

## ALIENATION AND SOCIAL ACTION

The word “alienation” is today one of those fashionable and hence suspect words.<sup>1</sup> It is very often used and therefore misused; it is an ambiguous and therefore obscure word; moreover it gives rise to the defensive reactions of those who believe that what it represents is dangerous in practice and who are interested in maintaining a situation which, according to them, is worthwhile defending. These reactions stem from different ways of reasoning and practical attitudes; starting with those who consider that it is necessary to fight against all obscure and ambiguous words and ending with those who oppose the pessimism of “the philosophy of despair.” There are therefore, among the opposers, all those who believe in the traditions of neo-positivism and in the postulate of the semantic analysis of terms. There are some catholics and even—astonishing as it may seem—some Marxists who, historically speaking, are those who are most responsible for

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<sup>1</sup> This sketch is part of the book published to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Professor Tadeusz Kotarbinski.

the actual popularity, not only of the term “alienation” itself, but also for the theoretic concepts connected with it.

In point of fact the theoretic concept of alienation has come to us in two ways, which although linked one to another are nonetheless different. The first one—the direct line of the filiation of ideas—was Hegelianism which exerted a constant influence, particularly on German humanism; the second is Marxism. At this point it is necessary to say that, genetically, Marxism was organically linked to Hegelianism; nevertheless its acception of alienation is clearly different and it was this acception which provoked in the 20th century, not only the renaissance, but also, more recently, the impetuous blossoming forth of this theory.

Fashion, in the intellectual sphere, may include some more or less marked elements of snobbishness, but almost never, or at least rarely, can it be reduced to snobbishness alone. It generally stems from the social need to interpret some given facts, and hence also from a new theoretic interest in certain ideas, an interest which, as Ludwik Krzywicki justly said, determines the “transfer of ideas.”

Even if this were the only reason, the “fashion” of alienation would require a very accurate sociological and psychological analysis. On the other hand, the lack of clarity and the ambiguity of the term as it is currently used should not discourage research which aims at defining it precisely with the help of the methods of semantic analysis. It is the only way, if one wants to discover from whence comes the “fashion” of a given term or concept and on the other hand—and this is most important—if one wants to determine the perspective of their political value. This is the core of the problem: if the social need for the interpretation of certain phenomena manifests itself—and this determines the fashion of the given concept—it is generally because certain problems require an explanation so that social action can be perfected. Intellectual “fashion” is therefore only their spontaneous and unconscious expression. Reflection allows not only the achievement of consciousness of what lies beneath these spontaneous processes in the sphere of social ideas, but moreover renders explicit ideas hitherto not very clear and misleading because of their ambiguity. It can and must play an important

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role in the perfecting of social activities linked to this group of ideas.

It is this aspect of the problem which we will investigate first in this article and which explains the title.

1) I shall first try to define precisely the essential concepts. I will strive to do it in the spirit of the definition-project, which is to say that I will convey the meaning of the words that I will use, as I understand them and as I intend to utilize them afterwards. Any other method is bound to fail because of the long history of the problem (which goes back at least to medieval philosophy) and of the consequent ambiguity of the term "alienation." Since I am not interested here in the history of the term, and it is possible not to speak of it in this context, I will limit myself to pointing out that it will always be possible to find the fundamentals or the impulses of anything that I may say of these questions in the course of history. Still this neither means that the definition that I adopt coincides with some other definition known in history nor that the whole structure of the concept and the consequent practical conclusions are identical to any one of the forms they took in the past. This is equally valid for the Marxist conception on which I rely and with which I identify myself as far as its guide lines are concerned. But Marx's conception was transformed in accordance with the transformations of his *Weltanschauung* and the ripening of his ideas on society; moreover the development of social rapports after Marx and above all the experiences of countries building socialism, engender reflections which, either did not appear in Marx or had not yet matured.

Let our point of departure be the difference between objectivation and alienation.

