

ALIENATION AND THE CONCEPT OF MODERNITY

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Analecta Husserliana, Vol. V, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1976, pp. 187–204.

ALIENATION AND THE CONCEPT OF MODERNITY*

For the past century and a half, the terms ‘alienation’ and ‘modernity’ have been discussed in numerous contexts by numerous writers, some of them philosophers. When we survey the current status of this discussion however, we are forced to the conclusion that there is no general agreement on how these terms are to be used or whether they bear any coherent relation to one another. It will not be my purpose in this paper to attempt a correction of this situation. What I propose is rather to stipulate—without sufficient argument—senses for these terms in such a way that they might become—at least for the purpose of our discussion this morning—topics of a possible debate.

Let us begin with the question: What is modernity? No single writer has addressed himself to this question more resolutely than Max Weber. And we could probably do no better than to begin our investigation into the question by considering the opening paragraph of the ‘Introduction’ to Weber’s *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. (The following translation is my own.)

“It is inevitable and legitimate for a child of modern European civilization to pose the following question whenever he takes up problems in the domain of world-history: What combination of circumstances has led to the emergence—precisely in the West, and uniquely here—of cultural manifestations which [derive from Western civilization and] nevertheless lie in a trajectory of development that has (as *we* like to think, anyway) *universal* significance and validity?”

In basic agreement with Weber, I should like to receive your provisional assent to the two following propositions. First, it is our more or less spontaneous tendency to think of modernization as a world-wide phenomenon, whatever the more specific topic: modern plumbing, or agricultural, military and juridical modernization. Second, for at least half a century, we have tended to equate modernization with the process of adopting, in the non-Western world, basically Western or European modes of thought, expression, and structures of societal and economic organization.

This much, at least, must be clear to any attentive student of contemporary linguistic usage. Whether this widespread tendency—evident in almost any product of present-day journalism (even on the sports pages)—is legitimate, this, of course, is quite another question. But, surely, Weber is right to say that we are forced—again and again—to raise the question.

So let us raise the question to another level by considering it in a somewhat more provocative form. Is it not, we might ask, simply an act of cultural *hubris* to assume—as we no doubt do—that the results of sociocultural historical developments in the West *do* have the unique and privileged status of being more than merely regional and historical phenomena, of having instead a universal significance and validity? This question, which I make no pretense of raising for the first time, has in fact been a favored trope of intellectuals and cultural critics—especially in the West—at least since the end of the eighteenth century. And since the middle decades of the nineteenth century it has become more and more fashionable—especially among intellectuals—to denigrate the results of civilizational developments in the West by laying stress upon a feature of occidental culture that is said to be nothing

* The main ideas of the paper were first formulated for a lecture on ‘Objektiver Geist und Rechtsphilosophie,’ presented at the University of Tübingen, Germany, June, 1972.

short of an endemic disease, a disease attributed precisely and uniquely to the West (e.g., by Russian slavophiles of the nineteenth century and by a variety of twentieth century Americans ranging from cultural anthropologists to Maoists and other participants in the so-called counter culture movement).

The disease in question is, of course, the loss of roots, the sense of uprootedness, the elimination of a feeling of *belonging*. In one word, the disease of the Western world has been designated as the process of *alienation*. As modern occidentals, we have been said to be at home anywhere and, for just that reason, truly at home nowhere. We have become—far more radically than any Alexandrian man—cosmopolitan and therefore a-politan, unbelonging, or, in short, alienated.

I have mentioned this familiar sense of the word ‘alienation’ not because I wish to dwell upon it in the time that remains available to me this morning, but because I wish to contrast this now familiar sense of the word with a sense, perhaps more original, that does, I believe, provide a clue to a possibly more coherent and more adequate conception of modernity. In so doing, it is my aim to make a minor but constructive contribution to the general theme of this conference, the question of Western culture.

My thesis will be that this question can be discussed more fruitfully if the discussants try—at least as a thought-experiment—to suspend, to bracket or, if you wish, to entertain an *epoché* of the now popular ‘crisis mentality.’

