

ISTVÁN MÉSZÁROS

MARX'S THEORY OF ALIENATION



Written: 1970;
Source: Marx's Theory of Alienation;
Transcribed: [Andy Blunden](#).

Table of Contents:

1. [Origins of the Concept of Alienation](#)
2. [Genesis of Marx's Theory of Alienation](#)
3. [Conceptual Structure of Marx's Theory of Alienation](#)

István Mészáros, 1970
Marx's Theory of Alienation

1. Origins of the Concept of Alienation

As is well known, Feuerbach, Hegel and English Political Economy exercised the most direct influence on the formation of Marx's theory of alienation. But we are concerned here with much more than simple intellectual influences. The concept of alienation belongs to a vast and complex problematic, with a long history of its own. Preoccupations with this problematic – in forms ranging from the Bible to literary works as well as treatises on Law, Economy and Philosophy – reflect objective trends of European development, from slavery to the age of transition from capitalism to socialism. Intellectual influences, revealing important continuities across the transformations of social structures, acquire their real significance only if they are considered in this objective framework of development. If so assessed, their importance – far from being exhausted in mere historical curiosity – cannot be stressed enough: precisely because they indicate the deep-rootedness of certain problematics as well as the *relative* autonomy of the forms of thought in which they are reflected.

It must be made equally clear, however, that such influences are exercised in the dialectical sense of “continuity in discontinuity”. Whether the element of continuity predominates over discontinuity or the other way round, and in what precise form and correlation, is a matter for concrete historical analysis. As we shall see, in the case of Marx's thought in its relation to antecedent theories discontinuity is the “*übergreifendes Moment*”, but some elements of continuity are also very important.

Some of the principal themes of modern theories of alienation appeared in European thought, in one form or another, many centuries ago. To follow their development in detail would require copious volumes. In the few pages at our disposal we cannot attempt more than an outline of the general trends of this development, describing their main characteristics insofar as they link up with Marx's theory of alienation and help to throw light on it.

1. The Judeo-Christian Approach

The first aspect we have to consider is the lament about being “*alienated from God*” (or having “fallen from Grace”) which belongs to the common heritage of Judeo-Christian mythology. The divine order, it is said, has been violated; man has alienated himself from “the ways of God”, whether simply by “the fall of man” or later by “the dark idolatries of *alienated Judah*”, or later again by the behaviour of “*Christians alienated from the life of God*”. The messianic mission consists in rescuing man from this state of self-alienation which he had brought upon himself.

But this is as far as the similarities go in the Judeo-Christian problematic; and far-reaching differences prevail in other respects. For the form in which the messianic transcendence of alienation is envisaged is not a matter of indifference. “Remember” – says Paul the Apostle – “that ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made High by the blood of Christ... Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief

corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit." Christianity thus, in its universality, announces the imaginary solution of human self-alienation in the form of "the mystery of Christ." This mystery postulates the reconciliation of the contradictions which made groups of people oppose each other as "strangers", "foreigners", "enemies". This is not only a reflection of a specific form of social struggle but at the same time also its mystical "resolution" which induced Marx to write: "It was only in appearance that Christianity overcame real Judaism. It was too refined, too spiritual to eliminate the crudeness of practical need except by raising it into the ethereal realm. Christianity is the sublime thought of Judaism. Judaism is the vulgar practical application of Christianity. But this practical application could only become universal when Christianity as perfected religion had accomplished, in a theoretical fashion, the alienation of man from himself and from nature." [Marx, *On the Jewish Question*]

Judaism in its "crude" realism reflects with a much greater immediacy the actual state of affairs, advocating a virtually endless continuation of the extension of its worldly powers – i.e. settling for a "quasi-messianic" solution on earth: this is why it is in no hurry whatsoever about the arrival of its Messiah – in the form of two, complementary, postulates:

1. the softening of *internal* class conflicts, in the interest of the cohesion of the national community in its confrontation with the outside world of the "strangers": "For *the poor shall never cease out of the land*: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thy hand wide unto *thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land*."
2. the promise of readmission into the grace of God is partly fulfilled in the form of granting the power of domination over the "strangers" to Judah: "And strangers shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your ploughmen and your vinedressers."

The formidable practical vehicle of this expanding domination was the weapon of "usury" which needed, however, in order to become really effective, its suitable counterpart which offered an unlimited outlet for the power of this weapon: i.e. the metamorphosis of Judaism into Christianity. For "Judaism attains its apogee with the perfection of civil society; but civil society only reaches perfection in the Christian world. Only under the sway of Christianity, which objectifies a national, natural, moral and theoretical relationships, could civil society separate itself completely from the life of the state, sever all the species-bonds of man, establish egoism and selfish need in their place, and dissolve the human world into a world of atomistic, antagonistic individuals."

The ethos of Judaism which stimulated this development was not confined to the general assertion of the God-willed superiority of the "chosen people" in its confrontation with the world of strangers, issuing in commands like this: "Ye shall not eat any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the *stranger* that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest *sell it* unto an *alien*: for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God." Far more important was in the practical sense the absolute prohibition imposed on the exploitation of the sons of Judah through usury: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, *thou shalt not be to him an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury*." Usury was only allowed in dealings with *strangers*, but not with "brethren".

Christianity, by contrast, which refused to retain this discrimination between “any of my people” and “strangers” (or “aliens” postulating in its place the “universal brotherhood of mankind”, not only deprived itself of the powerful weapon of “usury” (i.e. of “interest” and the accumulation of capital coupled with it) as the most important vehicle of early economic expansion but at the same time also became an easy prey to the triumphant advance of the “spirit of Judaism”. The “crude and vulgar practical principle of Judaism” discussed by Marx – i.e. the effectively self-centred, internally cohesive, practical-empirical partiality could easily triumph over the abstract theoretical universality of Christianity established as a set of “purely formal rites with which the world of self-interest encircles itself”. (On the importance of “usury” and the controversies related to it at the time of the rise of early capitalism)

It is very important to emphasise here that the issue at stake is not simply the empirical reality of Jewish communities in Europe but “the spirit of Judaism”; i.e. the *internal* principle of European social developments culminating in the emergence and stabilisation of capitalistic society. “The spirit of Judaism”, therefore, must be Understood, in the last analysis, to mean “the spirit of capitalism”. For an early, realisation of the latter Judaism as an empirical reality only provided a suitable vehicle. Ignoring this distinction, for one reason or another, could lead – as it did throughout the ages – to scapegoat-hunting anti-Semitism. The objective conditions of European social development, from the dissolution of pre-feudal society to the Universal triumph of capitalism over feudalism, must be assessed in their comprehensive complexity of which Judaism as a sociological phenomenon is a part only, however important a part it may have been at certain stages of this development.

Judaism and Christianity are complementary aspects of society's efforts to cope with its internal contradictions. They both represent attempts at an imaginary transcendence of these contradictions, at an illusory “reappropriation” of the “human essence” through a fictitious supersession of the state of alienation. Judaism and Christianity express the contradictions of “partiality versus universality” and “competition versus monopoly”: i.e. *internal* contradictions of what has become known as “the spirit of capitalism”. In this framework the success of partiality can only be conceived in contradiction to and at the expense of universality – just as this “universality” can only prevail on the basis of the suppression of partiality – and *vice versa*. Similarly with the relationship between competition and monopoly: the condition of success of “competition” is the negation of monopoly just as for monopoly the condition of extending its power is the suppression of competition. The partiality of Judaism the “chimerical nationality of the Jew is the nationality of the trader, and above all of the financier” – writes Marx, repeatedly emphasising that “the social emancipation of the Jew is the emancipation of society from Judaism”, i.e. from the partiality of the financier's “nationality”, or, expressed in more general terms, from “the Jewish narrowness of society”. “Jewish narrowness” could triumph in “civil society” because the latter *required* the dynamism of the “supremely practical Jewish spirit” for its full development. The metamorphosis of Judaism into Christianity carried with it a later metamorphosis of Christianity into a more evolved, less crudely partial form of – secularised – Judaism: “The Jew has emancipated himself in a Jewish manner, not only by acquiring the power of money, but also because money had become, through him and *also apart from* him, a world power, while the practical Jewish spirit has become the *practical spirit of the Christian nations*. The Jews have emancipated themselves in so far as the Christians have become Jews. Protestant modifications of earlier established Christianity, in various national settings, had accomplished a relatively early metamorphosis of “abstract-theoretical” Christianity into “practical-

Christian-Judaism” as a significant step in the direction of the complete *secularisation* of the whole problematics of alienation. Parallel to the expanding domination of the spirit of capitalism in the practical sphere, the ideological forms have become more and more secular as well; from the various versions of “deism” through “humanistic atheism” to the famous declaration stating that “God is dead”. By the time of the latter even the illusions of “universality” with which “the world of self-interest encircles itself”) – retained and at times even intensified by deism and humanistic atheism – have become acutely embarrassing for the bourgeoisie and a sudden, often cynical, transition had to be made to the open cult of partiality.

As has been mentioned, under the conditions of class society because of the inherent contradiction between the “part” and the “whole”, due to the fact that partial interest dominates the whole of society – the principle of partiality stands in an insoluble contradiction to that of Universality. Consequently it is the crude relation of forces that elevates the prevailing form of partiality into a bogus universality, whereas the ideal-oriented negation of this partiality, e.g. the abstract-theoretical universality of Christianity, before its metamorphosis into “practical-Christian-Judaism” – must remain illusory, fictitious, impotent. For “partiality” and “universality” in their reciprocal opposition to each other are two facets of the same, alienated, state of affairs. Egoistic partiality must be elevated to “universality” for its fulfilment: the underlying socioeconomic dynamism is both “self-centred” and “outer-directed”, “nationalist” and “cosmopolitan”, “protectionist-isolationist” and “imperialist” at the same time. This is why there can be no room for genuine universality, only for the bogus universalisation of the crudest partiality, coupled with an illusory, abstract-theoretical *postulate* of universality as the – merely ideological – negation of effective, practically prevailing partiality. Thus the “chimerical nationality of the Jew” is all the more chimerical because – insofar as it is “the nationality of the trader and of the financier” – it is in reality the only effective universality: partiality turned into operative universality, into the fundamental organising principle of the society in question. (The mystifications of anti-Semitism become obvious if one realises that it turns against the mere sociological phenomenon of Jewish partiality, and not against “the Jewish narrowness of society”; it attacks partiality in its limited immediacy, and thus not only does it not face the real problem: the partiality of capitalist self-interest turned into the ruling universal principle of society, but actively supports its own object of attack by means of this disorienting mystification.)

For Marx, in his reflections on the Judeo-Christian approach to the problems of alienation, the matter of central concern was to find a solution that could indicate a way out of the apparently perennial impasse: the renewed reproduction, in different forms, of the same contradiction between partiality and universality which characterised the entire historical development and its ideological reflections. His answer was not simply the double negation of crude partiality and abstract universality. Such a solution would have remained an abstract conceptual opposition and no more. The historical novelty of Marx's solution consisted in defining the problem in terms of the concrete dialectical concept of “partiality prevailing as universality”, in opposition to genuine universality which alone could embrace the manifold interests of society as a whole and of man as a “species-being” (*Gattungswesen* - i.e. man liberated from the domination of crude, individualistic self-interest). It was this specific, socially concrete concept which enabled Marx to grasp the problematics of capitalist society in its full contradictoriness and to formulate the programme of a *practical* transcendence of alienation by means of a genuinely universalising fusion of ideal and reality, theory and practice.

Also, we have to emphasise in this context that Marx had nothing to do with abstract “humanism” because he opposed right from the outset – as we have seen in the quotations taken from *On the Jewish Question*, written in 1843 – the illusions of *abstract universality* as a *mere postulate*, an impotent “ought”, a *fictitious* “reappropriation of non-alienated humanness”. There is no trace, therefore, of what might be termed “ideological concepts” in the thought of the young Marx who writes *On the Jewish Question*, let alone in the socioeconomically far more concrete reflections contained in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

2. Alienation as “Universal Saleability”

The secularisation of the religious concept of alienation had been accomplished in the concrete assertions concerning “saleability”. In the first place this secularisation progressed within the religious shell. Nothing could withstand this trend of converting everything into a saleable object, no matter how “sacred” it may have been considered at some stage in its “inalienability” sanctioned by an alleged divine command. (Balzac's *Melmoth* is a masterfully ironical reflection on the state of a totally secularised society in which “even the Holy Spirit has its quotation on the Stock Exchange”.) Even the doctrine of the “fall of man” had to be challenged – as it had been done by Luther, for instance – in the name of man's “liberty”. This advocacy of “liberty”, however, in reality turned out to be nothing more than the religious glorification of the secular principle of “universal saleability”. It was this latter which found its – however utopian – adversary in Thomas Münzer who complained in his pamphlet against Luther, saying that it was intolerable “that every creature should be *transformed into property* – the fishes in the water, the birds of the air, the plants of the earth”. Insights like this, no matter how profoundly and truthfully they reflected the inner nature of the transformations in course, had to remain mere utopias, ineffective protests conceived from the perspective of a hopeless anticipation of a possible future negation of commodity-society. At the time of the triumphant emergence of capitalism the prevalent ideological conceptions had to be those which assumed an affirmative attitude towards the objective trends of this development.

In the conditions of feudal society the hindrances which resisted the advance of “the spirit of capitalism” were, for instance, that “the vassal could not alienate without the consent of his superior (Adam Smith) or that “the bourgeois cannot alienate the things of the community without the permission of the king” (thirteenth century). The supreme ideal was that everyone should be able “to give and to alienate that which belongs to him” (thirteenth century). Obviously, however, the social order which confined to “The Lord” the power to “sell his Servant, or alienate him by Testament” (Hobbes) fell hopelessly short of the requirements of “free alienability” of everything – including one's person – by means of some contractual arrangement to which the person concerned would be a party. Land too, one of the sacred pillars of the outdated social order, had to become alienable” so that the self-development of commodity society should go on unhampered.

That alienation as universal saleability involved *reification* has been recognised well before the whole social order which operated on this basis could be subjected to a radical and effective criticism. The mystifying glorification of “liberty” as “contractually safeguarded freedom” (in fact the *contractual abdication* of human freedom) played an important part in delaying the recognition of the underlying contradictions. Saying this does not alter, however, the fact that the connection between alienation and relocation has been recognised – even though in an uncritical form – by some philosophers who far from questioning the contractual foundations of society idealised it. Kant, for instance, made the point that “such a contract is not a

mere reification [or “conversion into a thing” – *Verdingung*] but the transference – by means of hiring it out of one's person into the property of the Lord of the house.” All object, a piece of *dead* property could be simply alienated from the original owner and transferred into the property of someone else without undue complications: “the transference of one's property to someone else is its alienation” (Kant).” (The complications, at an earlier stage, were of an “external”, political nature, manifest in the taboos and prohibitions of feudal society which declared certain things to be “inalienable”; with the successful abolition of such taboos the complications vanished automatically.) The *living* person, however, first had to be reified – converted into a thing, into a mere piece of property for the duration of the contract – before it could be mastered by its new owner. Reified in the same sense of “verdingen” in which Kant's younger, contemporary Wieland uses the word in translating a line from Homer's *Odyssey*: “Stranger, will you become *my thing, my servant?*” (The current English translation, by contrast, characteristically reads like this: “Stranger,” he said, “I wonder how you'd like to work for me if I took you on as *my* man, somewhere on an upland farm, *at a proper wage of course.*)

The principal function of the much glorified “contract” was, therefore, the introduction – in place of the rigidly fixed feudal relations – of a new form of “fixity” which guaranteed the right of the new master to manipulate the allegedly “free” human beings as things, as objects without will, once they have “freely elected” to enter into the contract in question by “*alienating at will* that which belonged to them”.

Thus human alienation was accomplished through turning everything “into alienable, saleable objects in thrall to egoistic need and huckstering. Selling is the practice of alienation. just as man, so long as he is engrossed in religion, can only objectify his essence by an alien and fantastic being; so under the sway of egoistic need, he can only affirm himself and produce objects in practice by subordinating his products and *his own activity* to the domination of an alien entity, and by attributing to them the significance of an alien entity, namely *money.*” [Marx, *On the Jewish Question*] Reification of one's person and thus the “freely chosen” acceptance of a new servitude – in place of the old feudal, politically established and regulated form of servitude – could advance on the basis of a “civil society” characterised by the rule of money that opened the floodgates for the universal “servitude to egoistic need” (*Knechtschaft des egoistischen Bedürfnisses*).

Alienation is therefore characterised by the universal extension of “saleability” (i.e. the transformation of everything into commodity); by the conversion of human beings into “things” so that they could appear as commodities on the market (in other words: the “reification” of human relations), and by the fragmentation of the social body into “isolated individuals” (*vereinzelte Einzelnen*) who pursued their own limited, particularistic aims “in servitude to egoistic need”, making a virtue out of their selfishness in their cult of privacy. No wonder that Goethe protested “*alles vereinzelt ist verwerflich*”, “all isolated particularity is to be rejected”, advocating in opposition to “selfish isolationism” some form of “community with others like oneself” in order to be able to make a common “front against the world.” Equally no wonder that in the circumstances Goethe's recommendations had to remain utopian postulates. For the social order of “civil society” could sustain itself only on the basis of the conversion of the various areas of human experience into “saleable commodities”, and it could follow relatively undisturbed its course of development only so long as this universal marketing of all facets of human life, including the most private ones, did not reach its point of saturation.

3. Historicity and the Rise of Anthropology

“Alienation” is an eminently historical concept. If man is alienated, he must be alienated *from* something, as a result of certain *causes* – the interplay of events and circumstances in relation to man as the subject of this alienation – which manifest themselves in a *historical* framework. Similarly, the “transcendence of alienation” is an inherently historical concept which envisages the successful accomplishment of a process leading to a qualitatively different state of affairs.

Needless to say, the historical character of certain concepts is no guarantee whatsoever that the intellectual edifices which make use of them are historical. Often, as a matter of fact, mystifications set in at one stage or another of the analysis. Indeed, if the concept of alienation is abstracted from the concrete socio-economical process, a mere *semblance* of historicity may be substituted for a genuine understanding of the complex factors involved in the historical process. (It is an essential function of mythologies to transfer the fundamental socio-historical problems of human development to an atemporal plane, and the Judeo-Christian treatment of the problematics of alienation is no exception to the general rule. Ideologically more topical is the case of some twentieth century theories of alienation in which concepts like “world-alienation” fulfil the function of negating the genuine historical categories and of replacing them by sheer mystification.)

Nevertheless it is an important characteristic of intellectual history that those philosophers achieved the greatest results in grasping the manifold complexities of alienation – before Marx: Hegel above all the others – who approached this problematics in an adequate historical manner. This correlation is even more significant in view of the fact that the point holds the other way round as well: namely those philosophers succeeded in elaborating a historical approach to the problems of philosophy who were aware of the problematics of alienation, and to the extent to which they were so. (It is by no means accidental that the greatest representative of the Scottish “historical school”, Adam Ferguson had at the centre of his thought the concept of “civil society” which was absolutely crucial for a socio-historically concrete understanding of the problematics of alienation.) The ontological determinants of this intellectual interrelationship need to retain our attention here for a moment.

It goes without saying, the development in question is by no means a simple linear one. At certain points of crisis in history when the possible socio-historical alternatives are still *relatively* open – a relative openness which creates a temporary “ideological vacuum” that favours the appearance of utopian ideologies – it is relatively easier to identify the objective characteristics of the emerging social order than at a later stage by which time the needs that bring into life in the field of ideology the “uncritical positivism” we are all too familiar with have produced a self-perpetuating uniformity. We have seen the profound but hopelessly “premature” insights of a Thomas Münzer into the nature of developments hardly perceivable on the horizon, and he did not stand alone, of course, in this respect. Similarly, at a much earlier age, Aristotle gave a surprisingly concrete historical analysis of the inherent interconnection between religious beliefs and politico-social as well as family relations: “The family is the association established by nature for the supply of man's every day wants, and the members of it are called by Charondas 'companions of the cupboard', and by Epimenides the Cretan, 'companions of the manger'. But when several families are united, and the association aims at something more than the supply of daily needs, the first society to be formed is the village. And the most natural form of the village appears to be that of a colony from the family, composed of the children and grandchildren, who are said to be 'sucked with the same milk'.

And this is the reason why Hellenic states were originally governed by kings; because the Hellenes were under royal rule before they came together, as the barbarians still are. Every family is ruled by the eldest and therefore in the colonies of the family the kingly form of government prevailed because they were of the same blood. As Homer says: 'Each one gives law to his children and to his wives.'

For they lived dispersedly, as was the manner in ancient times. *Wherefore men say that the Gods have a king, because they themselves either are or were in ancient times under the rule of a king. For they imagine, not only the forms of the Gods, but their ways of life to be like their own.*

Many hundreds of years had to pass by before philosophers could reach again a similar degree of concreteness and historical insight. And yet, Aristotle's insight remained an isolated one: it could not become the cornerstone of a coherent philosophy of history. In Aristotle's thought the concrete historical insights were embedded in a thoroughly ahistorical general conception. The main reason for this was an overriding ideological need which prevented Aristotle from applying a historical principle to the analysis of society as a whole. In accordance with this ideological need it had to be "proved" that *slavery* was a social order in complete conformity with nature itself. Such a conception – formulated by Aristotle in opposition to those who challenged the established social relations carried with it bogus concepts like "freedom by nature" and "slavery by nature". For, according to Aristotle, "there is a great difference between the rule over freemen and the rule over slaves, as there is between *slavery by nature and freedom by nature*".

