"Society" and "Species-being" in Karl Marx

Hideki Shibata

Introduction

My translation of Bensho-Ho wo Yomigaeraseru tame ni [For the Resurgence of Dialectic] (Omote 2017) explores Marx’s dialectical materialism and Sartre’s existentialism. Sartre’s “absolute, impersonal consciousness” allows us to grasp I not as subject, but as object. I and the world coexist, and neither has priority over the other. According to Sartre, “the World has not created the me: the me has not created the World. These are two objects with absolute, impersonal consciousness, and it is by virtue of this consciousness that they are connected” (Sartre 1960, pp. 105 ─106). Sartre’s view is shared by Marx, who argues that reason and thinking are not essential and realistic parts of a human-being, but rather, that it is the sensuous human-being who makes himself the object, who has objects, and who stands in mutual interaction with other objects in the world. That is the realistic human-being and the essential and realistic part of human-being.

In the development of Husserl’s philosophical investigation, as is often said, he finally came to an antinomy integral to consciousness.

On the other hand, it [consciousness] leads us to the source of all those "apperceptions" which form the basis of the givenness of all entities, including man in his self-perception, while on the other hand it leads us to a self-consciousness of man in the midst of an already given world, in co-existence with others. (Landgrebe 1966, p. 33)

This paper owes much to the thoughtful and helpful comments and advices of the editor of Editage (by Cactus Communications).
Though Husserl did not further question this facticity of human existence as this particular individual in its specific historical situation and the antinomy of consciousness, he inspired philosophers after him, such as Martin Heidegger, Max Scheler, and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre regarded human consciousness as impersonal, absolute consciousness, which had no substance such as I or ego, and characterized a human as “projet” or “his going beyond a situation.”

For us man is characterized above all by his going beyond a situation, and by what he succeeds in making of what he has been made—even if he never recognizes himself in his objectification. This going beyond we find at the very root of the human—in need. ... The most rudimentary behavior must be determined both in relation to the real and present factors which condition it and in relation to a certain object, still to come, which it is trying to bring into being. This is what we call the project. (Sartre 1968, p. 91)

Sartre’s projet here is the same as Marx’s practice or the “revolutionary” and “practical—critical” activity that Marx describes in his First Thesis on Feuerbach, and which Marx rephrases as “objective” activity (Cf. Omote 2017). Needless to say, Marx acquired this view, which he shared with Sartre, not from Husserl or Heidegger, but from a duel with Hegel. In this article, I would like to investigate the process by which this occurred.

I would first like to clarify Marx’s concept of society, review his critique of Hegel in view of his concept of society, and then argue that his understanding of human-being was premised on species-being.  

1) Chapter 1 “Society” in Marx

In Private Property and Communism in the Third Manuscript of Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, Marx writes that “the sublation of self-estrangement follows the same course as self-estrangement,” and outlines how this development led to communism.

Private property is first considered only in its objective aspect—but nevertheless with labor as its essence. Its form of existence is therefore capital, which is to be annulled “as such” (Proudhon). Or a particular form of labor—labor leveled down, frag-

1) Humans as species-being in Marx’s sense have been described in relation to money (Shibata 2012), class (Shibata 2013), state (Shibata 2014), language (Shibata 2017), and natural science (Shibata 2017a) in my previous papers.
mented, and therefore unfree—is conceived as the source of private property’s perni-
ociousness and of its existence in estrangement from men. For instance, Fourier, who,
like the Physiocrats, also conceives agricultural labor to be at least the exemplary
type, whilst Saint-Simon declares in contrast that industrial labor as such is the
essence, and accordingly aspires to the exclusive rule of the industrialists and the im-
provement of the workers’ condition. Finally, communism is the positive expression of
annulled private property—at first as universal private property. (Marx 1975, p. 294)

The genealogy of the French socialists referenced in the above citation cannot be under-
stood as a precise description of the history of thought. Here Marx just wants to describe
the sublation of private property as self-estrangement, that is, what is important is the
sublation of private property, not French socialists or communists’ political arguments.

In this way, Marx describes communism as “the positive expression of annulled private
property,” and explains its historical significance using six steps. The last step is Marx’s
critique of Hegel’s dialectic. I would like to restrict myself to dealing with steps three
through five, which are especially important to understanding Marx’s critique of Hegel in
step six.

