for Marx, is contingent on a complex array of factors specific to each moment. Exploring how alienation from their fundamental nature leads to a morally impoverished and constrained existence for individuals. This perspective highlights the dynamic and contextual nature of morality, dependent on the broader socio-economic conditions and historical moments.

⁴³ Ibid.

Marx explains the connection between the abstract individual of capitalism by emphasizing the historical and dialectical evolution of the exchange relation.⁴⁴ He argues that under capitalism, an abstract individual first develops, which permits the development of human rights as more than just an ideologist's conceptualization. Marx traces the development of this abstract being through historical materialism, highlighting the division of society into pre-capitalist, capitalist, and communist stages. Human beings are not only inherently social but also individuated, asserting that true individuation occurs within the context of society and is dependent on specific stages of social and economic development.

In his work "Grundrisse," Marx notes that historically, individuals, including those who produce, were more integrated and dependent on a larger societal whole.⁴⁵ He further argues that society is not merely a collection of individuals but a complex network of relationships and conditions that define the interactions between these individuals. He uses the term "social individuals" to describe people as naturally social beings who also have the potential to develop rich individual qualities. In pre-capitalist societies, individuals' identities were tied to their positions and roles within the community, and any rights were attached to these specific roles.

Contending that the development of human rights is intertwined with the development of individuals who are identifiable simply as human beings, without reference to their position or relation to others, but as possessors or owners of labor power. Suggesting that the foundation of human rights and the development of capitalism are essentially intertwined and that human

⁴⁴ George G. Brenkert, "Marx and Human Rights," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (1986): 55-77.

⁴⁵ Chris Jones, "Karl Marx's Moral Philosophy and Critical Views of Western Morality," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (2023).

rights define the relationships fundamental to capitalism. The realization of communism would lead to a new expression of human capabilities and a significant enrichment of human nature, contrasting sharply with the conditions under capitalism, where human beings are alienated from the world. The act of selling labour to satisfy personal needs, Marx argues, is inherently alienating. This alienation is evidenced by the inversion of the relationship between one's consciousness and species-being, where labour becomes merely a means to survive rather than a fulfilling life activity. Marx describes this condition as a form of self-sacrifice, where the worker's labour does not emerge from spontaneous activity but belongs to another, ultimately causing the worker to perceive his labour as external to his life.

2.6 Duality of Activity- Rousseau and Marx:

The concept of the social contract suggests that a person becomes both the creator and the follower of the law, embodying both freedom and obedience as complementary aspects. This mutual relationship is also found in Marx's theories. According to Marx, an individual is both the creator of the conditions of his reality and a participant within them. The duality of being both active and passive is critical, as noted in Marx's third Thesis on Feuerbach, which discusses the relationship between human activity and the circumstances that frame it. These circumstances are shaped by and also shape human actions.⁴⁶ Both Rousseau and Marx explore this duality of activity and passivity, though their approaches differ in nature and implications. Rousseau's perspective is more constitutional, emphasizing political implications in the social contract that link personal will to a normative ethical pattern, ensuring that personal desires do

⁴⁶ Nathan Rotenstreich, "Between Rousseau and Marx," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 9, no. 4 (1949): 717–719.

not corrupt the social contract's foundations; Marx had a material one, where societal structures influence individual behaviours and vice versa.

For Marx, the relationship between societal norms and individual actions is seen through the lens of the proletariat, whose specific conditions and interests inherently drive toward the realization of human freedom and emancipation. This group, marginalized yet pivotal due to its position within bourgeois society, epitomizes the interrelation of interests with universal ideals, where individual interests align with broader emancipatory goals. In Marx's framework, there is no distinction between the will of all and the general will; instead, there is a synthesis where personal interests, directed by historical and social forces, achieve a normative status, ensuring their alignment with overarching principles of freedom and justice.

While there are similarities in the discussion of the original nonalienated condition of man, Marx's theory of alienation focuses more on the economic and social aspects of alienation, while Rousseau's discourse focuses on the development of inequality and the impact of society on human nature. Both works address the concept of man's original state and the impact of societal development, but they approach the topic from different perspectives. Marx viewed society through an economic lens, suggesting that individuals when acting purely out of self-interest, see others merely as means to their own ends, stripping people of broader human qualities. Rousseau argues that the development of personal property and society progression lead people away from a state of natural independence to one of moral corruption and competitive interdependence, where individuals value themselves and others in terms of social status rather than inherent qualities. The vision for the transcendence of private property in *EPP* also

suggested the production not for commerce but for communal utility, emphasizing the concept of the general will and collective decision-making as a path to a solution to alienation within society. Marx discusses how alienated labour can estrange individuals from their true selves, making them accept distorted forms of existence as their reality; Rousseau touches on how societal evolution distorts self-consciousness, with individuals measuring their worth by external validation. Although Rousseau focuses more on the moral and philosophical repercussions of societal evolution, and Marx emphasizes economic and material conditions, both argue that the capitalist structure alienates individuals from their labour and their very essence, transforming them into commodified units within the system.