Perhaps we might begin such an *epoché* by considering—at least as a possibility—a plausible itinerary of the word ‘alienation.’ The brief itinerary I am about to outline was suggested to me by a remark in the writings of Georg Lukács. In his book, *Der junge Hegel*, Lukács asserts that the German word for alienation, *Entäusserung*, first made its way into the German language as a translation of the English word ‘alienation.’ And the original sense of the word primarily exploited by *Entäusserung* was the purely juridical sense of releasing a thing to another party in a contractual exchange of property. This is the very same word that went through a rapid sequence of permutations during the period of German Idealism and its aftermath, culminating perhaps in the Paris Manuscripts of Karl Marx, the texts which have given such poignant comfort to existential socialists of the mid-twentieth century. Thus, with a little help from Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Sartre and others, the English philosophical vocabulary of our time has—via the process of translation—had the word ‘alienation’ thrown back upon it, with a considerable broadening of connotative and darkly allusive associations.

Now, whether or not this little exercise in etymology actually provides an accurate outline of the general stages by which the term ‘alienation’ has come to have its many and diverse contemporary senses, my more basic purpose is to effect—for the purposes of discussion—a suspension or *epoché* of these perhaps derivative senses in order to focus upon the perhaps more original sense. And it is my thesis that this original or juridical sense of the term, once rewon, might provide us with a clue to a more adequate and coherent concept of modernity.

First of all, we must acknowledge that the general phenomenon of contractual relations clearly antedates whatever stage in the development of Western civilization we might wish to designate as definitively modern. Indeed, contractual relations of one sort or other, are—as numerous anthropological studies testify—probably to be discerned in even the most unmodern forms of social

and economic life. It is nevertheless possible, I believe, to draw a clear conceptual distinction between two fundamental types of contractual relations. Following Max Weber, we might call these ‘status-contracts’ and ‘legal-contracts.’ The distinctive feature of the former is that the parties entering into the relation of exchanging things, whatever the things might be, do not enter the relation as persons, strictly so called. Or, to exploit Weber’s terminology once again, we might say that the parties to a status-contract are ‘status-persons,’ that is, not ‘legal persons’ in the strict sense of the word.

This, in turn, raises the conceptual problem of how we are to determine exactly what a legal-person is. To this end, however, the conceptual framework articulated by Max Weber will not, I’m afraid, prove adequate. Having thematized the question of modernity as the question of the legal or juridical person and the question of alienable property, we must instead turn attention to the two philosophers—and, so far as I am aware, the *only* two philosophers—who provide us with fully coherent, if controversial, concepts of legal personality and alienable property. With these preparatory remarks we will therefore undertake a consideration of Hegel and Marx as *the* philosophers of modernity, philosophers who make available for intelligible discussion and debate the question of what modernity is.

I. Hegel’s Concept of Person and Property

If it is granted, at least for the sake of argument, that Hegel (together with Marx) presents the philosophy of modernity, one must of course consider more precisely what Hegel understood modernity to be. According to most readings, Hegel is regarded either as a philosopher of the transcendental Ego in the cartesian-kantian tradition of continental Idealism¹ or as a philosopher of nationalism in the romantic tradition of German *Volksgeistphilosophie*.² A third reading that has become somewhat popular in recent years sees Hegel as a not entirely successful mixture of the ‘modern’ tradition of monological ego philosophy and the ‘classical’ or Aristotelian tradition of transindividual ‘practical’ philosophy.³

But the specifically *modern* dimension in Hegel’s philosophy of objective Spirit is, I believe, to be found in his principled rejection of the ostensibly modern philosophy of the Ego developed by Descartes as well as the allegedly modern natural rights theories of Rousseau, Kant and Fichte.⁴ Person and Subject, the determinations of the Self developed in the first and second parts of the philosophy of objective Spirit, take on a radically different significance from that attached to these words, e.g., in the Kantian *Metaphysik der Sitten*. For Hegel, unlike Kant, it is neither the case that a person exercises his basic right by taking things into possession, nor that a subject fulfills his duty by acting for the sake of the moral imperative. According to Hegel there is no fundamental distinction between rights and duties; the highest right *and* the highest duty is to be *actual*. A legal *person* has the right to be recognized by others (and, in principle, by all others). Only thus, i.e., in a free interaction with others, is a person truly actual. And as a subject, on the other hand, one’s basic *duty* is to *recognize* and act toward others

¹ See Habermas, *Wissenschaft und Technik als Ideologie*, pp. 11ff.

