

The Inevitability of Alienation
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WALTER KAUFMANN

THE INEVITABILITY OF ALIENATION*

I. Historical Perspective

"Alienation" is one of the most modish words of our time. It is also central in the self-understanding of millions of young people who see themselves as alienated and blame the societies in which they live for producing this condition. Twenty-five years ago few people had heard of "alienation." The term became popular only during the cold war, as a meeting place for East and West, for Marxism and existentialism.

This is odd because Hegel had used the word so much, devoting a whole chapter in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807), over a hundred pages in length, to "Spirit *alienated from itself.*" Nevertheless Hermann Glockner did not list the two German words for alienation, *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung,* in his four-volume *Hegel-Lexikon* (1935-39), and Johannes Hoffmeister did not include them either in the index of his scholarly edition of the *Phenomenology* (1952) or in his very learned philosophical dictionary (2d ed., 1955). It was the case of an idea whose time had not yet come.

The one great exception confirms this view. Karl Marx, who was thirteen years old when Hegel died in 1831, discussed both of the German words at length in his "Philosophical Manuscripts" in 1844; but most of this material was not published until 1932, and in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) Marx specifically denounced talk of "alienation" as "philosophical nonsense."

Less than a year after the publication of Marx's early manuscripts the Nazis came to power and put an end to scholarly discussions of Marx's thought in Germany, while the Soviet hierarchy accepted the view of alienation put forth in *The Communist Manifesto.*

Meanwhile others occasionally spoke of *Entfremdung* or *Verfremdung* — e.g., Martin Buber in *Ich und Du* (1923) and Bertolt Brecht in his anti-Aristotelian poetics — but these terms did not catch on anymore

* A fuller version of this paper, more than twice as long, was published by Doubleday and Company, Garden City, N.Y., in the fall of 1970 as the introductory essay in Richard L. Schacht's book *Alienation* and copyrighted in the name of Walter Kaufmann. The final version, revised further, appeared as Chapter 7, "The Need for Alienation", in my book *Without Guilt and Justice,* New York 1973. This book has also appeared in Germany, *Jenseits von Schuld und Gerechtigkeit,* Hamburg 1974.

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than "alienation" did in the English-speaking world until Marxism and existentialism sought common ground in discussions of alienation.

When the Nazis came to power, Georg Lukacs, whom the Communist Party in the Soviet Union had vilified in the 20s for his Hegelian deviations from true Marxism, fled to the Soviet Union and abjured his heresies. But he also went to work on *Der junge Hegel,* a book that was finished substantially in 1938 and published after thorough revision in 1948.. In the final 35 pages Lukacs made the stone that the builders had rejected for 140 years the chief corner stone: this final section bore the title "*Entäusserung* as the (or: a) central philosophical concept of the *Phenomenology of the Spirit.*" Of the forty footnotes that supported this view only six referred to Hegel's writings; two to Engels, two to Lenin — and twenty-one to Karl Marx!

Lucacs' attempt at self-justification was transparent: his Hegelianism was no deviation after all; alienation had been central in Hegel's thought no less than in Marx's. Thus his own affinity with existentialism was no heresy. In his preface to the 1968 edition of *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein,* Lukacs doubted whether Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence was derived from the original edition and said that "the problem was in the air" (p. 24); but he also admitted that "Kiekegaard played a considerable role in my early development; in the last years before the War (i.e., before 1914) in Heidelberg I even planned to write a monograph on his critique of Hegel" (p. 11). The publication of Marx's early manuscripts in 1932 and the concept of alienation provided at long last a desperately needed bridge for some rapprochement between Marxism on the one hand and humanism and existentialism on the other.

While Lukacs, writing in German, could not publish his Hegel book until 1948, Herbert Marcuse, writing in English in the U.S., published his *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* in 1941, making ample use of Marx's early manuscripts and devoting a good deal of attention to alienation. He had dedicated his first book to Heidegger, under whom he had studied.

