

# Review of: "Alienation, Values and the Destruction of the Subject"

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The general ambition of the paper is an ambitious and interesting one: it wants to describe alienation as a “way of being” that is “chosen” by the human being itself (p. 1). To achieve this, it understands alienation as both socially and individually derived; socially in the sense that certain values and objects are presented to the subject from the outside, and individually in the sense that it is nonetheless itself the author of these external, social forms as (part of) its accepted value system. In this way, the author can sympathize with Marx’ famous formulations from *Capital* on commodity fetishism in which what is really a social relation between subjects appears as if it were a social relation between things, while simultaneously being critical of the tendencies in subsequent Marxist theory to reducing the causes of alienation to the “external milieu” alone (p. 7).

The paper presents a consistent argument but does suffer from two weaknesses: it is imprecise in many of its references, and it does not justify its basic, ontological premises.

- i. The author tends to rely on and agree with some authors and distance itself from others based on very general summations of entire works. When Lacan, for example, is attributed the viewpoint that “reflection [is] confined only by an unconscious sphere” (p. 4), the only documentation for this claim is an unspecified reference to his first seminar in its entirety. This makes it very difficult to engage in a nuanced discussion, and it nourishes a suspicion that there might be useful insights in other authors that are not sufficiently considered.
- ii. The resulting position, to which the paper subscribes, appears like a more commonsensical idea (than the rejected alternatives), but is not really argued for substantially. On page 12-13, for example, we learn that “[i]n our opinion, the presence of unconscious repressed motives in the psyche of individuals is due to the existence of estranged values accepted by the individual but separated and hostile to his personal individual motives and values.” But we are never explained how the supposed non-alienated individual motives and values are possible. Which ontology of the subject is implied here? Does the “healthy” subject create their own values ex nihilo? Therefore, the article leaves us with an image of a possible non-alienated subject with “ontological freedom” (p. 4), who chooses its own values, but can be “split”, when it chooses wrongly or internalizes values that are not genuinely its own. This image, however, remains a specter or a fantasy. It is not argued for, but much rather postulated.

In conclusion, the article deals with an important and complex topic from an interesting angle but fails to argue convincingly for its own position. Nonetheless, this very failure may inspire more detailed studies of some of the authors that are dealt with along the way.