² See W.H. Walsh, *Hegelian Ethics*, pp. 40ff.

³ See M. Riedel, *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Staat bei Hegel*, pp. 15ff. and pp. 69ff.

⁴ Hobbes’ theory of right, which is much closer to Hegel’s, is too complicated to discuss here.

as moral (or conscientious) subjects. To speak of actual persons or actual subjects independent of all reference to others is, in this philosophy, to speak nonsense.

In view of the fact that many interpreters of Hegel do tend to speak in this way, perhaps it will be well to let Hegel speak for himself on this critical issue. In § 331 of the *Philosophy of Right* we read as follows: “Just as the individual is not an *actual person* without relation to other persons, the state too is no actual individual without relation to other states.” In both cases, as the context makes clear, the relation in question is one of recognition.

In other formulations of the philosophy of objective Spirit, Hegel’s concept of the person is even clearer. For example, in the Heidelberg *Encyclopedia*, § 405, he writes: “Because I am a person, . . . my only realization is in the *Being of other persons*, and I am an *actual person* for myself exclusively in this Being of the others.”

Or, if we look at the corresponding paragraph of the Berlin *Encyclopedia* of 1830, we read, in § 490, the following: “I . . . have the *existence* of my personality in the *being of other persons*, in my reference to them and in my being recognized [Anerkanntsein] by them, which is thus mutual [gegenseitig].”

Now if it is my highest right and duty to be actual and if my actuality as a person is only to be had through recognition by *other* persons,⁵ then the question how this recognition is mediated takes on a supreme significance for an understanding of Hegel’s entire social philosophy.

In a word, his teaching on this matter is to be found in his theory of fully alienable property. In contrast with St. Thomas Aquinas⁶ or John Locke,⁷ who formulated two of the most important pre-Hegelian (or pre-modern) theories of property, Hegel’s philosophy of objective Spirit presents us with something entirely new: namely, a systematically articulated and fundamental distinction between possession and property.⁸

Like many other social philosophers, Hegel distinguishes between mere physical possession and rightful possession; and also like others, he treats the latter as property. The novelty of Hegel’s theory comes into view when we note that rightful possession or property is not distinguished from mere possession in virtue of its mode of acquisition or disposition; according to Hegel, my right, your right and anyone’s right to property derives from our primal right to be recognized as free, as actual.

This has nothing to do with my right to satisfy physical or metabolic needs. For, as Hegel observes in his remark to § 45 of the *Philosophy of Right*, “If emphasis is placed on my needs, then the possession of property appears as a means to their satisfaction, but the true position is that, from the standpoint of freedom, property is the first embodiment of freedom and so *is in itself a substantive end*.” Property is accordingly defined as “the sphere capable of embodying” the freedom of a person.⁹ To be free, to be

⁵ Being recognized by others is a necessary but not the sufficient condition of actual selfhood. Another condition is that I (any I) recognize others.

⁶ *Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, question 66a, 1, 2.

⁷ *Of Civil Government*, Chapter V, § 27.

⁸ Unsystematic anticipations of Hegel’s theory may be found in Hobbes’ *Elements of Law*, 1641, and in Fichte’s *Rechtslehre* of 1796.

⁹ *Rechtsphilosophie*, § 41.

actual, I must be recognizable by others, my person must have phenomenal form for others, and precisely this is Hegel's definition of property. It follows from this definition that something comes to be my property not in virtue of any specific characteristics that it has as *a thing*, nor in virtue of any natural determination that I may have, but purely and simply through the fact that I am recognizable and recognized by others as *present* in it.