Löwith had also studied with Heidegger. In his *Von Hegel bis Nietzsche* (1941) alienation was not central, but the chapter on *Arbeit* reported Hegel's and Marx's ideas about alienation. In Erich *Fromm's Escape from Freedom* (also 1941) the word was used a couple of times and some of the phenomena to which Fromm later applied the term were discussed at some length, but the term was not yet considered worth listing in the index. The time was not ripe for it until the cold war had broken out.

In the fifties a few refugees from Germany and Austria naturalized "alienation" in the U.S. Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955), Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955), Erich Kahler's *The Tower and the Abyss* (1957), and Hanah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) made constant mention of it — and the indices to these books contain numerous references to it.

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In Germany, too, it was only in the fifties that the term began to attract much popular attention after Marx's early writings appeared in a cheap edition in 1953 (*Die Frühschriften,* ed. Landshut). Heinrich Popitz's *Der entfremdete Mensch* appeared the same year. The book had been begun a few years earlier — as a dissertation under Karl Jaspers.

It was Fromm who introduced Marx's early manuscripts to the American public, in 1961. The author's name was Fromm's, the title *Marx's Concept of Man.* This was also the title of Fromm's introductory essay, and he said at the outset: "Marx's philosophy, like much of existentialist thinking, represents a protest against man's alienation, his loss of himself and his transformation into a thing." Lukacs had tried to make his early existentialist leanings respectable by appealing to Marx; in the U.S. Marx was made more appealing by attempts to show that he had much in common with existentialism.

Before the discovery of his early manuscripts, it had always been hard to find much philosophy in Marx, and writers of an earlier generation had often turned to Engels instead. And it was often hard to find much concern for the individual human being in countries with communist governments. For all who felt distressed on either or both of these counts, the *young* Marx and the discussion of alienation spelled salvation.

It is easy to sympathize with the humane concerns of many of the writers who seized on "alienation", but the diagnoses of the ills of our times that were put forward in the seminal books of the fifties have always seemed wrong to me in important respects, and the term has been used in so many different ways that in Fromm's case, for example, the only common denominator of all his uses of the word appears to be that he is against alienation.

II. Analysis

The verb "alienate" is transitive like its two German equivalents, and its literal meaning is to make strange, to make another's. But the noun "Alienation", like the German *Entfremdung* and unlike *Entäusserung,* does not usually bring to mind an activity, except in special contexts where it functions as a technical term. Our primary association with "alienation" and *Entfremdung* is a human state of being — the state of *being* alienated or estranged from something or somebody. And it is phenomena of this sort that I propose to discuss now.

We are concerned with a relationship between A and B. A is a person or group of persons and is usually specified; but confusion frequently results from the failure to specify from whom or what A is supposed to be alienated. "Alienation" is an elliptical term that requires completion in *two* directions.

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What might B be? An individual, a group, other people in general, the society in which one lives, oneself, nature (hardly a univocal term, but possibly in the sense in which we speak of nature lovers), or perhaps the universe.

One can also be alienated from what one does (from one's activity, work, or labor) or from things (such as the products of one's labor). The young Marx stressed both of these forms of alienation along with man's alienation from his essence or true nature — a concept that was central in his thought in 1844. While Marx uses "alienation" in several different senses, what concerns him most is the dehumanization of man. Man's loss of independence, his impoverishment, his estrangement from his fellow men, and his involvement in labor that is devoid of any originality, spontaneity, or creativity are so many aspects of man's estrangement from his true nature. Whether man has an essence is, of course, questionable; and seeing how Marx's early manuscripts have been used to bring him closer to existentialism, it is ironical that nobody has argued more passionately that man has no essence than has Jean-Paul Sartre.

