

6: THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

Gajo Petrović

I. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

1. The title of this paper happens to be one of the longest, and this might be construed as indicative of the author's lack of modesty, but the author of this paper is not the author of its title; the latter was suggested by the organizers of the Notre Dame Conference. Moreover "The Philosophical and Sociological Relevance of Marx's Concept of Alienation" is not only a long title; it is also a broad topic and a big task. Shall we make it narrower in order to be able to consider it more carefully? Or rather shall we try to express our views as briefly as possible, to renounce long arguments and to restrict ourselves to stating only our main theses?

2. I feel certain that I would not have formulated the title of this paper in the same way, not merely because of its length, but even more because I feel that the question that it suggests starts from certain assumptions which I do not share. But are we simply to reject all questions involving assumptions that are unacceptable for us? Or is it more promising, from the viewpoint of a fruitful philosophical dialogue, to try to clarify and analyze the question suggested, to make explicit and, if necessary, to criticize some of the assumptions on which it rests but also to attempt to answer that part of the question which directs our attention to real and important philosophical problems?

3. The title may obviously be regarded as an abbreviated and neutralized form of the question: "What philosophical and sociological relevance, if any, belongs to (or is possessed by) Marx's concept of alienation?" And the question seems to suggest that there is such a thing as "Marx's concept of alienation" and that the content (or

meaning) of the concept is neither controversial nor unclear. In this way the title invites us to consider not Marx's concept of alienation "as such" but its philosophical and sociological relevance. It seems to leave open or to ignore the question whether there are some other "relevances" of the concept in addition to the philosophical and sociological ones. Are we simply to accept the alleged familiarity of Marx's concept of alienation and are we to confine ourselves to investigating its philosophical and sociological "relevance" without asking about its "relevance" for the whole of man's life?

II. MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

1. Is there something that might be called Marx's concept of alienation? If by a 'concept' is meant a finished product of thought with a fixed "content" that has been made explicit by means of a definition, there is no such thing as "Marx's concept of alienation." Marx never gave an explicit definition of alienation. However if by concept is meant an essence-hitting thought of a phenomenon, regardless of whether a formal definition has been given, there is certainly a concept of alienation in Marx, because Marx really thought of the essence of alienation and he knew how to express this thought.

Again if by a 'concept' is meant a perfectly clear, complete and consistent thought of a phenomenon's essence, a thought free of all gaps, insufficiencies and difficulties, there is indeed no concept of alienation in Marx, for it is not difficult to discover a number of obscurities and incongruities in Marx's views on alienation. However if by 'concept' is meant a thought of phenomenon which despite all its defects uncovers before us the phenomenon's essence, there is such a thing as Marx's concept of alienation.

Finally if by a 'concept' is meant a thought which satisfies itself in contemplating an essence such as it is with no intention of changing it, we could not attribute a concept of alienation to Marx. He was not a "pure scientist" elaborating "neutral" theoretical concepts picturing reality passively. Rather Marx, the theoretical philosopher and practical social reformer, conceived 'alienation' to be simultaneously a criticism of alienation and an appeal for a practical fight against alienation—a call for a revolutionary transformation of self-alienated man and society.

2. Is there something like Marx's concept of alienation? If by 'Marx's concept' is meant a concept which has been created *ex nihilo* by Marx, a concept which was entirely unknown before Marx, it would be an exaggeration to talk of Marx's concept of alienation. Very much in Marx's concept of alienation stems from Hegel and Feuerbach; moreover much in Hegel's and Feuerbach's concept of alienation is actually not theirs. The concept of alienation is a peculiar "summary" of the whole history of Western philosophy. It was alive, under different names, from the very beginnings of philosophical thought. However if by Marx's concept one means a concept which was transformed and given a new content and life by Marx, there is certainly such a concept because Marx's view on alienation is neither a repetition nor a combination of the views of Hegel and Feuerbach. It is in many respects their most radical negation.

Marx's concept of alienation is still alive in what is best in contemporary philosophy, sociology and psychology. Would it not be more adequate to talk of the "contemporary" (instead of Marx's) concept of alienation? Although it still stimulates and inspires discussion in so many trends of contemporary thought, Marx's concept of alienation is not the only concept of alienation in our times. Some of the contemporary concepts of alienation represent a further elaboration or variation of Marx's concept, and others are very different from it. Therefore it is legitimate to talk of "Marx's concept of alienation" as something which should not be confused with those concepts which have preceded or followed it.

3. There are those who think that Marx elaborated the concept of alienation at an early stage of his theoretical development but rejected it as inadequate later. And they find it curious that many Marxists still make much use of a concept which Marx himself abandoned. However is it really of decisive importance for others whether a thinker permanently retained or at one time repudiated some of his views? Even if Marx had renounced his own concept of alienation, it would not simply annihilate what he had previously written on it and even if Marx had come to regard his own concept of alienation as worthless, we may regard it as precious; furthermore we may be right.