Marx first argues that the significance of human history is clarified by communism as
the positive expression of annulled private property.

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-es-
trangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for
man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e.,
human) being—a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of
previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals human-
ism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolu-
tion of the conflict between man and nature and between man and man—the true res-
olution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and
self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, between the individual and the spe-
cies. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution.
The entire movement of history, just as its actual act of genesis—the birth act of its
empirical existence—is, therefore, for its thinking consciousness the comprehended
and known process of its becoming. (Marx 1975, pp. 296-7)

“Naturalism” and “humanism” in the above citation will be dealt with later, but I would
like to say here that this naturalism refers to the “natural historical process” in the pro-
logue of Das Kapital. Marx does not let his imagination run away here, but he describes—
while linking his description to history—only the results of his critical investigation of na-
tional economics, a branch of modern science. Following this citation, he presents the first
It is easy to see that the entire revolutionary movement necessarily finds both its empirical and its theoretical basis in the movement of private property—more precisely, in that of the economy.

This material, immediately perceptible private property is the material perceptible expression of estranged human life. Its movement—production and consumption—is the perceptible revelation of the movement of all production until now, i.e., the realization or the reality of man. Religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc., are only particular modes of production, and fall under its general law. The positive transcendence of private property as the appropriation of human life, is therefore the positive transcendence of all estrangement—that is to say, the return of man from religion, family, state, etc., to his human, i.e., social, existence. Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of consciousness, of man’s inner life, but economic estrangement is that of real life; its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects. (Marx 1975, p. 297)

The so-called formula of materialism was, in the past, vigorously accused of propounding economic determinism, but, as shown in the above citation, Marx does not intend to make such a trivial observation. He argues that as long as the movement of private property forms the base of human living, the movement, that is, production and consumption, is "the perceptible revelation of the movement of all production until now, i.e., the realization or the reality of man." We must understand precisely what Marx means by the word production, and it is, as discussed in his first manuscript titled "Estranged Labour," "life-engendering life," that is, the "creation of a world of objects by his practical activity [Das praktische Erzeugen einer gegenständlichen Welt]."

Marx delves a little more deeply into the idea of "society" in the above citations: "a social (i.e., human) being," or "his human, i.e., social, existence," and provides the following elaboration:

We have seen how on the assumption of positively annulled private property man produces man —himself and the other man; how the object, being the direct manifestation of his individuality, is simultaneously his own existence for the other man, the existence of the other man, and that existence for him. Likewise, however, both the material of labor and man as the subject, are the point of departure as well as the result of the movement (and precisely in this fact, that they must constitute the point of departure, lies the historical necessity of private property). Thus the social character is the general character of the whole movement: just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him. Activity and enjoyment, both in their content and in their
mode of existence, are social: social activity and social enjoyment. The human aspect of nature exists only for social man; for only then does nature exist for him as a bond with man—as his existence for the other and the other’s existence for him—and as the life-element of human reality. Only then does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence. Only here has what is to him his natural existence become his human existence, and nature become man for him. Thus society is the complete unity of man with nature—the true resurrection of nature—the consistent naturalism of man and the consistent humanism of nature.

Social activity and social enjoyment exist by no means only in the form of some directly communal activity and directly communal enjoyment, although communal activity and communal enjoyment—i.e., activity and enjoyment which are manifested and directly revealed in real association with other men—will occur wherever such a direct expression of sociability stems from the true character of the activity’s content and is appropriate to the nature of the enjoyment. (Marx 1975, pp. 297–298)

Marx’s “society” here apparently originates from the species-being described in the third determination of estranged labor in First Manuscript about Feuerbach. It refers to the human-being who has retrieved his estranged species-being. A human-being is, according to Marx, a profoundly social being, and the relationship between society and the individual is absolutely different from that portrayed by Ferdinand Tönnies, who distinguished between Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft. Marx says,

When I am active scientifically, etc.—an activity which I can seldom perform in direct community with others—then my activity is social, because I perform it as a man. Not only is the material of my activity given to me as a social product (as is even the language in which the thinker is active): my own existence is social activity, and therefore that which I make of myself, I make of myself for society and with the consciousness of myself as a social being.

My general consciousness is only the theoretical shape of that of which the living shape is the real community, the social fabric, although at the present day general consciousness is an abstraction from real life and as such confronts it with hostility. The activity of my general consciousness, as an activity, is therefore also my theoretical existence as a social being.