Yet the young Marx and the early Sartre are not by any means diametrically opposed. In his early existentialist phase Sartre made much of his distinction between the being of things (*en soi*) and the human mode of being (*pour soi*). Man, he said, lacked the solidity of things; man was condemned to be free. He showed in detail, not only in his philosophical works but also in his short stories, novels, and plays, how men constantly succumb to bad faith, hiding their freedom from themselves and seeing themselves as if they were things. His extravagant emphasis on man's complete freedom was at odds not only with Marxism but also with the facts of life; and it was his growing awareness of the hollowness of this rhetoric and of the ways in which the oppressed and starving are not completely free — his social conscience, in brief — that led him more than any other single factor to his later rapprochement wtih Marxism. But even his earlier philosophy could have been formulated in terms of a concept of human nature. The main difference between the young Marx and the early Sartre is not that one has such a concept while the other rejects it; it is rather that Sartre concentrates on the psychological processes that lead men to see themselves as objects, as things, as unfree, while Marx concerns himself with the economic processes that lead to much the same result. Both are concerned with man's loss of his freedom, but Marx sees the unfree as victims while the early Sartre insists that we are our own victims, that we really are free, and that we are at fault for not realizing it.

Thus one could also speak of alienation from freedom. And for those who believe in God or gods there may also be alienation from God or gods. But to speak of alienation without making clear who is held to be alienated from whom or from what is hardly very fruitful, and talk of the "total" alienation of modern man is as non-sensical as talk of the total absence of alienation.

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We must ask not only from whom or what a person or group is supposed to be alienated but also what would constitute the absence of this alienation. Self-consciousness involves a sense of what is other — alienum in Latin. If anyone literally found nothing human alien to himself, he would be totally lacking in any sense of selfhood. (Terence's beautiful line, *Homo sum; humani nil a me alienum puto* — I am a man, and I hold nothing human strange to me — refers not to the total absence but to the overcoming of a sense of strangeness: a triumph that involves imagination and understanding, not imbecility.) If anyone could not tell a strange hand from his own and actually experienced one just as he did the other, we might as well say that he experienced his own hand as strange and was alienated from himself and specifically from his own body.

Have we illicitly confounded otherhood and strangeness? A person of whom I realize that he is other than myself need not seem strange to me. He may be a familiar sight — no stranger nor strange to me: "I know him", But how well do I know him? I simply do not care enough to think about the 99 % of him that is for me *terra incognita.* We are strangers but not sufficiently interested to realize it or be bothered by it, and one might well hesitate to speak of alienation or estrangement in such cases lest one be taken to imply that there was a prior state of closer rapport.

Now suppose that I am suddenly struck by the fact that I hardly know this person. This could happen as we began to talk to each other. I might never have hesitated to say "I know him"; but now that I actually got to know him at least a little better I might come to feel that I really do not know him at all and that he is quite strange.

This paradox may seem to be reducible to the double meanings of "know" and "strange". As Hegel pointed out, what is *bekannt* or known by acquaintance and hence familiar is not necessarily *erkannt* or known in the sense of being comprehended. But that is not all. Familiarity actually obstructs knowledge, and comprehension involves the overcoming of a sense of strangeness. This point, too, is central in Hegel's thought.

Another image may make it clearer. It is hard to see in perspective and comprehend what is very close to us: comprehension requires some distance and consists in a triumph over distance. It is often easier to understand the problems of others than our own. In these cases, of course, emotional involvement does its share to blind us. But the same phenomenon can be observed when a play, a painting, or some piece of music is exceedingly familiar to us: we lack distance and must become alienated if we would comprehend it.

Plato and Aristotle remarked that philosophy begins in wonder or perplexity. We could also say that it begins when sometime suddenly strikes us as strange — or that philosophy is born of estrangement. It need not be alienation from other human beings; it could be estrangement from oneself or the universe. Or a belief or system of beliefs,

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a moral conviction or a code that we had taken for granted may suddenly seem strange to us. Such alienation need not be a merely intellectual event; it may involve a deep estrangement from the faith and morals of our society.