Or, in the technical vocabulary of Hegel's *Logic*, property as such is not constituted out of a *Ding* (or 'thing') with given properties. It is rather a *Sache* (or 'pure receptacle'), none of whose legal properties are given; all its determinations of right are constituted exclusively in the interactive process of reciprocal recognition, the process made manifest in the juridical act of alienation.

We must therefore inquire somewhat more closely into Hegel's concept of the *Sache* in his philosophy of objective Spirit. And in so doing, we must ask what this concept has to do with modernity. As to the question, 'what is a *Sache*?' Hegel himself gives his clearest answer in § 491 of the 1830 *Encyclopedia*. "The *Sache* is the mean (Mitte) by which the extremes meet in one. These extremes are the persons who, in the knowledge of their identity as free, are simultaneously mutually independent. For them, my will has its definite recognizable existence in the *Sache*"

As we have seen, legal persons are actual only in and through the recognition of other persons. To speak of a single person as free in his isolated singularity would be, on this theory, nonsense. But the personality-constituting interaction of individuals is not unmediated. And in so far as we wish to speak of the factors mediating this interactive process, we speak of *Sachen* functioning as alienable property. Thus Hegel's theory of property is, at the same time, his theory of how persons are constituted as free and actual.

Many philosophers, especially since Augustine, have, of course, attempted to determine what constitutes the person. And Hegel was not the first philosopher to stress interaction as a criterion of personality as such. But when the various pre-Hegelian attempts at such a definition are examined, systematic differences come into view. For example, Aristotle's famous definition of the ethical individual as *zoon politikon* was expressly restricted by the methodological limits of his theory of the practical sciences (i.e., Ethics-Politics). Thus participation in the supremely ethical activity of political life (i.e., ruling) was restricted to a naturally determined status-group (i.e., a group of status-persons whose membership was said to be based on a putative natural determination, e.g., sex, household of birth, etc.). In explicit opposition to this Aristotelian tradition, Hobbes attempted to specify the essence of the ethical individual in terms of linguistic interaction. But Hobbes was never able to bring his remarkably modern theory of language into harmony with his contractarian theory of society.

The basic difficulty that may be discovered in these and other 'pre-modern' theories of interaction becomes clear when seen in contrast to the Hegelian description of modern free and alienable property. For Aristotle it is an accepted fact that all 'persons' (if we may use this distinctively modern expression somewhat anachronistically) are not fully human since only a few male householders actually took part in the public life of ruling the *polis*. And although Hobbes acknowledged that all persons had the right to be recognized since they engaged in linguistic interaction, he also saw that purely linguistic interaction formed highly fragile structures for a multiplicity of individuals bent on

unlimited possession. With incomparable prose he argued that language as such is capable of almost unlimited dissemblance, and he set forth a masterful demonstration that practical rights, when they are determined within the purely linguistic realm, entail a mode of life that is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” In one word, Hobbes showed that linguistic structures cannot, as such, provide the ‘grammatical’ framework for juridical relations in society as an actual, worldly institution.

Now, to avoid misunderstanding, it must be stressed that the overcoming of this difficulty was not the result of Hegel’s single-handed invention. It was rather the result of Hegel’s *original insight*—namely, the insight into the significance of the principle of fully alienable property; the worldly institutionalization of this principle he saw epitomized by the French Revolution.

For his own formulation of the historical presupposition for his insight, let us consider the remark to § 62 of the *Philosophy of Right* (somewhat modifying the Knox translation):

It is about a millennium and a half since the freedom of personality began through the spread of Christianity to blossom and gain recognition as a universal principle from a part, though still a small part, of the human race. But it was only yesterday, we might say, that the principle of the freedom of property became recognized in some places. This example from history may serve to rebuke the impatience of opinion and to show the length of time that Spirit requires to come to its own self-consciousness.