Above all we must avoid postulating “society” again as an abstraction vis-à-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. His manifestations of life—even if they may not appear in the direct form of communal manifestations of life carried out in association with others—are therefore an expression and confirmation of social life. Man’s individual and species-life are not different, however much—and this is inevitable—the mode of existence of the individual is a more particular or more general mode
of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more particular or more general individual life.

In his consciousness of species man confirms his real social life and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms itself in species consciousness and exists for itself in its generality as a thinking being.

Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual (and it is precisely his particularity which makes him an individual, and a real individual social being), is just as much the totality—the ideal totality—the subjective existence of imagined and experienced society for itself; just as he exists also in the real world both as awareness and real enjoyment of social existence, and as a totality of human manifestation of life.

Thinking and being are thus certainly distinct, but at the same time they are in unity with each other.

Death seems to be a harsh victory of the species over the particular individual and to contradict their unity. But the particular individual is only a particular species-being, and as such mortal. (Marx 1975, pp. 298–299)

Chapter 2 Marx’s monism or relationalism among objects

In step four, Marx compares private property and its sublation, and describes the human society that emerges from the positive sublation of private property as follows:

Just as private property is only the perceptible expression of the fact that man becomes objective for himself and at the same time becomes to himself a strange and inhuman object; just as it expresses the fact that the manifestation of his life is the alienation of his life, that his realization is his loss of reality, is an alien reality: so, the positive transcendence of private property—i.e., the perceptible appropriation for and by man of the human essence and of human life, of objective man, of human achievements—should not be conceived merely in the sense of immediate, one-sided enjoyment, merely in the sense of possessing, of having. Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man. Each of his human relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their objective orientation, or in their orientation to the object, the appropriation of the object, the appropriation of human reality. Their orientation to the object is the manifestation of the human reality, it is human activity and human suffering, for suffering, humanly considered, is a kind of self-enjoyment of man.

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 when it is directly possessed, eat-
en, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc.—in short, when it is used by us. Although private property itself again conceives all these direct realizations of possession only as means of life, and the life which they serve as means is the life of private property—labor and conversion into capital.

In the place of all physical and mental senses there has therefore come the sheer estrangement of all these senses, the sense of having. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order that he might yield his inner wealth to the outer world. [On the category of “having,” see Hess, in the Philosophy of the Deed].

The abolition of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and qualities, but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become, subjectively and objectively, human. The eye has become a human eye, just as its object has become a social, human object—an object made by man for man. The senses have therefore become directly in their practice theoreticians. They relate themselves to the thing for the sake of the thing, but the thing itself is an objective human relation to itself and to man and vice versa. Need or enjoyment have consequently lost their egotistical nature, and nature has lost its mere utility by use becoming human use.

In the same way, the senses and enjoyment of other men have become my own appropriation. Besides these direct organs, therefore, social organs develop in the form of society; thus, for instance, activity in direct association with others, etc., has become an organ for expressing my own life, and a mode of appropriating human life.

It is obvious that the human eye enjoys things in a way different from the crude, non-human eye; the human ear different from the crude ear, etc. (Marx 1975, pp. 299–301)

The baseline in Marx’s above argument is that in the private property system objectification means the privation of objects, but following the positive sublation of private property, objectification means the acquisition of objects. Marx uses the words objective activity instead of objectification in Thesis about Feuerbach, but he has already unified objects and activity in Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. He is not a dualist of subject-object who puts objects on one side and human activities on the other side. Insofar as a human-being is a natural-being, it is an objective being and stands in mutual relationship with other humans as an object, and, moreover, with all of nature. In this sense, Marx’s view is of the relationalism among objects, that is, the monism. Marx develops his relationalism among objects more deeply in the following:

We have seen that man does not lose himself in his object only when the object becomes for him a human object or objective man. This is possible only when the object becomes for him a social object, he himself for himself a social being, just as society
becomes a being for him in this object.

On the one hand, therefore, it is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man’s essential powers—human reality, and for that reason the reality of his own essential powers—that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, become objects which confirm and realize his individuality, become his objects: that is, man himself becomes the object. The manner in which they become his depends on the nature of the objects and on the nature of the essential power corresponding to it; for it is precisely the determinate nature of this relationship that shapes the particular, real mode of affirmation. To the eye an object comes to be other than it is to the ear, and the object of the eye is another object than the object of the ear. The specific character of each essential power is precisely its specific essence, and therefore also the specific mode of its objectification, of its objectively actual, living being. Thus, man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the act of thinking, but with all his senses.