It may seem to be a *reductio ad absurdum* to speak of alienation when a child begins to ask questions about all sorts of things that but a few months earlier had not struck him as at all strange and that most Philistines would not dream of questioning. For it is clearly the child that does *not* ask questions that one has to worry about, and alienation of this type is a symptom of mental health, while lack of it is pathological. Those who assume that alienation is by definition regrettable would not think of applying the term to a healthy child. But adolescence is our second childhood; and when students start asking questions about their schools and the societies in which they live, it is often said that they are alienated. A healthy child ought not to be satisfied with the reply that this is simply how things are. Should an adolescent be content with such an answer?

Some people, no doubt, would apply the term to adolescents only by way of registering regret or disapproval. But in purely descriptive terms, the adolescent who gains a sense of distance experiences a gulf between himself and all sorts of things and people, and he feels estranged. The curiosity of the small child that asks questions is not so regularly accompanied by a deep sense of alienation.

Most writers who make much of alienation consider it a distinctively modern phenomenon — and deplore it. We have suggested in effect that they are wrong on both counts. The conditions that loom so large in the contemporary literature on alienation and in the seminal books published in the fifties can be found in earlier periods and in non-capitalistic societies. Those who deplore alienation and blame it on modernity or on our economic system should have considered these matters with more care, for there is no other way of establishing that their diagnoses are right; and if they are not, their prescriptions scarcely merit much attention. But in spite of its derivation from Hegel, most of the vast literature on alienation is historically blind.

III. Alienation in the Philosophy and Literature of the Past

Plato may be considered a paradigm of alienation. His *Republic* is the work of a man estranged from his society and from the politics and morals of his time. He is disaffected and convinced that it would be pointless for him to participate in the public life of his city. The notion of alienation from oneself is less clear, but Plato likes to cite approvingly an Orphic play on words: the body (*soma*) is the tomb (*sema*) of the soul. Life is one long exile, salvation is to be found only in death, and to be a self is a stranger. Plato also makes much of the

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experience of the divided self. The meaning of "alienation from nature" is also unclear, but if it means that some peasants or primitive peoples are in tune with nature, at home in it, and not alienated from it, then Plato certainly was alienated from nature. In his *Phaedrus* Socrates says that "trees and countryside won't teach me anything while men in the city do"; also that he can be got out of the city only if a book is dangled in front of him. Plato seems to have been no more intimate with nature. His path to salvation required men to regard sense experience as an illusion and nature as unreal.

One could also illustrate what is nowadays called alienation by considering Heraclitus and the Pythagoreans; but this is not the place to go through the history of philosophy. Suffice it to mention at least one other philosopher: Kant. Like Socrates, he did not care to leave the city and wander in the country, and like Plato he considered nature unreal. He, too, believed in two worlds, and he sought freedom, immortality, and God — if any — in the other world. Such otherworldliness is generally a sign of alienation from this world, from concrete human society, and from one's empirical self. Kant's ethic, moreover, is based on the experience of the divided self — and this was precisely the aspect of Kant's philosophy that first Friedrich Schiller and then Hegel tried to overcome. Eventually, Hegel went on to develop a different conception of man and his place in the world, of spirit, and of the nature of reality. This was the context in which Hegel introduced the concept of alienation.

In his first Duino Elegy Rilke says that "we are not very reliably at home in the interpreted world." This has often been taken for a very modern *malaise*. But there is a very strong presumption that most of the great philosophers shared it. Descartes lost his mother when he was one year old; Spinoza was six when his mother died; Leibniz, six when his father died. Pascal was three when his mother died, Hume three when his father died. Rousseau's mother died soon after his birth, and his father left when he was ten. Kant and Hegel lost their mothers at thirteen. Nietzsche lost his father at four. Russell's mother died when he was two, his father two years later. Sartre lost his father at two. [1]

Rilke's dictum obviously fits most of these men. It may not seem wholly applicable to Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hegel. But closer study reveals that what Hegel sought and eventually found in philosophy was a triumph over an unbearable sense of alienation. The cases of Spinoza and Leibniz may well have been similar.