In the process of life, men enter into relationships through the intermediary of their various types of works, material and spiritual. To live, man transforms material reality, produces various goods in order to satisfy the physical human needs. But he also creates spiritual goods that must satisfy determined needs at different historic stages of the development of society. Man creates society itself, because he is involved in social rapports and he creates the means which allow him to communicate with other men. In other terms (what precedes has been mentioned as an example

in order to formulate this idea), man *acts* in order to live but he also *lives* by acting, because man exists in regard to other men only *through the intermediary* of his works and he *is* for others the sum of what he has accomplished, in the broadest sense of the term “to accomplish.” But all human action, understood as an act, as well as all human work, understood as a product—are the external projection of man, since man acts while thinking and this is beyond doubt one of the characteristics which distinguish him from the animal world. What man thinks when he attempts to achieve a determined objective is transformed, when he acts, into an *objective* work, which is to say into something that exists beyond any human spirit and independently from him. This is what I mean by *objectivation*. In short, *objectivation is the process of transformation, through action, of human thinking into material and spiritual products which have an objective existence, independent of human will and conscience*. Needless to say—but we will do it if only to be pedantic—that this process of objectivation is the basis and the condition of men’s social life, since it satisfies their various needs and also permits them to communicate with one another and therefore to coexist.

Only when the meaning of objectivation has been explained—as the process and also the sum, of vital impact, of acts and works of human activity—is it possible to understand the concept of “alienation.”

The point of departure in this instance as well will be the observation of empirical facts in the sphere of man’s social life. There are various products of human activity. They are the work of individuals, because only concrete and living individuals exist biologically. But man, even if he exists as a concrete biological individual, is always a *social* individual, not only because he is the product of a certain society (physically and spiritually), but also because he can live and survive only in *society*, involved in its rapports and the mechanism of its action. Man’s activities also are *social* in two ways, just as the *products* of man which also have a social function. The mechanism of this function may differ according to the social rapports by which it is determined. The observation of social life proves that—even if man creates spiritual and material goods in order to satisfy certain needs of other men—in certain social conditions the products of human

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activity begin to function not only in an autonomous way, independently from the will and intentions of their makers, but even *contrarily* to their will and intentions, entangling their projects and even threatening in some way or other their makers. This is precisely what we call *alienation*. Therefore, *alienation is the process of functioning—given existing social rapports—of men's products (material and spiritual) independently from the will and intentions of their authors, in a spontaneous way, disturbing men's plans and projects and threatening in some way their existence.* We call alienation a certain functioning of men's products in given social conditions, a functioning whose mechanism escapes the control of the individual and even of societies, in such way as to constitute a menace to their plans and even to their existence. The best illustration is the parable of the sorcerer's apprentice who after setting in motion certain forces is no longer able to dominate them.

We can therefore conclude our considerations about the mutual rapports of objectivation and alienation.

Objectivation is a *necessary* phenomenon of the process of man's life. Without such an objectivation, men could neither exist (material and spiritual *production* is only a peculiar form of objectivation) nor coexist (were it only for the problem of communication).

Alienation, on the contrary is not a *necessary* phenomenon of the process of man's life (not all the products of man are alienated, even if they always have an objective existence), but solely a *possible* phenomenon. This depends on the social conditions according to which function man's objectified products. In certain social conditions, objectivation becomes alienation, in others it is not characterized by alienation (or it loses those characteristics when conditions are modified in a certain way.) The general conclusion we can arrive at, and which is extremely important in order to continue with our considerations, is that the processes of alienation are a function of the entirety of social rapports and, depending on the structure of the *whole* they may *appear* or *disappear*. It is needless to underline the importance of this verification concerning all the social activities whose aim is to consciously form human rapports.

2) To better understand the meaning of the abstract concept

of “alienation,” we must turn to some examples in which the term “alienation” is most convenient to indicate the functioning of man’s products.

Let us begin with the alienation of man’s material products.