On the other hand, let us look at this in its subjective aspect. Just as only music awakens in man the sense of music, and just as the most beautiful music has no sense for the unmusical ear—is [no] object for it, because my object can only be the confirmation of one of my essential powers, therefore can only exist for me insofar as my essential power exists for itself as a subjective capacity because the meaning of an object for me goes only so far as my sense goes (has only a meaning for a sense corresponding to that object)—for this reason the senses of the social man differ from those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man’s essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, human sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of humanized nature. The forming of the five senses is a labor of the entire history of the world down to the present. The sense caught up in crude practical need has only a restricted sense. For the starving man, it is not the human form of food that exists, but only its abstract existence as food. It could just as well be there in its crudest form, and it would be impossible to say wherein this feeding activity differs from that of animals. The care-burdened, poverty-stricken man has no sense for the finest play; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value but not the beauty and the specific character of the mineral: he has no mineralogical sense. Thus, the objectification of the human essence, both in its theoretical and practical aspects, is required to make man’s sense human, as well as to create the human sense corresponding to the entire wealth of human and natural substance. (Marx 1975, pp. 301–302)
The “social man” described above is later restated in step five as “socialist man” or “socialism as socialism.” Some people misguidedly understand “socialism as socialism” as being some developed social institution, and criticize Marx for not explaining this concept in detail. Such people, however, lack a rich imagination to visualize the society that would emerge after positive sublation of private property, because “the sense caught up in crude practical need has only a restricted sense.” On the other hand, these people will challenge, as Engels did, this criticism of utopian socialism, but they do not know Marx wrote poetry as a young man. That is clearly evident in sentences such as the following:

The senses of the social man differ from those of the non-social man. Only through the objectively unfolded richness of man’s essential being is the richness of subjective human sensibility (a musical ear, an eye for beauty of form—in short, senses capable of human gratification, senses affirming themselves as essential powers of man) either cultivated or brought into being. For not only the five senses but also the so-called mental senses, the practical senses (will, love, etc.), in a word, human sense, the human nature of the senses, comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of humanized nature.

Chapter 3 Marx’s critique of Hegel

From the end of step four, Marx criticizes the inadequacy of past philosophy and science, and essentially begins with a critique of Hegel’s philosophy.

We see how subjectivity and objectivity, spirituality and materiality, activity and suffering, only lose their antithetical character, and—thus their existence as such antitheses only within the framework of society; we see how the resolution of the theoretical antitheses is only possible in a practical way, by virtue of the practical energy of man. Their resolution is therefore by no means merely a problem of understanding, but a real problem of life, which philosophy could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as merely a theoretical one. (Marx 1975, p. 302)

This passage would presumably be the precursor of the Second Thesis about Feuerbach, but we must note that Marx’s new materialism, which he refers to in the Thesis about Feuerbach, originates from overcoming antitheses such as “subjectivity and objectivity, spirituality and materiality, activity and suffering.”

After arguing about the social man, Marx comments that socialism as socialism means there is no need for an “intermediary,” as in the following citation. The intermediary is the negation of negation as affirmation, communism is the negation of private property, which is negation, and atheism is the negation of God, which is negation.
Since for the socialist man the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the creation of man through human labor, nothing but the emergence of nature for man, so he has the visible, irrefutable proof of his birth through himself, of his genesis. Since the real existence of man and nature has become evident in practice, through sense experience, because man has thus become evident for man as the being of nature, and nature for man as the being of man, the question about an alien being, about a being above nature and man—a question which implies the admission of the unreality of nature and of man—has become impossible in practice. Atheism, as the denial of this unreality, has no longer any meaning, for atheism is a negation of God, and postulates the existence of man through this negation; but socialism as socialism no longer stands in any need of such a mediation. It proceeds from the theoretically and practically sensuous consciousness of man and of nature as the essence. Socialism is man's positive self-consciousness, no longer mediated through the abolition of religion, just as real life is man’s positive reality, no longer mediated through the abolition of private property, through communism. Communism is the position as the negation of the negation, and is hence the actual phase necessary for the next stage of historical development in the process of human emancipation and rehabilitation. Communism is the necessary form and the dynamic principle of the immediate future, but communism as such is not the goal of human development, the form of human society. (Marx 1975, pp. 305-306)

As noted above, in his critique of Hegel, Marx identifies “mediation” and “self-consciousness” as the main problems.