In literature Goethe may serve us as our first example. If rebellion against the establishment were a sign of alienation, the young Goethe would be an exemplary case. Consider Werther's suicide, Goetz's defiance, and Faust's wholehearted disgust with all academic learning.

[1] Professor Ben-Ami Scharfstein, Tel Aviv University, called most of these data to my attention in another context.

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But these anti-establishmentarian works became instant successes that made their author the hero of the younger generation. If we associate alienation primarily with a deep sense of estrangement from one's fellow men and from society, then Goethe became a paradigm of alienation precisely during the period of his greatest fame when he is often held to have been a pillar of the establishment. Even *Faust I* was written with an utter disregard for the possibility of performance on the stage — and it was never staged in public until 1829 when people wanted to honor Goethe on his 80th birthday, and then the play was cut severely. *Faust II* was not only not intended for the stage; when Goethe finished it shortly before his death, he sealed the manuscript and refused to divulge the conclusion even to friends. He had no desire to share his *magnum opus* with anyone. Truly, the work was much farther ahead of its time than the masterpieces of James Joyce and Samuel Beckett: roughly a hundred years.

The Middle Ages are sometimes viewed nostalgically as a time when all was harmony and integration. There is no need here to rehearse the horrors of that period. Suffice it that the greatest poet of the age, Dante, was a paradigm of alienation. His *Vita Nuova* is a case study of alienation from oneself, and his *Commedia* is the work of an outsider and exile, consumed by bitterness. He creates a vast hell to people it with his fellow men, including members of the establishment. If alienation is associated rather more with being artistically out of touch with one's time: who among Dante's contemporaries could have fathomed his work? And how many people since his time?

Many people consider 5th century Athens the site of a golden age, and at first glance Sophocles looks like the archetype of a non-alienated poet. I have contested that view elsewhere [2] and shall not repeat the argument. But Sophocles' Oedipus is surely alienation incarnate. His father was warned by the gods not to have children; Oedipus came into the world unwanted and was cast out into hostile nature to perish. He was saved and brought up in Corinth, a stranger without knowing it. He left Corinth to go into voluntary exile but did what he had meant not to do and outraged nature as well as society. In Thebes, of which he was a native, he considered himself a stranger and when he discovered his identity he asked to be thrown out of the city. The best epigraph for the play would be Heraclitus' "I sought myself." But when Oedipus discovers who he is, he is filled with such loathing that he destroys his eyes and wishes that he could destroy his hearing, too, cutting the last bonds to the world and to his fellow men. Those who wish to understand alienation and whether it is a distinctly modern phenomenon should reflect on the perennial fascination of this tragedy. Only one other play has fascinated men equally: *Hamlet*. And here, too, the hero totally dominates the tragedy with his pervasive sense of alienation. Generations

[2] W. Kaufmann, *Tragedy and Philosophy* (1968).

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of readers have identified with him. If they included a high percentage of young people, writers, and artists, perhaps these groups have always been prone to feel rather intensely what is nowadays called alienation. For alienation is the price of self-consciousness and sensitivity.

If alienation is predicated of the public's lack of any intimate relationship to art and literature, that is indeed a prevalent condition in modern capitalistic societies — as well as in modern communist countries. And did not the pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of Europe, the Renaissance patrons and popes and the wealthy citizens of northern Europe look on paintings and sculptures as status symbols? And how much did the masses care about art?

Beethoven made a great point of seeing his art, himself, and artists generally in a new light — but felt intolerable alienated. Now one could argue that those who had treated artists in the manner against which he protested so successfully had been less alienated from art than the public has been since; for now the artist is a person apart, and art and music are no longer amenities.

The term "alienation" has been used so indiscriminately that it is far from clear who is supposed to be alienated: the minority who reads Kafka or Euripides with understanding, the faddists who consider Edward Albee and Andy Warhol great, or the vast majority that reads the *Reader's Digest*. If the last group, what are we to say of the overwhelming majority of Rembrandt's and Mozart's contemporaries who never as much as heard of them? Who is more alienated — a writer in America who in 1970 still does not have a television set, or rather those who spend their leisure time watching television? The non-conformist is alienated from society, but those who conform are alienated from themselves.

