

INTERPRETATION

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ASPECTS OF IDENTITY AND ALIENATION

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I

Our concern in the present analysis is alienation—or separation—as it is conceived in terms of the relation between individuals and societies—societies comprising in the present context institutions, dynamics of social processes, as well as different modes of inter-personal behaviour. We employ the term “alienation” being aware of the fact that alienation connotes a process in which individuals give away themselves or it connotes the outcome of that process. It has to be said at the outset that we are concerned not only with processes but also with situations: denying normatively alienation as self-estrangement does not mean to imply that the situation of separateness or distance between individuals and societies has to be negated or negatively evaluated, even when self-estrangement proper is morally condemned.

This preliminary comment is due to the fact that in many a contemporary discussion of the human–social situation the notion of “alienation” became a prevailing notion leading to one in which different modes of inter-personal relations are subsumed under that vague heading. To a very large extent the contemporary usage of the term “alienation” carries the seal of Marx’s use of that term. We have to recall that the main point in Marx’s analysis lies in self-estrangement qua turning of one’s capacities into a commodity or turning different human expressions into a commodity to be exchanged (*Tauschwert*) or used (*Gebrauchswert*). Yet we have to be aware also of the fact that Marx’s analysis shifts the emphasis from the position of the individual to the position of man as the entity of the species—*Gattungswesen*. Therefore there might be a tendency to interpret the meaning of Marx’s analysis in a direction according to which to overcome alienation from the point of view of the individual is to overcome the very position of the individual. To be sure, the implicit or explicit trend of Marx’s analysis has been amplified by some of the presentations of Existenzphilosophy in its variations. In this context we have to mention Heidegger’s thesis, namely that the pivotal point in the analysis of the human situation is the unconditioned reign which appears as what Heidegger calls “the will to will,” which is essentially the technological will, namely the will to take advantage of nature and impose on it the human rule. In this sense the technological impetus is even more significant in bringing about human alienation than the economic impetus analysed by Marx. In as much as

Sartre is concerned, at least in the stage of "*L'etre et Néant*," alienation is implied in the very coexistence of human beings, since that coexistence carries within itself the limitation on individual freedom. Thus we can say that for Marx the solution of the problem of alienation lies in the establishment of freedom on the level of man as an entity of the species; thus the concern ceases to be with individuals in their limited scope of existence and activity. For Heidegger there is probably no solution to alienation inherent in the technological impetus unless a totally new era which has a human and ontological meaning will emerge. For the Existential Philosophy alienation ceases to be a process and becomes a primary situation which cannot be overcome.

We have mentioned the different trends which to a very large extent shape the mood of present-day analyses and response to social issues because our point of departure lies in an attempt to analyse different modes of relationships between individuals and societies, different numerically and phenomenologically. Hence no generalized, let alone totalistic, interpretation of alienation can be accepted or, to put it differently, not every separateness amounts to that *malaise* which is negatively evaluated in the different analyses of alienation. If we speak of processes characterized by the feature of strangeness or distance, we can say that there are modes of distance for which we rightly opt. Negatively speaking, we cannot presuppose a sort of unity, unanimity, harmony, etc. as an ethical norm, and therefore we cannot accept the view that where there is no unity etc., there is no confidence, involvement or being at home. We have to analyse more precisely modes or levels of coexistence in order to find where distance is justified and where it is not.

In addition, and this is only a parallel to the previous comment, in this analysis we assume that the relation, let alone identification, between an individual or individuals and a social domain in its various manifestations cannot be viewed as a primary fact. Individuals are also physical entities—societies are not. An identity between the individual and society is an identity established, accomplished or achieved. Therefore it depends on acts of identification on the part of the individuals who reach out toward a society and its dynamic processes. By reaching out they establish from their end what is sometimes called a 'meaningful relationship' with the society. Since we point to the dependence upon the acts of identification or even continuous attitudes of identification, the question remains open as to certain societal patterns which lend themselves to being the focus or goals of the acts of individuals in the direction of identification. The point is significant precisely since societies are not entities to which we can attribute intentions or intentionalities. Hence the openness of societies has to be of a structural or organizational pattern, while the openness of individuals is bound to be

one of acts, intentions and intentionalities.