Marx begins his investigation of Hegel’s dialectic by saying, “one must begin with Hegel’s Phänomenologie, the true point of origin and the secret of the Hegelian philosophy,” and he then points out Hegel’s “error.”

There is a double error in Hegel.

The first emerges most clearly in the Phänomenologie, the birth-place of the Hegelian philosophy. When, for instance, wealth, state power, etc., are understood by Hegel as entities estranged from the human being, this only happens in their form as thoughts ... They are thought-entities, and therefore merely an estrangement of pure, i.e., abstract, philosophical thinking. The whole process therefore ends with absolute knowledge. It is precisely abstract thought from which these objects are estranged and which they confront with their presumption of reality. The philosopher—who is himself an abstract form of estranged man—takes himself as the criterion of the estranged world. The whole history of the alienation process [Entäußerungsgeschichte] and the whole process of the retraction of the alienation is therefore nothing but the history of the production of abstract (i.e., absolute) thought—of logical, speculative thought. (Marx
Marx does not write of the second error, and continues his critique of Hegel with almost the same intention.

The *estrangement*, [*Entfremdung*] which therefore forms the real interest of the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of this alienation [*Entäußerung*], is the opposition of *in itself and for itself*, of consciousness and self-consciousness, of object and subject—that is to say, it is the opposition between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness within thought itself. All other oppositions and movements of these oppositions are but the *semblance*, the *cloak*, the *exoteric* shape of these oppositions which alone matter, and which constitute the *meaning* of these other, profane oppositions. It is not the fact that the human being *objectifies himself inhumanly*, in opposition to himself, but the fact that he *objectifies himself* [*selbst sich vergegenständlicht*] in *distinction* from and in *opposition* to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement [*Entfremdung*] and the thing to be superseded [*aufzuhebende*].

The appropriation of man’s essential powers, which have become objects—indeed, alien objects—is thus in the first place only an *appropriation* occurring in *consciousness*, in *pure thought*, i.e., in *abstraction*: it is the appropriation of these objects as *thoughts* and as *movements of thought*. Consequently, despite its thoroughly negative and critical appearance and despite the genuine criticism contained in it, which often anticipates far later development, there is already latent in the *Phänomenologie* as a germ, a potentiality, a secret, the uncritical positivism and the equally uncritical idealism of Hegel’s later works—that philosophic dissolution and restoration of the existing empirical world.

*In the second place*: the vindication of the objective world for man—for example, the realization that sensuous consciousness is not an *abstractly* sensuous consciousness but a *humanly* sensuous consciousness, that religion, wealth, etc., are but the estranged world of *human* objectification, of man’s essential powers put to work and that they are therefore but the *path* to the true *human* world—this appropriation or the insight into this process appears in Hegel therefore in this form, that *sense*, *religion*, state power, etc., are *spiritual* entities; for only *mind* is the *true* essence of man, and the true form of mind is thinking mind, logical, speculative mind.

The *human character* of nature and of the nature created by history—man’s products—appears in the form that they are *products* of abstract mind and as such, therefore, phases of *mind*—*thought-entities*. The *Phänomenologie* is, therefore, a hidden, mystifying and still uncertain criticism; but inasmuch as it depicts man’s *estrangement*, even though man appears only as mind, there lie concealed in it *all* the elements
of criticism, already prepared and elaborated in a manner often rising far above the Hegelian standpoint. The “unhappy consciousness,” the “honest consciousness,” the struggle of the “noble and base consciousness,” etc., etc.—these separate sections contain, but still in an estranged form, the critical elements of whole spheres such as religion, the state, civil life, etc. Just as entities, objects, appear as thought-entities, so the subject is always consciousness or self-consciousness; or rather the object appears only as abstract consciousness, man only as self-consciousness: the distinct forms of estrangement which make their appearance are, therefore, only various forms of consciousness and self-consciousness. Just as in itself abstract consciousness (the form in which the object is conceived) is merely a moment of distinction of self-consciousness, what appears as the result of the movement is the identity of self-consciousness with consciousness—absolute knowledge—the movement of abstract thought no longer directed outwards but proceeding now only within its own self: that is to say, the dialectic of pure thought is the result. (Marx 1975, pp. 331–332)