Conclusion:

The main natural rights identified by Rousseau are liberty, equality, and security. Rousseau attributes these rights to the state of nature, where individuals lived in almost total isolation, recognizing no duties or moral relations. He argues that men lived wholly by instinct in this state, and their natural rights diverged from ordinary usage by excluding any reference to duty or reason. Rousseau's concept of natural right is connected with the nature of man, defining a man's natural right as the ability to use his natural endowments per his instincts of self-love and compassion. Additionally, he emphasizes that the state of nature is a state of peace and security, where individuals are free from the passions engendered in society. The de facto equality and liberty in the state of nature, where individuals are entirely self-sufficient and independent from one another, form the basis for evaluating positive rights and are essential for understanding Rousseau's perspective on the rights of man.

Rousseau's moral critique of the dehumanizing impacts of alienation carries through the 18th century largely due to his profoundly radical views on equality, encapsulated in his assertion that "each man, by giving himself to all, gives himself to no one."⁴⁷ Similarly, Marx envisions a return to a non-alienated state where humans are reconciled with nature, fellows and their own identities. This reunification is anticipated to occur in the era of communism. Marx articulates that just as atheism, which negates the concept of God, heralds the onset of

⁴⁷ K. S. Pavithran, "'ALIENATION' AND THE HUMANIST SIGNIFICANCE OF MARXISM: A CRITICAL APPRECIATION," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 70, no. 1 (2009): 175–184.

theoretical humanism, so does communism by negating private property, where K.S.Pavithran calls this the introduction to practical humanism. Marx further clarifies,

“Communism, as fully developed naturalism, is equivalent to humanism, and as fully developed humanism, is equivalent to naturalism; it represents the definitive resolution of the conflicts between nature and society, and between individuals.”⁴⁸

Rousseau and Marx, despite the ages that separate their lives and the divergence in their philosophical underpinnings, share a profound concern for the individual's place and fulfillment within society. Their examinations of alienation, particularly in relation to labour, property and societal structures, reveal a deep-seated critique of the conditions that estrange individuals from their essence and from one another.

Rousseau's prescient observations on the corrupting influence of society and property on natural human freedom lay the groundwork for a critique of the modern condition that Marx would later expand upon with rigorous analysis and economic theory. Rousseau envisages a state of nature as a realm of peace, security and genuine freedom- a stark contrast to the bondage of societal expectations and the chains of dependence wrought by property. In this idyllic state, humanity's fundamental liberties and equality are preserved, unblemished by the complexities and inequalities that civilization brings. However, Rousseau does not merely lament the fall from this state; instead, he proposes the social contract as a mechanism through which society can recapture the essence of this lost freedom, albeit in a form that harmonizes individual liberties with the common good.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Penguin Books, 1975).

On the other hand, Marx situates alienation within the material conditions of capitalist production. He diagnoses the estrangement of labour as not merely a symptom of capitalist exploitation but as the very essence of this economic system. Workers are alienated from the products of their labour, which are expropriated by the capitalists; from the process of production, which becomes an alien activity imposed upon them; and from their species-being, as the creative and productive activity that defines humanity is reduced to a means for survival. This alienation extends to the relationships among individuals, who are brought into competition and isolation rather than community and solidarity. The intellectual dialogue between Rousseau and Marx, as delineated in this thesis, thus revolves around the central theme of alienation and the quest for a form of social organization that enables true human freedom. Both thinkers, despite their distinct historical contexts and philosophical frameworks, converge on the notion that contemporary society's conditions are antithetical to realizing this freedom. However, they also diverge significantly in their proposed solutions and the pathways to achieving a just society. Rousseau's social contract theory emphasizes the transformation of individual wills into a general will that reflects the common good, a process that requires the active participation and moral development of citizens. Marx, conversely, advocates for a radical restructuring of the economic base of society, envisioning a communist future where the means of production are communally owned, and labour is no longer a commodity but a freely chosen activity that fulfills human potential.

As traced in this piece, the intellectual journey from Rousseau to Marx offers philosophical and practical insights into the nature of human freedom, the pathology of alienation, and the pursuit of social justice. By engaging with their ideas, we gain a deeper understanding of the historical

evolution of these concepts and acquire critical tools for analyzing and addressing the pressing issues of our own era. The dialogue between Rousseau and Marx, far from being merely of historical interest, is profoundly relevant to contemporary debates on the future of democracy, the critique of capitalism, and the possibilities for creating societies that are both free and just. In bringing their ideas into conversation, this thesis contributes to a renewed vision of emancipation—a vision that recognizes the deep interconnections between individual fulfillment, societal structures, and the material conditions of existence.

Both Marx's analysis of alienation and Rousseau's discourse address the impact of social structures on human relationships with the environment. Rousseau's *Second Discourse* explores the transition from the state of nature to civil society, highlighting the ways in which the development of private property and social institutions led to alienation from nature. Similarly, Marx's analysis suggests that alienation from the environment is rooted in the failure to recognize its sociality, emphasizing that the physical objects in the environment are the result of social labour. Furthermore, both Rousseau and Marx critique the impact of social arrangements on human relationships with nature. They argue that the alienation from nature is not inherent but is a result of specific social and economic structures that have led to the objectification and alienation of the environment. In the context of the *Social Contract*, both Rousseau and Marx emphasize the need for conscious social control over production and the recognition of the sociality of the environment. They advocate for a reevaluation of the relationship between humans and nature, promoting a more harmonious and conscious approach to shaping the environment based on democratic decision-making and rational discourse about norms.

Rousseau's ideas about the impact of social structures on human-nature relationships and the need for a reevaluation of the *Social Contract* to address alienation from the environment.

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