Let us examine the capitalist market which was the particular object of Marx’s attention. On the market there is merchandise; it has a definite price and value on the basis of which it is exchanged. Merchandise consists of material goods—products of man—which must satiate certain material needs of man. But since in a capitalist society definite social rapports prevail based on the rapports of property, the product of human work changes character and becomes merchandise. Its function, which was to satiate man’s needs, no longer is conclusive and it is its exchange function that creates capital which gains the ascendancy. In the mechanism of the capitalist market man’s products start functioning not only in an autonomous way, independently from the will and plans of their maker (the scale of prices, the separation between goods intended to satisfy human needs and men anxious to satisfy these needs, of which the extreme example is the destruction of alimentary products while people go hungry, etc.), but also against his objectives and plans, threatening his physical existence (shutdowns, crisis of overproduction, etc.) This is a classical example of what is meant by the alienation of man’s *material products*.

But alienation is not limited to the sphere of material products. The classic example of alienation in spiritual matters—considering what interested young Marx and his contemporaries—is religion.

If we refuse the mythological conscience according to which God made man in his own image, we have to concede that the only rational thesis is Ludwig Feuerbach’s according to which *man* makes gods in his own image, a fact that can be demonstrated very easily on the basis of comparative studies in the field of the sciences of religion. Man *creates* religion and in this respect—bearing in mind the difference between the production of material and spiritual goods—the situation is analogous to his experience as producer of merchandise. In point of fact, the objectified products of his imagination in certain social conditions not only start to lead an independent existence, but also reach the point of threatening his existence: they engender persecution, in-

quisition, death on the pyre. There is no need to be particularly perspicacious in order to see the generalization of this problem when, in certain conditions, any ideology starts assuming the characteristics of a religion, with all the consequent dangers for man's freedom and happiness. According to Durkheim any ideology may function as a religion if it serves to render homogeneous a group on the basis of faith and not on the basis of scientifically verifiable convictions. And he was right. Marx and his contemporaries were also right when in their struggle for humanism they began attacking religious alienation. Because as long as one believes in the heteronomy of human destinies formed by extra- or super-human factors, and until one admits the thesis of the autonomous character of these destinies, according to which thesis they are formed *by* men and *for* men, it will not be possible to *realize*, in a consequent way, the line of humanism.

Let us take a striking current example: the discovery made by human genius of atomic disintegration and of automatization. It is incontestably an important province of the creation of the spirit which marks the beginning of a new epoch in the development of mankind, of an epoch that in its perspectives will surpass the social consequences of what has been called the industrial revolution. Here are therefore some discoveries which could make realizable the legendary paradise on earth, but functioning in certain social conditions they could threaten mankind with total destruction. This is a classic example of alienation: the threat is today known to everybody. *Nobody* wants to be annihilated personally or socially. We have therefore the right to suppose reasonably that *everybody* would like to avoid this annihilation, nevertheless we are boldly moving towards the abyss. Never before has mankind found itself playing the role of the sorcerer's apprentice in such a clear and tragic way. This is precisely what I call a situation of alienation. The name is not important (if I use the traditional term it is because I could not find a better one), but what is in question are the *objective* social situations that it is necessary to see and know in order to have the possibility to guarantee the efficacy of the social actions destined to oppose them.

In this sense the term "alienation" admits a very large semantic function. "Alienation" designates in fact all the social processes

in which man's products—material and spiritual—function in a social mechanism determined by definite social rapports, not only independently from man but in opposition to the social objectives he has set for himself and—sometimes—even threatening his social existence.

If this conception of alienation is broad, it is however sufficiently exact to prevent identifying alienation with *every* objectivation and with what is called social evil.

If for instance, traffic laws are in force independently from the will of the particular individuals who are obligated to cross the road in a disciplined way, nonetheless this is not alienation, just as the system of weight and measures socially accepted or the rules governing circulation on the roads, etc., are not alienation. Simply because in these instances there is no *opposition* to the social objectives of men (on the contrary, in all these cases it is a social convention which implements these objectives) nor is there any *danger* threatening their existence.