I would like to summarize what is, according to Marx, Hegel’s error. The problem is “abstract thought.” It is true that Hegel grasps the self-estrangement, the alienation, and the history, but he makes “the philosopher—who is himself an abstract form of estranged man” “the criterion of the estranged world,” and “the whole history of the alienation process and the whole process of the retraction of the alienation is therefore nothing but the history of the production of abstract (i.e., absolute) thought—of logical, speculative thought.” This means that estrangement is “the opposition in itself and for itself, of consciousness and self-consciousness, of object and subject,” and it is reduced to “the opposition between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness within thought itself.”

Eventually for Hegel, “it is not the fact that the human being objectifies himself inhumanly, in opposition to himself, but the fact that he objectifies himself in distinction from and in opposition to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement and the thing to be superseded.” What is important for Marx is, on the other hand, “the fact that the human being objectifies himself inhumanly, in opposition to himself,” and it is meaningless for him to bring this objectification into opposition with abstract thought and thereby resolve this opposition. Rather, Marx wishes “the vindication of the objective world for man.” So, it is most important for him to have the cognition that “religion, wealth, etc., are but the estranged world of human objectification, of man’s essential powers put to work and that they are therefore but the path to the true human world.”

Chapter 4 Species-being in Marx

How did Marx reach the standpoint thus far described? It is by way of a fundamental critique of political economy. Marx sees in “the connection between this whole estrange-
ment and the *money system* (Marx 1975, p. 271) the most important problem of the modern economy, and begins his investigation by observing that labor is part of private property, and delineating the four features of estranged labor: estrangement from labor products, estrangement from labor itself, estrangement from the species-being, and estrangement from men.

I would next like to review how Marx understands the relationship between private property and estranged labor.

*Private property* thus results by analysis from the concept of *alienated labor*, i.e., of *alienated man*, of estranged labor, of estranged life, of *estranged man*.

True, it is as a result of the *movement of private property* that we have obtained the concept of *alienated labor* (*of alienated life*) in political economy. But on analysis of this concept it becomes clear that though private property appears to be the reason, the cause of alienated labor, it is rather its consequence, just as the gods are *originally* not the cause but the effect of man’s intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal. (Marx 1975, pp. 279–280)

Marx’s understanding of private property, therefore, is founded on estranged labor, and he acquired his view of so-called historical materialism, that is, the materialistic understanding of history, in the process of investigating estranged labor. The third feature of estranged labor describes it most clearly as follows:

We have still a third aspect of *estranged labor* to deduce from the two already considered.

Man is a species-being, not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species (his own as well as those of other things) as his object, but—and this is only another way of expressing it—also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a *universal* and therefore a free being.

The life of the species, both in man and in animals, consists physically in the fact that man (like the animal) lives on inorganic nature; and the more universal man (or the animal) is, the more universal is the sphere of inorganic nature on which he lives. Just as plants, animals, stones, air, light, etc., constitute theoretically a part of human consciousness, partly as objects of natural science, partly as objects of art—his spiritual inorganic nature, spiritual nourishment which he must first prepare to make palatable and digestible—so also in the realm of practice they constitute a part of human life and human activity. Physically man lives only on these products of nature, whether they appear in the form of food, heating, clothes, a dwelling, etc. The universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his *inorganic* body—both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the materi-
al, the object, and the instrument of his life activity. Nature is man’s \textit{inorganic body}—nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body. Man \textit{lives} on nature—means that nature is his \textit{body}, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature. (Marx 1975, pp. 275–276)

Marx needed such a broad perspective of the human-nature relationship, needless to say, to situate modern civil society, which is founded on private property, in history, and relativize it. Without such relativization, we can only understand private property and modern civil society superficially, and have no chance of overcoming and eliminating them. Marx’s words—“a process of natural history”—from a phrase in \textit{Capital} (1996), “my standpoint, from which the evolution of the economic formation of society is viewed as a process of natural history” (Marx 1996, p. 10), have provoked many arguments, but the foundation of the “process of natural history” is “the species-being” and “life of the species” in the above citation. Especially important to understanding his “process of natural history” are the phrases “the universality of man appears in practice precisely in the universality which makes all nature his \textit{inorganic body},” and “that man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself.” Marx further explains “natural history” in “Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole” in this article.

