

# Marx on Alienation

Ryan Doody

March 23, 2016

## Alienation

*Alienation*, in its various forms, underpins Marx's critique of Capitalism. (Although it isn't the *only* issue that worries Marx).

**Alienation:** The unnatural separation of something from oneself that, otherwise, would properly belong to, or be intimately connected with, oneself.

Marx claims that, under Capitalism, workers suffer four different kinds of alienation:

### FOUR FORMS OF ALIENATED LABOR

- (1) **Alienation from Product.** Workers labor to produce things that they don't own, can't control, and have no say in what happens to it.
- (2) **Alienation in Productive Activity.** Workers become unconnected to the activity of working itself, and consequently becomes alienated from their own lives. (Mindless, or overspecialized, tasks; little understanding, and no control, of the production of things as a whole).
- (3) **Alienation from "Species-Being".** We become disconnected from what is distinctive, and important, about being the kinds of creatures we are. (Marx thinks that what's distinctive about us — human beings — is our ability to intentionally shape our environment. Workers are prevented from doing this.)
- (4) **Alienation from Other Human Beings.** We are at odds with one another. We see each other as competitors, not cooperators.

Alienation can often involve a hostile relationship. Alienation involves circumstances that don't quite make sense.

### Some Questions about Marxian Alienation:

1. What is it about Capitalism that leads to these forms of alienation?
2. Do you agree with Marx that labor is central to our self-conception (i.e., that it is our "species-being") and our overall well-being?
3. What would non-alienated labor look like?