

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

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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

or another field or phenomenal exemplification. One cannot simply identify it, for example, with Hegel's notion of the self-alienation of Absolute Spirit; or with Feuerbach's critique of religious consciousness as the alienation and objectification of human essence in some "other" super-human form; or with Marx and Engel's notion of man's alienation of his essence in labor, that is, in the objectification or the externalization (*Entäusserung*) of his practice in the objects of production and in production relations (that is, in Marx's notion of the fetishism of commodities). These are different ways in which the concept of alienation has classically been formulated. However one could add to these phenomena of alienation all those manifest instances of psychological, personal and esthetic alienation in which the concept is elaborated, appropriated by others and transformed and in which it finds its application in various ways. Let me cite a few examples of how diffuse the concept has become: the underlying mechanisms of projection and transference in Freudian psychology, however metaphysically abstract or methodologically isolated they become, are in their conceptual derivation the heirs of the Hegelian-Feuerbachian phenomenology; the influential family of esthetic theories which developed around the concept of *Einfühlung*, the so-called empathy theories of Worringer, Lipps, Vernon Lee, Santayana and others inherit this same general concept of alienation. Moreover it has of course become the commonplace of contemporary American sociology, so that "alienation" is on every schoolboy's lips and is used to characterize everything from American voting behavior to American sexual behavior, to the revolt on campus, to the fragmentation and dehumanization of modern art. Thus the concept practically reeks with relevance. But this relevance is largely uncritical, and "alienation" becomes, in effect, both a vulgarized and a glib concept—a "dead metaphor."

Petrović is, and rightly so, concerned with it in another way. Somewhere in this indifferent and diluted spread of the concept, he seeks some formulation of alienation which is philosophically and critically fundamental and is in such a way that not every phenomenon of alienation nor even all of them together reveal the essence of the concept. The notion of essence here is such that one does not discover what the essence of a thing is by grouping together all things of a certain kind and finding out what they have in common. The circularity of that procedure is enough to destroy the definition of essence, because one could not know what to group unless one already had a notion of what it was that these things had in common. Consequently Petrović seeks his answer in some notion of human essence which enables alienation to become fundamentally the self-alienation of human essence or of human being. One should note that the English translation of the German 'Wesen' is terribly awkward here and consequently leads one to commit numerous Platonistic errors.

'Human Essence,' or 'Human Being' with a capital 'B' has all the overtones of a Platonistic or Hegelian idealist essentialism; generally the German 'menschliches Wesen' is better translated as simply "the property of being human." Even though the term 'property' is no better than the term 'essence,' it seems less imposing.

It is precisely here that the problem lies and it is here that I think Petrović ultimately fails to reach a satisfactory or a clear resolution of it. The difficulties, one should admit, are notorious. Plato wrestled with the dialectical problem of the relation of essence to its embodiment in many of the dialogues and especially in the *Parmenides*. It lies at the core of Hegel's dialectic, involving as it does the knotty problem of so-called Concrete Universals. I would urge all to read Feuerbach's doctoral dissertation as a prelude to reading his *Essence of Christianity* to see how complex a problem the notion of "species-concept" (*Gattungsbegriff*) presents for Feuerbach (since it is after all fundamental to his definition of man's species-consciousness, his awareness of himself as a member of a species.)

What then is the problem in Marx's own terms? Man creates his own humanity. Therefore man is self-created essence by means of his *praxis*, that is, by means of his characteristic activity. And for Marx this does not mean any activity whatever, nor simply a phenomenal account or descriptive survey of what men do from day to day. Therefore it is not a sociological field-work problem to discover what *praxis* is. One does not go out and watch people, take notes, and then discover what their *praxis* is. Rather there exists previously a notion of what men do that is distinctive of their humanity. In counterdistinction to the idealist tradition, which was the first to formulate or identify man's being, or his being human, with his activity, Marx chooses not the activity of consciousness but what he called "sensuous concrete human practice" from which consciousness itself is said to be derived. Certainly the notion that man's being is identical with his characteristic activity is quite clear in the whole idealist tradition. Descartes' *Cogito* is probably the sharpest and clearest formulation of it: Man is a thinking being, he is what he is insofar as he thinks. His being is his thinking. In *The German Ideology*, in criticizing the German idealists and the idealist tradition in general, Marx characterizes basic human activity by describing it as the production of the means of existence and the production of men, that is, human reproduction. If anything is systematically essential to the materialist's concept of alienation, it is this. According to the thesis of historical materialism, from production there evolve the modes of organization of production—the production relations—and closely related to these are the modes of organization of the production of men, i.e., the family and everything that this entails, e.g. the division of labor. In Marx's view these are the biological and social foundations of human society. One should say then that the self which