On the other hand, is it really true that Marx in his later writings renounced "alienation"? It is well known that Marx and Engels in their *German Ideology* and in the *Communist Manifesto* criticized

philosophers for representing the historical process as a process of self-alienation of man and for speaking about the "alienation of man's essence." But is it not "curious" that the allegedly "discarded" concept of alienation reappeared in the later writings of Marx, that it was explicitly used not only in that unfinished manuscript which is now known as *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, but also in his undisputed masterwork *Das Kapital*? And is it not so that even in those works where Marx seemingly rejects the concept of alienation, its compounds serve as leading ideas and tacit presuppositions?

4. How are we to get at what is authentically Marx's view of alienation? Shall we try an "objective reconstruction" of his views on the basis of his texts? It would be possible to collect all of Marx's texts dealing with alienation, to compare them mutually and to analyze them carefully. It would also be possible to study all the works of Marx with the intention of making explicit what they implicitly say about alienation. This would require much space, time and patience, but it is theoretically possible. There is only one objection to such a procedure: it would probably contribute more to the distortion than to the elucidation of the essence of Marx's thought, for Marx's "concept" of alienation is a live thought that includes open questions and unsolved difficulties. Therefore to bring to life the essence of Marx's "theory" of alienation is not merely to repeat what Marx has already said, but to think in the spirit of Marx about the problems which he thought of, to contribute to solving difficulties which he fought with, and to open horizons which he only vaguely anticipated.

Will we not add something extraneous to the essence of Marx's thought in this way? Perhaps. But nevertheless the essence of a thought is not only what it in fact contains. Therefore the essence of Marx's thought is also what it includes merely as a possibility of further development. It is impossible to say what Marx really thought of alienation without saying many things which he actually never thought. To excavate the inner riches of a theory is certainly a risky undertaking, but there cannot be any life or theory if we are not ready to take some risks.

5. Marx's concept of alienation has in it something of that broadest and seemingly most natural meaning that is suggested by the etymology and morphology of the word—the meaning that alienation is the process or the state in which something becomes or has become alien to something else. But Marx's concept of alienation cannot be identi-

fied with such a general common sense idea. From the standpoint of common sense, self-alienation can be only a special case of alienation; for Hegel and Marx every alienation is a special case of self-alienation, because there is no alienation where there is no self.

If every alienation is self-alienation, things cannot be alienated either from themselves or from each other; it is also impossible to talk of the self-alienation of nature. There is no self-alienation where there is no self. This does not mean that the concept of alienation is entirely inapplicable to "dead" things and nature. Both single things and nature as a whole can be alienated from man, but these cases of alienation are only special forms of man's self-alienation, forms of the alienation of man from his own essence.

6. Every alienation is self-alienation both for Hegel and Marx, but while for Hegel the self which alienates himself from himself is the Absolute, for Marx it is man. Everything which happens is for Hegel a part of the circular process of alienation and de-alienation of the Absolute Mind, and man is the Absolute in the process of de-alienation. For Marx there is no Absolute Mind and nature is not an alienated form of any mind. The whole of human history is a process of alienation and de-alienation and conversely there is no alienation or de-alienation without and outside human history.

However there is only one step from Hegel to Marx, not only because in addition to the self-alienation of the Absolute Mind Hegel admits the self-alienation of the Finite Mind or man but also, and in the first order, because only owing to and through the Finite Mind does the Absolute Mind become self-aware, "returns" to himself from his self-alienation in nature. This means that without the finite mind the Absolute Mind cannot be de-alienated, but that which cannot de-alienate itself cannot alienate itself from itself either. In this way the Absolute Mind is basically dependent on the Finite Mind. It is not the Absolute Mind but the Finite Mind which is the subject of self-alienation and de-alienation.

7. Both Feuerbach and Marx reject Hegel's view that nature is a self-alienated form of the Absolute Mind and that man is the Absolute Mind in the process of de-alienation. For them man is not a self-alienated God, but God is a self-alienated man—he is merely man's essence abstracted, absolutized and estranged from man. Whereas Feuerbach thought that the de-alienation of man can be reduced to the abolition of that estranged picture of man which is God, Marx

stressed that religious alienation of man is only one among the many forms of man's self-alienation. Man not only alienates a part of himself in the form of God, he also alienates other products of his spiritual activity in the form of philosophy, common sense, art, morals; he alienates products of his economic activity in the form of commodity, money, capital; he alienates products of his social activity in the form of state, law, social institutions.