Since we emphasized this intentional character of the identification between individuals and societies as partners in the correlation, we may ask ourselves whether or not there is a given identity which lacks an intentional character altogether. One could suggest as a model of a given identity between partners the identity between a person or an individual and his body. But even vis-à-vis that example or model the question can be raised whether that identity is just given, primordial in a sense, or whether it too presupposes acts of identification or, more concretely, acts of turning the body into a fact or factor which is identical with the individual. If this is the case, then an individual performs acts vis-à-vis himself and, more specifically vis-à-vis his body, incorporating it as it were into himself or attributing it to himself up to the point of identification or full identity. Let us not forget psychopathological states which sometimes manifest themselves in a lack of awareness of the identity between an individual and his body. But even in areas of what is called normal experience, one wonders whether we do not encounter a perplexing situation, for instance whether blood taken from one's finger or arm being from the individual is identical with the individual at least to the extent that the blood flowing in one's veins is part of one's organism and thus can be attributed to the individual.

It can be concluded that we speak of processes both in terms of identity and distance and move to identification and alienation when we cling to a symmetry between the various aspects of the relation between individual and society. Because we refer to processes we can move further and deal with different processes and thus present a multi-levelled situation of identification and alienation. Before doing so, let us make one more preliminary remark on a certain presupposition of the very self-awareness of the individual who may maintain his individuality in his identity or even in his identification with a social pattern.

II

To be sure, in the social sphere there is no identity modelled after the relation between one's self-awareness and one's body: "a pantheistic faith is not possible where individuals have a lively sense of their individuality."¹ But even when individuals do not have a "lively sense of their individuality" they do have *some* sense of their individuality, be it the case that they conceive of their individuality as of a transient character. It takes certain acts to submerge the individuality in the pantheistic whole, e.g., to burn the body, since the body cannot be physically submerged in the whole and possibly is not deemed to deserve to be submerged there. The absence of the sense of individuality² might explain the fact that some interpreters

of the contemporary human situation tend to take the view that there is no indigenous concept of alienation in the traditional Asian world outlook. The assumption, at least the hidden one, seems to be that where there is no clear distinction between the individual and the whole, alienation cannot take place. Alienation connotes in this sense the fact that individuals who are supposedly submerged in the society are taken back and thus are at loss vis-à-vis that which is conceived at their milieu. Yet without an act of a differentiation between that which is the true being and that which is only accidental and transient, i.e. without the act which attributes to the whole the status of the true being and denies the individuals that status—there can be a situation of “an almost complete absence of individualism.” The interpretation of the relation of the individuality as an individuality or as having a quasi status only is of a different order than that of the awareness of the individual in his relation between his individuality and his body. Hence we may conclude that the relation between individuals and society be it a relation of submersion, be it a relation of a contact, and be it a relation of a breakdown of the contact viewed as alienation—all these relations are not given, natural, organic, preformed relations.

III

Having pointed to the extra-natural or, let us say, reflective character of the relation obtaining between the individual and the society, we may proceed to the analysis of the notion and the problem of alienation.

“Alienation,” as this concept is presented in many contemporary discussions, is used with different meanings. Within the broad meaning of alienation as un-connectedness of the individuals to their societies different sub-meanings, as it were, are put forward or implied. Unconnectedness may be, in the first place, due to a decision on the part of the individual to maintain a certain perspective vis-à-vis society or certain segments of society. This perspective might be motivated by methodical consideration, as would be the case when an individual living in a society or in a contemporary situation retreats methodically from his experience and turns society and the contemporary situation into a subject matter of his study. Here alienation amounts to a distance, or to a degree of distance. This distance is sometimes called alienation.³ In this sense, the notion of the alienated intellectual became a common notion in contemporary vocabulary. Still at least two sub-notions are comprised in the concept of the ‘alienated intellectual.’

The first is related to an intellectual vocation or avocation. Since intellectuals may look at situations not only as milieus of their experience and involvements but also as subject matters of their analytical research, the very shift to an analytical concern on their part creates a duality of

involvement and analysis. As such, it might taint the involvement, that is to say, make it less naive or less taken for granted than it might have been the case without the analytic attitude.

The second meaning of "alienated intellectual" is this: Since intellectuals turn situations into subject matters, they eliminate involvement in a situation altogether. Hence they are rootless or uprooted. Sometimes it is not clear whether rootlessness is an outcome of the intellectual analytical pursuit, or it is an outcome of the attitude society is taking with regard to those who study society and are or are not involved in it. Yet, by and large, we may conclude that the meaning of alienation *qua* distance, since that distance is due to a decision on the part of the person maintaining the distance, does not have a critical innuendo, neither an innuendo from the point of view of the individual nor—necessarily—from the point of view of the society. The distance is considered to be germane to a certain attitude and is not a deformation, or not so in the first place.

IV

We may consider now a narrower meaning of the concept of alienation. This meaning implies a certain critical attitude, though it is not clear to whom that criticism is to be addressed.