is required, as Petrović suggests, if alienation is to exist in the first place is itself the product of this dialectic, of man's relation to the production and reproduction of his own existence.

This is still abstractly conceived, but at least the materialism is quite clear as opposed to the classical idealist formulation of this alienation, e.g. in Hegel. Only with the development of Marx's political and politico-economic works does the fuller, and more specific, analysis begin to fill out the philosophical, materialist-humanist program of the earlier works.

Petrović assumes all this as background and proceeds then to raise the question as to how the self-alienation of man from his essence is to be overcome. But here we run into either a conceptual tangle or an outright paradox which I hinted at earlier in talking about the difficulties of the concept of essence and of human essence. Man has no eternal, Platonic, essence from which he is alienated. The concept of *such* an essence is rather itself the fantastic or symbolic form of alienation theory, exhibited in the theories of the fall from grace, the doctrine of original sin and the Platonic theory of forms. Instead, man creates his own essence, becomes human or humanized by the very evolution of his *praxis*. That is, his being human is nothing apart from the *humanizing* practice in which he engages. Marx insisted in fact that the historical evolution of class society by its unfolding of the possibilities of the universal system of production and exchange was the precondition for this humanization; that is, the precondition for rising beyond the hypothetically "unalienated" but brute life of some primitive economy, the myth of the unalienated state of nature which Hobbes and Rousseau, and Plato before them, already knew and said was a philosophical fiction. (Sometimes, unfortunately, it appears even in Marx's interpretations as if there were some such primordial unalienated state, and I think that Petrović is right in de-emphasizing this. Recent anthropological study reveals what a misleading myth this notion of the state of nature is, how untrue this is even about so-called primitive or preliterate societies.) Thus man comes to be humanized in the very process of recognizing his humanity, that is, in his evolving awareness of himself as a species being. Not only is this Feuerbach's argument, but it is also retained by Marx. One becomes human in recognizing that one is a member of the human species, in beginning to discover one's *self* in the *other* where the *other* is an exemplification of one's own essence, either as God or as Christ or as an Ideal Being of some sort. But Marx made the condition of this species-awareness itself the practical condition of the production of man's existence and not simply the reflective awareness which Feuerbach dealt with and which, Marx claimed, derived from the facts of social production and grew with the development of local, national and international economy. Consequently this *selbst-Entäusserung*, the *self-externalization* or *self-projection*, of human essence as an

object of awareness is never the abstract *praxis* of mental life, but rather it takes place in the process of social and economic and political activity itself. Obviously then this *Selbst-Entäußerung* is going to develop and change with the development and change of social, political and economic life. Therefore it cannot be a static or eternal essence but one which changes or evolves along with human historical development. So long as history remains history, so long as its essence is a transformation of the present, that is, as long as history essentially involves change (excluding the question of whether this change is inevitably progress), so long does human essence undergo change and transformation. On these grounds, the notion that there is no static essence follows from the fact that man produces his essence in his practice and his practice is in itself constantly being transformed and is transforming his environment. Strictly speaking, then, man can come to know his essence only by *praxis*. This activity changes historically; and what is more, if Marx is right, the historical change is lawful, can be described scientifically; consequently the charting of the transformation of human essence is in effect no more than the charting of the transformation of that *praxis* in which man makes history, for in making history he makes himself. In this process of constant change his essence is continuously undergoing transformation.