The same thing occurs if one tries to *identify* alienation with social evil. If it is true that alienation *is* a social evil (in a precise sense of the term “social evil”), not all social evil is however alienation. We can cite epidemics for instance or suicides caused by an unhappy love affair, etc. It is a question of the rapport of the part to the whole and not of equivalence.

3) There is a particular problem related to matters of alienation which must be discussed separately. It is called *auto-alienation*. In certain literature of existentialist inspiration, alienation and auto-alienation are simply identified. It is a great mistake that calls for an explanation.

“Alienation” qualifies the process in which *man's products* become extraneous to him, they function independently and in spite of his will and plans. The *products* of man and not man himself are in a position of “alienation.” Therefore if we speak of the alienation of man, this term assumes a particular meaning. Also, in order to point out the difference it is necessary to speak of *auto-alienation*. Let us see the situation and rapports attributed to his appellation by literature dedicated to this subject.

In this respect, chronologically, the oldest intuitions are linked to the analysis of religious alienation. The mechanism of this alienation consists in the fact that man projects some of his own



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characteristics in an absolute form on a super-human being who is his own product. In this way, such qualities as goodness, knowledge, love etc. (in an absolute sense) become the attributes of God, but at the same time man is deprived of these qualities if one compares him to the model of perfection he himself created. There is here a double alienation. In the first place, because human characteristics are detached from man and because they are “alienated” they become an integral part of one of the products of man’s mind functioning from that moment in an autonomous way. In the second place because man “grows poor” of the qualities which he has transposed outside of himself. This concept, belonging to Feuerbach, may be considered the first form of the idea of auto-alienation.

But there is also a much simpler interpretation. “Alienation” is the name given to the process during which man’s products have a given rapport with their creator. This rapport may also occur between the capabilities of man, his attitudes—in other words, between his personality considered as the ensemble of capabilities, attitudes etc. of man—and the human individual who is the “bearer” of them. This occurs when, placed in the sphere of an economy based on trade, man and his personality become merchandise as well and are submitted to the laws and estimations of such an economy. This is the difference between work and free creation, between earning one’s living and acting in order to satisfy human needs, etc. In life and in literature this has different names: commercialization of culture, transformation into merchandise of feelings, cultural and scientific creation, etc. The literature on the subject—including the *Communist Manifesto*—criticizes this situation in which everything that man has is on sale, and this causes him to adapt himself to the exigencies of buyers and to cease being himself. And in this sense he alienates himself. One of the aims of the Marxist ideal of the “total man” is to establish social conditions allowing man to act according to his needs and tastes, therefore to create and not to work (this context explains why Marx considers work an alienation, an “inhuman” activity, while he thinks that creative activity is not only necessary to man, but characterizes him).

In the light of this reasoning, one also understands better the difference—typically Hegelian, but playing an important role for

young Marx—between “the true man” and the real man. The real man, as he actually is, shows signs of alienation in regard to his “generic being,” while the true man is free of them. But the “true man” is an ideal, a model.

Up to now we have approached the problem of auto-alienation from the point of view of the rapport “man—man’s personality.” This term has nevertheless another meaning which reappears generally in discussions on alienation. It is a question of the alienation of man as an individual in regard to society, to which is connected the non-engagement in society’s dealings.

The literature of “the philosophy of despair”—works of philosophy as well as of belles-lettres—with its themes of solitude, of the individual lost in the crowd who does not find any meaning in life (seen as the objective one has in life) etc., is rich and varied.

There is in it a lot of snobbishness and decadence, and it delights in the psychological analysis of sick individuals and there is also a reactionary concept of the elite. But what this literature speaks of is a real problem that must not be forgotten because it is connected to new and negative social phenomena which the term “auto-alienation” suits very well.