There are many forms in which man alienates the products of his own activity from himself and makes of them a separate, independent and powerful world of objects toward which he is related as a slave—powerless and dependent. However he not only alienates his own products from himself, he also alienates himself from the very activity through which these products are produced, from the nature in which he lives and from other men. All these kinds of alienation are in the last analysis one; they are only different forms or aspects of man's self-alienation, different forms of the alienation of man from his human "essence" or "nature," from his humanity. The self-alienated man is a man who really is not a man, a man who does not realize his historically created human possibilities. A nonalienated man on the contrary would be a man who really is a man, a man who fulfills himself as a free, creative being of *praxis*.

III. THE PHILOSOPHICAL "RELEVANCE" OF MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

1. Contrary to what might be expected, I am ready to "confess" that Marx's concept of alienation has no "philosophical relevance." This is not to maintain that it is "philosophically irrelevant." The concept can be neither philosophically relevant nor philosophically irrelevant simply because it is primarily a philosophical concept.

If by "relevance" we mean "the state or quality of being relevant," and by being relevant, "bearing upon" something other than that which is relevant, a philosophical concept cannot be "philosophically relevant." One can ask about the philosophical relevance of a sociological, economic, legal, religious, literary or any other nonphilosophical concept; but it would be curious to ask about the philosophical relevance of a philosophical concept.

The question of the philosophical relevance of Marx's concept of alienation taken literally is based on the assumption that this is a non-

philosophical concept. Therefore the only adequate answer to it can be the criticism of this assumption. However the question might really be a not quite precise formulation of the question about the philosophic scope and value of the concept, and this question can be answered only by asking ourselves what place, if any, the concept has within the scope of philosophy.

2. Some philosophical adversaries of Marx's concept of alienation think that the concept has no place in philosophy because it is too special or too narrow. Only the most general concepts—they say—deserve a place inside philosophy, as the most general "theoretical" inquiry into the nature of the world. The concept of alienation does not possess such a generality. Those who want to exclude Marx's concept of alienation from philosophy by means of such an argument obviously have either a peculiar idea of Marx's concept of alienation or a dubious idea of what kind of generality is a prerequisite for philosophy. They either think that Marx limited alienation to one special aspect or field of man's being, for example to economics, politics or psychology or they believe that all concepts which aim at characterizing man are too special for philosophy.

However both assumptions are untenable. In speaking of "alienation," Marx did not have in mind only economic, political or psychological phenomena, he had in mind also the self-alienation of man as a whole being—a "phenomenon" which is so general that it cannot be studied by any special science. And on the other hand, those who think that even the most general problems of man are not philosophical, because man is merely one special being in the universe, overlook that regarded from the standpoint of quality man contains in himself everything that is in the world.

3. Some philosophers would be ready to concede that the concept of self-alienation belongs to philosophy, if anywhere, but they insist that the concept should be excluded from every theory because it is self-contradictory. Furthermore it might seem that alienation is by definition a polyadic relation which presupposes at least two terms, two entities which are alien to each other so that it would be self-contradictory to say of one single entity that it is alien to itself, i.e. self-alienated. Where there is only one self, there can be no alienation. Alienation requires two.

However such a simple argument starting from one and two would be valid only if man were absolutely simple, if being one he could not

consist of (or be divided into) two or more parts; and it is obviously invalid if we assume that a man is self-alienated when he is internally divided in such a way that his two parts are alien to each other.

If one objects that in such a case one should not speak of the self-alienation of the self but about the mutual alienation of the parts of the self, one could answer that talking of self-alienation instead of simply the "internal division" or "split" of man into two alien parts has the function of suggesting the following points: a) the division into two mutually alien parts was not carried out from the outside, it is the result of an action of the self itself; b) the division into alien parts does not annihilate the unity of the self; despite the split, the self-alienated self is nevertheless a self; and c) it is not simply the split into two parts that are equally related to the self as a whole: the implication is that one part of the self has more right to represent the self as a whole so that by becoming alien to it the other part becomes alien to the self as a whole.

4. One way to clarify and specify the inequality of the two parts into which a self-alienated self is split is to describe the self-alienation as a split between man's real "nature," or "essence," and his factual "properties," or "existence." The self-alienated man in such a case is a man whose actual existence does not correspond to his human essence. A self-alienated, human society would be a society whose factual existence does not correspond to the real essence of human society.

Some philosophers would be ready to grant that by defining self-alienation in such a way an appearance of avoiding contradiction has been produced, but they would insist that contradiction has really remained. Alienation of man's existence from his essence is a contradiction in terms, because man cannot be man without his human essence. A thing's essence is something owing to which a thing is what it is, and if a thing has alienated itself from its own essence, it is no longer the same thing. In other words, either the being in question is not alienated from man's essence, and then it is a man; or it is alienated from man's essence, and then it can be anything whatsoever, but it cannot be man.