To this point, the analysis is effective; however one then encounters the concept not of *selbst-Entäußerung* but rather *selbst-Entfremdung*, i.e. *self-alienation*, that is the pejorative notion of the separation from one's essence, implying the failure to realize the possibilities of one's essence or one's humanity. This is no longer the characterization of history or the historical evolution of *praxis* but of a normative, valuative characterization of an aspect of history. Petrović argues that this normative connotation adds nothing to the descriptive content of alienation but rather undertakes a valuative approach to the question. In production as in social life, man's essence is alienated, estranged from him insofar as he becomes himself the abstracted essence of production relations. That is, he becomes characterized simply by the phenomena of his *praxis*. His human essence is replaced by the forms in which his *praxis* itself becomes alienated from him in commodities or in his relation to other men in class society or in his relation to the means of production, or to his own labor in its externalized form as a commodity, that is, labor power. This is a characteristic of alienated production and its concomitants in alienated exchange and alienated distribution; and this alienation is to be overcome, according to the thesis, in a socialist society (using "socialist" now in the usual way). Professor Petrović has a special view about how one ought to use the term "socialist" and "communist": the "communist" is an earlier stage, "socialism" is an advanced stage. I refer you to a paper of his on this subject in the journal *Praxis*. This alienation is to be overcome when the

production becomes socialized.

Petrović raises a question, as to whether in fact human alienation can be overcome simply by the overcoming of the economic alienation of man in capitalist production. Furthermore he says that it cannot, that alienation is not simply to be identified with one of its phenomenal manifestations in production but rather that the concept of alienation, if it has any force at all, applies to what he calls the "whole man." And here this economic activity is only one aspect of man, his activity as a producer is only one aspect of his existence. Consequently alienation may continue because in social production or in socialized production, even under socialism, the technology of production itself may still produce alienation, e.g. the alienation that the technology of the large automated industry would produce. (It is interesting that Professor Tucker in his paper pointed to this same feature in Engels' article on authority and claimed here that Engels was taking issue with Marx's former idealized view of the factory.) Thus there remains a residue of alienation even when the material foundation out of which the alienation supposedly derives, the production relations in which man's essence is alienated from him in all of these ways, are overcome. There remains the alienation of man from himself in perhaps personal terms.

My problems with this formulation are essentially two. On the one hand, if in Petrović's view we regard human essence as the capacity for creating new possibilities, then the problem becomes one of asking whether alienation can ever be overcome or whether it is built into human essence itself. I should like to distinguish here between formal essence and concrete, applied or historical essence. If it is man's formal essence that he is always free to create new possibilities, then his essence is precisely his creation of new possibilities, that is, man can never overcome the alienation of any given stage of his development because he is always producing possibilities beyond those which he could possibly have met or achieved at a given time. As with his shadow, he can never catch up with his ideal self because he keeps creating and recreating it in the course of his activity. On the other hand, if the formal essence of man is that he is a being who is capable of alienating himself (to put it in this perverse form), then it would seem to be built into his frame that what makes him human is his capacity for self-alienation. Human beings can alienate themselves, animals cannot. That seems to be the direction in which this argument heads. If this is the case, then I think it tends partially away from what I think the materialist conception of alienation would have demanded, because this formal concept—namely, that man is a being such that he is capable of alienating himself, that is, producing possibilities which he may not realize, which he may choose not to realize—seems to me to move away from what I think Marx's materialist con-

ception of alienation was, his transformation of Hegel's and Feuerbach's notion. Moreover it moves from this in the direction of the existentialist characterization of man as essentially alienated, or divided being, and hence proceeds to the ontological characterization of man as a somehow intrinsically *divided being*. This, I think, leads in the direction of a sort of Platonistic (I hesitate to say Heideggerian) Marxism in which, at the bottom of all of this real activity, there is something even more fundamental, some formal essence that is something which makes man man, namely his freedom not to be able to fulfill himself. This is a negative and perverse version, admittedly, of which the positive form is Petrović's view of man's freedom to be able to create new possibilities.