Only with the institutionalized recognition that persons as legal persons have an imprescriptible right to “an external sphere capable of embodying their freedom,”¹⁰ a sphere where only *self-determinations* of the human spirit count as human—and not natural determinations endowed with social significance, such as birth, sex, color or, in general, status—only then did it become possible to speak of an *objective world* of personal freedom. And the first writer to draw the philosophical implications of this new state of affairs was Hegel.

In reference to our question concerning modernity, we may say, following Hegel, that the principle of freedom came into actuality ‘only yesterday.’ For Hegel, modernity—the ‘new world’ stressed at the beginning and the end of the *Phenomenology*—began ‘only yesterday.’ It was only yesterday that a ‘public space’¹¹ was institutionalized within which the mediating factor between now reciprocally recognizing persons came to be the pure *Sache*, something fully alienable, and no longer the naturally determined thing naturally related to certain status-persons. In virtue of this new structure of alienation and interaction, persons came to be determined as persons—as actual, as free, as beings no longer determined by allegedly sacral factors external to the world of Spirit. And only through the pure *Sache* as the mediating term in a relation of alienation does the person come to have his freedom, to be recognized as free, *not* as a person in the eyes of God *but* in the eyes of persons, other persons, for which, through which, and in which any given person has his actuality.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

That is why the ‘new world,’ and modernity in general, may be described as the actualization of freedom. And as the philosopher of freedom in this sense, Hegel is also the philosopher of modernity.

II. Marx’s Concept of the Commodity and Capital

Having now suggested that Hegel might be read as the original philosopher of modernity, we must also note that Hegel’s philosophy, thus conceived, has had very few followers. In addition to the rather ambivalent case of Max Weber,¹² the only example of which I am aware is Karl Marx. But the scientific writings of Marx have been—even more than those of Hegel—read with a predominantly polemical eye. Anyone who wishes to discuss Marx must recognize that most of his auditors will first attempt to determine whether he is for or against, and if he is for (as if that were a philosophical point), whether he seems to deliver an orthodox or heretical line of interpretation. Such a contexture of discussion obviously excludes the possibility of genuine philosophical discourse. And given this state of affairs, my present efforts to affirm that Marx, and especially the Marx of *Capital*, is to be read as a philosopher can hardly rise above the level of being a mere assertion.

Nevertheless I shall now attempt to show, or at least to make plausible, my central thesis concerning Hegel and Marx: namely that the Marx who wrote *Capital* was a philosopher of modernity in the Hegelian sense of the word. To say this is, of course, to turn the usual interpretation of Marx’s philosophical development ‘on its head,’ for I believe that the correct reading of this development is precisely the opposite of the commonly accepted view. It is not the early writings that are informed by a comprehension of Hegel’s philosophy (despite the obvious fact that they *mention* Hegel more frequently). The ‘Hegelian’ Marx is rather the mature Marx, and especially the Marx from 1857 to 1883. To ‘demonstrate’ this contention in the time available would, of course, be impossible. What I hope to do in the remaining minutes of my presentation is to make intelligible (i.e., discussible) the hypothesis that *Capital* unequivocally presupposes Hegel’s concept of alienable *property*. And just as for Hegel, it is, I believe, also true for Marx that this concept of property provides the basic clue to modernity.

For Marx, the capitalist system of production comes into being “only when the owner of the means of production and subsistence meets in the market with the free laborer selling his labor-power. And,” as we continue to read,¹³ “this one historical condition comprises a world’s history. Capital therefore announces, from its first appearance, a new epoch in the process of social production.”

Although vulgar ‘Marxists’ of all sorts have repeatedly spoken of the injustices of civil (or, as they like to say, ‘bourgeois’) society, Marx himself was, I believe, completely and consistently clear in his contention that the civil society of modernity had, for the first time in history, institutionalized the principle of right or justice, i.e., the basic category of the philosophy of objective Spirit. And, as we have seen, precisely this is Hegel’s conception of modernity.

¹² For a helpful (and unique) analysis of Weber’s ambivalence (in the sense suggested) see the doctoral dissertation of my student and friend, Anthony Kronman: *Autonomy and Interaction in the Social Thought of Max Weber*, Yale, 1972.