Highly industrialized society brings with it, on one hand, the creation of huge urban agglomerations with all the positive and negative problems of what we call a mass-society. On the other hand, it also brings about the disaggregation of the traditional links among the different groups, starting with family ties, then professional ties, neighbourhood ties and confessional ties etc., that is to say the links, which, naturally and traditionally, determined the *participation* of the individual to society. The great city and therefore the culture of mass-society destroys the traditional links; but it also creates some new ones, more powerful under many aspects: trade unions, sports clubs, cultural associations, political parties and associations, the links created by mass-culture conveyed by press, radio and television etc. The man-individual placed in this huge mechanism is connected to society by many more links than in the past, links more powerful as much because it is a question of what conditions and forms his personality, as it is a question of his organic incorporation in the ensemble of the social structure, of the impossibility of living

isolated outside of that structure and independently from it. There is therefore a clear integration and structuralization of society which determines a more strict integration of the individual in the society, at least under some aspects. This is not at all in contradiction with the disintegration which intervenes simultaneously within the social structure and which conditions the auto-alienation of the individual, in the sense of this term which interests us here.

Literature, good literature of course, goes further than dozens of scientific dissertations. To make myself clear, I will refer to Steinbeck's novel, *Grapes of Wrath*. The author describes in an extremely suggestive way, how, in their peregrinations to the West, a common destiny pushed men together in non-formal groups in which everybody could reciprocally count upon the others' help.

This factor has naturally been weakened by mass-society: man is a part of this society without which he cannot live, he depends on it under many aspects, but he is an atom without which society can very well do. This makes all the difference. This link, very powerful and organic on the one hand, on the other is very weak. This is why it is impossible to count on the help and solidarity of others (with the exception of particular alliances such as revolutionary groups, but this is not a characteristic of society as a whole). That is why it is easy to have relationships, but it is difficult to have friends (this is very clear in American society). Since this is the effect of the deep set rules governing a highly industrialized society, at least in the capitalist system, one is not only the object but also the subject of this disintegration. In other words, man loses the desire to involve himself in social problems, he confines himself more and more to the circle of his own narrow interests. This is, however, the principal *tendency*. Of course, this does not mean that in highly industrialized societies every tendency to take part in social life disappears totally. It can be found in groups having specific objectives, religious or revolutionary for instance; but then they are exceptions which do not modify the principal tendency. At the level of society, such participation appears in general when it is a matter of defending national causes. Nevertheless, even in these cases the tendency towards disintegration is not conquered, simply

the contradictory tendencies are overcome within one and the same society. The problem of auto-alienation still remains.

This is the “rational core” of the philosophy of the individual lost in the crowd, etc. It has two aspects. The first is the problem of a certain disintegration of society for whom the individual is something extraneous, and, by the same token, for the individual, society as well is something extraneous not requiring from the individual any emotional involvement. The second, is that an exacerbated individualism similar to anarchism is manifesting itself amongst disintegrated individuals and at the same time a uniformity of life, above all spiritual, of the individuals entangled in the mechanism of mass-society and culture which threatens to annihilate personality and borders upon the ghastly visions evoked in the fantastic novels of Zamiatine, Huxley, Orwell and others.

This sum of complicated problems, which should be studied meticulously rather than rejected because of a defensive reaction, is characteristic of auto-alienation.

Therefore it is clear from what we have said that it is necessary not to identify the problems of alienation and those of auto-alienation, and that those who try to reduce the problem of alienation simply to the problem of man who feels estranged in regard to society do not understand the issue at all. At least such as it is in the context of Marxist tradition.

Secondly, it is equally true that the problem of auto-alienation has at least two aspects and that its current and simplified interpretation is a mistake which further confuses the already complicated picture of a very important contemporary social problem.

4) When we speak of “alienation” are we thinking of the subjective conditions of individuals—who feel “lonely,” “lost,” “deprived of the meaning of life,” etc.—or of certain objective processes which influence the social position and the social improvement of individuals?