The introduction of the concept of "slavery by nature" has far-reaching consequences for Aristotle's philosophy. History in it is confined to the sphere of "freedom" which is, however, restricted by the concept of "freedom by nature". Indeed, since slavery must be fixed eternally – a need adequately reflected in the concept of slavery by nature" – there can be no question of a genuine historical conception. The concept of "slavery by nature" carries with it its counterpart: "freedom *by nature*", and thus the fiction of slavery determined by nature destroys the historicity of the sphere of "freedom" as well. The partiality of the ruling class prevails, postulating its own rule as a hierarchial-structural superiority determined (and sanctioned) by nature. (The partiality of Judaism – the mythology of the "chosen people" etc. – expresses the same kind of *negation* of history as regards the fundamental structural relations of class society.) The principle of historicity is therefore inevitably degraded into pseudo-historicity. The model of a *repetitive cycle* is projected upon society as a whole: no matter what happens, the fundamental structural relations determined by "nature" are said to be always reproduced, not as a matter of empirical fact, but as that of an *a priori necessity*. Movement, accordingly, is confined to an increase in "size" and "complexity" of the communities analysed by Aristotle, and changes in both "size" and "complexity" are circumscribed by the concepts of "freedom by nature" and "slavery by nature", i.e. by the postulated a priori necessity of reproducing the same structure of society. Thus the insoluble social contradictions of his days lead even a great philosopher like Aristotle to operate with self-contradictory concepts like "freedom by nature", imposed on him by the entirely fictitious concept of "slavery by nature", in direct agreement with the prevailing ideological need. And when he makes a further attempt at rescuing the historicity of the sphere of "freedom by nature", declaring that the slave is not a man but a mere *thing*, a "*talking tool*", he finds himself right in the middle of another contradiction: for the tools of man have a historical character, and certainly not one fixed by nature. Because of the partiality of his position, the dynamic, dialectically changing laws of social totality must remain a mystery to Aristotle. His postulate of a natural "duality" directly

rooted, as we have seen, in the ideological need of turning *partiality into universality* – make it impossible for him to perceive the manifold varieties of social phenomena as specific manifestations of an inherently interconnected, dynamically changing socio-historical totality.

The interrelationship between an awareness of alienation and the historicity of a philosopher's conception is a *necessary one* because a fundamental ontological question: the “nature of man” (“human essence”, etc.) is the common point of reference of both. This fundamental ontological question is: what is in agreement with “human nature” and what constitutes an “alienation” from the “human essence”? Such a question cannot be answered ahistorically without being turned into an irrational mystification of some kind. On the other hand, a historical approach to the question of “human nature” inevitably carries with it some diagnosis of alienation” or “reification”, related to the standard or “ideal” by which the whole issue is being assessed.

The point of central importance is, however, whether or not the question of “human nature” is assessed within an implicitly or explicitly “egalitarian” framework of explanation. If for some reason the fundamental equality of all men is not recognised, that is *ipso facto* tantamount to negating historicity, for in that case it becomes necessary to rely on the magic device of “nature” (or, in religious conceptions, “divine order” etc.) in the philosopher's explanation of historically established inequalities. (This issue is quite distinct from the question of the ideological justification of existing inequalities. The latter is essential for explaining the socio-historical determinants of a philosopher's system but quite irrelevant to the logically necessary interrelationship of a set of concepts of a particular system. Here we are dealing with the structural relations of concepts which prevail within the general framework of a system *already* in existence. This is why the “structural” and the “historical” principles cannot be reduced into one another except by vulgarisers – but constitute a dialectical unity.) The philosopher's specific approach to the problem of equality, the particular limitations and shortcomings of his concept of “human nature”, determine the intensity of his historical conception as well as the character of his insight into the real nature of alienation. This goes not only for those thinkers who – for reasons already seen – failed to produce significant achievements in this regard but also for positive examples, from the representatives of the Scottish “historical school” to Hegel and Feuerbach.

“Anthropological orientation” without genuine historicity well as the necessary conditions of the latter, of course – amounts to nothing more than mystification, whatever socio-historical determinants might have brought it into existence. The “organic” conception of society, for instance, according to which every element of the social complex must fulfil its “proper function” i.e. a function predetermined by “nature” or by “divine providence” in accordance with some rigid hierarchial pattern – is a totally ahistorical and inverted projection of the characteristics of an established social order upon an alleged “organism” (the human body, for instance) which is supposed to be the “natural model” of all society. (A great deal of modern “functionalism” is, *mutatis mutandis*, an attempt at liquidating historicity. But we cannot enter here into the discussion of that matter.) In this regard it is doubly significant that in the development of modern thought the concept of alienation acquired an increasing importance parallel to the rise of a genuine, historically founded philosophical anthropology. On the one hand this trend represented a radical opposition to the mystifications of medieval pseudo-anthropology, and on the other it provided the positive organising centre of an incomparably more dynamic understanding of the social processes than had been possible before.

Well before Feuerbach recognised the distinction between “true: *that is anthropological* and false: *that is theological* essence of religion” [Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*] religion was conceived as a historical phenomenon and the assessment of its nature was subordinated to the question of the historicity of man. In such a conception it became possible to envisage the *supersession* of religion insofar as mythology and religion were assigned only to a *particular* stage – though a necessary one – of the *universal history* of mankind, conceived on the model of man progressing from childhood to maturity. Vico distinguished three stages in the development of humanity (of humanity making its own history): (1) the age of Gods; (2) the age of heroes; and (3) “the age of men in which all men recognised themselves as *equal in human nature*”. Herder, at a later stage, defined mythology as “personified nature or dressed-up wisdom” and spoke of the “childhood”, “adolescence” and “manhood” of mankind, limiting even in poetry the possibilities of myth-creation under the circumstances of the third stage.

But it was Diderot who spelled out the socio-political secret of the whole trend by emphasising that once man succeeded in his critique of “the majesty of heaven” he will not shy away for long from an assault on the other oppressor of mankind: “the worldly sovereignty”, for these two stand or fall together. And it was by no means accidental that it was Diderot who reached this degree of clarity in political radicalism. For he did not stop at Vico's remarkable but rather abstract statement according to which “all men are equal in human nature”. He went on asserting, with the highest degree of social radicalism known among the great figures of French Enlightenment, that “*if the day-worker is miserable, the nation is miserable*”. Not surprisingly, therefore, it was Diderot who succeeded to the highest degree in grasping the problematics of alienation, well ahead of his contemporaries, indicating as basic contradictions “the distinction of yours and mine”, the opposition between “one's own particular utility and the general good” and the subordination of the “general good to one's own particular good.” And he went even further, emphasising that these contradictions result in the production of “*superfluous wants*”, “*imaginary goods*” and “*artificial needs*” – almost the same terms as those used by Marx in describing the “*artificial needs and imaginary appetites*” produced by capitalism. The fundamental difference was, however, that while Marx could refer to a specific social movement as the “material force” behind his philosophical programme, Diderot had to content himself – because of his “premature situation” – with the viewpoint of a far-away utopian community in which such contradictions as well as their consequences are unknown. And, of course, in accordance with his utopian standpoint related to the wretched working conditions of his day, Diderot could not see any solution except the *limitation of needs* which should enable man to liberate himself from the crippling *tedium of work*, allowing him to *stop*, to *rest* and to *finish working*. Thus an appeal is made to the utopian fiction of a “natural” limitation of wants because the type of labour which predominates in the given form of society is inherently anti-human, and “fulfilment” appears as *an absence* of activity, not as enriched and enriching, humanly fulfilling activity, not as self-fulfilment in activity. That which is supposed to be “natural” and “human” appears as something idyllic and *fixed* (by nature) and consequently as something to be jealously protected against corruption from “outside”, under the enlightening guidance of “reason”. Since the “material force” that could turn theory into social practice is missing, theory must convert itself into its own solution: into an utopian advocacy of the power of reason. At this point we can clearly see that even a Diderot's remedy is a far cry from the solutions advocated and envisaged by Marx.

Marx's radical superiority to all who preceded him is evident in the coherent dialectical historicity of his theory, in contrast to the weaknesses of his predecessors who at one point or another were all forced to abandon the

actual ground of history for the sake of some imaginary solution to the contradictions they may have perceived but could not master ideologically and intellectually. In this context Marx's profound insight into the true relationship between *anthropology* and *ontology* is of the greatest importance. For there is one way only of producing an all-embracing and in every respect consistent historical theory, namely by positively situating anthropology within an adequate general ontological framework. If, however, ontology is subsumed under anthropology – as often happened not only in the distant past but in our own time as well in that case one-sidedly grasped anthropological principles which should be historically explained become self-sustaining axioms of the system in question and undermine its historicity. In this respect Feuerbach represents a retrogression in relation to Hegel whose philosophical approach avoided on the whole the pitfall of dissolving ontology within anthropology. Consequently Hegel anticipated to a much greater extent than Feuerbach the Marxian grasp of history, although even Hegel could only find “the *abstract*, logical, *speculative* expression for the movement of history”.

In contrast to both the Hegelian abstractness and the Feuerbachian retrogression in historicity Marx discovered the dialectical relationship between materialist ontology and anthropology, emphasising that “man's feelings, passions, etc., are not *merely anthropological* phenomena in the [narrower] sense, but truly *ontological* affirmations of essential being (of *nature*). . . . Only through developed industry i.e. through the medium of private property – does the *ontological essence* of human passion come to be both in its *totality* and in its *humanity*; *the science of man* is therefore itself a product of man's establishment of himself by *practical activity*. The meaning of private property – liberated from its estrangement – is the existence of essential objects for man, both as objects of *enjoyment* and as objects of *activity*”. We shall discuss some aspects of this complex of problems later in this chapter, as well as in chapter IV, VI, and VII. What is particularly important to stress at this point is that the *specific* anthropological factor (“humanity”) cannot be grasped in its dialectical historicity unless it is conceived on the basis of the historically developing *ontological totality* (“nature”) to which it ultimately belongs. A failure to identify the adequate dialectical relationship between ontological totality and anthropological specificity carries with it insoluble contradictions. In the first place it leads to postulating some fixed “human essence” as the philosopher's “original datum”, and consequently to the ultimate liquidation of all historicity (from Feuerbach to some recent theories of “structuralism”). Equally damaging is another contradiction which means that pseudo-historical and “anthropological” considerations are applied to the analysis of certain social phenomena whose comprehension would require a non-anthropomorphic – but of course dialectical-concept of causality. To give an example: no conceivable “anthropological hypothesis” could in the least help to understand the “natural laws” which govern the productive processes of capitalism in their long historical development; on the contrary, they could only lead to sheer mystifications. It might seem to be inconsistent with Marx's historical materialism when we are told in *Capital* that “*The nature of capital is the same in its developed as in its undeveloped form*”. (Some people might even use this passage in support of their interpretation of Marx's as a “structuralist” thinker.) A more careful reading would, however, reveal that, far from being inconsistent, Marx indicates here the ontological ground of a coherent historical theory. A later passage, in which he analyses capitalist production, makes this clearer:

“The principle which it [capitalism] pursued, of resolving each process into its constituent movements, *without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man*, created the new modern science of technology. The varied, apparently unconnected, and petrified forms of the industrial processes now resolved

themselves into so many conscious and *systematic* applications of natural science to the attainment of given useful effects. Technology also discovered the few main fundamental forms of motion, which, despite the diversity of the instruments used, are *necessarily* taken by *every productive action of the human body...*

As we can see, the whole issue turns on understanding the natural basis (the general laws of causality, etc.) of *specifically human* historicity. Without an adequate grasp of this natural basis the “science of man” is simply inconceivable because everything gets ultimately dissolved into relativism. The “anthropological principle”, therefore, must be put in its proper place, within the general framework of a comprehensive historical ontology. In more precise terms, any such principle must be transcended in the direction of a complex dialectical social ontology.

If this is not achieved – if, that is, the anthropological principle remains narrowly anthropological – there can be no hope whatsoever of understanding a process, for instance, which is determined by *its own* laws of movement and imposes on human beings *its own* patterns of productive procedure “without any regard to their possible execution by the hand of man”. Similarly, nothing can be understood about the alienating “nature of capital” in terms of the fictitious postulates of an “egoistic human nature” so dear to the heart of the political economists. For the “sameness” of capital in both its “undeveloped” and “developed form” – a sameness which applies only to its “nature” and not to its form and mode of existence – must be explained in terms of the most comprehensive laws of a historical ontology founded on nature. The socially dominating role of capital in modern history is self-evident. But only the fundamental laws of social ontology can explain how it is possible that under certain conditions a given “nature” (the nature of capital) should unfold and fully realise itself – in accordance with its objective nature – by following its own inner laws of development, from its undeveloped form to its form of maturity, “*without any regard to man*”. Anthropological hypotheses, no matter how subtle, are a priori non-starters in this respect. Equally, a simple socio-historical hypothesis is of no use. For the issue at stake is precisely to explain what lies at the roots of historical development as its ultimate ground of determination, and therefore it would be sheer circularity to indicate the changing historical circumstances as the fundamental cause of development of capital itself. Capital, as everything else in existence, has – it goes without saying – its historical dimension. But this historical *dimension* is categorically 'different from an ontological *substance*.

What is absolutely essential is not to confound *ontological continuity* with some imaginary *anthropological fixity*. The ultimate ground of persistence of the problematics of alienation in the history of ideas, from its Judeo-Christian beginnings to its formulations by Marx's immediate predecessors, is the relative ontological continuity inherent in the unfolding of capital in accordance with its inner laws of growth from its “undeveloped” to its “developed form”. To turn this relative ontological continuity into some fictitious characteristic of “human nature” means that an elucidation of the actual processes which underlie these developments is a priori impossible. If, however, one realises that the ontological continuity in question concerns the “nature of capital”, it becomes possible to envisage a *transcendence* (*Aufhebung*) of alienation, provided that the issue is formulated as a radical *ontological* transformation of the social structure as a *whole*, and not confined to the partial measure of a political expropriation of capital (which is simply a necessary first step in the direction of the Marxian transcendence of alienation). Only if some basic conditions of an ontological transcendence are satisfied and to the extent to which they are so – i.e. insofar as there is an effective *break* in the objective ontological continuity of capital in its broadest Marxian sense – can we speak of a *qualitatively* new phase of development: the beginning of the “true history of mankind”. Without this

ontological frame of reference there can be no consistent historical theory; only some form of historical relativism instead, devoid of an objective measure of advance and consequently prone to subjectivism and voluntarism, to the formulation of "Messianic programmes" coupled with an arbitrary anticipation of their realisation in the form of idealistic postulates.

Here we can clearly see the historical importance of the young Marx's discovery concerning the dialectical relationship between ontology and anthropology: it opened up the road to the elaboration of Marx's great theoretical synthesis and to the practical realisation of the revolutionary programmes based on it. His predecessors, as a rule, turned their limited ontological insights into elements of a curious mixture of anthropological-moral-ideological preaching. Henry Home (Lord Kames), for instance – not a negligible figure but one of the greatest representatives of the Scottish historical school of Enlightenment – wrote the following lines: "*Activity is essential to a social being: to a selfish being it is of no use, after procuring the means of living. A selfish man, who by his opulence has all the luxuries of life at command, and dependents without number, has no occasion for activity. Hence it may fairly be inferred, that were man destined by providence to be entirely selfish, he would be disposed by his constitution to rest, and never would be active when he could avoid it. The natural activity of man, therefore, is to me evidence, that his Maker did not intend him to be purely a selfish being.*" Since the social grounds of this criticism cannot be spelled out – because of the contradiction inherent in it, i.e. because of the "selfishness" necessarily associated with the social class represented by Henry Home – everything must remain abstract-anthropological; worse: even this abstract criticism in the end must be watered down by the terms "entirely" and "purely selfish". A new form of conservatism appears on the horizon to take the place of the old one, appealing to the anthropological model of "Enlightened Man": this "natural" realisation of Triumphant Reason. "Even those who are most prone to persecution, begin to hesitate. Reason, resuming her sovereign authority, will banish it [i.e. persecution] altogether . . . within the next century it will be thought *strange*, that persecution should have prevailed among social beings. It will perhaps even be doubted, whether it ever was seriously put into practice." And again: "*Reason at last prevailed, after much opposition: the absurdity of a whole nation being slaves to a weak mortal, remarkable perhaps for no valuable qualification, became apparent to all.*" But the unhistorical and categorical criteria of "rational" and "absurd" rebound on this approach when it has to face some new problems. This is when its conservatism comes to the fore: "It was not difficult to foresee the consequences [of the general assault on the old order]: down fell *the whole fabric, the sound parts* with the infirm. And man now laugh currently at the *absurd notions* of their forefathers, without thinking either of being patriots, or of being *good subjects*." So just as much as one's own selfishness had to be distinguished from the "purely selfish" and "entirely selfish" behaviour of one's opponents, now the "legitimately" used criterion of "absurdity" has to be opposed to its "abuse" by those who carry it "too far", endangering the "sound parts" of the "social fabric". "Reason" is turned into a blank cheque, valid not only retrospectively but timelessly, sustaining the partial interest of its bearers, and destroying the earlier historical achievements. The insoluble dilemma of the whole movement of the Enlightenment is expressed in this mode of arguing, well before it assumes a dramatic political form in Burke's violent attacks on the French Revolution in the name of the continuity of the "sound social fabric". A dilemma determined by the objective contradiction of subordinating the general interest to the partial interest of a social class.

Thus no sooner are the achievements of the Enlightenment realised than they are liquidated. Everything must fit the narrowly and ambiguously defined model of "Rational Man". Only those aspects of alienation are

recognised which can be classified as “alien to Reason”, with all the actual and potential arbitrariness involved in such an abstract criterion. Historicity reaches only as far as is compatible with the social position that requires these vague and abstract criteria as its ground of criticism, for the acknowledgment of human equality is, on the whole, confined to the abstract legal sphere. The same goes for the achievements in anthropology: old taboos are successfully attacked in the name of reason, but the understanding of the objective laws of movement, situating the specifically human factor within a dialectically grasped comprehensive natural framework, is hampered by the preconceived ideas expressed in the self-idealising model of “Rational Man”.

The reasons for this ultimate failure were very complex. Its ideological determinants, rooted in a social position dense with social contradictions that had to remain veiled from the thinkers concerned, have been mentioned already. Equally important was the fact that the underlying economic trends were still far from their point of maturity, which made it virtually impossible to gain an adequate insight into their real nature. (Marx could conceive his theory from the position of a qualitatively higher historical vantage point.) But the crucial point was that the philosophers of the Enlightenment could only take – at best – some tentative first steps in the direction of the elaboration of a dialectical method but were unable to grasp the fundamental laws of a materialist dialectic: their social and historical position prevented them from doing so. (On the other hand Hegel succeeded later in identifying the central concepts of dialectics, but in an “abstract, speculative, idealist fashion”.) This meant that they could not solve the dilemma inherent in historicised anthropology and anthropologically oriented history. For, paradoxically, history and anthropology helped one another up to a point, but turned into fetters for each other beyond that critical point. Only a materialist dialectic could have shown a way out of the impasse of this rigid opposition. For the want of such a dialectic, however, the historical principle was either dissolved into the pseudo-historicity of some repetitive cycle, or tended towards its own absolutisation in the form of historical relativism. The only possible solution which could have *transcended* both the “anthropological principle” and relativistic “historicism” would have been a synthesis of history and anthropology in the form of a comprehensive, materialist, dialectical ontology – having the concept of “self-developing human labour” (or “man's establishment of himself by practical activity” for its centre of reference. The revolutionising idea of such a synthesis, however, did not appear in the history of human thought before the sketching of Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

4. The End of “Uncritical Positivism”

The middle of the eighteenth century marked a turning point in the various approaches to the problems of alienation. As the contradictions of the emerging new society started to become more visible, the earlier “uncritical positivism” that characterised not only the school of “Natural Law” but also the first classics of Political Economy, ran into insurmountable difficulties. In the previous period the concept of alienation has been used in regard to socio-economic and political phenomena in a thoroughly positive sense, insisting on the desirability of the alienation of land, political power, etc., on the positivity of “profit upon alienation”, on the rightfulness of procuring interest without alienating capital, on selling one's labour, on reifying one's person, and so on. This one-sided positivism could not be maintained, however, once the crippling effects of the capitalistic mode of production based on the general diffusion of alienation started to erupt also in the form of social unrest that did not shy away from the violent destruction of the much glorified and idealised “rational” machinery of increasingly larger scale manufacture.

The crisis in the middle of the eighteenth century which brought into life the various critical theories was not, it goes without saying, an internal crisis of rising capitalism. It was, rather, a social crisis caused by a drastic transition from the antiquated feudal-artisan mode of production to a new one which was very far indeed from reaching the limits of its productive capabilities. This explains the essentially uncritical attitude towards the central categories of the new economic system even in the writings of those who criticised the social and cultural aspects of capitalistic alienation. Later on, when the inherent connection between the social and cultural manifestations of alienation and the economic system became more evident, criticism tended to diminish, instead of being intensified. The bourgeoisie which in the writings of its best representatives subjected some vital aspects of its own society to a devastating criticism, could not go, of course, as far as extending this criticism to the totality of capitalistic society. The social standpoint of criticism had to be radically changed first for that and, as we all know, a century had to elapse before this radical reorientation of social criticism could be accomplished.

There is no space here for a detailed systematic survey of the rise of social criticism. Our attention, again, must be confined to a few central figures who played an important role in identifying the problematics of alienation before Marx. We have already seen Diderot's achievements in this respect. His contemporary, Rousseau was equally important, though in a very different way. Rousseau's system is dense with contradictions, more so perhaps than any other in the whole movement of the Enlightenment. He himself warns us often enough that we should not draw premature conclusions from his statements, before carefully considering, that is, all the facets of his complex arguments. Indeed an attentive reading amply confirms that he did not exaggerate about the complexities. But this is not the full story. His complaints about being systematically misunderstood were only partially justified. One-sided though his critics may have been in their reading of his texts (containing as they did numerous qualifications that were often ignored), the fact remains that no reading whatsoever, however careful and sympathetic, could eliminate the inherent contradictions of his system. (Needless to say; we are not talking about logical contradictions. The formal consistency of Rousseau's thought is as impeccable as that of any great philosopher's, considering the non-abstract character of his terms of analysis. The contradictions are in the social substance of his thought, as we shall see in a moment. In other words, they are *necessary* contradictions, inherent in the very nature of a great philosopher's socially and historically limited standpoint.)