It is naive to assume that all forms of alienation issue from one root form — regardless of whether that is blamed on economic causes or not — and to think that the person who is liberated from that will no longer suffer from any alienation. On the contrary, creativity and originality require non-conformity; and the more profoundly he is bound to become alienated from society.

Those who assume that in pre-industrial society men were less alienated — perhaps not at all — and not only happier and more intimate with nature but also more humane should read Nikos Kazantzakis' *Zorba the Greek* and Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. And in *The Painted Bird* Jerzy Kosinski has given us not only a shattering picture of a peasant society but also one of the greatest symbols of alienation to be found in world literature. He tells — and this is no invention — of the bird catcher who now and then chose the strongest bird from his cages, painted it in rainbow hues, squeezed it to make it twitter and attract a flock of its own species, and then set it free. One after another, the drab birds would attack the painted bird until he dropped to the ground, soaked in blood. The whole book develops this theme.

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IV. "THINGS HAVE NEVER BEEN WORSE"

The literature on alienation is tainted by the notion that things have never been worse. This marks an understandable reaction to the faith that things have never been better. But this new anti-faith in the unique alienation of modern man is as unsound and unsophisticated as the old faith in progress. Both notions are deplorably undialectical. "Dialectic" is almost as fashionable a term as "alienation", but few who use it have any clear idea of Hegel's meaning.

Hegel opposed the dogmatism of those who believe in such crude propositions as that things were never so good or never so bad. Not only must we examine the meaning of "good" and "bad" and the implicit standards; we must also inquire how what has become better is related to what has become worse. And if we consider something very bad, it is simpleminded to say that we must obviously get rid of it, whatever the cost, or to assume that anything at all would be bound to be better than what we do not like. We must ask what changes would be for the better — and what price we probably would have to pay for each. Changes usually have side-effects that in the long run are more important than the effects intended.

Thus a great many of the phenomena that are often lumped together under the word "alienation" are due to the spread of education. That much of the education offered in capitalistic societies is a travesty is widely recognized by now along with the urgent need for reforms. But any notion that education in communist countries or in the so-called third world is much better or that the masses used to be much better educated, more humane, and more appreciative of poets, painters, and philosophers is wildly out of touch with fact.

Even the best education must increase alienation. It shows men how the familiar is not comprehended and how what had seemed clear is really quite strange. If alienation is much more widespread now than it used to be, this is in large measure because more people receive more education than formerly.

Moreover, our educational system not only exposes more people — not only in absolute numbers but also a higher percentage than formerly — to great art and literature; it also encourages them to believe that they can write and paint as well as anyone. They are led to think that they might well make great discoveries or inventions. But such great expectations are doomed to be disappointed in almost all cases — for at least two reasons.

First, the creative life is full of depressions, and very few people have talent enough to find an over-all sense of satisfaction in it. Instead of emphasizing fundamental skills and basic knowledge, training people for the jobs that actually await them, our educators often talk blithely of research, discovery, and creativity. But disciplined originality is rare,

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and few pupils go on to discover or create anything of lasting interest. Their disappointment is often spoken of as alienation.

Secondly, there is the population explosion. Thus every American boy today has only a fraction of the chance to become president of his country that every American boy had 100 years ago. And the student who chooses to become a scientist, philosopher, or artist is quite apt to feel that the competition is incomparably keener than ever before. During the long period of his education he has no assurance that he will be able to make a living in his chosen field, much less that he will ever be able to do anything of lasting importance. And this is one of the most crucial aspects of what is nowadays called alienation. The number of those who feel frustrated in this way is clearly greater than ever, although the situation has not become worse in terms of percentages. On the contrary, upward mobility has rarely been greater. But if one of those rare periods when it was greater lies only a few years back, then a sudden drop may create the erroneous impression that things have never been worse.