In a broad sense alienation as it is to be considered now connotes not only an unconnectedness but a lack of an attachment, or a feeling of a lack of an attachment to a situation at stake or to the society and its patterns in general. A lack of attachment is not conceived as emerging out of a decision, let alone a decision inherent in a methodical perspective. The lack is due to the fact that something went wrong in the relation between the individual and the society, that is to say that the situation or the society does not generate the feeling of attachment, but on the contrary generates the feeling of dissociation. The relation between an individual and society has to have as its norm the engendering in the individual of a feeling of attachment. When this feeling is not engendered, the position of the unconnected individual is an indication of a social problem between individuals and their respective societies. Once individuals are aware of the fact that the situation as it prevails factually falls short in comparison with the norm, the reaction of the individuals follows the feeling of the gap between the factual and the normative.

It is in this sense that many a discussion deals with alienation as bitterness or in terms of other expressions of the attitude of disappointment. It is in this context that alienation appears as a synonym of a feeling of injustice and bitterness;⁴ or, somewhat differently, political alienation is viewed as political apathy. Yet a closer reading of these pieces of analysis

of the social situation might render a somewhat different meaning to the suggested identification of alienation with apathy in the area of political action. Eventually the reference is made to the attitude of doubt: "they doubted the qualifications and effectiveness of American voters and questioned whether the political institutions could solve major national and international problems."⁵ Though the analysis as conceived in sociology or political science does not raise fundamental problems as to the notion of alienation employed in this context, these problems cannot be disregarded. Let us raise some of the questions pertinent to the situation of the alleged alienation.

The tacit assumption seems to be a twofold one: The first is that the normative situation is one where voters are effective in shaping the political process; the second assumption seems to be that it is the norm that political institutions ought to cope with and to solve major problems in the national and international sphere. The first assumption is related to the positive impact of individuals on the political process; the second assumption relates to the positive impact of institutions on pertinent human problems. If there is alienation, then it comes about due to the gap between the assumption and reality, or between the expectation and the situation as it factually is.

Hence we have to conclude that alienation is mediated by an ideology or an expectation; the institutions and the political processes are conceived as being grounded in a certain pattern, while factually they do not exhibit the pattern or they lost their pattern. Alienation in terms of the relation between individuals and institutions is in turn tied up with the relation between the institutions and their presupposed ideological substance.

Hence, alienation conveys in the context not only a descriptive meaning in terms of a factual situation prevailing between the individuals and the society; it conveys, and it intends mainly to convey, an evaluative meaning. It is wrong that this situation should prevail and the indication of the wrong done is the feeling of bitterness and the sense of injustice generated by the situation. The reflective character of the relation between the individuals and the society accounts for the response on the part of the individuals to this reflection on the presuppositions, on the one hand, and to reality, on the other. Yet it seems to be still unclear whether the situation is that unequivocal as the employment of the term alienation would suggest in this context.



The implication that there exists a one-to-one correlation between the attitude of apathy and the inhibiting and forbidding character of the

political process calls for some serious doubts. The theoretical doubt is due to one's wondering whether there is at all an *a priori* fitting response to conditions, or whether there are several possible responses related to a condition, with apathy being just one of them. For instance: facing the "thickness" of human reality may engender (looked at it systematically) a projection of an utopian view; it might generate an eremitic attitude which is not identical, and by no means so, with apathy, since an eremite might dedicate himself to a cultivation of human welfare which lies outside the main track of the political process, as monasteries have done and do. Apathy grounded in bitterness is only one of the possible attitudes of response to political conditions. To some extent it takes a decision, an overt or a tacit one, to select one attitude out of other possible attitudes. The decision is not only a response to a stimulus; it is grounded also in an evaluation of the political process as well as in a relative evaluation of certain avenues of behaviour to be pursued, i.e. whether one is concerned with one's own vineyard, or whether one is still related to societal life, though outside the political domain in its organized and institutional area.

The main conclusion to be derived from this deliberation is that insofar as there is apathy, and apathy is looked at as being identical with alienation, there is to some extent *self*-alienation. Alienation in this sense is not an automatic result of the political process, and one wonders whether there are automatic results in this area at all. Empirically, and this is rather an important consideration, one may point to the fact that a very "thick" political process sometimes engenders an attitude not of apathy but precisely an attitude of rejection and revolt. In this sense the rejection and the rebellion are the other side of the coin of self-alienation in the positive sense of the term, where human beings are engaged in the shaping of the political process or in an attempt to shape that process against its established institutions. Criticism is a sort of an alienation but is obviously far from being identical with apathy. It means that we do not take it as self-evident that only an identification with the political process rooted in involvement and participation provide for the adequate attitude to prevail between individuals and societies. Rejection and involvement are adequate attitudes as well.