There is something in such an argument. If a man were a thing and if one should conceive of man's essence as something shared by all men, then somebody alienated from man's essence could not be a man in fact either. But are we entitled to assume that man has essence

in the same sense in which nonhuman things have it? Or is there a difference in principle between all other beings and man so that man's essence is not what all men have in common, but what man as man can and ought to be? The question might seem difficult; however if we answer it in the affirmative, there need be no contradiction in the concept of self-alienation.

5. Some critics of alienation would agree that the concept of self-alienation is not self-contradictory, but they would insist that it is untenable because its use is inconsistent with certain indisputable "philosophical truths" that have been not only accepted but even discovered (or at least elaborated) and given a special prominence by Marxism. As the most important among such truths, the view of man as a historical being is cited. The concept of the self-alienation of man—they say—presupposes, and has no sense without, the concept of a permanent, unchangeable essence or nature of man; and it is certain knowledge of our time that man has no eternal, unchangeable properties but rather that he changes and develops historically.

However it is not difficult to see that the historical view of man excludes not every kind of man's essence but only an everlasting, unchangeable nature or essence of man whereas "essence" implied in the concept of alienation need not be of this kind. Moreover the essence of man as conceived by Marx is neither an unchangeable part of man's factuality, nor an eternal or nontemporal idea toward which man ought to strive; it is the totality of historically created human possibilities which at each stage of man's historical development can be, and really is, different. To say that man alienates himself from his human essence would then mean that a man alienates himself from the realization of his historically created human possibilities. To say that a man is not alienated from himself would, on the contrary, mean that a man stands on the level of his possibilities, that in realizing his possibilities, he permanently creates new and higher ones.

6. Some would be ready to grant that the concept of alienation does not exclude history in the sense of a series of changes, but they would insist that it is incompatible with the view of history as an open process leading to the emergence of ever new qualities. The concepts of self-alienation and de-alienation—they would maintain—can be useful within the framework of a view of history as a closed, circular process having its beginning in an original nonalienated society where man's existence corresponded to his essence, and an end in a

final de-alienated society representing a return to (or an ameliorated form of) the original harmony between existence and essence.

However Marx's concept of alienation, as it was sketched above, does not necessarily imply a nonalienated original or future society where there is no split between man's essence and existence. If an animal becomes man at the very moment when its existence ceases to be determined by its essence, when he becomes free either to realize his human essence or to alienate himself from it, it means that even in the beginning of his development man can be self-alienated. And if man's essence is a set of historically created human possibilities, then at any given stage of his evolution (even at the most advanced one) man can be alienated from it, i.e., below the level of his possibilities.

The requirement of de-alienation that is naturally suggested by the very concept of self-alienation does not imply a circular character of the historical process nor does it demand an end of history. The requirement is not a call for a return to something that has already existed because to be de-alienated means to be able to fulfil one's own human possibilities and to create new and higher ones. In other words, not the return to the past but the projecting of a new future is the core of de-alienation.

It would also be wrong to interpret de-alienation as a terminal of history. Some Marxists, it is true, have really thought that absolute de-alienation is possible, that all alienation, social and individual, can be once and for all abolished; the most radical among the representatives of such an optimistic view have even maintained that all alienation has already been eliminated in principle in socialist countries, that it exists there only as a case of individual insanity or as an insignificant "remnant of capitalism"; but such a view cannot be attributed to Marx. Rather from his basic views it would follow that only relative de-alienation is possible. It is not possible to wipe out alienation once and for all, because human "essence" or "nature" is not something given and finished which can be fulfilled to the end. However it is possible to create a basically nonalienated society that would stimulate the development of nonalienated, really human individuals, but it is not possible to create a society that would produce only non-alienated, free, creative individuals and that would exclude every possibility of anybody's being self-alienated.

7. Some philosophers would be ready to grant that Marx's concept

of alienation is neither self-contradictory nor inconsistent with any indisputable philosophical truth. They would concede that it may be used in discussion about man in general and contemporary man in particular, but they would insist that everything which can be said by the help of this concept can be said not worse—and perhaps even better—without it. Although not definitely “bad,” the concept is unnecessary or, more mildly, not indispensable.

There is some truth in such a view. Much of what can be thought by the help of the concept of alienation can also be thought without it, and the word “alienation” is certainly not indispensable. However is it so that all that can be thought by the help of alienation can be equally well thought without it?

Some people think that “alienation” is merely a pseudophilosophical term for such concrete phenomena as, for example, private property, the existence of classes or class exploitation. According to such a view, instead of talking about the “self-alienated” and “nonself-alienated society” one could talk simply about the “class-society” and “classless society.”