There are very few philosophers before Marx who would stand a comparison with Rousseau in social radicalism. He writes in his *Discourse on Political Economy* – in a passage he later repeats, stressing its central importance, in one of his *Dialogues* – that the advantages of the “social confederacy” are heavily weighed down on the side of the rich, against the poor:

“for this [the social confederacy] provides a powerful protection for the immense possessions of the rich, and hardly leaves the poor man in quiet possession of the cottage he builds with his own hands. Are not all the advantages of society for the rich and powerful? Are not all lucrative posts in their hands? Are not all privileges and exemptions reserved for them alone? Is not the public authority always on their side? If a man of eminence robs his creditors, or is guilty of other knaveries, is he not always assured of impunity? Are not the assaults, acts of violence, assassinations, and even murders committed by the great, matters that are hushed up in a few months, and of which nothing more is thought? But if a great man himself is robbed or insulted, the whole police force is immediately in motion, and woe even to innocent persons who

chance to be suspected. If he has to pass through any dangerous road, the country is up in arms to escort him. If the axle-tree of his chaise breaks, everybody flies to his assistance. If there is a noise at his door, he speaks but a word, and all is silent. . . . Yet all this respect costs him not a farthing: it is the rich man's right, and not what he buys with his wealth. How different is the case of the poor man! *The more humanity owes him, the more society denies him ...* he always bears the burden which his richer neighbour has influence enough to get exempted from . . . all gratuitous assistance is denied to the poor when they need it, just because they cannot pay for it. I look upon any poor man as totally undone, if he has the misfortune to have an honest heart, a fine daughter and a powerful neighbour. Another no less important fact is that the losses of the poor are much harder to repair than these of the rich, and that the difficulty of acquisition is always greater in proportion as there is more need for it. 'Nothing comes out of nothing', is as true of life as in physics: money is *the seed of money*, and the first guinea is sometimes more difficult to acquire than the second million.... The terms of the social compact between these two estates of man may be summed up in a few words: 'You have need of me, because I am rich and you are poor. We will therefore come to an agreement. I will permit you to have the honour of serving me, on condition that you bestow on me the little you have left, in return for the pains I shall take to command you.

If this is the case, it cannot be surprising that the menacing shadow of an inevitable revolution appears in Rousseau's thought:

“Most peoples, like most men, are docile only in youth; as they grow old they become *incorrigible*. When once customs have become established and prejudices inveterate, it is *dangerous and useless to attempt their reformation*; the people, like the foolish and cowardly patients who rave at sight of the doctor, can no longer bear that any one should lay hands on its faults to remedy them. There are indeed times in the history of States when, just as some kinds of illness turn men's heads and make them forget the past, *periods of violence and revolutions do to people what these crises do to individuals*: horror of the past takes the place of forgetfulness, and *the State, set on fire by civil wars, is born again, so to speak, from its ashes*, and takes on anew, fresh from the jaws of death, the vigour of youth. . . . The empire of Russia will aspire to conquer Europe, and will itself be conquered. The Tartars, its subjects or neighbours, will become its masters and ours, by a *revolution which I regard as inevitable. Indeed, all the kings of Europe are working in concert to hasten its coming.*”

Yet the same Rousseau also asserts, talking about himself, in his *Third Dialogue*, that “he always insisted on the *preservation of the existing institutions*”. And when he sets out the terms of his educational experiment, he writes: “*The poor man has no need of education*. The education of his own station is *forced upon him, he can have no other*; the education received by the rich man from his own station is least fitted for himself and for society. Moreover, a natural education should fit a man for any position. . . . Let us choose our scholar among the rich; we shall at least have made another man; *the poor may come to manhood without our help*. (Accordingly, in the utopian community of his *Nouvelle Héloïse* there is no education for the poor.) The idealisation of nature thus, paradoxically, turned into an idealisation of the poor man's wretched conditions: the established order is left unchallenged; the poor man's subjection to the well-to-do is maintained, even if the *mode* of “commanding” becomes more “enlightened”. Thus in the end Rousseau is justified in his assertion about his insistence “on the preservation of the existing institutions”, notwithstanding his statements about social injustice and on the inevitability of a violent revolution.

But this idealisation of nature is not some intellectual “original cause It is the expression of a contradiction unknown to the philosopher himself, carrying with it a stalemate, a static conception in the last analysis: a purely imaginary transference of the problems perceived in society onto the plane of the moral “ought” which envisages their solution in terms of a “moral education” of men. The fundamental contradiction in Rousseau's thought lies in his incommensurably sharp perception of the *phenomena of alienation* and the glorification of their *ultimate cause*. This is what turns his philosophy in the end into a monumental moral sermon that reconciles all contradictions in the ideality of the moral sphere. (Indeed the more drastic the cleavage between ideality and reality, the more evident it becomes to the philosopher that moral “ought” is the only way of coping with it. In this respect – as in so many others as well – Rousseau exercises the greatest influence on Kant, anticipating, not in words but in general conception, Kant's principle of the “primacy of Practical Reason”.)

Rousseau denounces alienation in many of its manifestations:

(1) He insists – in opposition to the traditional approaches to the “Social Contract” – that man cannot alienate his *freedom*. For “to alienate is to give or to sell . . . but for what does a people sell itself? ... Even if each man could alienate himself, he could not alienate his children: they are born man and free; their liberty belongs to them, and no one but they has the right to dispose of it.” (Moreover, he qualifies this statement by adding that there can be only one rightful way of disposing of one's inalienable right to liberty: “each man, in giving himself to all, gives himself to nobody” and therefore “in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a *moral* and collective body, composed of as many members as the assembly contains voters, ain(I receiving from this act its unity, *its common identity*, its life, and its will”. Which means, in Rousseau's eyes, that the individual has not lost anything by contracting out of his “natural liberty”; on the contrary, he gains “*civil liberty* and the *proprietorship* of all he possesses.” Furthermore, man also “acquires in the civil state, *moral liberty*, which alone makes him truly *master of himself*; for the mere impulse of appetite is *slavery*, while *obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves is liberty*.”) As we can see, the argument progresses from reality to morality. By the time we reach the point of the Social Contract, we are confronted in the shape of the much idealised “assembly” – with a *moral construction*.” The collective “moral body”, its “unity and common identity” etc., are *moral postulates* of a would-be legitimization of the bourgeois system. The moral construction of the “assembly” is necessary precisely because Rousseau cannot envisage any real (i.e. effective material) solution to the underlying contradictions, apart from appealing to the idea of an “obedience to a law which we prescribe to ourselves” in the general political framework of the “assembly” which radically transcends, in an ideal fashion, the “bad reality” of the established order while leaving it intact in reality.

(2) A corollary of the previous point is the insistence on the *inalienability and indivisibility of Sovereignty*. According to Rousseau Sovereignty “being nothing less than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated, and the Sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself”. Again it is clear that we are confronted with a *moral postulate* generated in Rousseau's system by the recognition that “the *particular will* tends, by its very nature, to *partiality*, while the *general will* tends to *equality*”, and by the philosopher's inability to envisage a solution in any other terms than those of a moral “ought”. For while the particular will's tendency towards partiality is an ontological reality, the “general will's tendency to equality” is, in the given historical situation, a mere postulate. And only a further moral postulate can “transcend” the contradiction

between the actual, ontological “is” and the moral “ought” of an equality inherent in the “general will”. (Of course in Rousseau's structure of thought this insoluble contradiction is hidden beneath the self-evidence of a dual tautology, namely that “the particular will is partial” and “the general will is universal”. Rousseau's greatness, however, breaks through the crust of this dual tautology paradoxically by defining “universality” – in an apparently inconsistent form – as “equality”. The same “inconsistency” is retained by Kant, *mutatis mutandis*, in his criterion of moral universality.)

(3) A constantly recurring theme of Rousseau's thought is *man's alienation from nature*. This is a fundamental synthesising idea in Rousseau's system, a focal point of his social criticism, and has many aspects. Let us briefly sum up its crucial points.

(a) “Everything is good when it leaves the hands of the Creator of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man” writes Rousseau in the opening sentence of *Emile*. It is civilisation which corrupts man, separating him from nature, and introducing “*from outside*” all the vices which are “*alien to man's constitution*”. The result is the destruction of the “*original goodness of man*”.

(b) In this development – away from nature by means of the vehicle of civilisation – we can see a “rapid march towards the perfection of society and towards the deterioration of the species,” i.e. this alienated form of development is characterised by the grave contradiction between *society* and the human *species*.

(c) Man is dominated by his *institutions* to such an extent that the sort of life he leads under the conditions of institutionalisation cannot be called by any other name than *slavery*: “Civilised man is born into slavery and he lives and dies in it: ... he is *in the chains of our institutions*.”

(d) Vice and evil flourish in large towns and the only possible antidote to this alienation, country life, is increasingly under the dominion of the big towns: “*industry and commerce* draw all the money from the country into the capitals ... *the richer the city the poorer the country*.” Thus the dynamic vehicles of capitalistic alienation – industry and commerce – bring under their spell nature and country life, ever intensifying the contradiction between *town* and *country*.

(e) The acquisition of *artificial needs* and the forced growth of “useless desires” characterises the life of both the individuals and the modern State. “If we ask how the needs of a State grow, we shall find they generally arise, like the wants of individuals, less from any real necessity than from the *increase of useless desires*.” Corruption in this sense starts at an early age. The natural impulses and passions of the child are suppressed and replaced by artificial modes of behaviour. The result is the production of an “*artificial being*” in place of the natural, “original” human being.

As we can see, in all these points the penetrating diagnosis of prevailing social trends is mixed with an idealisation of nature as the necessary premise

of the Rousseauian form of criticism. We shall return to the complex determinants of this approach in a moment.

(4) In his denunciation of the roots of alienation, Rousseau attributes to money and wealth the principal responsibility “in this century of calculators”. He insists that one should not *alienate oneself by selling oneself*, because this means turning the human person into a mercenary.” We have already seen that according to Rousseau “to alienate is to *give* or to *sell*”. Under certain special conditions – e.g. in a patriotic war when one is involved in defending one's own country – it is permissible to alienate oneself in the form of *giving* one's life for a noble purpose, but it is absolutely forbidden to alienate oneself in the form of *selling* oneself: “for all the victories of the early Romans, like those of Alexander, had been won by brave citizens, who were ready, at need, to *give* their blood in the service of their country, but would *never sell it*.” In accordance with this principle Rousseau insists that the first and absolute condition of an adequate form of education is that the laws of the market should not apply to it. The good tutor is someone who is “not a man *for sale*” and he is opposed to the prevailing practice that assigns the vitally important function of education “to *mercenaries*”. Human relations at all levels, including the intercourse of nations with each other, are subordinated to the only criterion of deriving profit from the other, and consequently they are impoverished beyond recognition: “Once they know the profit they can derive from each other, what else would they be interested in?”

As we can see even from this inevitably summary account, Rousseau's eye for the manifold phenomena of alienation and dehumanisation is as sharp as no one else's before Marx. The same cannot be said, however, of his understanding of the causes of alienation. In order to explain this paradox we have now to turn our attention to questions that directly concern the historical novelty of his philosophical answers as well as their limitations. In other words, we have to ask what made possible Rousseau's great positive achievements and which factors determined the illusory character of many of his answers and suggestions.

As we have seen in the previous section, the philosophers' concept of equality was indicative, in the age of the Enlightenment, of the measure of their achievements as regards both a greater historical concreteness and a more adequate understanding of the problematics of alienation. The validity of this general point is clearly displayed in Rousseau's writing. His concept of equality is uncompromisingly radical for his age. He writes in a footnote to *The Social Contract*: “Under bad governments, this equality is only *apparent and illusory*; it serves only to *keep the pauper in his poverty and the rich man in the position he has usurped*. In fact, laws are always of use to those who possess and harmful to those who have nothing; from which it follows that the social state is advantageous to men only *when all have something and none too much*.”

Since, however, the actual social relations stand, as Rousseau himself recognises, in a hostile opposition to his principle of equality, the latter has to be turned into a mere *moral postulate* “on which the whole social system *should rest*”. In a categorical opposition to the actual state of affairs Rousseau stipulates that “the fundamental compact substitutes, for such physical inequality as nature may have set up between men, an equality that is moral and *legitimate*, and that men, who may be unequal in strength or intelligence, become every one *equal by convention and legal right*”. Thus the terms of transcendence are abstract. There does not appear on the horizon a material force capable of superseding the relations in which the pauper is kept “in his poverty and the rich man in the position he has usurped”. Only a vague reference is made to the desirability of a system in

which “all have something and none too much”, but Rousseau has no idea how it could be brought into being. This is why everything must be left to the power of ideas, to “education” above all: “moral education” – and to the advocacy of a legal system which presupposes in fact the effective diffusion of Rousseau's moral ideals. And when Rousseau, being the great philosopher he is who does not evade the fundamental issues even if they underline the problematic character of his whole approach, asks the question “how can one adequately educate the educator”, he confesses in all sincerity that he does not know the answer. But he emphasises that the characteristics of the good educator *ought* to be determined by the nature of the functions he *ought* to fulfil. Thus, again and again, Rousseau's analysis turns out to be an uncompromising reassertion of his radical moral postulates.

However uncompromising is Rousseau's moral radicalism, the fact that his concept of equality is basically a moral-legal concept, devoid of references to a clearly identifiable system of social relations as its material counterpart (the vision of a system in which “all have something and none too much” is not only hopelessly vague but also far from being egalitarian) carries with it the abstract and often rhetorical character of his denunciation of alienation. Thus we can see that while his grasp of the necessity of equality enables him to open many a door that remained closed before him, the limitations of his concept of equality prevent him from pursuing his enquiry to a conclusion that would carry with it the most radical *social negation* of the whole system of inequalities and dehumanising alienations, in place of the *abstract moral radicalism* expressed in his postulates.

The same point applies to the role of anthropological references in Rousseau's system. As we have seen, his conception of “healthy man” as a model of social development enables him to treat revolution as the only possible “reinvigorating force” of society under certain conditions. But such an idea is totally inadequate to explain the complexities of the historical situations in which revolutions occur. This we can see from the continuation of Rousseau's analysis of revolutions: “But such events are rare; they are exceptions, the cause of which is always to be found in the particular constitution of the State concerned. They cannot even happen *twice* to the same people, for it can make itself free as long as it remains barbarous, but not when the *civic impulse* has lost its vigour. Then disturbances may destroy it, but revolutions cannot mend it: it needs a master, not a liberator. *Free peoples, be mindful* of this maxim: 'Liberty may be gained, but can never be recovered'.” The anthropological model, therefore, paradoxically helps to nullify Rousseau's insight into the nature of social development, by confining revolutions in the analogy of man's cycle of life – to a non-repeatable historical phase. Again it is clear that the ultimate reference is to the sphere of the moral “ought”: the whole point about violence and revolutions is made in order to shake men out of their callous indifference so that (“by becoming mindful of his maxim”) they can save themselves from the fate of “disturbances and destruction”.

But all this does not quite explain Rousseau's system of ideas. It simply shows why – given his concept of equality as well as his anthropological model of social development – Rousseau cannot go beyond a certain point in his understanding of the problematics of alienation. The ultimate premises of his system are: his assumption of *private property* as the sacred foundation of civil society on the one hand, and the “*middle condition*” as the only adequate form of *distribution* of property on the other. He writes: “It is certain that *the right of property is the most sacred of all the rights* of citizenship, and even *more important* in some respects than *liberty itself*; . . . property is the true foundation of civil society, and the real guarantee of the undertakings of citizens: for if property were not answerable for personal actions, nothing would be easier than to evade duties and laugh at the laws.”

And again: “the general administration is established only to secure individual property, which is antecedent to it.” As to the “middle condition”, according to Rousseau it “constitutes the genuine strength of the State” . (Also, we ought to remember in this connection his insistence that “all ought to have something and none too much”, as well as his thundering against the “big towns” which undermine the type of property relations he idealises in many of his writings.) His justification for maintaining this type of private property is that “nothing is more fatal to morality and to the Republic than the continual shifting of rank and fortune among the citizens: such changes are both the proof and the source of a thousand disorders, and overturn and confound everything; for those who were brought up to one thing find themselves destined for another”. And he dismisses in a most passionate tone of voice the very idea of abolishing “mine” and “yours”: “Must *meum* and *tuum* be annihilated, and must we return again to the forests to live among bears? This is a deduction in the manner of my adversaries, which I would as soon anticipate as let them have the shame of drawing.”

These ultimate premises of Rousseau's thought determine the concrete articulation of his system and set the limits to his understanding of the problematics of alienation. He recognises that law is made for the protection of private property and that everything else in the order of “civil society” – including “civil liberty” – rests on such foundation. Since, however, he cannot go beyond the horizon of this idealised civil society, he must maintain not only that law is made for the benefit of private property but also that private property is made for the benefit of the law as its sole guarantee. Thus the circle is irrevocably closed; there can be no escape from it. Only those features of alienation can be noticed which are in agreement with the ultimate premises of Rousseau's system. Since private property is taken for granted as the absolute condition of civilised life, only its form of distribution is allowed to be queried, the complex problematics of alienation cannot be grasped at its *roots* but only in some of its *manifestations*. As to the question: which of the multifarious manifestations of alienation are identified by Rousseau, the answer is to be sought in the *specific* form of private property he idealises.

Thus he denounces, for instance, the corruption, dehumanisation, and alienation involved in the cult of money and wealth, but he grasps only the *subjective* side of the problem. He insists, rather naively, that the wealth which is being produced is “*apparent and illusory*; a lot of money and little effect”. Thus he displays no real understanding of the immense *objective power* of money in the “civil society” of expanding capitalism. His dissent from the alienated manifestations of this power is confined to noticing its subjective effects which he believes to be able to neutralise or counteract by means of the *moral education* he passionately advocates. The same goes for his conception of the “social contract”. He repeatedly stresses the importance of offering a “*fair exchange*” and an “*advantageous exchange*” to the people involved. The fact that human relations in a society based on the institution of “exchange” cannot conceivably be “fair” and “advantageous” to all, must remain hidden from Rousseau. In the end what is considered to be “fair” is the maintenance of a hierarchical system, a “social order” in which “all places are marked for some people, and every man must be educated for his own place. If a particular person, educated for a certain place, leaves it, he is good for nothing.”

What Rousseau opposes is not the alienating power of money and property as such, but a particular mode of their realisation in the form of the *concentration* of wealth and all that goes with *social mobility* produced by the dynamism of expanding and concentrating capital. He rejects the *effects* but gives his full support, even if unknowingly, to their *causes*. Since his discourse, because of the ultimate premises of his system, must be confined

to the sphere of effects and manifestations, it must become sentimental, rhetorical and, above all, moralising. The various manifestations of alienation he perceives must be opposed in such a discourse – which necessarily abstracts from the investigation of the ultimate causal determinants – at the level of mere *moral postulates*: the acceptance of the system of “*meum and tuum*” together with its corollaries leaves no alternative to this. And precisely because he is operating from the standpoint of the same material base of society whose manifestations he denounces – the social order of private property and “fair and advantageous exchange” – the terms of his social criticism must be intensely and abstractly moralising. Capitalistic alienation as perceived by Rousseau in its particular manifestations – those, that is, which are harmful to the “middle condition” – is considered by him contingent, not necessary, and his radical moral discourse is supposed to provide, the non-contingent alternative so that the people, enlightened by his unmasking of all that is merely “apparent and illusory”, would turn their back on the artificial and alienated practices of social life.

These moralising illusions of Rousseau's system, rooted in the idealisation of a way of life allegedly appropriate to the “middle condition” in opposition to the actuality of dynamically advancing and universally alienating large-scale capitalistic production, are necessary illusions. For if the critical enquiry is confined to devising alternatives to the dehumanising effects of a given system of production while leaving its basic premises unchallenged, there remains nothing but the weapon of a moralising-“educational” appeal to individuals. Such an appeal directly invites them to oppose the trends denounced, to resist “corruption”, to give up “calculating”, to show “moderation”, to resist the temptations of “illusory wealth”, to follow the “natural course”, to restrict their “useless desires”, to stop “chasing profit”, to refuse “selling themselves”, etc., etc. Whether or not they *can* do all this, is a different matter; in any case they *ought* to do it. (Kant is truer to the spirit of Rousseau's philosophy than anyone else when he “resolves” its contradictions by asserting with abstract but bold moral radicalism: “*ought implies can*”.) To free the critique of alienation from its abstract and “ought-ridden” character, to grasp these trends in their objective ontological reality and not merely in their subjective reflections in the psychology of individuals, would have required a new social standpoint: one free from the paralysing weight of Rousseau's ultimate premises. Such a radically new socio-historical standpoint was, however, clearly unthinkable in Rousseau's time.

But no matter how problematic are Rousseau's solutions, his approach dramatically announces the inevitable end of the earlier generally prevailing “uncritical positivism”. Helped by his standpoint rooted in the rapidly disintegrating “middle condition” at a time of great historical transformation, he powerfully highlights the various manifestations of capitalistic alienation, raising alarm about their extension over all spheres of human life, even if he is unable to identify their causes. Those who come after him cannot ignore or sidestep his diagnoses, though their attitude is often very different from his. Both for his own achievements in grasping many facets of the problematics of alienation and for the great influence of his views on subsequent thinkers Rousseau's historical importance cannot be sufficiently stressed.

There is no space here to follow in any detail the intellectual history of the concept of alienation after Rousseau. We must confine ourselves to a very brief survey of the main phases of development leading to Marx.

The historical succession of these phases can be described as follows:

1. The formulation of a critique of alienation within the framework of general moral postulates (from Rousseau to Schiller).