¹³ Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. I, ‘The Process of Capitalist Production’ (ed. by F. Engels, transl. by Moore, Aveling and Untermann), Modern Library, New York, p. 189.

In order to avoid needless misunderstanding it must be stressed that modernity, thus interpreted, is not to be understood as 'better' than previous epochs. The question of 'better' or 'worse' does not pertain to the point at issue. The issue is a formal and ontological one. As to the formal issue, relations among modern selves, i.e., free persons in the strict sense, are, through the free exchange of fully alienable property, no longer determined by natural factors. As to the ontological issue, the structure of formal relations thus entailed has, under the conditions of modernity, an institutional embodiment.¹⁴

In order to appreciate the significance of Marx as a philosopher of modernity, we must call attention to the most important aspect of modern society that Hegel left virtually undiscussed. It concerns the *dynamic* of civil society. For Hegel, as in the next century for Max Weber, the feature of societal development most stressed was the negative process of eliminating all elements of pre-modern societies that continued to persist contrary to the principle of modernity. Although the modern world begins with the establishment or institutionalization of the principle of free property, exceptions to the basic rule of modern society do continue to exist. But the important point is that they are now identifiable *as exceptions* to an established and recognized rule.

In so far as Hegel and Weber discussed the developmental tendency of modern society, their discussion tended to focus on this process of eliminating exceptions to the rule (Weber's expression for this is 'rationalization').

What neither Hegel nor Weber succeeded in grasping was the basic *dynamical* aspect within modern society as *modern*: the accumulation of capital or the production of surplus value. The description of this aspect of modernity may be regarded as Marx's *original insight*.

For an understanding of Marx's argument the first prerequisite is that we outline his concept of the commodity.

Now, in the first place, the analysis of the commodity presupposes the philosophical concept of fully alienable property developed in Hegel's philosophy of objective Spirit. The commodity is not a thing—in that sense of the word previously specified—nor is it a pure *Sache*. If you will pardon a somewhat barbaric use of English, the commodity may be best understood as a 'thingified' *Sache*, a 'verdinglichte Sache.'

In other words, the phenomenal form through which one person manifests himself and is recognized as free in his relation to others, is the property-form. According to the principle of free property, as it was described by Hegel, it has become, for the first time, possible for buyers and sellers of a specific type of alienable property, namely labor-power, to confront each other as free persons and to engage in free contractual relations. In *principle*, this relationship, as a legal relationship, is not a

¹⁴ The historical event most important for the ontological issue was the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Paris, 1789. As I have attempted to show on other occasions, this reference to an historical event does not imply that the ontology in question is an historical one. In other words, the ontology of Hegel's philosophy of objective Spirit is *not* an historical ontology. This, I believe, is the major mistake of most Heideggerian interpretations of Hegel's ontology, a mode of interpretation formulated most articulately by Herbert Marcuse in his first book, *Hegel's Ontologie und die Grundlegung einer Theorie der Geschichtlichkeit*, Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1932.

natural determination. In so far as the alienable property mediating this relation of recognition is labor-power, the labor-power exchanged must be limited to a specific time. If a person were to sell his labor-time without any specified limit, he would no longer be the proprietor of it.

This point was already made with sufficient clarity by Hegel in § 67 of the *Philosophy of Right*.

But what Hegel failed to see was that all property relations of a given society could come to manifest themselves in terms of a single natural determination. This natural determination is what Marx called ‘labor-time.’ When all given factors (*Sachen*) are determined (a) as mediating terms in relations of recognition among free persons, i.e., as free property and (b) as objectifications (or embodiments) of abstract human labor-time, then this *is* the logical structure of ‘the commodity form’ as this expression is used in *Das Kapital*.

And, as Marx discovered in the 1850s, this is precisely the state of affairs that had come into being with the mode of production and circulation of commodities typical of modern civil society. In this society the totality of property relations are, at the same time, relations mediated by factors that have themselves been produced by human labor.