The most obvious objection to such a view would be that it assumes that the concept of self-alienation can be applied only to societies, whereas Marx applied it both to societies and to individual men. An attempt to save the reduction of alienation to class oppression from this objection by saying that it is possible to define the self-alienated man in terms of self-alienated society (by defining “self-alienated man” as “the man of self-alienated, i.e., class society”) would not help, because according to Marx even in a self-alienated society some men can be basically nonself-alienated and in a basically nonself-alienated society some men can be self-alienated.

However this is not all. There are at least two more serious objections to the identification of self-alienation with class rule. First, if every class society is a self-alienated society, this does not mean that *only* class society can be self-alienated and that every self-alienated society must be divided into social classes. Self-alienation can exist even in a classless society. Second, even if only class society were a self-alienated society, this would not mean that “class society” and “self-alienated society” are only different names for the same concept. The two concepts have different contents and can be defined independently of each other.

Therefore it would be possible to make the distinction between

class and classless society and still dispute the division of societies into “self-alienated” and “nonself-alienated.” There would be nothing “contradictory” or “illogical” in such a proceeding. However this would mean to remain in the limits of a scientific, empirico-positivistic approach to society—appropriate for describing external facts and properties but unsuitable for uncovering their inner connection and essential meaning from the viewpoint of man as a whole—and that would also mean to be unable to find a theoretical foundation for the requirement for a revolutionary change of the existing class society. We may be able to describe in all details the class structure and class struggles of our society, but we are not entitled to say either that we know it or that we have good reasons for fighting against it unless we have succeeded in grasping it as an inhuman, self-alienated form of human society.

8. Many of those who regard the concept of self-alienation as not indispensable would agree that the concept cannot be reduced to the concept of class rule or class exploitation. In contrast to such concepts as “class rule,” “class struggle” and so on, which are descriptive, the concepts of self-alienation and nonself-alienation are evaluative. When we characterize a society or an individual as self-alienated, we do not add any new information to its description, we simply express the opinion that it is not as it should be. Why then should we use such complicated terms as “self-alienation” and “nonself-alienation”? Why should we not simply use old, well-known terms such as “good” and “bad” (or “moral” and “immoral”)?

The suggestion might seem acceptable. However the concepts of alienation and de-alienation as conceived by Marx are neither descriptive and factual nor prescriptive and evaluative. To characterize an individual or a society as self-alienated or nonself-alienated is neither to mention some of its empirically ascertainable properties nor just to express one’s moral indignation about it. It is a characterization of the ontologico-anthropological nature of the man or society in question, a characterization which moves neither on the level of pure factual “is” nor on the level of pure moral “ought.” It belongs to a “third” realm which is really “first.”

Man is not only what he is, but also what he can and ought to be. Yet man is not a sum of “is” and “ought.” Before we analyze him into “is” and “ought,” he is already someone in essence and it is for this realm of “essence” (which precedes the split into the realm of

facts and the realm of values) that the concepts of alienation and non-self-alienation are used. They are only two among the concepts aiding in analyzing man philosophically, as a free creative being of praxis. In addition they have a function for this realm, and they cannot be replaced by any concept serving either to describe the factual existence of man or to prescribe for him ideal moral rules.

9. One might be ready to admit that in addition to scientific concepts necessary to describe objectively the factuality of man and value concepts serving to judge morally what is good and what is bad in him, one also needs "ontological," or "ontologico-anthropological" concepts in order to analyze the essence or essential structure of man. However one might insist that the family of such concepts need not include the Marxian concept of "alienation," that what is said by the help of this concept can also be said by the help of some non-Marxist philosophical concept. Instead of speaking about self-alienated and nonself-alienated man and society, should we not speak, for example, about "human" and "inhuman" society and man (or about more and less human society and man)?

The suggestion might seem plausible. However the attributes 'human' and 'inhuman' cannot be identified with the attributes 'non-self-alienated' and 'self-alienated.' I think that no really human society (or man) can be self-alienated and that every inhuman society (or man) is self-alienated, but I do not think that the concepts "inhumanity" and "humanity" must necessarily be defined in terms of self-alienation and de-alienation. It is logically possible, for example, to divide man and societies into human and inhuman according to whether they correspond to an outside ideal or standard of humanity. To be inhuman in such a case would not mean to be alienated from one's own historically created human possibilities but to be unable to achieve a high goal prescribed from outside.

In this way, far from being eliminable from philosophy by the help of the concepts "human" and "inhuman," the concepts of "self-alienation" and "de-alienation" are indispensable for clarifying one special interpretation of those concepts, that interpretation in which to be human or inhuman means to be "faithful" or "unfaithful," "equal" or "unequal" to his own creative possibilities.