2. The assertion of a necessary supersession of capitalistic alienation, accomplished speculatively (“*Aufhebung*” = “a second alienation of human existence = an alienation of alienated existence”) i.e. a merely imaginary transcendence of alienation), maintaining an uncritical attitude towards the actual material foundations of society (Hegel).
3. The assertion of the historical supersession of capitalism by socialism expressed in the form of moral postulates intermingled with elements of a realistic critical assessment of the specific contradictions of the established social order (the Utopian Socialists).

The moralising approach to the dehumanising effects of alienation seen in Rousseau persists, on the whole, throughout the eighteenth century. Rousseau's idea of “moral education” is taken up by Kant and is carried, with great consistency, to its logical conclusion and to its highest point of generalisation. Towards the end of the century, however, the sharpening of social contradictions, coupled with the irresistible advancement of capitalistic “rationality”, bring out into the open the problematic character of a direct appeal to the “voice of conscience” advocated by the propounders of “moral education”. Schiller's efforts at formulating his principles of an “aesthetic education” – which is supposed to be more effective as a floodgate against the rising tide of alienation than a direct moral appeal – reflect this new situation, with its ever intensifying human crisis.

Hegel represents a qualitatively different approach, insofar as he displays a profound insight into the fundamental laws of capitalistic society. We shall discuss Hegel's philosophy and its relation to Marx's achievements in various contexts. At this point let us briefly deal with the central paradox of the Hegelian approach. Namely that while an understanding of the *necessity* of a supersession of the capitalistic processes is in the foreground of Hegel's thought, Marx finds it imperative to condemn his “uncritical positivism”, with full justification, needless to say. The moralising criticism of alienation is fully superseded in Hegel. He approaches the question of a transcendence of alienation not as a matter of moral “*ought*” but as that of an *inner necessity*. In other words the idea of an “*Aufhebung*” of alienation ceases to be a moral postulate: it is considered as a necessity inherent in the dialectical process as such. (In accordance with this feature of Hegel's philosophy we find that his conception of equality has for its centre of reference the realm of “is”, not that of a moral-legal “ought”. His “epistemological democratism” – i.e. his assertion according to which all men are *actually* capable of achieving true knowledge, provided that they approach the task in terms of the categories of the Hegelian dialectic, is an essential constituent of his inherently historical conception of philosophy. No wonder, therefore, that later the radically ahistorical Kierkegaard denounces, with aristocratic contempt, this “omnibus” of a philosophical understanding of the historical processes.) However, since the socio-economic contradictions themselves are turned by Hegel into “thought-entities”, the necessary “*Aufhebung*” of the contradictions manifest in the dialectical process is in the last analysis nothing but a merely *conceptual* (“abstract, logical, speculative”) supersession of these contradictions which leaves the actuality of capitalist alienation completely unchallenged. This is why Marx has to speak of Hegel's “uncritical positivism”. Hegel's standpoint always remains a bourgeois standpoint. But it is far from being an unproblematical one. On the contrary, the Hegelian philosophy as a whole displays in the most graphic way the gravely problematic character of the world to which the philosopher himself belongs. The contradictions of that world transpire through his categories, despite their “abstract, logical speculative” character, and the message of the *necessity* of a transcendence counteracts the *illusory* terms in which such a

transcendence is envisaged by Hegel himself. In this sense his philosophy as a whole is a vital step in the direction of a proper understanding of the roots of capitalistic alienation.

In the writings of the Utopian Socialists there is an attempt at changing the social standpoint of criticism. With the working class a new social force appears on the horizon and the Utopian Socialists as critics of capitalistic alienation try to reassess the relation of forces from a viewpoint which allows them to take into account the existence of this new social force. And yet, their approach *objectively* remains, on the whole, within the limits of the bourgeois horizon, though of course *subjectively* the representatives of Utopian Socialism negate some essential features of capitalism. They can only project a supersession of the established order of society by a socialist system of relations in the form of a largely imaginary model, or as a moral postulate, rather than an ontological necessity inherent in the contradictions of the existing structure of society. (Characteristically enough: educational utopias, oriented towards the “workman”, form an essential part of the conception of Utopian Socialists.) What makes their work of an enormous value is the fact that their criticism is directed towards clearly identifiable material factors of social life. Although they do not have a *comprehensive* assessment of the established social structures, their criticism of some vitally important social phenomena – from a critique of the modern State to the analysis of commodity production and of the role of money greatly contributes to a radical reorientation of the critique of alienation. This criticism, however, remains partial. Even when it is oriented towards the “workman”, the proletarian social position appears in it only as a directly given sociological immediacy and as a mere negation. Thus the Utopian critique of capitalist alienation remains – however paradoxical this may sound – within the orbit of capitalistic partiality which it negates from a partial standpoint. Because of the inescapable partiality of the critical standpoint the element of “ought”, again, assumes the function of constructing “totalities” both negatively – i.e. by producing the overall object of criticism in want of an adequate comprehension of the structures of capitalism – and positively, by providing the utopian counter examples to the negative denunciations.

And this is the point where we come to Marx. For the central feature of Marx's theory of alienation is the assertion of the historically necessary supersession of capitalism by socialism freed from all the abstract moral postulates which we can find in the writings of his immediate predecessors. The ground of his assertion was not simply the recognition of the unbearable dehumanising effects of alienation – though of course subjectively that played a very important part in the formation of Marx's thought – but the profound understanding of the objective ontological foundation of the processes that remained veiled from his predecessors. The “secret” of this elaboration of the Marxian theory of alienation was spelled out by Marx himself when he wrote in his *Grundrisse*:

“this process of *objectification* appears in fact as a process of *alienation* from the *standpoint of labour* and as *appropriation of alien labour* from the *standpoint of capital*.”

The fundamental determinants of capitalistic alienation, then, had to remain hidden from all those who associated themselves knowingly or unconsciously, in one form or in another – with “the standpoint of capital”.

A radical shift of the standpoint of social criticism was a necessary condition of success in this respect. Such a shift involved the critical adoption of the standpoint of labour from which the capitalistic process of *objectification* could appear as a process of *alienation*. (In the writings of

thinkers before Marx, by contrast, “objectification” and “alienation” remained hopelessly entangled with one another.)

But it is vitally important to stress that this adoption of labour's standpoint had to be a critical one. For a simple, uncritical identification with the standpoint of labour – one that saw alienation only, ignoring both the *objectification* involved in it, as well as the fact that this form of *alienating-objectification* was a *necessary* phase in the historical development of the objective ontological conditions of labour – would have meant hopeless *subjectivity and partiality*.

The universality of Marx's vision became possible because he succeeded in identifying the problematics of alienation, from a critically adopted standpoint of labour, in its complex ontological totality characterised by the terms “objectification”, “alienation”, and “appropriation”. This critical adoption of the standpoint of labour meant a conception of the proletariat not simply as a sociological force diametrically opposed to the standpoint of capital – and thus remaining in the latter's orbit – but as a *self-transcending* historical force which cannot help superseding *alienation* (i.e. the historically given form of *objectification*) in the process of realising its own immediate ends that happen to coincide with the “reappropriation of the human essence”.

Thus the historical novelty of Marx's theory of alienation in relation to the conceptions of his predecessors can be summed up in a preliminary way as follows:

1. the terms of reference of his theory are not the categories of “*Sollen*” (ought), but those of *necessity* (“is”) inherent in the objective ontological foundations of human life;
2. its point of view is not that of some *utopian partiality* but *the universality* of the critically adopted standpoint of labour;
3. its framework of criticism is not some abstract (Hegelian) “speculative totality”, but the *concrete totality* of dynamically developing society perceived from the material basis of the proletariat as a necessarily self-transcending (“universal”) historical force.

2. Genesis of Marx's Theory of Alienation

1. Marx's Doctoral Thesis and His Critique of the Modern State

ALREADY in his Doctoral Thesis Marx tackled some of the problems of alienation, though in a quite peculiar form, analysing the Epicurean philosophy as an expression of a historical stage dominated by the "privatisation of life". The "isolated individuality" is representative of such a historical stage, and philosophy is characterised by the simile of the "moth" that seeks "the lamplight of the private realm" after the universal sunset. These times which are also characterised by a particular intensity of a "hostile schism of philosophy from the world" are, however "Titanic" because the cleavage within the structure of the given historical stage is tremendous. From this viewpoint Lucretius – the Epicurean poet – must be considered, according to Marx, the true heroic poet of Rome. A poet who "celebrates in song the substance of the Roman Spirit; in place of Homer's joyful, robust, total characters here we have hard, impenetrably armoured heroes lacking in all other qualities; the *war of all against all* (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), the rigid form of being-for-itself, nature that lost its god and god who lost its world".

As we can see, Marx's analysis serves to throw into relief a principle – *bellum omnium contra omnes* – which has a fundamental bearing on alienation. Later on, in connection with the Hobbesian philosophy, he refers to the same principle, in opposition to the romantic and mystifying approach of his contemporaries, the "true socialists":

"The true socialist proceeds from the thought that the dichotomy of life and happiness (*der Zwiespalt von Leben und Glück*) must cease. To prove this thesis, he summons the aid of nature and assumes that in it this dichotomy does not exist; from this he deduces that since man, too, is a natural body and possesses all the general properties of such a body, no dichotomy should exist for him either. Hobbes had much better reasons for invoking nature as a proof of his *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Hegel, on whose construction our true socialist depends, actually perceives in nature *the cleavage*, the dissolute period of the absolute idea and even calls the animal the concrete anguish of God." [*German Ideology*]

The contradictory character of the world is already in the centre of Marx's attention when he analyses the Epicurean philosophy. He emphasises that Epicurus is principally interested in contradiction, that he determines the nature of the atom as inherently contradictory, and this is how the concept of alienation appears in Marx's philosophy stressing the contradiction between "existence alienated from its essence": "*Durch die Qualitäten erhält das Atom eine Existenz, die seinem Begriff widerspricht, wird es als enttiussertes, von seinem Wesen unterschiedenes Dasein gesetzt.*" And again: "*Erstens macht Epikur den Widerspruch zwischen Materie und Form zum Charakter der erscheinenden Natur, die so das Gegenbild der wesentlichen, des Atoms, wird. Dies geschieht, indem dem Raum die Zeit, der passiven Form der Erscheinung die aktive entgegengesetzt wird. Zweitens wird erst bei Epikur die Erscheinung als Erscheinung aufgefasst, d. h. als eine Entfremdung des Wesens, die sich selbst in ihrer Wirklichkeit als solche Entfremdung betätigt.*" Marx also emphasises that this "externalisation", and "alienation" is a "*Verselbstständigung*", i.e. an

independent, autonomous mode of existence, and that the “absolute principle” of Epicurus' atomism – this “natural science of self-consciousness” – is abstract individuality.

Marx's next step towards a more concrete formulation of the problematics of alienation was closely connected with his enquiries into the nature of the *modern state*. The historical tendency described earlier by Marx in its generic form with the terms “isolated individuality” and “abstract individuality” appeared now not in its negativity but as a positive force (positive as synonymous with “real” and “necessary”, and not as predicative of moral approval). This historical tendency is said to give rise to the “self-centred” modern state, in contradistinction to the polis-state in which the “isolated individuality” is an unknown phenomenon. Such a modern state, whose “centre of gravity” was discovered by modern philosophers “within the state itself”, is thus the natural condition of this “isolated individuality”.

Viewed from the standpoint of this “self-centred” modern state the principle of *bellum omnium contra omnes* can be formulated as if it possessed the elemental force, eternal validity, and universality of the laws of nature. It is significant that in Marx's discussion of the “Copernican law” of the modern state the name of Hobbes appears again in company of those philosophers who greatly contributed to the elaboration of the problematics of alienation. “Immediately before and after the time of Copernicus's great discoveries on the true solar system the law of gravitation of the state was discovered : the centre of gravity of the state was found within the state itself. As various European governments tried to apply this result with the initial superficiality of practice to the system of equilibrium of states, similarly Macchiavelli and Campanella began before them and Hobbes, Spinoza, and Hugo Grotius afterwards down to Rousseau, Fichte and Hegel, to consider the state with the eye of man and to develop its natural laws from reason and experience, not from theology, any more than Copernicus let himself be influenced by Joshua's supposed command to the sun to stand still over Gideon and the moon over the vale of Ajalon.

In this period of his development Marx's attention is focused primarily on the problems of the state. His early evaluation of the nature and function of religion appears in this connection. Criticising those who held the view according to which the downfall of the old religions brought with it the decadence of the States of Greece and Rome, Marx emphasises that on the contrary it was the downfall of these states that caused the dissolution of their respective religions. This kind of assessment of religion has, of course, its predecessors, but it reaches its climax in Marx's theory of alienation. At the time of writing the article just referred to, Marx's sphere of reference is still confined to politics. Nevertheless his radical reversal of his opponents' approach-which he calls “history upside down” – is a major step in the direction of a comprehensive materialist conception of the complex totality of capitalist alienation.

The most important work for the understanding of the development of Marx's theory of alienation up to the Autumn of 1843 is his *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*. We shall discuss later in a more detailed form Marx's criticism of the Hegelian view of alienation. At this point, however, it is necessary to quote a very important passage from this work, in order to show some characteristic features of this phase of Marx's intellectual development. It reads as follows:

“The present condition of society displays its difference from the earlier state of civil society in that – in contrast to the past – it does not integrate the individual within its community. It depends partly on chance, partly on the individual's effort etc. whether or not he

holds on to his estate; to an estate which, again, determines the individual merely externally. For his station is not inherent in the individual's labour, nor does it relate itself to him as an objective community, organised in accordance with constant laws and maintaining a permanent relationship to him.... The principle of the bourgeois estate – or of bourgeois society – is enjoyment and the ability to enjoy. In a political sense the member of bourgeois society detaches himself from his estate, his real private position; it is only here that his characteristic of being human assumes its significance, or that his determination as a member of an estate, as a communal being, appears as his human determination. For all his other determinations appear in bourgeois society as inessential for man, for the individual, as merely external determinations which may be necessary for his existence in the whole – i.e. as a tie with the whole – but they constitute a tie which he can just as well cast away. (The present bourgeois society is the consistent realisation of the principle of individualism; individual existence is the ultimate end; activity, labour, content etc. are only means.) The real man is the private individual of present-day political constitution. . . . Not only is the estate founded on the division of society as its ruling law, it also divorces man from his universal being; it turns him into an animal that directly coincides with his determination. The Middle Ages constitute the animal history of mankind, its Zoology. The modern age, our civilisation commits the opposite error. It divorces from man his objective being as something merely external and material. [[*Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*](#)]

As we can see, many elements of Marx's theory of alienation, developed in a systematic form in the *Manuscripts of 1844*, are already present in this *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*. Even if Marx does not use in this passage the terms “*Entfremdung*”, “*Entäußerung*”, and “*Veräußerung*”, his insistence on the “division of society” (“*Trennung der Sozietät*”) and on the merely “external determination of the individual” (“*äusserliche Bestimmung des Individuums*”), with their direct reference to the “divorce of man from his objective being” (“*Sie trennt das gegenständliche Wesen des Menschen von ihm*”) in the age of “civilisation” – i.e. in modern capitalistic society – take him near to the basic concept of his later analysis.

Moreover, we can note in our quotation a reference to the mere “*externality of labour*” as regards the individual (“*Tätigkeit, Arbeit, Inhalt etc. sind nur Mittel*” etc.): an idea that some ten months later is going to occupy a central place in Marx's theory of alienation. Here, however, this phenomenon is considered basically from a legal-institutional standpoint. Accordingly, capitalism is characterised as “the consistent realisation of the principle of individualism” (“*das durchgeführte Prinzip des Individualismus*”), whereas in Marx's later conception this “principle of individualism” is put in its proper perspective: it is analysed as a manifestation determined by the *alienation of labour*, as one of the principal aspects of labour's self-alienation.

2. The Jewish Question and the Problem of German Emancipation

The Autumn of 1843 brought certain changes in Marx's orientation. By that time he was already residing in Paris, surrounded by a more stimulating intellectual environment which helped him to draw the most radical conclusions from his analysis of contemporary society. He was able to assess the social and political anachronism of Germany from a real basis of criticism (i.e. he could perceive the contradictions of his own country from the perspective of the actual situation of a historically more advanced European state) and not merely from the standpoint of a rather *abstract ideality* that

characterised German philosophical criticism, including, up to a point, the earlier Marx himself.

Philosophical generalisations always require some sort of *distance* (or “outsider-position”) of the philosopher from the concrete situation upon which he bases his generalisations. This was evidently the case in the history of philosophy from Socrates to Giordano Bruno, who had to die for being radical outsiders. But even later, “outsiders” played an extraordinary part in the development of philosophy: the Scots with respect to the economically much more advanced England; the philosophers of the backward Naples (from Vico to Benedetto Croce) in relation to the capitalistically more developed Northern Italy; and similar examples can be found in other countries as well. A great number of philosophers belong to this category of outsiders, from Rousseau and Kierkegaard down to Wittgenstein and Lukács in our century.

To Jewish philosophers a particular place is to be assigned in this context. Owing to the position forced upon them by virtue of being social outcasts, they could assume an intellectual standpoint *par excellence* which enabled them, from Spinoza to Marx, to accomplish some of the most fundamental philosophical syntheses in history. (This characteristic becomes even more striking if one compares the significance of these theoretical achievements with the artistic products of Jewish painters and musicians, sculptors and writers. The outsider's viewpoint that was an advantage in theoretical efforts became a drawback in the arts, because of the inherently national character of the latter. A drawback resulting – apart from a very few exceptions, such as the quite peculiar, intellectualistic-ironical, poems of Heine – in somewhat rootless works, lacking in the suggestiveness of representational qualities and therefore generally confined to the secondary range of artistic achievements. In the twentieth century, of course, the situation greatly changes. Partly because of a much greater – though never complete – national integration of the particular Jewish communities accomplished by this time thanks to the general realisation of the social trend described by Marx as the “reabsorption of Christianity into Judaism”. [[On the Jewish Question](#)] More important is, however, the fact that parallel to the advance of this process of “reabsorption” – i.e. parallel to the triumph of capitalistic alienation in all spheres of life – art assumes a more abstract and “cosmopolitan” character than ever before and the experience of rootlessness becomes an all-pervasive theme of modern art. Thus, paradoxically, the earlier drawback turns into an advantage and we witness the appearance of some great Jewish writers – from Proust to Kafka – in the forefront of world literature.)

The outsider position of the great Jewish philosophers was doubly accentuated. In the first place, they were standing in a necessary opposition to their discriminatory and particularistic national communities which rejected the idea of Jewish emancipation. (e.g. “The German Jew, in particular, suffers from the general lack of political freedom and the pronounced Christianity of the state.”) But, in the second place, they had to emancipate themselves also from Judaism in order not to paralyse themselves by getting involved in the same contradictions at a different level, i.e. in order to escape from the particularistic and parochial positions of Jewry differing only in some respects but not in substance from the object of their first opposition. Only those Jewish philosophers could achieve the comprehensiveness and degree of universality that characterise the systems of both Spinoza and Marx who were able to grasp the issue of Jewish emancipation in its paradoxical duality as inextricably intertwined with the historical development of mankind. Many others, from Moses Hess to Martin Buber, because of the particularistic character of their perspectives or, in other words, because of their inability to emancipate themselves from

“Jewish narrowness” – formulated their views in terms of second rate, provincialistic Utopias.

It is highly significant that in Marx's intellectual development a most important turning point, in the Autumn of 1843, coincided with a philosophical *prise de conscience* with regard to Judaism. His articles [*On the Jewish Question*](#) written during the last months of 1843 and in January 1844, sharply criticised not only German backwardness and political anachronism that rejected Jewish emancipation, but at the same time also the structure of capitalistic society in general as well as the rôle of Judaism in the development of capitalism.

The structure of modern bourgeois society in relation to Judaism was analysed by Marx on both the social and political plane in such terms which would have been unthinkable on the basis of acquaintance with the Gennan – by no means typical – situation alone. During the last months of 1842 Marx had already studied the writings of French Utopian Socialists, e.g. Fourier, Étienne Cabet, Pierre Leroux and Pierre Considérant. In Paris, however, he had the opportunity of closely observing the social and political situation of France and to some extent even getting personally involved in it. He was introduced to the leaders of the democratic and socialist opposition and often frequented the meetings of the secret societies of workers. Moreover, he intensively studied the history of the French Revolution of 1789 because he wanted to write a history of the Convention. All this helped him to become extremely well acquainted with the most important aspects of the French situation which he was trying to integrate, together with his knowledge and experience of Germany, into a general historical conception. The contrast he drew, from the “outsider's” viewpoint, between the German situation and French society – against the background of modern historical development as a whole – proved fruitful not only for realistically tackling the Jewish question but in general for the elaboration of his well-known historical method.

Only in this framework could the concept of *alienation* – an eminently historical concept, as we have seen – assume a central place in Marx's thought, as the converging point of manifold socio-economic as well as political problems, and only the notion of alienation could assume such a role within his conceptual framework. (We shall return to a more detailed analysis of the conceptual structure of Marx's theory of alienation in the next chapter.)

In his articles *On the Jewish Question* Marx's starting point is, again the principle of *bellum omnium contra omnes* as realised in bourgeois society (“*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*”) that splits man into a public citizen and a private individual, and separates man from his “communal being” (*Gemeinwesen*), from himself, and from other men. But then Marx goes on to extend these considerations to virtually every aspect of this extremely complex “*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*”; from the interconnections between religion and the state – finding a common denominator precisely in a mutual reference to alienation – to the economic, political and family relations which manifest themselves, without exception, in some form of alienation.