Thus some forms of "alienation" are inevitable consequences of education while others are due to the unrealistic expectations raised by our present system. A great many forms of alienation could be prevented by providing much less education — a cure far worse than the disease — but some forms could also be prevented by educational reforms.

V. DESTRUCTIVE AND FRUITFUL ALIENATION

My dialectical approach to alienation is much closer to Hegel than to Marx. Under Marx's influence, many writers use the term more or less exclusively for destructive conditions, almost as the antonym of self-realization: Consider a famous passage from Marx's early manuscript on "Alienated Labor": "The alienation of the worker in his object finds expression as follows according to the principles of political economy: The more the worker produces, the less is there for him to consume; the more values he creates, the more he loses value and dignity; the more his product is shaped, the more misshapen the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous the worker; the more powerful the work is, the more powerless becomes the worker; the more spirit there is in the work, the more devoid of spirit and a slave of nature the worker."

It is worth noting that the final clause is ungrammatical in the original[3] and that the whole paragraph is placed in parentheses, for

[3] *Je geistreicher die Arbeit, um so mehr geistloser (sic) und Naturknecht der Arbeiter...* MS, p. XXIII. See, e.g., Karl Marx, *Texte zu Methode und Praxis,* II: Pariser Manuskripte 1844, ed. Günther Hillmann, Rowohlt, paperback 1966, p. 54.

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it is all too often forgotten that these early manuscripts represent rough and unrevised drafts. Yet these ideas richly merit critical attention. In the first place, they are expressed again and again in the same fragment and in the other early manuscripts. Secondly, this is the birthplace of the fateful Marxian idea that the condition of the workers is *bound* to become more and more inhuman and intolerable until there is a violent revolution in which, according to *Das Kapital,* "the expropriators are expropriated." [4] Finally, these ideas have been immensely influential not only on Marxism but also on the literature on alienation.

The passage quoted is a fine sample of Marx's style which wallows in antitheses. But Marx was wrong. What he described as an inevitable development is not what actually happened in England, the United States, and the other industrial nations of the West. It is easy to agree with Marx that the developments he pictures are without exception terrible: impoverishment, degradation, dehumanization, barbarization, enfeeblement, and moronization. But why call all this alienation? And what led him to think it was inevitable?

The answers to both questions are to be found in Hegel and Feuerbach, whose names are constantly encountered in the manuscripts of 1844. Hegel had used "necessary" again and again as a synonym of "natural" and an antonym of "arbitrary" or "utterly capricious." Among later Germain writers this confusion is common, and Marx's thought suffers severely from it.

Feuerbach had shown how man projects his best qualities into the deity until God becomes the image of perfection and man a hopelessly imperfect sinner. Man strips himself of all that is good and strong to clothe God in goodness and strength, and the greater he makes his God, the smaller he makes himself. Marx sought to transpose this idea, and if he had been right that the worker is divested of all the qualities that appear in his product — that its beauty, subtlety, and power leave him ugly, coarse, and weak — it could be argued that this is alienation. But since it is not at all inevitable that the workers become poorer the more they produce, it makes little sense to call impoverishment "alienation." And if we speak of moronization as "alienation" instead of keeping it clearly in focus as a phenomenon in its own-right, we stand much less chance of preventing it.

Many writers use "alienation" to designate brutalization, moronization, loss of spontaneity, mindless conformity, lack of "authenticity", or anything at all that one might call dehumanization. Serious critics are not satisfied to label what they like "swell" or "groovy" or "divine"; neither should serious writers be content to call what they deplore "alienation".

[4] Vol. I, near the end of chapter 24. The whole paragraph, which could be said to represent the climax of volume I (volumes II and III were not published by Marx himself), invites comparison with the paragraph from "Alienated Labor".

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We should restrict the term to cases in which someone feels estranged from something or from others. We need not stipulate that previously A was close to B: estrangement can take the form of one's suddenly feeling or realizing how a gulf separates one from B.