The first conclusion to be derived from the preceding analysis is that the term alienation is ambiguous and calls for a further elaboration to enable us, among other things, to distinguish between a mode of alienation which indicates the static relation between individuals and societies as expressed in the withdrawal to apathy versus a dynamic mode of relation which indicates the tension between rejection and participation.

The second consideration centers on a closer analysis of the political process and the feeling of impotence which engenders bitterness and apathy

in the minds of the voters. The voters usually vote for one of two alternatives or for both: They vote for a broad platform related to certain social goals or ideological objectives such as welfare, peace, the nature of economy in terms of central planning or free market; or they vote for a concrete personality who is viewed as embodying the pursuit of the goals and the capacity of judgment and foresight in a given situation. They vote also for specific issues such as the voting age or the abolition of capital punishment. There is an in-between area which is not up for popular voting, the area of concrete decisions which indeed can be viewed as related to the overriding goals or ideological objectives, but call for expert knowledge and relative evaluation. This would be the case as to the relative amount spent in the budget for defence, for social welfare or education. In a democracy there is a certain collaboration between the aspect of popular voting as shaping an overriding decision and the aspect of expert knowledge which shapes the concrete and scattered decisions. It would be futile and misleading to assume a permanent or even a sporadic harmony between these two expressions of the attitudes of shaping policy decisions.

This aspect of the parallelism and intersection between the two ways of shaping the political process can be looked at from an additional point of view as well. We have to distinguish between, e.g., the adherence to the concept of majority rule, or to the concept of the rule of law, and the concrete embodiment of the majority or even the concrete embodiment of the maxim of the rule of law. We may agree to the principle of majority rule but we may reject the concrete decisions taken by a concrete majority here and now. Our adherence on the one hand and our rejection on the other presuppose a distinction between principles and decisions whose legitimacy is asserted, but whose wisdom or feasibility is questioned. Hence a certain alienation inside the political process, to the extent that alienation does not mean unconnectedness, is essential for the dynamics and the flexibility of that process. This flexibility brings about a certain grain of freedom with regard to the individual who may take concurrently two parallel positions: He might criticize the very principle of the rule of the majority, or only the concrete manifestations of the majority in so far as these manifestations presuppose the principle but are only concrete acts of narrowing down the principle. The over-identification with the political process leads eventually to a levelling down of the process to one layer only. This over-identification may lead in turn to a dogmatic fanaticism whereby every act of the majority is considered to be not only legitimate, but also adequate.

The adherence to a principle and a critical attitude vis-à-vis the concrete embodiments of that principle can be viewed from a broader position of human behaviour, which in turn is pertinent to the question of alienation. An over-identification might lead to a contraction of the human personality

and of human performance, and along with them to turning the social and political realm into a one-sided and one dimensional realm. In case one's adherence to the principle of the rule of majority leads him to the ready-made approval of any decision taken by that majority, one identifies, that is to say over-identifies, the principle with those who govern and decide. This is a contraction of the political sphere. If one assumes this, what really counts is the content of the decision and not the principle underlying the decision, one will be inclined to disregard the principle and care only for the content. One would not care whether the content is put forward according to the principle of the majority rule or not. In addition, once we maintain a situation in which different layers of public life are present, we may assume that different responses of different individuals might be forthcoming. Different layers enable both identifications and disidentifications: "the individual must be seen as someone who organizes his expressive situational behavior in *relation* to situated activity roles, but . . . in doing this he uses whatever means are at hand to introduce a margin of freedom and maneuverability, of pointed disidentification, between himself and the self virtually available for him in the situation." "One great theme of social organization is the scheduling of roles: the individual is allowed and required to be one thing in one setting and another thing in a different setting, the role that is given primacy at one occasion being dormant on another."⁶

In terms of the problem of alienation the outcome of this analysis is that a certain alienation or disidentification is the corollary of a certain freedom in the sense of a distance maintained by the individuals. A call for an exclusive identification and for an across the board criticism of alienation viewed as being only negative does not amount to a preservation of human freedom. It might eventually mean a call for a total and exclusive submersion of individuals in one layer of the human situation. Hence it will be a call addressed to the individuals to forego certain "pockets" of freedom.

VI

This analysis, conducted from the angle of the individuals, has obviously to be supplemented from the angle of the society and the political processes. We suggest a distinction between decisions taken which disregard human considerations and decisions whose spill-over outcomes turn out to carry in themselves a *de facto* disregard for human considerations. Let us begin with the second type of dynamics.