In the light of our reasoning the question is rather rhetorical. Nevertheless those who ask it are right because the problem is not absolutely clear if one sticks to the current literature on the subject.

“Alienation” is the name given to certain *objective* processes in which man’s products have certain rapports with their creator.

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From this angle the question is meaningless. To the contrary, in the case of auto-alienation, it has some value.

In this case, in our acception, "auto-alienation" is the name given to certain *objective* processes in which the individual finds himself in a certain situation if it is a question of his attitude in regard to other men and society. These objective processes are evidently mirrored back in the conscience of men who feel lonely, lost, without purpose, etc. But their feelings are only a secondary phenomenon in regard to the objective processes which originated them. In other words: man is not alienated (in the sense of auto-alienation) because he feels so, but on the contrary, he feels certain things because he is in the objective situation called "auto-alienation."

To define this situation, one can use, as proposed by some—for instance Professor S. Zolkiewski—the language of the theory of structuralism, analyzing it according to the structure of social rapports (which can therefore reproduce themselves) which determine the individual existence of men. But it can also be done in another way, using, for instance, the traditional language of the socio-historical theory of Marxism. Personally, I am convinced that this is the better solution because I fear that a too universal application of the theory and methods of structuralism—which till now has brought lasting results only in linguistics—is not founded and results more from a fashion than from the real needs of research—as in the twenties under the influence of neo-positivism, when formalized language was in fashion). It is however a minor question which requires verification in practice, in the course of research. It does not change at all the essence of our problem, namely that of the objective character of the processes of alienation.

5) We have now concluded at least a superficial explanation of the concepts which interest us and which we are going to use in the course of our reasoning. It is time to ask a question: do these reasonings have a practical range? Or, in other words, can the category of alienation which is so widely disputed today be of any use in social action? If so, in which way?

My answer is affirmative and I see four areas, at least, which lend themselves to the concretization of the general thesis on the practical range of the category of alienation.

a) Let us start with the values of classification and knowledge that alienation brings with it.

The fact that there is a general theory and category of alienation allows the classification of certain social situations having characteristics which correspond to those generally attributed to the situations of alienation. Knowledge and diagnostics are made easy, if it a question of the contingent social action.

b) In practice what matters is precisely the function which permits the establishing of diagnostics.

In conformity with the general theory of alienation, as we know, the product of objectivation assumes the characteristics peculiar to the processes of alienation only when social rapports lend themselves to it. The very simple conclusion that we deduced previously is that a certain change in social rapports makes it possible to overcome alienation. When the characteristics of alienation disappear, man's products—material and spiritual—start to function in conformity with the will and plans of their maker. They no longer function spontaneously.

Here are some examples.

Merchandise, on the capitalist market, has all the characteristics of the alienated product of man, because it functions in social conditions provided by capitalism which is founded on the rapports of property. Therefore, to overcome this alienation—that brings with it not only the lack of planned production and crises but also as a consequence, shut downs, hunger, poverty and the danger of imperialist wars which threaten directly man's existence—it is convenient to transform the social rapports that condition this alienation, and, in the first place, the rapports of property. This was one of the fundamental ideas of Marx, the practical consequences of which has determined the line of development of our epoch.

The same occurs in the State in as far as it is an organization of physical coercion—"the troupes of armed men" as Lenin said, such institutions as the army, the police, tribunals and prisons. In the perspective of Marxism it is an alienation whose genesis and development depend on given social rapports: on the division of society in antagonistic classes based on the system of private property. Conclusion: to conquer this alienation and to thus extend social democracy, it is necessary to transform the social

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rapports which condition alienation, the division of society in antagonistic classes, and this presupposes the elimination of the system of private ownership of the means of production which determine these classes.