He uses a great variety of terms to designate the various aspects of alienated bourgeois society, such as “*Trennung*” (divorce or separation), “*Spaltung*” (division or cleavage), “*Absonderung*” (separation or withdrawal), “*verderben*” (spoil, corrupt), “*sich selbst verlieren, verdussern*” (lose and alienate oneself), “*sich isolieren und auf sich zurilckziehen*” (isolate and withdraw oneself into oneself), “*dusserlich machen*” (externalise, alienate), “*alle Gattungshände des Menschen zerreißen*” (destroy or disintegrate all the ties of man with his species), “*die Menschenwelt in eine Welt*”

atomistischer Individuen auflösen” (dissolve the world of man into a world of atomistic individuals), and so on. And all these terms are discussed in specific contexts which establish their close interconnections with “*Entäusserung*”, “*Entfremdung*”, and “*Veräusserung*”

Another important study from this period of Marx's intellectual development, written simultaneously with the articles *On the Jewish Question*, is entitled: *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right, Introduction*.” In this work the primary task of philosophy is defined as a radical criticism of the “non-sacred” forms and manifestations of self-alienation, in contrast to the views of Marx's contemporaries – including Feuerbach – who confined their attention to the critique of religious alienation. Marx insists, with great passion, that philosophy should transform itself in this spirit. “It is the task of history, therefore once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world.

The immediate task of philosophy, which is in the service of history, is to *unmask human self-alienation in its secular form* now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form. Thus the criticism of heaven is transformed into the criticism of earth, the criticism of religion into the criticism of law, and the criticism of theology into the criticism of politics.

In this study one cannot fail to perceive the “outsider's” standpoint in relation to the German situation. Marx points out that merely opposing and negating German political circumstances would amount to nothing more than an anachronism, because of the enormous gap that separates Germany from the up-to-date nations of Europe. “If one were to begin with the *status quo* itself in Germany, even in the most appropriate way, i.e. negatively, the result would still be an anachronism. Even the negation of our political present is already a dusty fact in the historical lumber room of modern nations. I may negate powdered wigs, but I am still left with unpowdered wigs. If I negate the German situation of 1843 I have, according to French chronology, hardly reached the year 1789, and still less the vital centre of the present day.” The contrast between German anachronism and the historically “up-to-date nations” of Europe points, in Marx's view, towards a solution that with respect to Germany is rather more of a “categorical imperative” than an actuality : *the proletariat* that has yet to develop itself beyond the Rhine.

In complete agreement with the line of thought characteristic of the articles *On the Jewish Question* – in which Marx emphasised, as we have seen, that the complete emancipation of Judaism is inconceivable without the universal emancipation of mankind from the circumstances of self-alienation – he repeatedly stresses the point that “The emancipation of the German coincides with the emancipation of man”. Moreover, he emphasises that “It is not radical revolution, universal human emancipation which is a Utopian dream for Germany, but rather a *partial, merely political* revolution which leaves the pillars of the building standing” and that “In Germany complete [universal] emancipation is a *conditio sine qua non* for any partial emancipation”. The same applies to the *Jewish Question*; for no degree of political emancipation can be considered an answer when “the Jewish narrowness of society” is at stake.

The importance of these insights is enormous, not only methodologically – insofar as they offer a key to understanding the nature of Utopianism as the inflation of *partiality into pseudo-universality* – but also practically. For Marx clearly realises that the practical supersession of alienation is inconceivable in terms of politics alone, in view of the fact that politics is only a *partial* aspect of the totality of social processes, no matter how centrally important it may be in specific historical situations (e.g. late eighteenth century France).

But the limits are also in evidence in these articles. The opposition between “partiality” and “universality” is grasped in its rather abstract generality and only one of its aspects is concretised, negatively, in Marx's rejection of “*political partiality*” as a possible candidate for bringing about the supersession of alienation. Its positive counterpart remains unspecified as a general *postulate of “universality”* and thus assumes the character of a “Sollen” (ought).. The identification of “universality” with the ontologically fundamental sphere of *economics* is a later achievement in Marx's thought. At this stage his references to political economy are still rather vague and generic. Although he sees intuitively that “the relation of industry, of the world of wealth in general, to the political world is a major problem of modern times”, his assessment of the specific contradictions of capitalism is still rather unrealistic: “While in France and England,” he writes, “the problem is put in the form: political economy or the rule of society over wealth; in Germany it is put in the form : national economy or the rule of private property over nationality. Thus, in England and France it is a question of abolishing monopoly, which has developed to its final consequences; while in Germany it is a question of proceeding to the final consequences of monopoly.) It is, therefore, not surprising that the element of “ought” – in want of a concrete demonstration of the fundamental economic trends and contradictions which objectively point to the necessary supersession of alienation – plays such an important part in Marx's thought at this stage of his development. In 1843 Marx is still forced to conclude that the critique of religion ends “with the *categorical imperative* to overthrow all those conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being and his first assessment of the role of the proletariat is in full agreement with this vision. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, however, Marx makes a crucial step forward, radically superseding the “political partiality” of his own orientation and the limitations of a conceptual frame-work that characterised his development in its phase of “revolutionary democratism”.

3. Marx's Encounter with Political Economy

The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 are evidently the work of a genius; considering the monumentality of this synthesis and the depth of its insights it is almost unbelievable that they were written by a young man of . There may appear to be a contradiction here, between acknowledging the “work of a genius” and the Marxist principle according to which great men, just as much as great ideas, arise in history “when the time is ripe for them”. In fact “Dr. Marx's genius” was noticed by Moses Hess and others well before the publication of any of his great works.

And yet, we are not involved in any contradiction whatsoever. On the contrary, Marx's own development confirms the general principle of Marxism. For “genius” is but an abstract potentiality before it is articulated in relation to some specific *content* in response to the objective requirements of a historically given situation. In the abstract sense – as “phenomenal brainpower” etc. – “genius” is always “around”, but it is wasted, unrealised, or whittled away in activities and products which leave no mark behind them. The unrealised “genius” of Dr. Marx that mesmerised Moses Hess is a mere historical curiosity as compared with its full realisation in Marx's immense works which not only did not in the least impress the same Moses Hess but succeeded only in arousing his narrow-minded hostility.

In the concrete realisation of the potentiality of Marx's genius his grasp of the concept of “labour's self-alienation” represented the crucial element: the “Archimedean point” of his great synthesis. The elaboration of this concept in its complex, Marxian comprehensiveness – as the philosophical synthesising point of the dynamism of human development – was simply inconceivable

prior to a certain time, i.e. prior to the relative maturation of the social contradictions reflected in it. Its conception also required the perfection of the intellectual tools and instruments – primarily through the elaboration of the categories of dialectics – which were necessary for an adequate philosophical grasp of the mystifying phenomena of alienation, as well as, of course, the intellectual power of an individual who could turn to a proper use these instruments. And last, but not least, the appearance of this “Archimedean concept” also presupposed the intense moral passion and unshakeable character of someone who was prepared to announce a “war by all means” on the “conditions in which man is an abased, enslaved, abandoned, contemptible being”; someone who could envisage his *personal* fulfilment, the realisation of his intellectual aims, in the “realisation through abolition” of philosophy in the course of fighting that war. The simultaneous fulfilment of all these conditions and prerequisites was necessary indeed for the Marxian elaboration of the concept of “labour's self-alienation” at a time when the conditions were “ripe for it”.

It is well known that Marx started to study the classics of political economy at the end of 1843, but they only served to give, in both *On the Jewish Question* and his *Introduction to a Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, a background lacking in definition to a primarily *political* exposition, in the spirit of his programmatic utterance according to which the criticism of religion and theology must be turned into the criticism of law and politics.

In accomplishing the transformation of Marx's thought mentioned above, the influence of a work entitled *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* (*Umrisse zu einer Kritik der Nationalökonomie*; written by the young Engels in December 1843 and January 1844 and sent to Marx in January for publication in *Deutsch-Französischen Jahrbüchern*) was very important. Even in 1859 Marx wrote about these *Outlines* in terms of the highest praise.

Alienation, according to this early work of Engels, is due to a particular mode of production which “turns all natural and rational relations upside-down”. It can be called, therefore, the “unconscious condition of mankind”. Engels' alternative to this mode of production is formulated in the concrete programme of socialising private property: “If we abandon private property, then all these unnatural divisions disappear. The difference between interest and profit disappears; capital is nothing without labour, without movement. The significance of profit is reduced to the weight which capital carries in the determination of the costs of production; and profit thus remains inherent in capital, in the same way as capital itself reverts to its original unity with labour.

The solution conceived in these terms would also show a way out from the contradictions of the “unconscious conditions of mankind”, defined in this connection as economic crises: “Produce with consciousness as human beings – not as *dispersed atoms without consciousness of your species* – and you are beyond all these *artificial and untenable antitheses*. But as long as you continue to produce in the present unconscious, thoughtless manner, at the *mercy of chance* – for just as long *trade crises* will remain”.

Stimulated by this work of the young Engels, Marx intensified his study of the classics of political economy. (A few months later he also met Engels who was just returning from England and could recall his observations in the industrially most advanced country.) The outcome of Marx's intensive study of political economy was his great work known by the title *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. They show a fundamental affinity of approach with the work of the young Engels but their scope is incomparably broader. They embrace and relate all the basic philosophical problems to the

fact of labour's self-alienation, from the question of freedom to that of the meaning of life (see Chapter VI), from the genesis of modern society to the relationship between individuality and man's "communal being", from the production of "artificial appetites" to the "alienation of the senses", and from an assessment of the nature and function of Philosophy, Art, Religion and Law to the problems of a possible "reintegration of human life" in the real world, by means of a "positive transcendence" instead of the merely conceptual "Aufhebung" of alienation.

The converging point of the heterogeneous aspects of alienation is the notion of "labour" (*Arbeit*). In the *Manuscripts of 1844* labour is considered both in general – as "productive activity" the fundamental ontological determination of "humanness" (*menschliches Dasein*), i.e. really human mode of existence) – and in particular, as having the form of capitalistic "division of labour". It is in this latter form – capitalistically structured activity – that "labour" is the ground of all alienation.

"Activity" (*Tätigkeit*), "division of labour" (*Teilung der Arbeit*), "exchange" (*Austausch*) and "private property" (*Privateigentum*) are the key concepts of this approach to the problematics of alienation. The ideal of a "positive transcendence" of alienation is formulated as a necessary socio-historical supersession of the "*mediations*": Private Property–Exchange–Division of Labour which interpose themselves between man and his activity and prevent him from finding fulfilment in his labour, in the exercise of his productive (creative) abilities, and in the human appropriation of the products of his activity.

Marx's critique of alienation is thus formulated as a rejection of *these mediations*. It is vitally important to stress in this connection that this rejection does not imply in any way a negation of *all* mediation. On the contrary: this is the first truly dialectical grasp of the complex relationship between mediation and immediacy in the history of philosophy, including the by no means negligible achievements of Hegel.

A rejection of all mediation would be dangerously near to sheer mysticism in its idealisation of the "*identity* of Subject and Object". What Marx opposes as alienation is not mediation in general but a set of *second order* mediations (Private Property–Exchange–Division of Labour), a "mediation of the mediation", i.e. a *historically specific* mediation of the *ontologically fundamental self*-mediation of man with nature. This "second order mediation" can only arise on the basis of the ontologically necessary "first order mediation" – as the specific, *alienated form* of the latter. But the "first order mediation" itself – productive activity as such – is an absolute ontological factor of the human predicament. (We shall return to this problematics under both its aspects – i.e. both as "first order mediation" and as alienated "mediation of the mediation" in a moment.)

Labour (productive activity) is the one and only absolute factor in the whole complex: Labour–Division of Labour–Private Property–Exchange. (Absolute because the human mode of existence is inconceivable without the transformations of nature accomplished by productive activity.) Consequently any attempt at overcoming alienation must define itself in relation to this absolute as opposed to its manifestation in an alienated form. But in order to formulate the question of a positive transcendence of alienation in the actual world one must realise, from the earlier mentioned standpoint of the "outsider", that the *given form* of labour (Wage Labour) is related to *human activity* in general as the *particular* to the *universal*. If this is not seen, if "productive activity" is not differentiated into its radically different aspects, if the ontologically absolute factor is not distinguished from the historically specific form, if, that is, activity is conceived – because of the

absolutisation of a particular form of activity – as a homogeneous entity, the question of an actual (practical) transcendence of alienation cannot possibly arise. If Private Property and Exchange are considered absolute – in some way “inherent in human nature” – then Division Of Labour, the capitalistic form of productive activity as Wage Labour. Must also appear as absolute, for they reciprocally imply each other. Thus the second order mediation appears as a first order mediation, i.e. an absolute ontological factor. Consequently the negation of the alienated manifestations of this mediation must assume the form of nostalgic moralising postulates (e.g. Rousseau).

The study of political economy provided Marx with a most detailed analysis of the nature and functioning of the capitalistic form of productive activity. His negation of alienation in his previous writings was centred, as we have seen, on the critique of the existing institutions and legal-political relations and “labour” appeared only *negatively*, as a missing determination of the individual's position in “bürgerliche Gesellschaft”. In other words: it appeared as an aspect of a society in which the *political and social* spheres are divided in such a way that the individual's position in society is *not inherent in his labour*. Before the *Manuscripts of 1844* the economic factor appeared only as a vaguely defined aspect of socio-political relations. Even the author of the articles *On the Jewish Question* and on *the Hegelian Philosophy of Right* did not realise the fundamental ontological importance of the sphere of *production* which appeared in his writings in the form of rather generic references to “needs” (*Bedürfnisse*) in general. Consequently Marx was unable to grasp in a comprehensive way the complex hierarchy of the various kinds and forms of human activity: their reciprocal *interrelations* within a *structured* whole.

All this is very different in the *Manuscripts of 1844*. In this work Marx's ontological starting point is the self-evident fact that man, a specific part of *nature* (i.e. a being with *physical* needs historically prior to all others) must *produce* in order to sustain himself, in order to satisfy these needs. However, he can only satisfy these primitive needs by *necessarily* creating, in the course of their satisfaction through his productive activity, a complex hierarchy of *non-physical* needs which thus become necessary conditions for the gratification of his original physical needs as well. Human activities and needs of a “spiritual” kind thus have their ultimate ontological foundation in the sphere of material production as specific expressions of human interchange with nature, mediated in complex ways and forms. As Marx puts it: “*the entire so-called history of the world is nothing but the begetting of man through human labour, nothing but the coming-to-be [Werden] of nature for man*”. Productive activity is, therefore, the *mediator* in the “subject-object relationship” between man and nature. A mediator that enables man to lead a human mode of existence, ensuring that he does not fall back into nature, does not dissolve himself within the “object”. “Man lives on nature”, writes Marx, “ – means that 'nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die. That man's physical *and spiritual* life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature”.

Productive activity is hence the source of consciousness and alienated consciousness” is the reflection of alienated activity or of the alienation of activity, i.e. of labour's self-alienation.

Marx uses the expression: “man's inorganic body”, which is not simply that which is given by nature, but the concrete expression and embodiment of a historically given stage and structure of productive activity in the form of its products, from material goods to works of art. As a result of the alienation of labour, “man's inorganic body” appears to be merely external to him and therefore it can be turned into a commodity. Everything is “reified”, and the

fundamental ontological relations are turned upside down. The individual is confronted with mere objects (things, commodities'), once his "inorganic body" – "worked-up nature" and externalised productive power – has been alienated from him. He has no consciousness of being a "species being". (A "Gattungswesen" – i.e. a being that has the consciousness of the species to which it belongs, or, to put it in another way, a being whose essence does not coincide directly with its individuality. Man is the only being that can have such a "species-consciousness" – both subjectively, in his conscious awareness of the species to which he belongs, and in the objectified forms of this "species-consciousness", from industry to institutions and to works of art – and thus he is the only "species being".)

Productive activity in the form dominated by capitalistic isolation – when "men produce as dispersed atoms without consciousness of their species" – cannot adequately fulfil the function of *mediating* man with nature because it "reifies" man and his relations and reduces him to the state of animal nature. In place of man's "consciousness of his species" we find a cult of privacy and an idealisation of the abstract individual. Thus by identifying the human essence with mere individuality, man's biological nature is confounded with his proper, specifically human, nature. For mere individuality requires only *means* to its *subsistence*, but not specifically human – humanly-natural and naturally-human, i.e. *social-forms* of self-fulfilment which are at the same time also adequate manifestations of the life-activity of a "Gattungswesen", a "species being". "Man is a species being not only because in practice and in theory he adopts the species as his object (his own as well as those of other things) but – and this is only another way of expressing it – but also because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being". The mystifying cult of the abstract individual, by contrast, indicates as man's nature an attribute – mere individuality – which is a *universal* category of nature in general, and by no means something *specifically* human. (See Marx's praise of Hobbes for having recognised in nature the dominance of individuality in his principle of *bellum omnium contra omnes*.)

Productive activity is, then, *alienated activity* when it departs from its proper function of humanly *mediating* in the subject-object relationship between man and nature, and tends, instead, to make the isolated and reified individual to be reabsorbed by "nature". This can happen even at a highly developed stage of civilisation if man is subjected, as the young Engels says, to "a natural law based on the unconsciousness of the participants". (Marx has integrated this idea of the young Engels into his own system and more than once referred to this "natural law" of capitalism not only in the *Manuscripts of 1844* but in his *Capital* as well.)

Thus Marx's protest against alienation, privatisation and reification does not involve him in the contradictions of an idealisation of some kind of a "natural state". There is no trace of a sentimental or romantic nostalgia for nature in his conception. His programme, in the critical references to "artificial appetites" etc., does not advocate a return to "nature", to a "natural" set of primitive, or "simple", needs but the "full realisation of man's nature" through an adequately *self-mediating* human activity. "Man's nature" (his "specific being") means precisely *distinctiveness* from nature in general. The relationship of man with nature is "self-mediating" in a twofold sense. First, because it is nature that mediates itself with itself in man. And secondly, because the mediating activity itself is nothing but man's attribute, located in a specific part of nature. Thus in productive activity, under the first of its dual ontological aspects, nature *mediates itself with nature*, and, under its second ontological aspect – in virtue of the fact that productive activity is inherently *social activity* – *man mediates himself with man*.

The second order mediations mentioned above (institutionalised in the form of capitalistic Division Of Labour–Private Property–Exchange) disrupt this relationship and subordinate productive activity itself, under the rule of a blind “natural law”, to the requirements of commodity-production destined to ensure the reproduction of the isolated and reified individual who is but an appendage of this system of “economic determinations”.

Man's productive activity cannot bring him fulfilment because the institutionalised second order mediations interpose themselves between, man and his activity, between man and nature, and between man and man. (The last two are already implied in the first, i.e. in the interposition of capitalistic second order mediations between man and his activity, in the subordination of productive activity to these mediations. For if man's self-mediation is further mediated by the capitalistically institutionalised form of productive activity, then nature cannot mediate itself with nature and man cannot mediate himself with man. On the contrary, man is confronted by nature in a hostile fashion, under the rule of a “natural law” blindly prevailing through the mechanisms of the market (Exchange) and, on the other hand, man is confronted by man in a hostile fashion in the antagonism between Capital and Labour. The original interrelationship of man with nature is transformed into the relationship between Wage Labour and Capital, and as far as the individual worker is concerned, the aim of his activity is necessarily confined to his self-reproduction as a mere individual, in his physical being. Thus means become ultimate ends while human ends are turned into mere means subordinated to the reified ends of this institutionalised system of second order mediations.)

An adequate negation of alienation is, therefore, inseparable from the radical negation of capitalistic second order mediations. If, however, they are taken for granted – as for instance in the writings of political economists as well as of Hegel (and even in Rousseau's conception as a wholly – the critique of the various manifestations of alienation is bound to remain partial or illusory, or both. The “uncritical positivism” of political economists needs no further comment, only the remark that its contradictions greatly helped Marx in his attempts at clarifying his own position. Rousseau despite his radical opposition to certain phenomena of alienation, could not break out from a vicious circle because he reversed the actual ontological relationships, assigning priority to the second order mediations over the first. Thus he found himself trapped by an insoluble contradiction of his own making: the idealisation of a fictitious “fair exchange” opposed, sentimentally, to the ontologically fundamental first order mediations, i.e. in Rousseau's terminology, to “civilisation”. As far as Hegel is concerned, he identified “objectification” and “alienation” partly because he was far too great a realist to indulge in a romantic negation of the ontologically fundamental self-mediation (and self-genesis) of man through his activity (on the contrary, he was the first to grasp this ontological relationship, although in an “abstract, speculative” manner), and partly because, in virtue of his social standpoint, he could not oppose the capitalistic form of second order mediations. Consequently he fused the two sets of mediations in the concept of “objectifying alienation” and “alienating objectification” : a concept that a priori excluded from his system the possibility of envisaging an actual (practical) supersession of alienation.

It was Marx's great historical achievement to cut the “Gordian knot” of these mystifyingly complex sets of mediations, by asserting the absolute validity of the ontologically fundamental first order mediation (in opposition to romantic and Utopian advocates of a direct unity) against its alienation in the form of capitalistic Division Of Labour–Private Property and Exchange. This great theoretical discovery opened up the road to a “scientific

demystification” as well as an actual, practical negation of the capitalistic mode of production.

4. Monistic Materialism

In elaborating a solution to the complex issues of alienation much depends on the “Archimedean point” or common denominator of the particular philosophical system. For Marx, in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* this common denominator was, as already mentioned, the concept of a capitalistic “alienation of labour”. He emphasised its importance as follows: “The examination of division of labour and exchange is of extreme interest, because these are perceptibly alienated expressions of human activity and of essential human power as a species activity and power”.

If, however, one's centre of reference is “religious alienation”, as in Feuerbach's case, nothing follows from it as regards actual, practical alienation. “*Religious estrangement* as such occurs only in the realm of consciousness, of man's inner life, but *economic estrangement* is that of real life; *its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects*”. Feuerbach wanted to tackle the problems of alienation in terms of real life (this programmatic affinity explains Marx's attachment to Feuerbach in a certain period of his development), in opposition to the Hegelian solution, but because of the abstractness of his viewpoint: idealised “man” (“human essence” taken generically, and not as “the ensemble of social relations” [[Theses on Feuerbach](#)]), his position remained basically *dualistic*, offering no real solution to the analysed problems.