A prominent example of the accidental character of the estrangement of human institutions and products from human life is the widely discussed problem of pollution caused by the growing technology. It seems correct to

say: (a) Technology and the technological devices and vehicles came to exist as means for easing of the human toil. Yet technology reached a point whereby it makes human life easier in terms of the investment of energy needed, but makes—in some areas—human life more difficult in terms of its impact on human health. On the one hand a tremendous amount of energy goes in the direction of solving of health problems and on the opposite end human health is endangered by the spill-over results of technology. (b) The endangering effects of technology are not the results of deliberate actions, as would be the case with the using of chemicals to fight human beings. The harmful results of DDT (and DDT made malaria obsolete) were not intended. The intention was to extend the facilities of and for human life and subsistence, yet the fall-out of technology turns in these cases against the first intention which promoted technology.

This is the accidental aspect of alienation, whereby the results conform to the intention because, e.g., the automobile with a gasoline motor still makes traveling easier or faster. Yet the results have a harmful impact on other areas of human life, which were not in the first place within the direction of the particular technological device at stake.

Alienation in this particular case is caused by two factors: (a) by a one-sided approach to human existence: we tend to pick up one aspect of existence, e.g., transportation, and by the same token disregard other aspects of existence, the long range impact of the vehicles on the environment; (b) the second aspect is to be accounted for by the limitation of human planning: we do not predict the whole range of the effects of our action, or, put it in a different way, we do not foresee the effects of the effects of our deliberate actions. We tend to see the conformity between the outcomes and the intentions and tend not to see—because of the limitation of our pre-view—the secondary effects engendered by the primary effects.

Taking into consideration the pattern of accidental alienation we are bound to pose the question: Granted that we could not anticipate the outcome of our actions (and the fact that we could not anticipate them makes this mode of alienation into an accidental one)—once we realize what the outcome is, are we to leave it as it is? Do we take the view that once the accidental outcomes are there, they do have their own automatic propensity to the extent that we cannot try to direct them or to divert them, even to the point of making them cease to exist?

A closer look into the modes of human behaviour will show that the readiness of leaving the spill-over effects as they are is not due to a fatalistic attitude of looking at the results as if they were a cataclysmic event of nature. There might be some reasoning behind this quasi-fatalism, and the discernment of the reasoning brings us a step further in our analysis of the phenomenon of alienation.

Once we know that the gasoline-operated automobiles cause the air pollution we face the dilemma: do we want to go back to the horse-operated vehicles, or do we want to maintain the mechanically operated vehicles in spite of their hazardous effects? We face this dilemma, whether we articulate it or not, since we face the question whether we cherish in our scale of values life or good life, understood here as comfort. The dynamics of the society and the habits of individuals, the conformity which they accept without questioning the validity of the dynamics, all these may be viewed as tacit expressions of the preference for comfort, even when comfort defies the underlying value of human life. This sort of alienation of the comfort of life from life as the sub-structure for comfort and essentially as the very reason for it, is an alienation which, at least to some extent relies on the tacit consent of the individuals to the drifting character of events as they go. To be sure, a referendum was not held; no explicit act of consent is involved. But the fact that people do keep buying cars, etc. is an indication that a consent is there.

Yet there is an additional factor which has to be taken into consideration. Empirically speaking, the clash between life and comfort and the preference bestowed on the later—implying alienation—might not be so fatal as the formulation of the dichotomy tends to convey it. The experts tell us that there are possibilities for constructing mechanical vehicles which will be, at least, less hazardous. The understanding is that these vehicles are not being constructed because of economic consideration for those who construct vehicles, envisaging loss or restriction of profit. If this is the case then we encounter a different situation from the point of view of alienation: human beings are taken advantage of, their drive for comfort is manipulated for the sake of engrossing the profit. Here human beings are not left to the momentum of their own; they are not left to their hidden tacit preferences. They are objects in the hands of others. Not their preference, even an ill-conceived one, is guiding their lives. What is guiding their lives, is the manipulation dictated by the concern for profit, the concern which makes human beings into objects—objects that are dragged and do not make decisions, explicit or implicit ones, in accordance with their own preferences. To be an object, is to be in terms of the market, a commodity. We move here from the accidental alienation to alienation proper, as the classic analysis of alienation had it.

VII

Marx's analysis of the phenomenon and the dynamics of alienation centers on two interrelated concepts: the exchange value of labor and person, and the turning of the person from his metaphysical and moral

status as a person into a thing (*Sache*). We look at labor not as an expression of human activity and even of man's primordial position in the world, whereby he has to create the means for the satisfaction of his needs. We look at labor from the position of its value in the market and exclusively so—we turn labor into a commodity. What is important at this juncture is a sort of a induction which takes place: Since labor is viewed from the position of its exchange value, man behind labor is viewed from the angle of his exchange value as against the angle of his inherent value as a person and not as a thing. The real issue in the shifting of the value considerations amounts virtually to making the economic angle into a total angle for the evaluation of the position of man in society and in the world.

