

Self-Knowledge, Estrangement, and Social Metabolism

Boris Hennig

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Abstract

I will explore two key themes in Marx's thought, estrangement and political economy, in their relation to human self-knowledge. Starting from Marx's claim that all forms of estrangement rest on the estrangement of human labour, I will follow him in describing labour as socially extended metabolism. In order to distinguish between organic and extended metabolism, I will draw a distinction between functional and social organization, and argue that socially extended metabolism gives rise to shared values and concepts in the same way in which organic metabolism gives rise to life. On this basis, I will suggest that both the subject and object of human self-knowledge is a socially extended self, which can connect to itself only when humans are freely participating in socially extended metabolism, that is, economy, science, and industry. Estrangement, on the other hand, will be seen to result from a disruption within socially extended metabolism.

Keywords

Self-Knowledge, Estrangement, Labour, Metabolism, Marx