It is imperative to realize that alienation need not be destructive. One cannot participate in all the groups to which one might belong: one has to make choices, and not only are time and energy limited, but some groups define themselves in opposition to other groups. Alienation from B may be the price one pays for belonging to C; and it need not even be felt to be a price.

Moreover, some kinds of alienation are fruitful: witness, for example, the discourse of Nietzsche's Zarathustra "On the Way of the Creator". Erich Fromm equates alienation with "what in theistic language would be called "sin" [5]; and suggestions abound that we ought to prevent alienation. But that would really dehumanize man.

It does not follow that we should be casual or callous about destructive alienation. The evils the young Marx attacked in the passage we have quoted should be fought; but as Marx himself discovered within less than four years, to fight them effectively it is best not to lump them together under the catch-all label of alienation.

We have given reasons for not restricting the term "alienation" to self-destructive conditions. Should we then use it exclusively for fruitful estrangement — for the conditions we have illustrated from the lives of various philosophers and poets? The trouble is that one does not know in advance when estrangement will prove to be fruitful. Moreover, self-destruction and creativity are not mutually exclusive. This last point is central in the Prologue to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*; but those put off by its flamboyant tone may ponder Nietzsche's own case or that of Franz Kafka. Kafka was one of the most creative and original writers of our century; but he left instructions to burn the manuscripts of *The Trial* and *The Castle* because he felt so sure that he had failed. It would be perverse and unhelpful to say either that he thought he was alienated but, being a great writer, actually was not — or that he was alienated without knowing it. It is much less misleading to say that he was and felt deeply alienated without realizing how fruitful his condition was.

Insofar as alienation involves a painful sense of isolation and self-doubt, it may seem as if there were two kinds of men: the few who, being creative, can cope with it, and the many who are not creative and cannot. Anysuch bifurcation of humanity, however, has to be rejected. A man's contemporaries are poor judges of his rank, and many men, like Kafka, are unsure of their own status. Moreover, nobody is creative all the time, and nobody is creative none of the time. As they grow older, many men approximate the latter extreme; but if they

[5] *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961, p. 46).

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are mere caricatures of what they might be, they need to be persuaded that in order to become more humane they must first become more alienated. This notion finds support not only in Hegel but also in some of the world's great religions.

Judaism and Christianity began by challenging men to alienate themselves from nature, society, and themselves. The prophets did not only warn their people against being "like all the nations"; they themselves were strangers among their own people. Sigmund Freud spoke out of this tradition and gave a classical picture of fruitful alienation when he said at the outset of his *Selbstdarstellung* (1925) that as a Jew he became familiar early in life "with the lot of standing among the opposition and being placed under a ban by the 'compact majority'. This laid the foundation for a certain independence of judgment."

In early Christianity the sense of alienation encompassed the whole world: nature was the enemy, sex was evil, the body a prison, and society Caesar's. Hope turned to another world. Nor were the Hinduism of the Upanishads and early Buddhism less alienated.

We need not choose the paths prescribed by these religions to agree that the development of the spirit requires a full measure of estrangement. We can and should insist on that while remaining faithful to the earth. As Sartre's Orestes says, "Man's life begins on the other side of despair".

It is tempting to be as polemical as Marx was and to say that fundamentally Hegel saw estrangement as the heartbeat of the life of the spirit, while Marx wanted to get rid of alienation. I have pleaded extenuating circumstances for those who want to go back to the young Marx, but it is high time for them to recognise, as Marx himself did by 1848, that the cause of humanity is ill served by the loose and indiscriminate talk of "alienation".

Estrangement from society and from oneself to the point of isolation and self-doubt is the price of self-consciousness. Creativity is one response to it, commitment another; and both entail further alienation. Whoever would try to protect the young from alienation has despaired of man. It would be more in keeping with the spirit of the prophets, Confucius, and Socrates to say instead: Life without estrangement is scarcely worth living; what matters is to increase men's capacity to cope with alienation.

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