The over-economization of the outlook is the driving force in the thrust for the change taking place which turns man into a commodity. This has to be stressed because we may still hold the view that there might be an economic, that is to say, exchange ingredient and the mutuality of exchange, within the realm of inter-personal relations. The fact that one receives compensation or a remuneration for one's work, does not mean necessarily that one's work has only an exchange value. The contraction of the value character of work as labor or as product is an overstepping of the boundaries delineating the ingredient of the exchange value which is present in the situation, without forming the exclusive character of that situation. Thus if one listens to a guide who tells you that the library you are visiting is a "five million dollar building" and he does not tell you about the books stocked in the library or about special collections kept there, one is exposed to a shifting from a broad evaluation of the library to the evaluation of the money aspect of the building. This aspect is there because of the physical erection of the building; but certainly it does not give justice to the position of the building in terms of the objective it serves and in terms of the totality of a library.

If this contracting shift is to be deplored in terms of a building, the more is it to be deplored in terms of human beings engaged in various areas of societal activities. The dynamics of the economic process brings about this turn into a *Sache* even more strongly than Marx had envisaged it. The manipulative aspect of economic life exposes human beings to conditioning. They are exposed to advertisement, the objective of which is to make them aware of their needs, real or spurious. Since the economy depends on a rapid turn-over of goods, human beings are made to conform not to their own pace and their own deliberations, but to the accelerated pace of the economic change and production: Production is directing the consumption and not the other way around. Since financially everybody depends, to a greater or lesser degree, on the process of production, the process is made into a measure for human life and thus into the predomi-

nantly determining factor in the whole complexity and complexion of human existence.

In addition to this exposure, which has a component of anonymity, persons when conditioned by the productive process are as a matter of fact being manipulated by other human beings. The turn into a commodity and a thing is concomitant with the encroachment both on human freedom and on human equality: Human freedom is impaired since human beings are deprived, at least partially, of an area for their decisions; human equality is impaired since human beings are made dependent on decisions of other human beings who utilize with regard to them the techniques of conditioning and of creating and recreating needs.

The economic area is susceptible to this shift from needs to products and to the phenomenon of alienation which goes along with that shift. This is so because the economic sphere cannot be viewed in a way similar to the political sphere: The economic sphere does have its point of departure in the generating propensity of human needs, reaching out for their satisfaction. Thus the satisfaction is dependent upon certain creative acts embodied in commodities and in services. The political sphere can be looked at, and has been looked at like this, as one of the manifestations of the sovereignty and autonomy of men. Men extend their autonomy beyond their respective personal boundaries and create a common sphere of interaction. Now, the impact of the economic activity is that pressing, that it can make—and does make—the political sphere subservient to its own dynamics.

Once human beings are treated as commodities and are manipulated, the political sphere too ceases to be an extension and a manifestation of autonomy; it becomes an agent in the alienating process of turning human beings into things. Yet it is not true that the human beings are automatically turned into commodities. In an extreme situation where they face the dilemma—either economic subsistence and transformation into a commodity or extinction and preservation of autonomy—one could theoretically assume that human beings opt for subsistence which is tantamount to survival. But in many situations this is not the case: Human beings let themselves be manipulated because manipulation evokes in them a response they can approve of, for instance the aspiration for change, vogue, preservation of a youthful character, conspicuous consumption, etc. On the opposite end, modern society did not enlarge the scope of the concept of the services and did not apply this concept to some of the most vital areas of human existence. This is the case in the medical area where there are no medical services related to the status of the human person as a man and where he is bound to go out for his physical survival to the medical services and buy them. These are not services, but commodities. Once they are commod-

ities, human existence too, in one of the most sensitive areas, becomes a commodity.

Society was able, at least partially, to turn schools into services. Yet it did not extend this line of approach to some of the most crucial spheres of human lives. Even work is not a service rendered to men as we see in many cases: human beings are not sufficiently remunerated for their work and they leave work altogether or supplement their earnings by welfare subsidies. Instead of pulling together the wages earned and the public money flowing through the welfare funds, some human beings are underpaid, and are dependent on the meager sums of their earnings and on the public agencies in control of the subsidies. Work does not achieve in these cases even its minimal objective—subsistence. This brings about thicker and thicker modes of dependence of certain human beings on other human beings. In the communist world we see a complementary development: the state provides for work, though the level of the wages in many a case is far from being satisfactory, even from a very modest point of view. But for the sake of the satisfaction of the need to make a living, people are called to pay the price of giving up all other human demands like freedom to criticize, freedom to repudiate the official line, freedom to get out, etc. The communist regimes are based, paradoxically of course, on the isolation of the elemental economic sphere of subsistence from all other areas of human societal life. They are based on the evaluation that for the sake of the economic survival human beings are willing to disregard other aspects of social life, or even in a more extreme form that they do not care for all the other areas of social life once their need for subsistence is guaranteed. This being so, aspirations and values are brushed aside because they do not have an independent status, outside of promoting the objective of subsistence. The phraseology does not center on the concept of the exchange value of labor and of the human beings as commodities. But the practice adheres to the exchange value.