10. One might admit that the concept of alienation cannot be fully replaced by any of the traditional non-Marxist philosophical concepts, but insist that among specifically Hegelian and Marxist concepts

there are some which make the concept of alienation necessary. Moreover some Marxists and Marxologists have been inclined to identify "alienation" with "objectification," the process of projecting human potentialities through man's productive activity into external objects. However Marx clearly distinguished between objectification and alienation and sharply criticized Hegel for having identified objectification with alienation and the suppression of alienation with the abolition of objectivity.

To be sure, there have been Marxists who thought that there is no essential link or connection between objectification and alienation, that alienation is something arising quite incidentally out of objectification. Marx on the contrary thought that in every objectification lies a possibility of alienation so that as long as there is objectification, there will be a "danger" of alienation. However this is not a sufficient reason for simply identifying objectification and alienation.

Some Marxists and Marxologists have been ready to draw the distinction between objectification and alienation, but they were inclined to think that all alienation can be reduced to alienation arising out of objectification, to the alienation of man from the results of his objectifying activity, so that consequently the whole problem of alienation could be reduced to the problem of enumerating and describing in detail the forms of man's objectification.

However according to Marx the alienation of man from the products of his activity is only one form or aspect of alienation. Man alienates himself not only from the products of his own activity, he alienates himself also from his fellow men who produce together with him and from the nature in which he lives and which always lives in him. Moreover he alienates himself from his own productive activity through which he creates objects, transforms and humanizes nature and collaborates and communicates with other men. In other words man alienates himself from his essence, from his own human "nature," from what he as man can and ought to be.

IV. THE SOCIOLOGICAL RELEVANCE OF MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

1. If the question about the "philosophical relevance" of Marx's concept of alienation strictly taken has no sense, the same need not hold for the question about its sociological relevance. And indeed, if we

agree that the concept of alienation is basically philosophical (and not sociological), the question about its sociological relevance naturally arises. What, then, if any, is the "sociological relevance" of Marx's concept of alienation?

According to one view, the mere fact that alienation is a philosophical concept indicates that the concept is sociologically irrelevant. All philosophical concepts—it is said—are irrelevant for sociology. It would be possible to argue against such a view; however I shall content myself with the remark that those who regard all philosophical concepts as irrelevant for sociology demonstrate in this way that a certain pseudophilosophy (the positivistic one) is very relevant for their own sociology.

2. Some sociologists have been ready to grant that philosophical concepts may be useful in sociology, but they would insist that all concepts belonging to such a branch of philosophy as axiology (or at least to its sub-branch, ethics) should be kept apart from sociology as well as from every other empirical science inquiring into the nature of what is (not what merely ought to be). According to their view, alienation is an axiological, and also more precisely, an ethical concept. Therefore although the term might be useful in the context of moral discourse, it ought to be abandoned within the sociological context.

There are at least two defective assumptions in such a view. One is the assumption, which we have criticized above, that the concept of alienation as conceived by Marx is a value concept. Another is the idea that "pure sciences" without any "axiological" or "ethical" presuppositions or ingredients are desirable and possible. Without undertaking a criticism of this second assumption here, we shall merely observe that a value-free science is an illusion of dubious value.

3. There are sociologists who do not deny that philosophical concepts, including axiological ones, may be relevant for sociology, but they maintain that Marx's concept of alienation is one of those philosophical concepts which have no sociological relevance.

The concept of alienation—they argue—cannot be of any use for sociology because the phenomenon of alienation exists in different guises, in practically all societies, in small, egalitarian, cooperative and agricultural societies no less than in big, non-egalitarian, competitive and industrial ones. But if the phenomenon of alienation is so universal, why should it mean that the concept of alienation is not useful?

Would it not follow rather that it has an extremely wide use in sociological analysis, that it is indispensable for analysis of every society that has existed so far?

4. An opposite objection to the sociological relevance of Marx's concept of alienation (sometimes found in the same authors) is that the concept is too narrow or too eccentric to be suitable for sociology. Some sociologists have maintained, for example, that for Marx and Engels "alienation" was a romantic concept with a preponderantly sexual connotation, a concept for depicting a man whose way of thinking is determined by his repression of sexuality.

Even if it were so, the concept could have a sociological significance. Sexuality is not utterly unimportant. However it is far from true that the concept had such a meaning for Marx. Those who interpret him in this way show only that they are themselves more interested in sexology than in sociology.

5. Some have argued that the concept of alienation in Marx, although it might be sufficiently clear for philosophical purposes, is not sufficiently clear for the purposes of sociology, while others have added that the impression of the "unclearness" of the concept is the result of the fact that there are here several different concepts hidden behind one single word.