We must stress at this point that the labor-process is, as Marx showed in Chapter VII of *Capital* (Vol. I), a natural process, *ein Stoff- und Formwechsel der Menschen mit der Natur* (‘a metabolic and formative relation between men and nature’). It follows from this that the *entire* system of property relations in modern society manifests itself as a system based upon one distinct, unitary and universal natural determination, i.e., labor-power in use, or labor, strictly so-called. And the single measure of the labor thus embodied is time.

To be sure, this is a type of natural determination that can only arise within a modern society—that is, a society in which the factors entering into the process of production are, in principle, pure and fully alienable *Sachen*.

But precisely this indicates the conceptual basis for a new dynamic principle, a principle that Hegel never examined, even though it is completely in accord with his concept of modernity and, indeed, only comprehensible in terms of it.

As Marx stresses, all commodity relations within the capitalist phase of civil society are, with respect to their legal status, property relations. And since property relations—in the sense of Hegel’s philosophy of objective Spirit—*actualize* the non-temporal structure of justice, they are, for Marx, incapable of elimination. He makes this point most clearly in his ‘Critique of the Gotha Program’ (1875). But, what *is* capable of elimination according to Marx is the *commodity form* of property relations—the form that systematically determines (i.e., constitutes the essence of) the capitalist system of production and circulation.

Property relations will retain the commodity form as long as the *Sachen* mediating the interaction of persons appear not merely as *Sachen* but *also* as quanta of embodied labor-time, as quantified by a distinctive natural determination, i.e., by the time expended in the labor process.

Labor-time is thus a natural determination, like the principle for the external determination of inter-personal relations in pre-modern societies. But there are also two basic differences between this and pre-modern types of natural determinacy:

- (1) It presupposes the principled elimination of all pre-modern types of natural determinacy (e.g., the distinction of persons according to status, such as masters and servants),
- and
- (2) the commodity form is the first and only type of natural determination that characterizes the structure of social relations as a totality.

The working out of this dynamic process, in terms of which alienable property appears nearly exclusively in the commodity form, is itself no natural process; it is rather the dynamic structure of the *first* epoch in the production process of modernity. Precisely what system will come to replace the system of commodity production is—according to the Hegelian principles of the mature Marx—not to be predicted in advance. One can only refer to it *ex negativo*: i.e., as the elimination of the commodity form.

The authentic philosophy of modernity is capable of no prophecy. But, as Marx observed: “It can shorten and lessen the birth pangs.”

Such was the basic scientific or philosophic insight of the mature Marx. Unfortunately, the *Anstrengung des Begriffs* (‘the effort of conceptual thought’) that led him to this insight is to be found but rarely among contemporary ‘Marxists.’ Perhaps this is another example from history showing the length of time that Spirit requires to come to its own self-consciousness.

APPENDIX

Some Theses on Hegel and Marx

1. Alienation, in the juridical sense outlined above, is a central clue to the concept of modernity.
2. The social philosophy of Hegel and Marx presents the most coherent and adequate theory of modernity that we have.
3. Hegel conceives modernity (*die Neuzeit*) as the completion (*Vollendung*) of the European tradition. And the word completion is to be understood in at least two senses. On the one hand, the legal, moral and civil relations described in Hegel's philosophy of objective Spirit articulate the basic structure of European society at the end of its process of development. On the other hand, Hegel presents this basic structure (i.e., the European) as the first and *only* social formation that has been, in principle, fully consummated. (That is, only in European civilization is the process institutionalizing fully alienable property in principle complete.)
4. The basic structure of objective Spirit, which Hegel presents as the consummated structure of the West, is *no longer* distinctively European. Although a legitimate modern state must always presuppose some kind of definite national tradition, such a state can never justify its legitimacy by appeal to any specific tradition. The modern state is legitimate only in so far as it is informed by the universal principles of justice. These Hegel describes under the title 'Abstract Right.' With the emergence of modernity, the national peculiarities of a given people are legitimated only in so far as they give concrete content to these otherwise merely abstract principles.
5. Since the structure of objective Spirit shows itself—and especially when viewed in the context of Hegel's philosophy as a whole—as completely purified of all dependency upon German, French, English, or even *European* peculiarities, the incessantly repeated charge that Hegel's philosophy may be understood as a metaphysical 'accommodation' to the Prussian state and the Restoration of the 1820s is absurd. It is explicitly outruled by his most basic argument.¹⁵
6. Hegel is not merely the philosophical expression of modernity; the Hegelian philosophy is, according to Hegel himself, only intelligible to one who has pre-philosophically experienced modernity, i.e., to one who has experienced the specific legal relations of fully alienable property, i.e., the mode of *interaction* distinctive of modern civil society. In other words, no philosopher prior to the principled recognition of the freedom of alienating *persons* and alienable *property*, i.e., no philosopher prior to the French Revolution—e.g., Plato, Aristotle, or Hobbes—would have been in a position to comprehend the philosophy of modernity. When the significance of this historic heuristic factor is grasped, one is less likely to read Hegel's philosophy as an expression of errant egotism.