The outcome of our analysis can be summed up as follows: The presupposition of at least a certain amount of freedom lies in the distance between the individuals and the society and its institutions. This distance depends to some extent on human self-awareness, that is to say, that the individuals with self-awareness take a certain stand vis-à-vis society. But this distance presupposes a mode of behavior on the part of the society and its institutions, granting the sphere of distance for the individuals and not creating for them an ultimate situation whereby they are bound to take extreme decisions or whereby they are forced to behave as if they took these decisions: either live or preserve certain values. In cases where society does not leave room for these diversified decisions and creates a pattern of a monolithic behavior guided by the exchange and commodity

value of human beings, the real and obnoxious alienation occurs. This alienation is not a manifestation of a distance qua freedom; it is rather a manifestation of an abyss and as such is a corollary of oppression.

VIII

The loss implied in alienation as a fact and as process is the negative aspect of alienation. As loss, it has to be distinguished from dissociation and distance. Here we encounter the significant and telling change which came about in the understanding of the concept of alienation. The concept got transplanted from the sphere of the relationship between man and the divine transcendent being to the area of the relationship between individuals and societies, where both partners are being placed in the domain of immanence. "For ecstasy is naught but going forth of a soul from itself and its being caught up in God . . . it becomes immersed in God."⁷ "[T]he soul having its acts in God by virtue of its union with him, lives the life of God."⁸ The presupposition of the ecstatic notion of alienation is that there is a transcendent being who in terms of his value quality is the supreme being. Union with that being is the highest achievement. The loss caused by the removal from the human sphere is neutralized, moreover, compensated by the union with the transcendent being. The loss in terms of life on the level of the human being is compensated by life on the level of God. The loss is essentially an elevation.

As against this, the negative evaluation of alienation, in its various ingredients as analyzed in the preceding discussion, presupposes the negation or abolition of the self-contained transcendent level of reality. Society and its institutions are not a self-contained entity and do not carry within themselves the immediate positive value quality. Society is a creation of the individuals. The fact that they are at loss with society is an indication not of an elevation but of a lack of rapport between them and their own creation. The immanent character of society, and to some extent the secondary character of society as against the given character of the individuals and the self-sufficient character of the divine being, brings about the suspicion that the created society loses its character as a created entity and moves around as if it were a transcendent or self-contained being. The relationship pertaining between individuals and societies as their creation is different from the relationship pertaining between a creator and the work of art which is his creation. In terms of the relationship between individuals and the work of art, the presupposition seems to be that the work of art gains through the act of creation a position independent from that of the creator. The ontology of the work of art is supposedly different from the ontology of the society and its institutions. The reason for that

difference seems to lie in the fact that human beings do not live their concrete lives within their created works of art, while they do live their concrete lives within and through society and its institutions. Detachment of the work of art is to be considered part of the position of the work of art. Detachment of society seems to be a perversion and runs against the propensity of the creating individuals. Alienation seems to confer on the creations of the individuals a status these creations lack in terms of their *raison d'être*. Thus alienation is a perversion in terms of making the subjects subservient to their creations. It is also a perversion in terms of changing the proper ontological status of the different human creations. Society lacks both the pre-existent transcendence of the divine being and the bestowed independence of the works of art. The perversion of the ontological order comes along with the perversion of the moral order.

Again, alienation both in the sense of elevation and the flight of the spirit as Saint Teresa has it,⁹ as well as in its negative connotation as perversion, is related to deeds, to deeds of transposing the spirit or to deeds of subjugating the human beings. Alienation in both these senses is not viewed as a primordial forlornness of man in the world, as modern Existenz Philosophy tends to view the human condition. Indeed, forlornness does not imply a grain of the meaning of the concept of alienation, but we have to be careful in seeing the important differences between the various notions. There is a tendency to bring all these notions together and to look at them as varieties on the same theme. But they are not. A point in case is Sartre's view according to which we move from the primary position of freedom to the secondary position of subjugation, brought about by alienation, or subjugation being the other side of the coin of alienation.