Whenever real, corporeal \textit{man}, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature, \textit{posits} his real, objective \textit{essential powers} as alien objects by his externalisation, it is not the \textit{act of positing} which is the subject in this process: it is the subjectivity of \textit{objective} essential powers, whose action, therefore, must also be something \textit{objective}. An objective being acts objectively, and he would not act objectively if the objective did not reside in the very nature of his being. He only creates or posits objects, because he is posited by objects—because at bottom he is \textit{nature}. In the act of positing, therefore, this objective being does not fall from his state of “pure activity” into a \textit{creating} of the \textit{object}; on the contrary, his \textit{objective} product only confirms his \textit{objective} activity, his activity as the activity of an objective, natural being.

Here we see how consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both. We see also how only naturalism is capable of comprehending the action of world history. (Marx 1975, p. 336)

The “consistent naturalism or humanism” referred to above is the philosophical foundation of the materialistic understanding of history and Marx’s realistic dialectic. He learned and used the concept “object” from Feuerbach, but added the concept “action” to it, and de-
veloped it further. We can see this in the words “objective activity,” which are central to the concept in the *Thesis about Feuerbach*.

Marx further explains the relationship between men and nature as follows:

Man is directly a *natural being*. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand endowed with *natural powers, vital powers*—he is an *active* natural being. These forces exist in him as tendencies and abilities—as *instincts*. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited creature, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his instincts exist outside him, as *objects* independent of him; yet these objects are *objects* that he *needs*—essential *objects*, indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers. To say that man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being full of natural vigor is to say that he has *real, sensuous objects* as the object of his being or of his life, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects. To *be* objective, natural and sensuous, and at the same time to have object, nature and sense outside oneself, or oneself to be object, nature and sense for a third party, is one and the same thing. Hunger is a natural *need*; it therefore needs a *nature* outside itself, an *object* outside itself, in order to satisfy itself, to be stilled. Hunger is an acknowledged need of my body for an *object* existing outside it, indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential being....

A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its *object*; i.e., it is not objectively related. Its being is not objective.

A non-objective being is a *non-being*.

Suppose a being which is neither an object itself, nor has an object. Such a being, in the first place, would be the *unique* being: there would exist no being outside it—it would exist solitary and alone. For as soon as there are objects outside me, as soon as I am not alone, I am another—another *reality* than the object outside me. For this third object, I am thus a *different reality* than itself; that is, I am *its* object. Thus, to suppose a being which is not the object of another being is to presuppose that no objective being exists. As soon as I have an object, this object has me for an object. But a *non-objective* being is an unreal, non-sensuous thing—a product of mere thought (i.e., of mere imagination)—an abstraction. To be *sensuous*, that is, to be really existing, means to be an object of sense, to be a *sensuous* object, to have sensuous objects outside oneself—objects of one’s sensuousness. To be sensuous is to *suffer*.

Man as an objective, sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being—and because he feels that he suffers, a *passionate* being. Passion is the essential power of man energetically bent on its object.
But man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore, he is a *species-being*, and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing. Therefore, *human* objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is *human sense* as it immediately is—as it is objectively—*human* sensibility, human objectivity. Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the *human* being. And as everything natural has to *come into being*, *man* too has his act of origin—*history*—which, however, is for him a known history, and hence as an act of origin it is a conscious self-transcending act of origin. History is the true natural history of man. (Marx 1975, pp.336–337)

“Natural history” in the previous sentence, and “history is the true natural history of man” refers to the “process of natural history” described previously. “Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the human being,” and this is why “human objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is human sense as it immediately is—as it is objectively—human sensibility, human objectivity.” So, a human must act on its objects and process them, and “as everything natural has to come into being, man too has his act of origin—history—which, however, is for him a known history.”

To return to the subject, Marx describes the third feature of estranged labor as depending on the argument of species-being as follows:

In estranging from man (1) nature, and (2) himself, his own active functions, his life activity, estranged labor estranges the *species* from man. It changes for him the *life of the species* into a means of individual life. First it estranges the life of the species and individual life, and secondly it makes individual life in its abstract form the purpose of the life of the species, likewise in its abstract and estranged form.