¹⁵ This was shown unequivocally by Eric Weil in his book *Hegel et l'Etat* (1950).

7. Although the structure of objective Spirit does reveal itself in time, and despite the fact that this manifestation is only graspable as the result of an historical development, this structure itself is *not* temporal and Spirit is *not* to be understood as essentially historical. If allusion must be made to time, then the structure of Spirit is to be described as synchronic, not diachronic.
8. Hegel's theory of modernity is exhibited most precisely in his concepts of the alienating person and alienable property. These are the first concepts presented in his *Philosophy of Right* and are the primitive concepts for his entire philosophy of objective Spirit.
9. One sense of the non-temporal and consummatory structure of objective Spirit was captured by Marx in the following passage from the *Grundrisse* of 1857–58: "... It is only in the most modern of civil societies, the United States, that the abstraction of the category 'labor,' 'labor in general,' labor *sans phrase*, the starting point of modern political economy becomes realized in practice. Thus the simplest abstraction which modern political economy sets up as its starting point, and which expresses a relation dating back to antiquity and valed for all forms of society, appears truly realized in this abstraction only as a category of the most modern society

This example of labor strikingly shows how even the most abstract categories, in spite of their applicability to all epochs—just because of their abstract character—are by the very definiteness of the abstraction a product of historical conditions as well, and are fully applicable only to and under those conditions."¹⁶

This does not imply that history *per se* is over (as, for example, Kojève reads Hegel) but only that *an historical development*—namely the European development toward an ontological embodiment and a phenomenal manifestation of the form of social interaction—has been brought to completion. In virtue of this, a thinker who has grasped Hegel's argument—such as Karl Marx and, to a certain extent, Max Weber—can envisage the history of this developmental process with the eyes of the owl of Minerva. By the same token, however, all forms of prophecy are excluded.

10. There is a continuity between the basic structures of Hegel's philosophy and that of the mature (i.e., from 1857) Marx. Marx's *Grundrisse* and *Capital* become philosophically intelligible when they are read as elaborations of the problem of the *dynamic* of modern (or civil) society, whose basic structure Hegel had already articulated. In order to make comprehensible a problem that Hegel had barely suggested, Marx *presupposed* the Hegelian philosophy of objective Spirit and made systematic use of the conceptual categories of the *Logik* (especially the categories of 'essence'). Thus Marx was able to show the systematic interactions between 'the Production Process of Capital' (*Capital*, Vol. I) and 'the Circulation Process of Capital' (*Capital*, Vol. II) and to demonstrate the finite or limited character of the process of the accumulation of capital, a process which otherwise seems to be without bounds. (Precisely this is what he took to be the ideological character of bourgeois 'political economy.' That is why his major work bears the sub-title: 'A Critique of Political Economy.')

¹⁶ Marx, *Grundrisse*, Dietz, Berlin, 1953, p. 25. Transl. by David McLellan, with some alterations.

11. For the Marx of *Capital* it would therefore be appropriate to say: Unscientific socialists have attempted to *change* the world in various ways; the first point, however, is to grasp it.

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