The main importance of the classics of political economy for Marx's intellectual development was that by throwing light on the palpable sphere of economics (analysed by them, as regards the capitalistic stage of production, in the most concrete terms) they helped him to concentrate on the “perceptibly alienated expressions of human activity”. His awareness of the importance of productive activity enabled Marx to identify, with utmost clarity, the contradictions of a non-mediated, undialectical, “dualistic materialism”.

It is significant that Marx's intense study of political economy sharpened his criticism of Feuerbach and, at the same time, pushed into the foreground the affinities of Marxian thought with certain characteristics of the Hegelian philosophy. It may seem paradoxical at first that, in spite of the *materialistic* conception shared by both Marx and Feuerbach, and in spite of the much closer *political affinity* between them than between Marx and Hegel, the relationship of the historical materialist Marx and the *idealist* Hegel is incomparably more deeply rooted than that between Marx and Feuerbach. The first embraces the totality of Marx's development whereas the second is confined to an early, and transitory, stage.

The reason is to be found in the basically *monistic* character of the Hegelian philosophy in contrast to Feuerbach's dualism. In the famous passage in which Marx distinguishes his position from the Hegelian dialectic he also emphasises the deep affinity, insisting on the necessity of turning “right side up again” that which in Hegel's philosophy is “standing on its head”. [[Theses on Feuerbach](#)] But it would be impossible to turn the Hegelian conception “right side up again”, in order to incorporate its “rational kernel” into Marx's system, if there did not lie at the basis of their “opposite” philosophical approaches the common characteristics of two – ideologically different, indeed opposite – *monistic* conceptions. For dualism remains dualism even if it is turned “the other way round”.

By contrast, we can see in Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* his complete rejection of Feuerbach's ontological and epistemological *dualism*: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing (*Gegenstand*), reality, sensuousness is conceived only in the form of the object (*Objekt*) or of contemplation (*Anschauung*), but not as human sensuous activity, practice, not subjectively. Hence it happened that the active side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism – but only abstractly, since of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really differentiated from thought-objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as objective (*gegenständliche*) activity. Hence, in the *Essence of Christianity*, he regards the theoretical attitude as the only genuinely human attitude, while practice is conceived and fixed only in its dirty-Judaical form of appearance." [[Theses on Feuerbach](#)]

This reference to "practice" is very similar to Goethe's principle concerning *Experiment as Mediator between Object and Subject* (*Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt*) and the second thesis on Feuerbach emphasises this similarity even more strongly. Now the lack of such mediator in Feuerbach's philosophy means that its dualism cannot be overcome. On the contrary, it assumes at the level of social theory the sharpest possible form "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating. Hence this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, of which one is superior to society." [[Theses on Feuerbach](#)] This is why Feuerbach's system, in spite of the philosopher's materialistic approach, and in spite of his starting out "from the fact of religious self-alienation", [[Theses on Feuerbach](#)] cannot be in a lasting agreement with the Marxian philosophy. For a kind of "materialistic dualism" is manifest in Feuerbach's philosophy at every level, with all the contradictions involved in it. (Cf. "abstract thinking" y. "intuition", "contemplation", "Anschauung"; "isolated individual" y. "human essence"; "abstract individual" y. "human species", and so on.)

The secret of Marx's success in radically transcending the limitations of dualistic, contemplative materialism is his unparalleled dialectical grasp of the category of mediation, for no philosophical system can be monistic without conceptually mastering, in one form or another, the complex dialectical interrelationship between mediation and totality. It goes without saying, this applies – *mutatis mutandis* – to the Hegelian philosophy as well. Hegel's idealistic monism has for its centre of reference his concept of "activity" as "mediator between Subject and Object". But, of course, the Hegelian concept of "activity" is "abstract mental activity" which can mediate only "thought-entities". ("Object", in Hegel's philosophy is "alienated Subject", "externalised World Spirit" etc., i.e. in the last analysis it is a pseudo-object.) In this characteristic of the Hegelian philosophy the inner contradictions of its concept of mediation come to the fore. For Hegel is not a "mystifier" because "he is an idealist": to say this would amount to hardly more than an unrewarding tautology. Rather, he is an idealist mystifier because of the inherently contradictory character of his concept of mediation, i.e. because of the taboos he imposes upon himself as regards the second order mediations while he is absolutising these – historically specific – forms of capitalistic "mediation of the mediation". The philosophical repercussions of such a step are far-reaching, affecting all his main categories, from the assumed identity of "alienation" and "objectification" to the ultimate identity of "subject" and "object", as well as to the conception of "*Aufhebung*" as a merely conceptual "reconciliation" of the subject with itself. (Even the "*nostalgia*" for the original direct unity appears – though in an "abstract, speculative, logical form" – in the conceptual opposition between "Ent-

äußerung”, alienation, and “Er-*innerung*”, i.e. turning “inwards”, remembering a past necessarily gone for ever.)

Only in Marx's monistic materialism can we find a coherent comprehension of “*objective* totality” as “sensuous reality”, and a correspondingly valid differentiation between subject and object, thanks to his concept of mediation as ontologically fundamental productive activity, and thanks to his grasp of the historically specific, second order mediations through which the ontological foundation of human existence is alienated from man in the capitalist order of society.

5. The Transformation of Hegel's Idea of “Activity”

Activity appeared in the writing of the classics of political economy as something *concrete*, belonging to the palpable manifestations of real life. It was, however, confined in their conception to a *particular sphere*: that of manufacture and commerce, considered completely ahistorically. It was Hegel's great theoretical achievement to make universal the philosophical importance of activity, if even he 'did this in an *abstract* form, for reasons mentioned already.

Marx writes in his *Manuscripts of 1844* about the magnitude as well as the limitations of the Hegelian achievements: “Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy. He grasps labour as the essence of man – as man's essence in the act of proving itself : he sees only the positive, not the negative side of labour. Labour is man's coming-to-be for himself within alienation, or as alienated man. The only labour which Hegel knows and recognises is *abstractly mental labour*”. Thus with Hegel “activity” becomes a term of crucial importance, meant to explain human genesis and development in general. But the Hegelian concept of “activity” acquires this universal character at the price of losing the sensuous form “labour” had in political economy. (That the political economist conception of “labour” was one-sided, partial, and ahistorical, does not concern us here where the point at stake is the relative historical significance of this conception.)

Marx's concept of “activity” as *practice* or “productive activity” – identified both in its *positive* sense (as human objectification and “self-development”, as man's necessary self-mediation with nature) and in its *negative* sense (as alienation or second order mediation) resembles the political economist's conception in that it is conceived in a sensuous form. Its theoretical function is, however, radically different. For Marx realises that the non-alienated foundation of that which is reflected in an alienated form in political economy as a *particular sphere* is the *fundamental ontological sphere* of human existence and therefore it is the ultimate foundation of all kinds and forms of activity. Thus labour, in its “sensuous form”, assumes its universal significance in Marx's philosophy. It becomes not only the key to understanding the determinations inherent in all forms of alienation but also the centre of reference of his practical strategy aimed at the actual supersession of capitalistic alienation.

To accomplish the Marxian formulation of the central issues of alienation, a critical incorporation of Hegel's achievements into Marx's thought was of the greatest importance. By becoming aware of the universal philosophical significance of productive activity Marx made a decisive step forward with respect to the writings of political economy and thus he was enabled to work out certain objective implications of the latter which could not be realised by the political economists themselves because of the partial and unhistorical character of their approach. We can see this clearly expressed in the following words of Marx: “To assert that division of labour and exchange rest on

private property is nothing short of asserting that labour is the essence of private property – an assertion which the political economist cannot prove and which we wish to prove for him. Precisely in the fact that division of labour and exchange are embodiments of private property lies the twofold proof, on the one hand that human life required private property for its realisation, and on the other hand that it now requires the supersession of private property”. Thus political economy cannot go to the roots of the matter. It conceives a *particular* form of activity (capitalistic division of labour) as the *universal* and *absolute* form of productive activity. Consequently in the reasoning of political economists the ultimate point of reference cannot be *activity itself* in view of the fact that a particular form of activity – the historically established socioeconomic practice of capitalism – is absolutised by them.

Political economy evidently could not assume as its ultimate point of reference activity in general (i.e. productive activity as such : this absolute condition of human existence) because such a step would have made impossible the absolutisation of a *particular form* of activity. The only type of “absolute” which enabled them to draw the desired conclusions was a *circular* one: namely the assumption of the basic characteristics of the specific form of activity whose absoluteness they wanted to demonstrate as being *necessarily inherent in “human nature”*. Thus the historical *fact* of capitalistic Exchange appeared in an idealised form on the absolute plane of “human nature” as a “*propensity to exchange and barter*” (Adam Smith) from which it could be easily deduced that the “commercial” form of society, based on the capitalistic division of labour, is also the “natural” form of . society.

If the absolute factor is identified with private property (or with some fictitious “propensity to exchange and barter”, which is only another way of saying the same thing), then we are confronted with an insoluble contradiction between natural and human, even if this contradiction is hidden beneath the rhetorical assumption of a harmonious relationship between “human nature” and capitalistic mode of production. For ff one assumes a fixed human nature (e.g. a “propensity to exchange and barter”), then the really natural *and absolute* necessity (expressed in the self-evident truth of the words: “man must *produce* if he is not to die”) is subordinated to a *pseudo-natural* order. (The proposition equivalent to the Marxian self-evident truth, according to the alleged “natural order” of “human nature”, should read: “man *must exchange and barter if he is not to die*”, which is by no means true, let alone self-evidently true.) Thus the ontologically fundamental dimension of human existence is displaced from its natural and absolute status to a *secondary* one. This is, of course, reflected in the scale of values of the society which takes as its ultimate point of reference the system of exchange and barter: ff the capitalistic order of things is challenged, this appears to the “political economists” as though the very existence of mankind is endangered. This is why the supersession of alienation cannot conceivably be included in the programme of political economists, except perhaps in the form of illusorily advocating the cure of some *partial effects* of the capitalistic alienation of labour which is idealised by them, as a system, as man's “necessary” and “natural” mode of existence. And this is why the attitude of political economists to alienation must remain, on the whole, one that cannot be called other than “uncritical positivism”.

Hegel supersedes, to some extent, this contradiction of political economy, by conceiving activity in general as the absolute condition of historical genesis. Paradoxically, however, he destroys his own achievements, reproducing the contradictions of political economy at another level. Insofar as he considers “activity” as the absolute condition of historical genesis, logically prior to the form of externalisation, he can – indeed he must – raise

the question of an “*Aufhebung*” of alienation; for the latter arises in opposition to the original direct unity of the “Absolute” with itself. Since, however, he cannot distinguish, as we have seen, between the “externalised” form of activity and its “alienated” manifestations, and since it is inconceivable to negate “externalisation” without negating the absolute condition: activity itself, his concept of “*Aufhebung*” cannot be other than an abstract, imaginary negation of alienation as objectification. Thus Hegel, in the end, assigns the same characteristic of untranscendable absoluteness and universality to the alienated form of objectification as to activity itself and therefore he conceptually nullifies the possibility of an actual supersession of alienation. (It goes without saying that a form, or *some* form of *externalisation* – i.e. objectification itself – is as absolute a condition of development as activity itself: a non-externalised, non-objectified activity is a non-activity. In this sense *some kind* of mediation of the absolute ontological condition of man's interchange with nature is an equally absolute necessity. The question is, however, whether this mediation is in *agreement* with the objective ontological character of productive activity as the fundamental condition of human existence or *alien* to it, as in the case of capitalistic second order mediations.)

Marx draws the conceptual line of demarcation between Labour as “*Lebensäußerung*” (manifestation of life) and as “*Lebentäußerung*” (alienation of life). Labour is “*Lebentäußerung*” when “I work in order to live, in order to produce a means to living, but my work itself is not living”, i.e. my activity is forced upon me “by an external necessity” instead of being motivated by a need corresponding to an “inner necessity” [[Comments on James Mill](#)]

In the same way, Marx makes the distinction between an *adequate* mediation of man with man on the one hand and “*alienated* mediation” of human activity through the intermediary of things on the other hand. In the second type of mediation – “in the alienation of the *mediating activity itself*” (*indem der Mensch diese vermittelnde Tätigkeit selbst entäußert*) – man is active as a “dehumanised man” (*entmenschter Mensch*). Thus human productive activity is under the rule of “an *alien mediator*” (*fremder Mittler*) – “instead of *man himself* being the *mediator for man*” (*statt dass der Mensch selbst der Mittler für den Menschen sein sollte*) and consequently labour assumes the form of an “*alienated mediation*” (*entäußerte Vermittlung*) of human productive activity.”

Formulated in these terms, the question of “*Aufhebung*” ceases to be an imaginary “act of the “Subject” and becomes a concrete, practical issue for real man. This conception envisages the supersession of alienation through the abolition of “alienated mediation” (i.e. of capitalistically institutionalised second order mediation), through the liberation of labour from its reified subjection to the power of things, to “external necessity”, and through the conscious enhancing of man's “inner need” for being humanly active and finding fulfilment for the powers inherent in him in his productive activity itself as well as in the human enjoyment of the non-alienated products of his activity.”

With the elaboration of these concepts – which fully master the mystifying complexity of alienation that defeated no less a dialectician than Hegel himself – Marx's system in *statu nascendi* is virtually brought to its accomplishment. His radical ideas concerning the world of alienation and the conditions of its supersession are now coherently synthesised within the general outlines of a monumental, comprehensive vision. Much remains, of course, to be further elaborated in all its complexity, for the task undertaken is “*Titanenartig*”. But all further concretisations and modifications of Marx's conception – including some major discoveries of the older Marx – are

realised on the conceptual basis of the great philosophical achievements so clearly in evidence in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*.

3. Conceptual Structure of Marx's Theory of Alienation

1. Foundations of the Marxian System

LEGENDS are easily invented and difficult to dispose of. An empty balloon (sheer ignorance of all the relevant evidence) and a lot of hot air (mere wishful thinking) is enough to get them off the ground, while the persistence of wishful thinking amply supplies the necessary fuel of propulsion for their fanciful flight. We shall discuss at some length, in the chapter which deals with *The Controversy about Marx*, the main legends associated with the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. At this point, however, we have to deal, briefly, with a legend that occupies a less prominent place in the various interpretations in an explicit form, but which has none the less, a major theoretical importance for an adequate assessment of Marx's work as a whole.

The Manuscripts of 1844, as we have seen, lay down the foundations of the Marxian system, centred on the concept of alienation. Now the legend in question claims that Lenin had no awareness of this concept and that it played no part in the elaboration of his own theories. (In the eyes of many dogmatists this alleged fact itself is, of course, ample justification for labelling the concept of alienation "idealist".)

If Lenin had really missed out Marx's critique of capitalistic alienation and reification – his analysis of "alienation of labour" and its necessary corollaries – he would have missed out the core of Marx's theory: the *basic* idea of the Marxian system.

Needless to say, nothing could be further from the truth than this alleged fact. Indeed the very opposite is the case: for in Lenin's development as a Marxist his grasp of the concept of alienation in its true significance played a vital role.

It is an irrefutable fact that all of Lenin's important theoretical works – including his critique of *Economic Romanticism* as well as his book on *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* – postdate his detailed *Conspectus of The Holy Family*, written in 1895. The central ideas expressed in this *Conspectus* in the form of comments remained in the centre of Lenin's ideas in his subsequent writings. Unfortunately there is no space here to follow the development of Lenin's thought in any detail. We must content ourselves with focusing attention on a few points which are directly relevant to the subject of discussion.

It is of the greatest significance in this connection that in his *Conspectus of The Holy Family* Lenin quotes a long passage from this early work and comments upon it as follows:

"This passage is highly characteristic, for it shows how Marx approached the *basic idea of his entire 'system'*, *sit venia verbo*, namely *the concept of the social relations of production*.

Little matters whether or not one puts, half-apologetically, in inverted commas the word “system”. (Lenin, understandably, had to do this because of the customary polemical references to “system-building”, associated, in Marxist literature, with the Hegelian philosophy. Besides, he was writing the *Conspectus* of a book highly critical of the Hegelian system and of the uses to which it had been put by the members of “The Holy Family”.) What is vitally important in this connection is the fact that “the basic idea of Marx's entire system” – “the concept of the social relations of production” is precisely his concept of alienation, i.e. the Marxian critical demystification of the system of “labour's self-alienation”, of “human self-alienation”, of “the practically alienated relation of man to his objective essence”, etc., as Lenin correctly recognised it. This we can clearly see if we read the passage to which Lenin's comment refers:

“Proudhon's desire to abolish non-owning and the old form of owning is exactly identical to his desire to abolish the *practically alienated relation of man to his objective essence*, to abolish the political-economic expression of human *self-alienation*. Since, however, his criticism of political economy is still bound by the premises of political economy, the reappropriation of the objective world is still conceived in the political-economic form of possession. Proudhon indeed does not oppose owning to non-owning, as Critical Criticism makes him do, but possession to the old form of owning, to private property. He declares possession to be a 'social function'. In a function, 'interest' is not directed however toward the 'exclusion' of another, but toward setting into operation and realising my own powers, the powers of my being. Proudhon did not succeed in giving this thought appropriate development. The concept of 'equal possession' is a political-economic one and therefore itself still an *alienated expression* for the principle that the object as being for man, as the objective being of man, is at the same time the existence of man for other men, *his human relation to other men, the social behaviour of man in relation to man*. Proudhon abolishes political-economic *estrangement* within political-economic *estrangement*.”

Those who are sufficiently acquainted with the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* will not fail to recognise that these ideas come from the *Paris Manuscripts*. In fact not only these pages but many more in addition to them had been transferred by Marx from his *1844 Manuscripts into The Holy Family*. The Russian Committee in charge of publishing the collected works of Marx, Engels and Lenin – the same Committee which finds “idealist” the *Manuscripts of 1844* – acknowledged in a note to Lenin's *Conspectus of The Holy Family* that Marx “considerably increased the initially conceived size of the book by incorporating in his chapters parts of his economic and philosophical manuscripts on which he had worked during the spring and summer of 1844 Lenin could not read, of course, Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844*, but in his *Conspectus of The Holy Family* he quoted a number of important passages, in addition to the one on Proudhon, which originated in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and which deal with the problematics of alienation.”

If, then, Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844* are idealistic, so must be Lenin's praise of their central concept – incorporated from them into *The Holy Family* – as “the basic idea of Marx's entire system”. And this is not the worst part of the story yet. For Lenin goes on praising this work (see his article on Engels) not only for containing “the *foundations of revolutionary materialist socialism*” but also for being written “*In the name of a real, human person*”. Thus Lenin seems to “capitulate” not only to “idealism”, confounding it with revolutionary materialist socialism”, *but – horrible dictu – to “humanism”* as well.

Needless to say, this “humanism” of writing “in the name of a real, human person” is simply the expression of the “standpoint of labour” that characterises the *Manuscripts of 1844*. It expresses – in explicit polemics against the fictitious entities of idealist philosophy – the critically adopted standpoint of “the worker, trampled down by the ruling classes and the state”;... the standpoint of the proletariat in its opposition to the “propertied class” which “feels happy and confirmed in this self-alienation, it recognises as its own power”, whereas “the class of the proletariat feels annihilated in its self-alienation; it sees in it its own powerlessness and *the reality* of an *inhuman existence*”. This is what Lenin, and Marx, had in mind when they spoke of the “real, human person”. However, no amount of textual evidence is likely to make an impression on those who, instead of really “reading Marx” (or Lenin, for that matter), prefer reading into the classics of Marxist thought their own legends, representing – under the veil of a high-sounding verbal radicalism – the sterile dogmatism of bureaucratic-conservative wishful thinking.

As Lenin had brilliantly perceived, the central idea of Marx's system is his critique of the capitalistic reification of the social relations of production, the alienation of labour through the reified mediations of Wage Labour, Private Property and Exchange.

Indeed Marx's general conception of the historical genesis and alienation of the social relations of production, together with his analysis of the objective ontological conditions of a necessary supersession of alienation and reification, constitute a system in the best sense of the term. This system is not *less but* more rigorous than the philosophical systems of his predecessors, including Hegel; which means that any omission of even one of its constituent parts is bound to distort the *whole* picture, not just one particular aspect of it. Also, the Marxian system is not *less but* far more complex than the Hegelian one; for it is one thing ingeniously to invent the logically appropriate “mediations” between “thought-entities”, but quite another to identify in reality the complex intermediary links of the multifarious social phenomena, to find the laws that govern their institutionalisations and transformations into one another, the laws that determine their relative “fixity” as well as their “dynamic changes”, to demonstrate all this in reality, at all levels and spheres of human activity. Consequently any attempt at reading Marx not in terms of his own system but in accordance with some preconceived, platitudinous “scientific model” fashionable in our own days, deprives the Marxian system of its revolutionary meaning and “inverts it into a dead butterfly-collection of useless pseudo-scientific concepts.

It goes without saying that Marx's system is radically different from the Hegelian one. Not only as regards the opposition between the actual social phenomena, depicted by Marx, and the Hegelian “thought-entities”, but also in that the Hegelian system – due to its internal contradictions – had been *closed* and ossified by Hegel himself, whereas the Marxian system remains *open-ended*. We shall return to the discussion of this vitally important difference between a closed and an open system in the last section of this chapter. But first we have to consider the structure of the Marxian system as a whole, in order to gain a clearer understanding of its manifold complexities.

On the face of it, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* are critical commentaries on Hegel and on the theories of political economists. A closer look, however, reveals much more than that. For the critique of these theories is a vehicle for developing Marx's own ideas on a great variety of closely interconnected problems.