This problem appears to be a dialectical one. I do not think it is resolved in Marx. I do not think it is resolved in Marxism. I am very happy that Petrović raises it, but I think it needs some more tough thinking. The other side of this is that if all possibilities were realized there would be no alienation, and if there were no alienation, man's creative freedom would be at an end. This is the "end of history" argument which Petrović correctly criticizes. The essence would then become static and if it became static it would not be what we formally defined it as, namely, that kind of thing which constantly is capable of transforming itself in *praxis* and of creating new possibilities. We would have in effect Kant's *kingdom of ends* in which *is* and *ought* are identical and in which we have the kind of being that some theology speaks of, i.e. God's being in which essence and existence are one. I think the kind of theology which would be most akin to this notion of essence would be Augustinian in which the essence is created by the very fact of the absolutely free act of God's willing this or that. God does not have an essence to conform to, He creates His own essence by His own action. I think there are in fact strong voluntarist and Augustinean elements in Marx and in Marxism, but I think they have to be carefully construed.

The other problem I see with this is: How does one come to know one's essence? I think Petrović is keenly aware of this problem too, especially when he talks about it with respect to the relevance of the concept of alienation to sociology. How does one know one's essence and how does one know that one is falling short of it? If it is a question simply of describing what men do, then in fact there is no description of the essence but only of their existence. The distinction is an important one methodologically in many fields. Recently it has become a rather fundamental though trivial distinction in linguistics—trivial in the sense that everyone knows it and knows what it means as a distinction between *competence* and *performance*. A speaker may be competent if he knows the grammar of the language. A description of the grammar is therefore a description of his competence. He may stumble, he may speak incom-

plete sentences, he may have a headache, he may go to sleep; that is his performance which has nothing to do with his competence. I think this distinction makes sense in many fields, including sociology. But then one does not come to know one's essence by doing sociological field work. Rather here is the need for sociological theory which Petrović says is at the same time not simply descriptive theory but normative, valuative theory. However the question still remains, how does one come to know, in a sociological theory, what human essence is? If one poses it as a formal question for science, then I think one loses the sense that Marx had of it and which I think Petrović retains, namely, that one comes to know one's essence in *praxis* itself, and not outside of it, not standing outside and describing it externally. But this is not novel. In addition I feel that Petrović lapses into vague and sometimes pious phrases that do not go beyond a characterization of this "essence" in such terms as "free creative being of *praxis*" or "historically created human possibilities." These are all good initial programmatic distinctions. But how does one characterize "free creative being of *praxis*"? How does one make it the object of a concrete analysis, of *what the "free creative being of *praxis*" is at this time, in this place?* Consequently I think the problem begins where Petrović ends, or at least he alludes to a broader spectrum at the very end when he begins to talk about the problems of alienation in socialist society. We have here a different problem but it is also a concrete one. And in this sense I would like to distinguish what I called before a Platonist element. (I should not call it Platonist, for it runs through Aristotle as well.) Let me rather call it *formalist* element, in the sense of what Marx rejected in formalism, namely, its abstractness and its lack of concrete, historical application. The formalist definition, just as Aristotle's "happiness is activity in accordance with virtue" does not tell one what the concrete conditions of happiness are. It tells one formally that whatever they are they are in accordance with one's nature. Another instance is Kant's categorical imperative. It does not tell one what to do concretely; it only says that whatever one does, the formal conditions it would have to meet are such that man could rationally will it to be a universal maxim. Since these conditions are definitional, they are empty formulations. Similarly, to talk about human essence is empty until what it means to talk about "free Creation of human possibilities" or the "overcoming of alienation" becomes concrete talk about what human essence is *now* under *these* circumstances such that it needs to be fulfilled in a different way than it is being fulfilled at present. And this of course is the "criticism of the here below" that Marx thought philosophy ought to accomplish and which Petrović says it ought to undertake. In this sense Petrović's very interesting discussion on alienation in classless society, I think, requires a still deeper and fuller analysis.