Strange as it may sound, there is an additional parallelism between alienation as elevating ecstasy and alienation as subjugating estrangement. In both views the position is not a fleeting one; it is a permanent and constant status. The adherence achieved through the transforming union with God is a permanent status; the perversion inherent in the alienation of labor is a permanent status, and precisely that permanence renders to alienation the position of reality or of a structure of reality. The difference between these two views seems to be this: The transforming permanent union is achieved in ecstasy through a deed of an individual who loses himself through his own acts. The alienation vis-à-vis the individual in terms of the social order is one accomplished through the anonymous processes of the society and not through individual acts carried out by individuals through their disciplined and mystic immersion. The anonymous character of the social existence is related to alienation since the human beings lose in society their character by becoming commodities.

The status of commodity levels down the individuals and their personal accomplishments, including the personal accomplishment of their elevation through the flight of their spirit.

The ecstatic elevation interpreted as a permanent condition called for a permanent act of identification with the divine being. The permanent condition of alienation in the social sphere is due to the rhythm of the social process and it too does rely on acts. We encounter here the dialectic between acts and processes in the social field. Though social institutions are created, they do not have an initial self-supporting status; they move to some extent through the changed institutions. The preservation of the institution and the changing of the preserved institutions is the double rhythm of the social process insofar as it addresses itself to institutions. Once the institutions are there, the goal is changed. In the awareness of the human beings engaged in the aspiration for change and in the striving for it the identification is with the goal of change. The institutions are the groundwork for the change. The acts of identification disregard the structure and adhere to the goals, though the goals presuppose the structure.¹⁰

In an institutionalized society, which is tantamount to an organized society, we encounter therefore this particular tension: It seems to be rather difficult to maintain the position of the institutions as that of goals of human aspirations, once the institutions are present and are thus taken for granted for new human actions and newly formulated human aspirations. Institutions turn out to be goals when they are endangered, that is to say, when they cannot be taken for granted, at least in the eyes of those who adhere to them. The position of being a goal is the correlate of the position of not being taken for granted and the price paid by established institutions is that they shift from the position of goals to one of backgrounds for actions and aspirations.

To come back to the first part of our analysis we have to restate the position as follows: The distance between the individual and the society which is wrongly characterized as amounting to alienation is the corollary of freedom of the individual, and it can find its expression both in a withdrawal from society and in identification with it. In neither case is the attitude of individuals an automatic result of the processes. Where alienation overpowers the conscious or intentional attitude it is a negative phenomenon because it suppresses the basic human condition of reflection and intentionality. Where alienation as a process or the state of affairs *qua* distance expresses intentional attitudes it is part and parcel of the dual rhythm of human existence. That rhythm consists in both acts of identification and acts of taking a distance. In this sense a totalistic interpretation and negative evaluation of alienation is not warranted because one aspect of alienation related to distance is concomitant with the very position of man in the world.

As a matter of fact we come here across a phenomenon of transposing the social criticism of alienation onto the ontological position of man and the world. As we suggest a differentiated analysis of modes of separateness, we also suggest a differentiated analysis of the social position of man and his ontological position. The ontological position (being the more basic one), entails also the guidelines for a normative evaluation of the social existence, namely whether it conforms to the spectrum of the ontological freedom or suppresses it. Again at this last point a social criticism is not only justified but essential for the ontological analysis and evaluation of man. The irony is that a totalistic interpretation of alienation may lead to an alienation from the ontological position of man with all the consequences which go along with such an interpretation.

¹ Emile Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, trans. Cornelia Brookfield (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1958), p. 59.

² Idem, p. 58.

³ See Joseph H. Schwab, *College Curriculum and Student Protest* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1969), p. 268.

⁴ Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago: Alohis, 1961), p. 72.

⁵ Michael Aiken, Louis A. Ferman, and Harold L. Sheppard, *Economic Failure, Alienation and Extremism*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1968), pp. 8, 142.

⁶ Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press 1961), pp. 132-33.

⁷ *The Living Flame of Love* by St. John of the Cross, with his letters, poems, and minor writings, trans. Davis Lewis, with an Essay by Cardinal Wiseman, ed. and introd. Benedict Zimmerman (London: T. Baker, 1939), p. 53.

⁸ *The Complete Works of Saint John of the Cross*, trans. and ed. E. Allison Peers, Vol. III, (Westminster, Mass.: The Newman Press, 1953), p. 233.

⁹ *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, transl. and ed. E. Allison Peers, Vol. 1, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946), p. 119.

¹⁰ See Nathan Rotenstreich, *Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), mainly pp. 144 ff.; and "Spontaneity and Alienation," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, XI, No. 4 (December 1971), pp. 475 ff.