As has been mentioned, the system we can perceive in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* is a system in *statu nascendi*. This can be recognised, above all, in the fact that the basic ontological dimension of labour's self-alienation does not appear in its universality until the very end of this work, i.e. in the section on *money*. As a matter of fact this section had been written *after* Marx's critical examination of the Hegelian philosophy in the same manuscript, although in the published versions the latter is put to the end (in accordance with Marx's wishes). And this is by no means a negligible point of chronological detail. Indeed Marx's profound assessment of the Hegelian philosophy as a whole – made possible by his analysis of political economy which enabled him to recognise that “Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy” puts into Marx's hands the key to unlocking the ultimate ontological secret of the “money-system”, thus enabling him to embark on a comprehensive elaboration of a materialist dialectical theory of value. (Compare this part of the *Manuscripts of 1844*, in concreteness as well as in comprehensiveness notwithstanding its limited size, with a work that tackles the same problematics: Marx's *Comments on James Mill's Elements of Political Economy*, written shortly before his *Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole*, probably in May or June 1844.) It is by no means accidental that a substantial part of these pages on *The Power of Money* had been subsequently incorporated by Marx in his *Capital*.

But even if this general ontological dimension of labour's self-alienation is not rendered explicit until the very end of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, it is implicitly there, though of course at a lower level of generalisation, almost right from the beginning. At first it is present in this system in *statu nascendi* only as a vague intuition and, accordingly, Marx's method of analysis is more *reactive than positive* and self-sustaining : he lets his hand be guided by the problematics of the immediate subject of his criticism, namely the writings of political economists.

As his insights accumulate (through his gradual realisation that the partial aspects: “worker as a commodity”, “abstract labour”, “one-sided, machine-like labour”, “earth estranged from man”, “stored-up human labour = dead capital”, etc. point in the same direction) the originally adopted framework proves to be hopelessly narrow and Marx casts it aside.

From the discussion of *Estranged Labour* onwards Marx follows a different plan : the centre of reference of every single issue is now the concept of “alienated labour” as the “essential connection” between the whole range of estrangements “and the money-system”. And yet, although this programme is there in the last section of the first manuscript, it is not fully realised until the very end of the third manuscript. In this latter Marx is able at last to demystify the “money-system” – this ultimate mediator of all alienated mediations, this “pimp between man's need and the object, between his life and his means of life”, this “visible divinity” was “the alienated ability of mankind”, as “the external, common medium and faculty of turning an image into reality and reality into a mere image (a faculty not springing from man as man or from human society as society)”, as “the existing and *active concept of value ... the general confounding and compounding of all things* – the world upside down ... the *fraternisation of impossibilities*” which “*makes contradictions embrace*”. And all this in the context of explaining the “truly *ontological* affirmations of essential being (of nature)”, “the *ontological* essence of human passion”, and “the existence of essential objects for man, both as objects of *enjoyment* and as objects of *activity*”.

Thus Marx's system in *statu nascendi* is accomplished when he clearly realises that although the money-system reaches its climax with the

capitalistic mode of production, its innermost nature cannot be understood in a limited historical context but in the broadest ontological framework of man's development through his labour, i.e. through the ontological self-development of labour via the necessary intermediaries involved in its necessary self-alienation and reification at a determinate stage (or stages) of its process of self-realisation.

2. Conceptual Framework of Marx's Theory of Alienation

The difficulties of Marx's discourse in his *Manuscripts* of 1844 are not due merely to the fact that this is a system *in statu nascendu* in which the same problems are taken up over and over again, at an increasingly higher level of complexity, in accordance with the emergence and growing concretisation of Marx's vision as a whole – though of course this is one of the main reasons why people often find this work prohibitively complicated. Some of its major difficulties, however, are inherent in Marx's method in general and in the objective characteristics of his subject of analysis.

Marx investigates both the *historical* and the *systematic-structural* aspects of the problematics of alienation in relation to the dual complexities of “real life” and its “resections” in the various forms of thought. Thus he analyses:

1. the manifestations of labour's self-alienation in reality, together with the various institutionalisations, reifications and mediations involved in such a practical self-alienation, i.e. Wage Labour, Private Property, Exchange, Money, Rent, Profit, Value, etc., etc.;
2. the reflections of these alienations through religion, philosophy, law, political economy, art, “abstractly material” science, etc.;
3. the interchanges and reciprocities between (1) and (2); for “the gods in the beginning are not the cause but the effect of man's intellectual confusion. Later this relationship becomes reciprocal;
4. the inner dynamism of any particular phenomenon, or field of enquiry, in its development from a lesser to a higher complexity;
5. the structural interrelations of the various social phenomena with each other (of which the reciprocity between (1) and (2) is only a specific type) as well as the historical genesis and renewed dialectical transformation of this whole system of manifold interrelations;
6. a further complication is that Marx analyses the particular theories themselves in their concrete historical embeddedness, in addition to investigating their structural relations to each other at a particular time (e.g. Adam Smith the political economist compared to Adam Smith the moral philosopher; at the same time the types of answers given by Adam Smith – both as an economist and as a moralist – are situated historically, in relation to the development of capitalism in general).

As we can see, then, the main difficulties we experience in reading the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, with the exception of those due to their being a system in *statu nascendi*, are expressions of Marx's efforts directed at adequately dealing with the mystifying complexities of his subject of analysis on the basis of concrete empirical enquiry in place of mere philosophical abstraction.

In the course of his analysis of the various theoretical reflections of actual human self-alienation Marx makes the general point that:

“It stems from the very nature of estrangement that each sphere applies to me a *different and opposite yardstick* – ethics one and political economy another; for each is a specific estrangement of man and focuses attention on a *particular round of estranged essential activity*, and each stands in an *estranged relation* to the other. Thus M. Michel Chevalier reproaches Ricardo with having abstracted from ethics. But Ricardo is allowing political economy to speak its own language, and if it does not speak ethically, this is not Ricardo's fault”.

Thus he emphasises that the contradictions we encounter in these fields are necessarily inherent in the structural relation of the various disciplines of thought to each other and to a common determinant which paradoxically makes them oppose each other. But how is such a paradoxical relationship possible? How does this double alienation come about?

Before we can make an attempt at elucidating Marx's enigmatic answers to these far from easy questions, we have to embark on a journey back to some fundamentals of Marx's discourse.

Marx's immediate problem is: why is there such a gulf between philosophy and the natural sciences? Why does philosophy remain as alien and hostile to them as they remain to philosophy? This opposition is absurd because:

“natural science has invaded and transformed human life all the more practically through the medium of industry; and has prepared human emancipation, however directly and much it had to consummate dehumanisation. Industry is the actual historical relation of nature, and therefore of natural science, to man. If, therefore, industry is conceived as the exoteric revelation of man's essential powers, we also gain an understanding of the human essence of nature or the natural essence of man. In consequence, natural science will lose its *abstractly material* rather, its *idealistic-tendency*, and will become the *basis of human science*, as it has already become the basis of actual human life, albeit in an estranged form. One basis for life and another basis for science is *a priori* a lie. The nature which comes to be in human history – the genesis of human society – is man's real nature; hence nature as it comes to be *through industry*, even though in an *estranged* form, is true *anthropological nature*”.

From this quotation it becomes clear that in his criticism of philosophy Marx is not led by some misconceived ideal of remodelling philosophy on natural science. Indeed he sharply criticises both philosophy and the natural sciences. The first for being “speculative” and the latter for being “abstractly material” and “idealistic”. In Marx's view both philosophy and the natural sciences are manifestations of the same estrangement. (The terms “abstractly material” and “idealistic” indicate that natural science is now “in an estranged form” the basis of “actual human life”, because of the fact that it is necessarily interconnected with an alienated form of industry, corresponding to an alienated mode of production, to an alienated form of productive

activity.) This is why Marx opposes to *both* “speculative philosophy” and to “abstractly material, idealistic natural science” his ideal of a “*human science*”.

What Marx means by “human science” is a science of concrete synthesis, integrated with real life. Its standpoint is the ideal of non-alienated man whose *actual* human – as opposed to both “speculatively invented” and to practically dehumanised, “abstractly material” – needs determine the line of research in every particular field. The achievements of the particular fields – guided right from the beginning by the common frame of reference of a non-fragmented “human science” – are then brought together into a higher synthesis which in its turn determines the subsequent lines of investigations in the various fields.

This conception of “human science”, in its opposition to abstractly material and idealistic” natural science, is obviously directed against the fragmentation and “unconscious”, alienated determination of science. Many instances of the history of science testify that the extent to which certain fundamental lines of research are carried out are greatly determined by factors which lie, strictly speaking, far beyond the boundaries of natural science itself. (To take a topical example : there can be no doubt whatever that *automation* is at least as fundamentally a *social* problem as a *scientific* one.) The lines of research actually followed through in any particular age are necessarily finite whereas the lines of *possible* research are always virtually infinite. The role of social needs and preferences in scaling down the infinite to the finite is extremely important. However – and this is the point Marx is making – in an alienated society the process of scaling down itself, since it is “unconsciously” determined by a set of alienated needs, is bound to produce further alienation : the subjection of man to increasingly more powerful instruments of his own making. , The structure of scientific production is basically the same as that of fundamental productive activity in general (all the more because the two merge into one another to a considerable extent): a lack of control of the productive process as a whole; an “unconscious” and fragmented mode of activity determined by the inertia of the institutionalised framework of the capitalistic mode of production; the functioning of “abstractly material” science as a mere *means* to predetermined, external, alienated ends. Such an alienated natural science finds itself between the Scylla and Charibdis of its “autonomy” (i.e. the idealisation of its “unconscious”, fragmentary character) and its subordination as a mere *means* to external, alien ends (i.e. gigantic military and quasi-military programmes, such as lunar flights). Needless to say, the subjection of natural science as a mere means to alien ends is by no means accidental but necessarily connected with its fragmented, “autonomous” character, and, of course, with the structure of alienated productive activity in general. Since science develops in a fragmented, compartmentalised framework, it cannot conceivably have overall aims which, therefore, have to be imposed on it from outside.

Philosophy, on the other hand, expresses a twofold alienation of the sphere of speculative thinking (1) from all practice – including the, however alienated, practice of natural science – and (2) from other theoretical fields, like political economy, for instance. In its speculative “universality” philosophy becomes an “end in itself” and “for itself”, fictitiously opposed to the realm of means: an abstract reflection of the institutionalised alienation of means from ends. As a radical separation from all other modes of activity philosophy appears to its representatives as the only form of “species-activity”, i.e. as the only form of activity worthy of man as a “universal being”. Thus instead of being a universal dimension of all activity, integrated in practice and in its various reflections, it functions as an independent (“*verselbständigt*”) “alienated universality”, displaying the absurdity of this whole system of alienations by the fact that this fictitious “universality” is

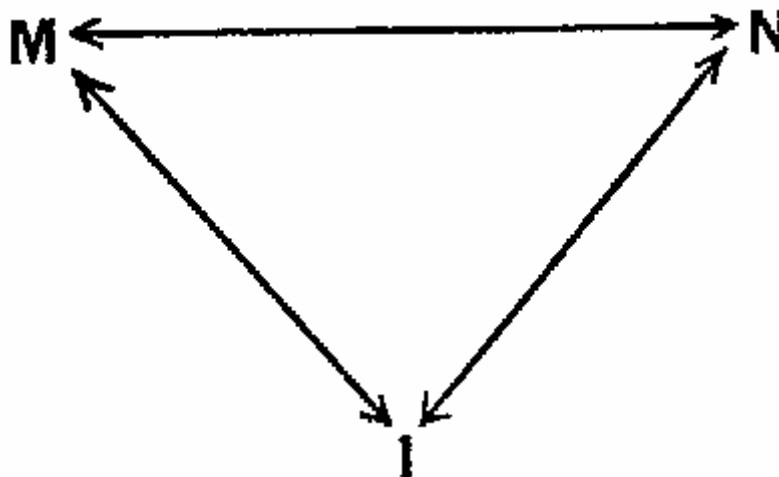
realised as the most esoteric of all esoteric *specialities*, strictly reserved for the alienated “high priests” (the “*Eingeweihten*”) of this intellectual trade.

If the “abstractly material” character of the particular natural sciences is linked to a productive activity fragmented and devoid of perspectives, the “abstractly contemplative” character of philosophy expresses the radical divorce of theory and practice in its alienated universality. They represent two sides of the same coin: labour's self-alienation manifest in a mode of production characterised by Marx and Engels as “the unconscious condition of mankind”.

This takes us back to our original problem. Why is it that the different theoretical spheres apply “a different and opposite yardstick” to man? How is it possible that though both philosophy and political economy express the same alienation, their “language” is so different that they cannot communicate with each other?

In order to simplify these matters to some extent, let us try and illustrate, however schematically, the structural interrelationship of the principal concepts involved in Marx's theory of alienation. (Schematic illustrations of this kind are always problematical because they have to express in a fixed, “two-dimensional” form the complexity of dynamic interchanges. It must be stressed, therefore, that they are not meant to be substitutes for an adequate conceptual understanding – but merely a visual aid towards it.)

The fundamental terms of reference in Marx's theory of alienation are “man” (M), “nature” (N), and “industry” or “productive activity” (I). For an understanding of “the human essence of nature or the natural essence of man” the concept of “Productive activity” (or “industry”, used from now on for the sake of brevity) is of a crucial importance. “Industry” is both the *cause* of the growing complexity of human society (by creating new needs while satisfying old ones: “the first historical act is the *production of new needs*” and the *means* of asserting the supremacy of man – as “universal being” who is at the same time a unique “specific being” – over nature. In considering Marx's views we have to remember that when he applies the term “actual” (*wirklich*) to man he either equates it with “historical”, or simply implies historicity as a necessary condition of the human predicament. He wants to account for every aspect of the analysed phenomena in inherently historical terms, which means that nothing can be taken for granted and simply assumed as an ultimate datum. On the contrary, the whole theory hinges on the proof of the historical *genesis* of all its basic constituents. Accordingly, Marx pictures the relationship between “man” (M), “nature” (N), and “industry” (I) in the form of a *threefold interaction* between its constituent parts. This can be illustrated as follows:

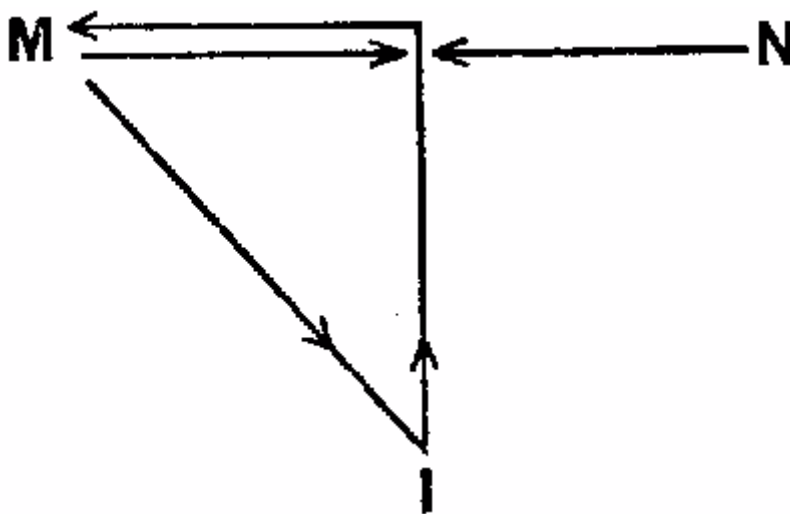


As we can see, here we have a dialectical *reciprocity* (indicated by the double-ended arrows) between all three members of this relationship which means that “man” is not only the *creator of industry* but also its *product*. (Similarly, of course, he is both product and creator of “truly anthropological nature” – above all in himself, but also outside him, insofar as he leaves his mark on nature. And since man's relation to nature is mediated through an alienated form of productive activity, “anthropological nature” outside man bears the marks of this alienation in an ever-extending form, graphically demonstrated by the intensity of *pollution* that menaces the very existence of mankind.)

Talking about this process of reciprocal interaction, Marx calls it the “genesis of human society”. At the same time he designates the two main aspects of industry's fundamental (first order) mediating function by the expressions “natural essence of man” and “human essence of nature”. His expression : “man's real nature – as opposed to man's biological or animal nature – is meant to embrace both aspects and thus to define *human nature* in terms of a necessarily *threefold* relationship of dialectical reciprocity. Man's biological or animal nature, by contrast, can only be defined in terms of a *two-fold* relationship, or, to put it the other way round, picturing the basic ontological situation merely in terms of a twofold relationship, between “Man” and “Nature”, would only account for the characteristics of man's biological-animal nature. For human consciousness implies already a specific human relation to “industry” (taken in its most general sense as “productive activity”). One of the basic contradictions of theories which idealise *the unmediated* reciprocity between “Man” and “Nature” is that they get themselves into the impasse of this animal relationship from which not a single feature of the dynamism of human history can be derived. Then, in an attempt to get rid of this contradiction – in order to be able to account for the specifically human characteristics – they are forced to assume a “ready-made human nature”, with all the *a priorism* and *theological teleologism* that necessarily go with such a conception of philosophy.

Rousseau's conception, *mutates mutandis*, belongs to the latter category, though in a paradoxical way. For in the most generic terms Rousseau is aware of the ludicrous character of idealising nature. He stresses that: “he who wants to preserve, in civil society, the primacy of natural feelings, has no idea of what he wants. Always standing in contradiction to himself, always oscillating between his inclinations and his duties, he will be neither a man nor a *citoyen*; he will be good neither for himself nor for others. He will be one of those people of our race; a Frenchman, an Englishman, a *bourgeois*: a *nothing*. And yet, this insight never induces Rousseau to elaborate a genuinely historical account of man and his relationships. On the contrary, despite his insights he continues to operate with the fictitious notion of

“preserving man's original constitution”.” (It must be emphasised that his idealisation of a – hierarchical – family as the *anthropological model* of “natural” relation opposed to the system which produces an “artificial being” – proves to be a major drawback in his analyses.) Even if he recognises the irrevocable remoteness of the “original” direct unity – in Hegelian terms the inherently past character of “*Er-innerung*” as opposed to the *present* actuality of “*Ent-äusserung*” – he continues, unlike Hegel, to postulate it, often in a negative form, in his sentimental negation of “civilisation”. In Rousseau's conception “industry” (civilisation) exercises an essentially disruptive function, by putting an end to a “natural” relationship. Such an interpretation may enable the philosopher to grasp certain contradictions of a given stage of society, but it does not allow him to indicate a solution that could stand the test of actual historical development. “Industry” (civilisation) comes into the picture as something “evil”, even if Rousseau recognises, nostalgically, that it cannot be done away with. Thus his system, at its very foundations, is profoundly *ahistorical*. It can be illustrated in contrast to Marx's conception as follows:



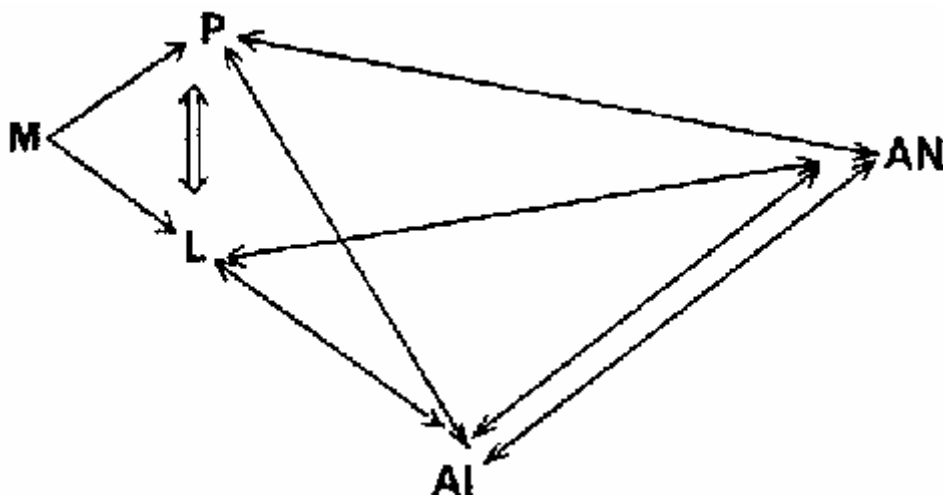
As we can see, there is a kind of “short circuit” in this account, and the one-sided interaction between man and industry results in the tragic negativity of divorcing or alienating man from nature. (It would be interesting to inquire into the relationship between Rousseau's conception of man and nature and the Kantian notion of “*das Böse*” – “evil” – and in general the Kantian philosophy of history, its tragic vision of man.) Since the fundamental ontological relations are pictured by Rousseau in these terms, his educational ideal of preserving the “original” substance of humanness by cultivating the “naturally good” in man, is bound to remain not only utopian but also tragically hopeless. The “short-circuit” produces a “vicious circle” which cannot be broken except by the unwarranted assumption of a “ready-made” educator. Rousseau himself is conscious of the problematic character of such a construction but, given his fundamental concepts, he cannot do anything against it. “The more we reflect the more we recognise the growing difficulties. For the educator *ought to have been* educated for his pupil; the servants ought to have been educated for their masters, so that all those who are in the pupil's vicinity would communicate to him the right things; one should go backwards from education to education up to I do not know which point. Otherwise how could one expect the proper education of a child from someone who himself had not been properly educated? Is it impossible to find such a rare mortal? [An adequately educated educator.] I do not know. In this age of moral decadence who knows the height of virtue of which the human soul is still capable? But *let us assume* that we have found this prodigy. From considering what he *ought* to do we can find out what he *ought to be* like.