Another example which belongs to the classic repertory of Marxism is religious alienation. There is no need to characterize it, it is too evident. We can pass directly to the practical conclusions. To overcome it, a change is necessary in social rapports, especially in the fields of culture and education, if this form of alienation is to be overcome, at least as a mass phenomenon, because it is too complicated a psychological phenomenon to relate simply to social rapports and to suppose that only with these transformations, religious beliefs will disappear entirely and definitively.

We can try to generalize the significance of these examples from the point of view which interest us. *Any alienation can be overcome* (of course, by a more or less lengthy process), *if one knows what conditions it socially and if one modifies suitably the human rapports which determine its functioning.*

c) This statement throws into relief not only the practical value of the category of alienation, but at the same time its power of mobilization as far as social action is concerned, social action being one of those elements upon which the optimistic character of Marxist humanism is founded.—Its adversaries would call it utopian and millenarian.—Because if one ascertains that alienation is a social evil (they are not identical concepts, as we have already said, since every social evil is not necessarily alienation), one verifies at the same time that man, while acting socially, is always able to dominate this evil. It is a statement capable of stirring to action and hence an optimistic one. Optimistic when compared to the metaphysics of evil, at least as expressed in some varieties of existentialism (Sartre's, for instance, that declares the unavoidable victory of evil regardless of what men do.)

d) The range of this power of mobilization is magnified as one realizes that alienation is a *constant* social problem in any system. Alienation is in fact linked to the objectivation which is a constant and necessary phenomenon of any vital process on a human level. It is sufficient that certain social rapports to exist for objectivation to start functioning as alienation.

Is there always a valid formula? Are the social rapports that promote the processes of alienation known? According to me there is no general formula, and in these conditions there can be no general remedy to oppose the phenomenon.

We can draw two practical conclusions at least.

In the first case, the struggle against alienation is an endless process whose objective is to conquer a particular alienation and not alienation *in general*, which would be a utopia. This action is not only precise but its social range is vast: it tends to enlarge our knowledge of the world, even if we know full well that it is an endless process, as a mathematical series tends to a limit. Nevertheless, any stage of this process is of considerable practical importance to mankind—even if we know that it is endless, in the same way as it is important to cure an illness, even if we can reasonably assume that in the future the human organism will be seized by other illnesses.

The second conclusion is extremely important when we examine the problem of alienation in a socialist system. If there is no general formula concerning the genesis of alienation, we cannot exclude, a priori, the possibility of witnessing the development of social situations and rapports unknown to this moment which can engender new forms of alienation. There is only one thing to do: to discover the most general rapport existing between objectivation and alienation, the detrimental effect of the latter on society and to be conscious of its being a social phenomenon which can be overcome only if one knows the social rapports which provoke it and transforms them suitably. It is not a panacea, but certainly a very precious directive for practical action. It enables one to speak not only of the practical power that confines alienation, but also to include it in the praxeologic dictionary if a sufficiently broad significance is attributed to the concept of “good work.”

6) What we just said, brings us to the problem of alienation in socialism.

If in given social rapports, objectivation can always degenerate into alienation, we must ask ourselves a question. Is socialism, as a social structure, subject to this law or not?

The question would be useless and petty, considering the evidence of the problem, if it were not for some of the



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suggestions to be found in the works of the young Marx. He thought, at that time, that the elimination of economic alienation would bring about automatically, in some way, the disappearance of all the other forms of alienation. We can interpret this phenomenon with indulgence and admit that Marx thought only of the alienation peculiar to the system of private property which would disappear with it, or admit that his judgement of alienation was general and then simply recognize that he was wrong. On the other hand considering the works he wrote in his maturity, one can rightfully doubt that he afterwards stuck to some of the ideas of his early work on the subject which were utopian in character.

When we speak of alienation in socialism after Marx, it is convenient to make a differentiation between two stages: the earlier stage—socialism—and the later stage—communism. They are fundamentally different from the point of view of their genetic links with capitalism, and therefore with private property and the division of society into classes.