For labor, *life activity, productive life* itself, appears to man in the first place merely as a *means* of satisfying a need—the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species, its species-character, is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man’s species-character. Life itself appears only as a *means to life.* (Marx 1975, p. 276)

The third feature of estranged labor is often called the estrangement from the species-being, but in more precise terms, first the species-being and private life are divided and estranged, and then the private life makes the species-being its means of living. That is to say, the estrangement of the species-being and the private life means the division of
“Society” and “Species-being” in Karl Marx (Shibata)

273

both, and explains the formation of the individual in modern civil society in a profound way. As a result, the individual is abstracted, and at the same time the species-being is also abstracted. This abstraction is, needless to say, not abstraction in thought, but abstraction in the objective world.

Marx explains the phrase “the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life” to clarify the significance of the species-being.

The animal is immediately one with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity. Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity. It is not a determination with which he directly merges. Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity. Estranged labor reverses the relationship, so that it is just because man is a conscious being that he makes his life activity, his essential being, a mere means to his existence.

In creating a world of objects by his personal activity, in his work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being, i.e., as a being that treats the species as his own essential being, or that treats itself as a species-being. Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. An animal’s product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms objects only in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object. Man therefore also forms objects in accordance with the laws of beauty.

It is just in his work upon the objective world, therefore, that man really proves himself to be a species-being. This production is his active species-life. Through this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the objectification of man’s species-life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created. In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him his species-life, his real objectivity as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him.
Similarly, in degrading spontaneous, free activity to a means, estranged labor makes man’s species-life a means to his physical existence.

The consciousness which man has of his species is thus transformed by estrangement in such a way that species [-life] becomes for him a means. (Marx 1975, pp. 276─277)

These passages summarize the significance of Marx’s argument of species-being. First, he compares humans with animals, and grasps the significance of the species-being of humans compared to the limited species-being of animals: “Conscious life activity distinguishes man immediately from animal life activity. It is just because of this that he is a species-being. Or it is only because he is a species-being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. Only because of that is his activity free activity.” We usually think that “free” means individuals acting of their own will and colliding with each other. Marx, however, thinks otherwise. This freedom eventually makes a human part of an impersonal universal consciousness, with himself as object.

Second, Marx tactfully describes the creation of the human world in the phrase “creating a world of objects by his personal activity [das praktische Erzeugen einer gegenständlichen Welt].” In addition, the human world is said to be created on the basis of the natural world. The expression used is the extension of the “objectification [Vergegenständlichung]” in the first feature of estranged labor and directly derived from the definition of species-life, that is, “life creating life.”

Third, “creating a world of objects by his personal activity [das praktische Erzeugen einer gegenständlichen Welt]” is rephrased by “his work upon inorganic nature [die Bearbeitung der unorganischen Natur],” and both expressions together are further rephrased in “his work upon the objective world [die Bearbeitung der gegenständlichen Welt].” The “work [Bearbeitung]” means adding labor to existing natural objects and transforming them, and, as a result, men duplicating themselves through this activity. Such objective duplication is the foundation of Marx’s realistic dialectic. Marx expresses it as follows: “He duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he sees himself in a world that he has created.” Marx’s explanation reveals that his interest was not limited to human consciousness and that the duplication [Verdoppelung] of objects themselves was of most importance.

Conclusion

The individual ego or subject no longer satisfies as a definition of human, and Marx’s use of the word—species-being—is an alternative definition of human being. Heidegger’s in-the-world-being is, as discussed in my previous paper (Cf. Shibata 2017a), very limited, compared to Marx’s concept. Heidegger does not regard reason or apperception as human qualities, and he criticized the development of scientific reasoning that began in ancient
Greece. Natural science is today less subjective and dogmatic than Heidegger expected, and its investigative process depends on mutual exchanges between humans and nature. Further, these exchanges are part of an endless process of overcoming and breaking down existing theories of nature, and theories provide the means to investigate the natural sciences.

The concept of species-being itself does not originate with Marx. His species-being is said to have placed production and labor at the center of the human community, and excluded elements of thoughts, like love. Marx, however, investigated labor and production with great care, and identified both “objective duplication” and “realistic dialectic.” These observations allowed Marx to understand human society as a profound and realistic process, and to anticipate the possibility of a social revolution.

References