Being is thus derived from *ought* in order to serve as the pivotal point of this whole system of postulates opposed to the actuality of “civilisation”. Since the foundation of all historicity – which is also the only possible ground of an “education of the educator” – is negated, the educator must be fictitiously assumed and assigned the unreal function of protecting the “natural being” from the temptations of civilisation, money, sophistication, etc., thus educationally rescuing him from the perspectives of becoming an “artificial being”. The tragic utopianism of this whole approach is manifest in the all-pervasive contradiction that while Rousseau *negates the* ontologically fundamental mediation of man and nature through “industry” (not only in his explicit polemics against “civilisation” but primarily by postulating “natural man”) he positively affirms the alienated mediations of this mediation (1) by idealising the alleged anthropological primacy of a rigidly hierarchical family; (2) by postulating an – equally hierarchical – system of education in which “the servant is educated for the master”, and “everyone is educated for his own station” etc., and in which the educator is miraculously “set above” the rest of society; and (3) by asserting the atemporal nature and ideal necessity of the capitalistically institutionalised second order mediations – “fair and advantageous exchange”, the eternal permanence of “meum” and “tuum”, etc. as we have seen already. No wonder, therefore, that the overall impression of Rousseau's conception is a *static* one, adequately expressed in the tragic pathos of a revolt condemned to inertia and impotence. A pathos expressing the unfavourable configuration of a set of contradictions, perceived and depicted from a specific socio-historical standpoint by this great philosopher and writer.

Marx's approach is radically different. He is not talking simply about man's alienation from “nature” as such, but about man's alienation from his own nature, from “anthropological nature” (both within and outside man). This very concept of “man's own nature” *necessarily implies* the ontologically fundamental self-mediation of man with nature through his own productive (and self-producing) activity. Consequently “industry” (or “productive activity”) as such, acquires an essentially *positive* connotation in the Marxian conception, rescuing man from the theological dilemma of “the fall of man”.

If such an essentially positive role is assigned to “industry” in the Marxian conception, how then can we explain “alienation” as “self-alienation”, i.e. as the “alienation of labour”, as the “alienation of human powers from man through his own productive activity”.

To anticipate, briefly, the central topic of the next chapter insofar as is necessary in this connection, let us draw up a comparative diagram. Let (M) stand for “man”, (P) for “private property and its owner”, (L) for “wage labour and the worker”, (AN) for “alienated nature”, and (AI) for “alienated industry” or “alienated productive activity”, then we can illustrate the changed relationships as follows:



Here, as a result of “labour's self-alienation” – the objectification of productive activity in the form of “alienated labour” (or “estranged essential activity”, to use another of Marx's expressions) – we have a multiplicity of basic interrelations

- (1) (M) is split into (P) and (L);
- (2) (P) and (L) antagonistically oppose each other;
- (3) the original (M) □ (I) □ (N) reciprocity is transformed into the alienated interrelationships
 - (a) (P) □ (AI) □ (AN) and
 - (b) (L) □ (AI) □ (AN).

Furthermore, since now everything is subordinated to the basic antagonism between (P) and (L), we have the additional alienated interrelations of

- (4) (P) □ (L) □ (AI) and
- (5) (P) □ (L) □ (AN).

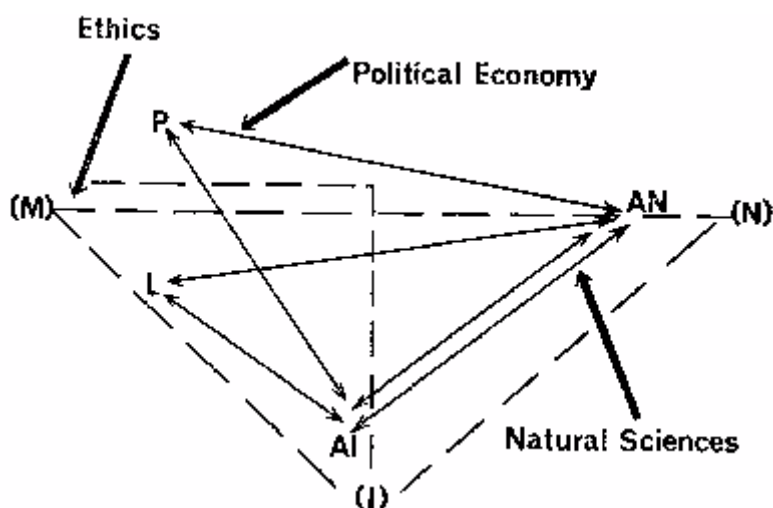
In these sets of relationships in which the second order mediations of (P) and (L) have taken the place of “man” (M), the concepts of “man” and “mankind” may appear to be mere philosophical abstractions to all those who cannot see beyond the direct immediacy of the given alienated relations. (And they are indeed abstractions if they are not considered in terms of the socio-historically concrete forms of alienation which they assume.) The disappearance of “man” from the picture, his practical suppression through the second order mediations of (P) and (L) – (we had to omit the other institutionalised second order mediations, e.g. EXCHANGE, MONEY, etc., partly because they are already implied in (P) and (L), and partly in order to simplify the basic interrelations as far as possible) – means not only that there is a *split* now at every link of these alienated relationships but also that LABOUR can be considered as a mere “material fact”, instead of being appreciated as the human agency of production.

The problem of the reflection of this “reification” in the various theoretical fields is inseparable from this double mediation, i.e. from the “mediation of the mediation”. The political economist gives a “reified”, “fetishistic” account of the actual social relations of production when, from the standpoint of idealised Private Property (P) he treats Labour (L) as a mere material fact of

production and fails to relate both (P) and (L) to “man” (M). (When Adam Smith, as Marx observes, starts to take “man” into account, he leaves immediately the ground of political economy and shifts to the speculative viewpoint of ethics.)

Now we are in a better position for understanding Marx's assertion according to which each theoretical sphere applies a different, indeed opposite yardstick to man, and “each stands in an estranged relation to the other”. For if the foundation of theoretical generalisations is not the fundamental ontological relationship of (M) □ (I) □ (N) but its *alienated form*: the reified “mediation of the mediation” – i.e. (M) □ (P) □ (L) □ (AI) □ (AN) then political economy, for instance, which directly identifies itself with the standpoint of private property, is bound to formulate its discourse in terms of (P) and (L), whereas ethics, in accordance with its own position which coincides only *indirectly* with “the standpoint of political economy” (i.e. the standpoint of private property), will speculatively oppose the abstract concept of “Man” to (P) and (L). The fact that both disciplines approach, from different – though only methodologically, not socially different – points of view, the same complex phenomenon, remains hidden from the representatives of both speculative, moralising philosophy and empiricist political economy.

We could illustrate the respective positions of Ethics, Political Economy, and the “abstractly material” Natural Sciences in relation to the alienated and reified social relations of production like this:



As we can see, the “language” of Political Economy and Ethics – not to mention the Natural Sciences – cannot be common because their central points of reference are far from being the same. Political Economy's points of reference are (P) □ (AN) □ (L) and (P) □ (AI) □ (AN), whereas Ethics (and, *mutatis mutandis*, speculative philosophy in general) has for its centre of reference abstract “Man” (or its even more abstract versions, like “World Spirit” etc.), depicted in his relations with “Nature” and “Industry” or “Civilisation” more often than not in a Rousseau-like fashion, with all the a priorism and transcendentalism involved in it. (The points of reference of the Natural Sciences are, of course, (AN) and (AI), in their dual orientation towards nature, or “basic research”, on the one hand, and towards productive technology, or “applied science”, on the other. Intensified “alienation of nature” – e.g. *pollution* – is unthinkable without the most active participation of the Natural Sciences in this process. They receive their tasks from “alienated industry”, in the form of capitalistic “targets of production” – i.e. targets subordinated to the “blind natural laws” of the market –

irrespective of the ultimate human implications and repercussions of the realisation of such tasks.)

Moreover, as Marx emphasises, the idealisation of abstract “Man” is nothing but an alienated, speculative expression of the (P) □ (L) relationship. The nature of the actual relationships is such that adequately to comprehend them it is necessary to assume a radically critical attitude towards the system of alienations which “externalises” (or “objectifies”) man in the form of “alienated labour” and “reified private property”. “Real man” – the “real, human person” – does not actually exist in a capitalist society except in the alienated and reified form in which we encounter him as “Labour” and “Capital” (Private Property) antagonistically opposing each other. Consequently the “affirmation” of “man” must proceed via the *negation* of the alienated social relations of production. Speculative philosophy, however, does not *negate the* (P) □ (L) □ (AI) □ (AN) relationship but merely *abstracts from* it. And through its abstract concept of “Man” which ignores the basic antagonism of society : the actuality of (P) □ (L), speculative philosophy depicts the alienated social relations of production – in accordance with its own specific ideological function – in a “sublimated” fashion, transforming the “palpable reality” of actual social contradictions into a fictitious, and *a priori* insoluble, opposition between the “realm of here and now” and its “transcendental” counterpart,

It is clear from the Marxian account that the various theoretical spheres reflect – in a necessarily alienated form, corresponding to a set of specific alienated needs – the actual alienation and reification of the social relations of production. They all focus attention “on a particular round of estranged essential activity” (i.e. political economy on the reproduction of the economic cycle of production; speculative philosophy on “spiritual activity” and on the norms regulating human behaviour, in its most general terms; and the “abstractly material” natural sciences on the conditions of a direct interchange between man and nature) and they stand “in an estranged relation to each other”.

Since neither political economy nor speculative philosophy have a real awareness of the social dynamism inherent in the antagonism between private property and labour – and precisely because they cannot possibly recognise the objective character of this antagonism as one “hastening to its annulment” – their systems must remain *static*, corresponding to the necessarily ahistorical standpoint of private property which they represent, directly or indirectly. Viewed from such a standpoint they can only perceive – at best – *the subjective* aspect of this basic contradiction : the direct clash of individuals over “goods” or “property”, but they cannot grasp the *social necessity* of such clashes. Instead they either interpret them as manifestations of “egoistic human nature” – which amounts to an actual defence of the position of private property under the semblance of a “moral condemnation” of “human egoism” – or, more recently, treat these clashes as problems of a “lack of communication”, as tasks for a “human engineering”, aiming at devising methods for a minimisation of “conflicts about property”, in order to ensure the continued existence of the alienated social relations of production.

Marx, by contrast, grasps this whole complexity of interrelated concepts at their strategic centre : *the objective* social dynamism of the contradiction between Property and Labour. He recognises that “human life required private property for its realisation” because “only through developed industry – i.e. through the medium of private property – does the *ontological essence* of human passion come to be both in its totality and in its humanity”. Alienation, relocation, and their alienated reflections are therefore socio-

historically *necessary* forms of expression of a fundamental ontological relationship. This is the “positive aspect” of labour's self-alienation.

At the same time Marx emphasises the negative aspect as well. The latter is directly displayed in the social contradiction between PRIVATE PROPERTY and LABOUR: a contradiction which, however, cannot be perceived from the standpoint of private property, nor from that of a spontaneous identification with labour in its partiality, but only from the critically adopted standpoint of labour in its self-transcending universality. In Marx's eyes the increasing evidence of an irreconcilable social antagonism between private property and labour is a proof of the fact that the ontologically necessary phase of labour's self-alienation and reified self-mediation – “through the medium of private property” etc. – is drawing to its close. The intensification of the social antagonism between private property and given labour demonstrates the inner-most contradiction of the productive system and greatly contributes to its disintegration. Thus human self-objectification in the form of self-alienation loses its relative historical justification and becomes an indefensible social anachronism.

Ontological necessity cannot be realistically opposed except by another ontological necessity. Marx's line of reasoning – in stressing *the relative* (historical) necessity of self-alienation as well as the disruptive *social anachronism* of self-objectification as self-alienation at a later stage of development – establishes “*Aufhebung*” (the transcendence of alienation) as a concept denoting *ontological necessity*. Marx argues that what is at stake is the *necessity* of any actual supersession of the earlier indispensable but by now increasingly more paralysing (therefore historically untenable) reification of the social relations of production. In this respect, too, his theory brings a radical break with the views of his predecessors who could picture “transcendence” either as a mere *moral postulate* (a “*Sollen*”) or as an abstract *logical requirement* of a speculative scheme devoid of practical relevance.

As to the transcendence of alienation in the theoretical fields, it must be clear from what has been said so far that Marx's ideal of a “human science” is not meant to be a programme of remodelling philosophy and the humanities on the natural sciences. Not only because the latter are also specific forms of alienation but, above all, because we are concerned here with a practical, not with a theoretical issue. For whatever model we may have in mind as our ideal of philosophical activity, its applicability will depend on the totality of social practice which generates, in any particular socio-historical situation, the practicable intellectual needs not less than the material ones. The realisation of Marx's ideal of a “human science” presupposes, therefore, the “self-sustaining” (“*positive*”) existence of such – non-alienated – needs in the social body as a whole. Marx's formulation of the ideal itself, by contrast, corresponds to the needs of negating – under their theoretical aspects – the totality of the existing social relations of production. “Human science”, therefore, becomes a reality to the extent to which alienation is *practically* superseded and thus the totality of social practice loses its fragmented character. (In this fragmentation theory is opposed to practice and the particular fields of “estranged essential activity” – both theoretical and practical – oppose each other.) In other words, in order to realise “human science” philosophy, political economy, the “abstractly material” natural sciences, etc., must be *reciprocally integrated* among themselves, as well as with the totality of a social practice no longer characterised by the alienation and relocation of the social relations of production. For “human science” is precisely this *dual integration* - in transcendence of the earlier seen *dual alienation* of the particular theoretical fields (1) among themselves and (2) with the totality of a non-alienated social practice.

The “*übergreifendes Moment*” (overriding factor) of this complex is, of course, the supersession of alienation in social practice itself. Since, however, alienated social practice is already integrated, in an “inverted” and alienated form, with “abstractly material” science and speculative philosophy, the actual transcendence of alienation in social practice is inconceivable without superseding at the same time the alienations of the theoretical fields as well. Thus Marx conceives the actual process of “*Aufhebung*” as a *dialectical interchange* between these two poles – the theoretical and the practical – in the course of their *reciprocal integration*.

3. Alienation and Teleology

As we have seen, both “alienation” and its “*Aufhebung*” denote an ontological necessity in the Marxian system. What we have to consider now is the kind of *teleology* which is at work in the developments depicted by Marx.

Marx is often accused of “economic determinism”. He is supposed to hold the naive idea according to which economy determines, mechanically, every aspect of development. Such accusations, needless to say, cannot be taken seriously. For – as has been mentioned already – in Marx's view the first historical act of man is the *creation* of his first new need, and no mechanical determination can conceivably account for that. In Marx's dialectical conception the key concept is “human productive activity” which neither means simply “economic production”. Right from the beginning it is much more complex than that, as Marx's references to *ontology* in fact, indicate. We are concerned here with an extremely complicated structure and Marx's assertions about the ontological significance of economics become meaningful only if we are able to grasp the Marxian idea of manifold specific *mediations*, in the most varied fields of human activity, which are not simply “built upon” an economic basis but also actively *structure* the latter through the immensely intricate and relatively *autonomous* structure of their own. Only if we succeed in dialectically grasping this multiplicity of specific mediations can we really understand the Marxian notion of economics. For if economics is the “ultimate determinant”, it is also a “determined determinant” : it does not exist outside the always concrete, historically changing complex of concrete mediations, including the most “spiritual” ones. If the “demystification” of capitalistic society, because of the “fetish-character” of its mode of production and exchange, has to start from the analysis of economics, this does not mean in the least that the results of such economic enquiry can be simply transferred to other spheres and levels. Even as regards the culture, politics, law, religion, art, ethics, etc. of capitalistic society one has still to find those complex mediations, at various levels of historico-philosophical generalisation, which enable one to reach reliable conclusions both about the 'specific ideological forms in question and about the given, historically concrete form of capitalistic society as a whole. And this is even more evident if one tries to transfer the enquiry to a more general level, as becomes in 'fact necessary in the course of the structural analysis of any particular form of society, or of any specific form of human activity. One cannot grasp the “specific” without identifying its manifold interconnections with a given system of complex mediations. In other words: one must be able to see the “atemporal” (systematic) elements in temporality, and the temporal elements in the systematic factors.

“Economic determinism”, it goes without saying, negates the dialectical interrelationship between temporality and atemporality, discontinuity and continuity, history and structure. It opposes to the Marxian dialectical conception a mechanical model in which an atemporal structure of determinations prevails. (Some so-called “structuralist Marxists”, with their anti-dialectical rejection of “historicism”, are representatives of “vulgar economic determinism”, dressed in a culturally fashionable “structuralist”

cloth. It was this old trend of “vulgar economic determinism” which made Marx say a long time ago: “I am not a Marxist”.) The concept of complex *mediations* is missing from the vision of economic determinists who – however unconsciously – capitulate to “blind economic necessity” which seems to prevail through the fetish-character of capitalism, through the alienation and relocation of the social relations of production under capitalism. (The *Geisteswissenschaften* [“sciences of the Spirit”] and – *mutatis mutandis* – their modern structuralist versions are, as regards their fundamental conceptual structure, a mystified form of economic determinism “upside down”, insofar as the crucial concept of *mediation* is missing from them. They mirror the immediacy of capitalistic reification, even if in an inverted fashion, asserting the same kind of direct mechanical determinations under “spiritualised” names. Consequently they either display a rigid negation of all historicity, or invent a pseudo-history of the “Spirit”, devoid of the objective dialectical transitions and mediations which characterise a genuine historical account. Significantly enough some “Marxist structuralists” can switch with the greatest ease to and fro between the categories of the *Geisteswissenschaften* and their own pseudo-Marxist – i.e. vulgar economic determinist – concepts.)

Since both “alienation” and “*Aufhebung*” must be understood, according to Marx, in terms of ontological necessity, a correct historical conception depends on the interpretation of such necessity. Economic determinism as a historical hypothesis is a contradiction in terms because it implies the ultimate negation of history. If history means anything at all, it must be “open-ended”. An adequate historical conception must be, therefore, open to the idea of a break of the chain of – “reified”, “fetishistic”, “blind”, etc. – economic determinations. (Indeed a transcendence of alienation is inconceivable without the break of this chain.) Such an idea is, needless to say, inadmissible from the view point of economic determinism which must therefore negate history, by taking its own ahistorical standpoint for granted and by turning it into an alleged “permanent structure”.

At this point the paradoxical character of Hegel's achievements proves to be particularly instructive. Lukács, in his *History and Class Consciousness*, emphasises that: “Hegel's tremendous intellectual contribution consisted in the fact that he made *theory* and *history* dialectically relative to each other, grasped them in a dialectical, reciprocal penetration. Ultimately, however, his attempt was a failure. He could never get as far as the genuine unity of theory and practice; all that he could do was either to *fill the logical sequence* of the categories with rich historical material, or *rationalise history*, in the shape of a succession of forms, structural changes, epochs, etc., which he raised to the level of categories by *sublimating* and abstracting them.

What Lukács could not see at the time of writing *History and Class Consciousness* was the fact that the Hegelian historical conception as a whole – conceived from the necessarily ahistorical “standpoint of political economy” which carried with it the identification of “alienation” and “objectification” – had to be thoroughly ahistorical or, more exactly, pseudo-historical. For no matter how fine and sensitive were Hegel's particular historical insights, because of his ahistorical *assumptions* – i.e. “objectification” = “alienation”, etc. – he had to negate history in its totality by assigning to it an “end”, in accordance with an *a priori* “goal” It was not the case, therefore, that – in order to complete his system – Hegel inconsistently left the ground of his historical conception but right from the beginning his conception was inherently ahistorical. This is why he *had* to operate with the method of rationalising history and relativising the logical sequence of categories. And this is why he had to “deduce” a sublimated human history from the categories of thought, instead of elucidating the latter in terms of the former. (The recognition of a “humanly natural and

naturally human” agent of history – necessarily carrying with it a specific objectivity which can only be grasped in terms of a dialectical social ontology – would have prevented him from conveniently putting an end to history at the point of the . “reconciliation of the World Spirit” with capitalistic reality anticipated by the Hegelian system from the very moment of its inception.) Thus – however paradoxical this may sound despite his (abstract) programmatic criticism of “immediacy” Hegel ended up by idealising the immediacy of the fetishism of capitalism manifest in the *historically determinate* identity of capitalistic objectification and capitalistic alienation.

Human actions are not intelligible outside their socio-historical framework. But human history – in its turn is far from being intelligible without a *teleology* of some kind. If, however, the latter is of a “closed”, *aprioristic* kind – i.e. all varieties of *theological teleology* – the philosophical system which makes use of such a conception of teleology must be itself a “closed system”.

The Marxian system, by contrast, is organised in terms of an inherently historical – “open” – teleology which cannot admit “fixity” at any stage whatsoever. This we can illustrate, briefly anticipating some main points of the subsequent chapters, with reference to two Marxian assertions in particular:

(1) According to Marx all necessity is “*historical necessity*”, namely “a *disappearing necessity*” (“*eine verschwindende Notwendigkeit*”). This concept not only makes intelligible the multiple transformations and transitions of social phenomena in terms of historical *necessity* but at the same time it leaves the doors wide open as regards the future development of human society. (More about this in Chapter VIII.)

(2) The “goal” of human history is defined by Marx in terms of the *immanence* of human development (as opposed to the *a priori transcendentalism* of theological teleology), namely as the realisation of the “human essence”, of “humanness”, of the “specifically human” element, of the “universality and freedom of man”, etc. through “man's establishment of himself by practical activity” first in an alienated form, and later in a positive, self-sustaining form of life-activity established as an “inner need”. Man as the “self-mediating being of nature” must develop – through the objective dialectics of an increasingly higher complexity of human needs and aims – in accordance with the most fundamental objective laws of ontology of which – and this is vitally important – man's own active mediatory role is an essential part. Thus the Marxian system remains open because in this account the very “goal” of history is defined in inherently historical terms, and not as a fixed target. In Marx's account history remains open in accordance with the specific ontological necessity of which self-mediating human teleology is an integral part : for there can be no way of predetermining the forms and modalities of human “self-mediation” (whose complex teleological conditions can only be satisfied in the course of this self-mediation itself) except by arbitrarily reducing the complexity of human actions to the crude simplicity of mechanical determinations. Nor can there be a point in history at which we could say: now the human substance has been fully realised”. For such a fixing would deprive the human being of his essential attribute: his power of “self-mediation” and “self-development”.