We have also maintained above that there are differences and inconsistencies in Marx's view of alienation. However there is still a definite basic view of alienation in Marx: the view according to which to be self-alienated is to be alienated from one's own essence so that a self-alienated man is a man alienated from his human essence, and a self-alienated society, one that is alienated from the essence of human society. And the question is whether such a concept of alienation has some sociological relevance or not. Is it the sole task of sociology to describe and classify social phenomena according to some external characteristics, or is it also to study them as *human* phenomena characterizing social man and human society?

6. A number of sociologists have maintained that the concept of alienation is essentially "critical." Regarding it as a defect, some of them have tried to "save" the concept by removing the "critical" or "polemic" components from it. Others have insisted that this is an undertaking doomed to fail because the critical or polemic components of "alienation" belong to its essence. Both of them were in a sense right: those who wanted to "save" the concept were right in

their basic intention; those who wanted to reject it, for in their view the concept is basically critical.

However they were wrong in the common fundamental assumption that a sociological concept must be devoid of critical content. Man is not man insofar as he is not critical toward other men and toward himself, and science is not science unless it has a critical attitude toward the "object" and "results" of its investigation. The idea of an "uncritical" science using "neutral" concepts is a contradiction in terms. And the idea of an "uncritical" sociology is, in addition to that, a direct support for an apologetic social theory justifying the existing social order.

7. Some have insisted that the concept of alienation is inapplicable in sociology because no reliable objective criteria for measuring the alleged phenomenon of alienation can be found. In order to justify the use of "alienation" in sociology, others have tried to find criteria and standards for measuring it. The application of these standards has sometimes led to unexpected and curious results (such as, for example, that physicians in a hospital for the mentally ill are more alienated than most of their patients and that average "normal" people are more alienated than either the mentally ill or the doctors who treat them).

Is this to be interpreted as a sign of the defectiveness of the standards applied or as a sign of their fruitfulness? Shall we try to find better criteria and standards for measuring alienation or should we come to see that it is senseless to look for a numerical expression of man's self-alienation and nonself-alienation (or de-alienation)? The tacit assumption of the requirement for measuring alienation is the opinion that man's essence, humanity and inhumanity are measurable quantities.

Instead of trying to find criteria for measuring alienation, should we not question the assumption common to those who want to exclude alienation from sociology because it is not strictly measurable, and to those who try to find criteria for measuring it, the assumption that all sociological phenomena must be measurable? Should we really confine sociology to the investigation of measurable phenomena? Or should we conceive of it in a broader way?

8. Some would be ready to admit that sociology can investigate phenomena which are not measurable, but they would insist that sociology has to do only with phenomena which are empirically ascer-

tainable. The phenomena of alienation can be studied by sociologists only if we can define it in terms of empirically observable qualities.

We do not deny that phenomena of alienation can be observed empirically, but we think that there can be no universal empirical criteria for distinguishing between alienation and nonalienation. This would be possible if, and only if, self-alienation were a decline from an eternal, fixed, permanent, unchangeable human nature and if that unchangeable human nature were definable in terms of empirically observable characteristics. However neither is alienation a decline from such an eternal essence of man, nor is man's essence something directly observable.

Does this mean that the phenomenon of alienation should not be studied by sociology? Or does it mean that sociology should not be reduced to an inquiry into empirically observable phenomena?

9. The question whether Marx's concept of alienation could and should be used in sociology comes down to the question whether sociology has to acquiesce in the allegedly "objective" description, measuring and classification of empirically ascertainable facts, or whether it has also to say something about the human meaning and value of those facts. The controversial problem here is not "alienation" but the nature, meaning and scope of sociological inquiry.

If the concept of alienation is of basic importance for sociology, this does not mean that it should be used without discrimination always and everywhere and that its uncritical use can serve as a substitute for critical sociological inquiry.

V. THE HUMAN "RELEVANCE" OF MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION

1. Our task has been to say something on the philosophical and sociological relevance of Marx's concept of alienation. In trying to fulfill this obligation, we have attempted to show that the concept is not merely philosophical; it is a concept of great importance for sociology. Yet it is no less relevant for other social sciences and for psychology, as well as for art and literary criticism. In all spheres of theory it is a critical concept that directs the investigation toward the seeing of problems in their essence and integrity. The concept is relevant not only for theory; it is also of great importance for man's real

life and for the practical struggle for a really human man and social community.

2. Marx's thesis that contemporary man and contemporary society are self-alienated is not only a pure "thesis," it is at the same time an invitation to change existing man and society. Moreover it is not an invitation to any kind of change. If existing man and society are basically self-alienated, this means that the fulfillment of man and the realization of a really human society are impossible without their revolutionary transformation.