Following the Marxist train of thought, it is banal to say that socialism, by definition and in fact, never fully overcomes *any* known alienation, not even economic. Even without mentioning the fact that in the light of Marxism, State and bureaucracy are by definition alienations (and yet in a socialist system they exist and must exist), still more evident are the problems of the division into classes that remain, of the differences between manual and intellectual labor, between work in the country and work in the city, etc. But even if it is the question of the fundamental basis—of economic alienation—it is nonetheless the very problem of property which still has to be resolved, because according to Marx the elimination of private property is not only a negative postulate that governs nationalization, but also—and perhaps above all—a positive postulate, i.e. socialization which transforms the citizens into co-owners. Without this it is impossible to achieve communism as “free association of producers” according to Marx’s terminology.

It is therefore evident that the persistence of processes of alienation in the socialist phase is, in the light of Marxism, an absolutely clear question from the theoretical point of view. If this is the actual situation, it is therefore not possible to exclude

that, in new conditions, some phenomena of alienation—for instance bureaucracy or the autonomization of the function of physical constraint—may be aggravated momentarily, and it is even possible to be faced with new forms of alienation, unknown up to that moment. From the theoretic point of view, it is not possible to reject such a possibility. From the practical point of view, it is impossible.

What can be said in this respect as far as communism is concerned? From a certain point of view, nowadays, the problem has no practical importance. Contrary to the illusions nurtured during a certain period, it can be now verified, in full conscience, that in so-called “socialist” countries, we are still very far from achieving a society in which the edification of communism will be a reality and it is the only aspect which could be of some interest here. If only on the basis of experience, we are compelled to reject Stalin’s thesis (since it is a groundless revision of Marxism), according to which it is possible to build a communist society in a State system that permits an adequate apparatus of physical coercion and a bureaucracy. It is therefore necessary to return to Marx’s thesis, according to which communism can be victorious only on a world-wide scale, because only on this condition—theoretically at least—could the State and also armed conflicts disappear, and a material basis created permitting the distribution of material goods “to everybody according to his needs,” without which—in Marx’s opinion—“the ancient filthiness” might again reappear in another form.

It is therefore possible to erect the foundations, or the framework, of a communist society, but the road leading to its accomplishment is still very long and since the forms of transition to this new system, especially in highly industrialized countries, will differ from those we have known up to now, the form of this future society will be certainly differentiated, and it is impossible, as of now, to say something correct on the subject.

Nevertheless, some questions linked to alienation may and should interest us even in this long-range perspective.

It is necessary to ascertain, in the first place, that theoretically it is impossible to exclude the appearance of processes of alienation also in this type of society. Since alienation cannot exist without the objectivation of human activities, it is impossible to exclude

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the appearance of certain processes of alienation, even transitory. We can foresee for instance, that “the free association of producers,” as Marx called it, will meet with great difficulties in struggling against the danger of alienation of the apparatus of management, planification and production, which—because of its international character at that moment and because of its needs for highly trained specialists—will have a natural tendency towards stabilization, which brings with it the danger of alienation.

Therefore there certainly will be some difficulties and possibilities of degeneration in the sense of processes of alienation. But there will be, in return, almost certainly more perfected means to help in the struggle, including the utilization of electronic machines programmed for this purpose.

Such a society will have another problem, that of the participation of its members in community life—in other words—the struggle against all the phenomena of auto-alienation. The problem becomes the formation of the personality of men in the new society which fluctuates between the Scylla of anarchic individualism and the Charybdis of the destruction of personal individuality, which with the impulse of biochemistry passes from the sphere of fiction into that of real possibilities.

But anything we might say about these fascinating subjects still belonging to the future, still belongs to science-fiction. It is much better not to dwell upon them and simply be conscious of the vitality of these problems.

However what is certain and important in the context of our considerations, is that the category of alienation will always have, even in such a future, a practical value. If one does not take into account these problems in relation to man’s action in a communist society, it will be impossible to build communism and—after its edification—either maintain or develop it.