If we were to characterize existing man and society simply as insufficiently human, then the way out could be found in the gradual, further development of humanity, but if it is a basically inhuman, self-alienated society, no such gradual change will do. What is needed is a radical revolutionary change of existing man and society. Thus the "concept" of alienation is also a call for the revolutionary transformation of the world.

3. Some think that de-alienation could be carried out on an individual plane without any change of the social structure or "external conditions," through an internal moral revolution or by application of certain medicopsychiatric therapies. Others think that de-alienation can be carried out only on a social plane through a transformation of the social structure, primarily through changes in the sphere of economy that will be automatically followed by corresponding changes in all other spheres of life.

However alienation is a phenomenon found both in individual men and in human society and it dominates not just this or that side of man's life but the whole man. Therefore the road to de-alienation leads neither only through transformation of the external conditions of man's existence, nor only through the change of his individual "inner" self. The de-alienation of social relations is a precondition for a full development of nonalienated, free human personalities, and free human personalities are a necessary precondition for the de-alienation of social relations. From this theoretical circle there is no theoretical way out. Rather the only way out is the revolutionary social *praxis* by means of which men, changing their social relations, change also their own nature.

4. The question about the decisive or essential sphere of man's de-alienation is justified only if we do not forget that the difference between the essential and unessential is very relative. Perhaps the

most fundamental form of man's self-alienation is the split of his activity into different "spheres" in an external, mutual relationship. In accordance with this, we may say that the essential sphere of de-alienation is not a special sphere but the "sphere" of the relations between the spheres, the "sphere" of the struggle for overcoming the split of man into mutually opposed spheres.

This does not mean that the existing difference between the spheres should be ignored or disputed. In the whole of history up to now, in the interaction among the different spheres, the determining role in the last analysis has belonged to the economic sphere. Therefore the fight for de-alienation of this sphere has a special significance. Only we should not think that the struggle for de-alienation in other spheres is without significance. We should also beware of the illusion that it is possible to carry out the de-alienation of the economic sphere while remaining within the limits of that sphere.

5. The problem of de-alienation of economic life cannot be solved by the abolition of private property. The transformation of private property into state property (be it a "capitalist" or a "socialist" state property) does not introduce an essential change in the situation of the working man, the producer. The de-alienation of economic life requires also the abolition of state property, its transformation into real social property, and this can be achieved only by organizing the whole of social life on the basis of the self-management of the immediate producers.

However if the self-management of producers is a necessary condition for the de-alienation of the economic "sphere" of man's life, it is not also a sufficient condition. The self-management of producers does not lead automatically to the de-alienation of distribution and consumption; it is not sufficient even for the de-alienation of production. Some forms of alienation in production have their root in the nature of contemporary means of production and in the organization of the process of production so that they cannot be eliminated by a mere change in the form of managing production. Some ways of struggling for de-alienation have already been found and verified; others have to be invented and tested.

6. From the requirement of abolishing the independence of "spheres" of man's existence, the sphere of philosophy cannot be exempted. And consequently the de-alienation of man should mean, among other things, the overcoming of philosophy in the sense it has

had up to now. Philosophy should cease to be a narrow special branch of knowledge. It should develop as a critical reflection of man about himself and about the world in which he lives, an auto-reflection which penetrates the whole of his life and serves as a coordinating force of all his activity. As a concept which implies the negation of philosophy, the concept of de-alienation is not merely philosophical, it is metaphilosophical.

COMMENT

Marx W. Wartofsky

Petrović set himself a difficult task in this paper. He proposes first to give an analysis of the concept of alienation that primarily deals with a number of hypothetical criticisms or interpretations (or rather misinterpretations). Secondly, he seeks to define not only its relevance to sociology but also its human relevance with regard to the distinction between economic alienation and personal alienation. Finally Petrović proposes a metaphilosophical thesis concerning the disalienation of philosophy itself. I cannot say that Petrović succeeds in this complex and difficult assignment which he sets for himself, but he raises questions of great importance as well as practical, not narrowly theoretical, relevance. I think that this is all to the good. In his own analysis at this Symposium and in a number of his other papers, Petrović has succeeded in exhibiting the relevance of the concept of alienation to contemporary philosophical discussion.

My comment will evolve around three central points. First, I would like to make a few remarks about the concept of alienation itself in order to clarify for myself and with respect to Professor Petrović's formulation of it what I think it means. Secondly, I will consider what I think is a paradoxical question in Petrović's formulation of the concept. And finally I will treat the very interesting remarks Petrović makes on alienation in a classless society.

From everything Professor Petrović has said, I think it is clear that alienation is not a simple concept, but, like other major philosophical notions, it is a complex one whose boundaries are not simply given by a specific application to one or another phenomenon of alienation or by paradigm cases. Petrović is right in holding that one cannot simply identify the concept with its particular form in one or another application, in one