

Alienation

In this paper I discuss three paradigmatic thinkers of alienation: Rousseau, Marx, and Lukács. I am going to focus on two major aspects in their work which are of interest for a project I named neoexistentialism. The first major aspect can be expressed with the question of what should be reappropriated in overcoming alienation? The second point concerns the question of how we experience our being alienated? Or put otherwise, what kind of emotions, moods, if any, are indicative of being alienated? This second issue is connected to the problem of whether unconscious alienation is possible or not? If possible, it should be explained how her own being alienated can be made accessible to the person in question.

In particular, I examine with regard to Rousseau the structure of what might be called a precursor conception of alienation. By this, I mean that alienation in a broad sense could be and has been understood in Rousseau as an analysis of “social pathologies” in the development of modern society. However, alienation in this sense has the structure of possession and subsequent disappropriation of man’s original constitution. If we take a closer look at Rousseau in the light of Marx’ more specific concept, it can be pointed out that there is a general structure of alienation that might be described with the possession – disappropriation – reappropriation formula. In Rousseau, I claim, we have a simplified version of alienation in the form of hypotheticalal possession – disappropriation.

The discussion of Rousseau already implies a look at Marx’ theory of alienation which I develop in the second, short part of my paper. Here I show that normative basis of alienation in the early Marx is the concept of man’s self-realization in the working process. The self-realization, in turn, takes place in a double movement of a prior objectification and a following re-appropriation.

The last part of my argumentation is dedicated to Lukács’s theory of reification in *History and Class Consciousness* where his contribution to the theory of alienation has often been seen in his concept of reification (*Verdinglichung*). I discuss Lukács’s critique of capitalist society with an eye on how the concept of reification partly carries on and partly modifies Marx’s conception of alienat-

ed labor. This part of the paper shows that even Lukács could not clarify how non-alienated conditions should be conceived – a problem recent descriptions of alienation (Hartmut Rosa, Rahel Jaeggi) could not solve either.

I. ROUSSEAU ON ALIENATION

It is widely accepted that Rousseau gave one of the fiercest critiques of modern civilization and society in general. He has been often said to have accurately described or at least anticipated what later on was baptized alienation,¹ even if he himself made no use of the term. With regard to this concept of alienation, Rousseau's *Second Discourse* on inequality might serve as a point of reference. In this text, he essentially claims that (1) human beings under conditions of civilization, while seemingly free, are in fact enslaved by their mutual social relations, and (2) that this slavery to one another was brought about by a socio-cultural development leading to a loss of authenticity. Alienation in a broad sense could be and has been understood in Rousseau as an analysis of "social pathologies" in the development of modern society. Alienation in this sense is characterized by the structure of possession and subsequent disappropriation of man's original constitution. Taking a closer look at Rousseau, it can be pointed out that he works with a simplified version of alienation in the form of hypothetical possession – disappropriation. In contrast, the general structure of alienation elaborated by Marx might be described with the possession – disappropriation – reappropriation formula. What we find in Rousseau can only be labeled "alienation" in a looser sense, since the semantic core of alienation, i.e. something's becoming strange or foreign to someone, does not exactly correspond to Rousseau's basic problem. He develops an idea that might be called "alienation", but has a significantly simpler conceptual structure than alienation in Marx and in the tradition relying on him.

As to conceptual clarifications, I have to remind that there is no explicit use of "alienation" in Rousseau's work. The only candidate for a conceptual antecedent of the term is the corrupted state of modern civilized humans, more precisely, modern man's distance to the original natural state. Rousseau's theory, thus, claims that modern civilized man had become alienated from man's original nature. Working with this rudimentary definition of "alienation", we have to work out the components corresponding to the semantic core of the term: it consists in something's becoming strange to someone what previously belonged to it. There is a clear restriction on the being that comes alienated, in as much

¹ Zehnpfennig 2013. 179; Jaeggi 2014; Struma 2001. 161. Christoph Henning thinks that key motifs of Rousseau's complex work could be arranged around the center of "the major topic of alienation" (Henning 2015. 35–36).

as it must have the cognitive capacity of recognizing strangeness and familiarity. Let us look at how Rousseau describes modern society and the state of modern, civilized man.

As mentioned above, Rousseau's two early discourses expound perhaps the most radical critique of civilization. He even goes beyond Plato's notorious critique of poetry which is far more restricted in its scope, since Rousseau holds the entire field of sciences, arts, and even morals to be corruptive. The first of the two *Discourses* from 1750 and 1755 works out principal objections against sciences, fine arts, and morals in general, whereas the *Second Discourse* tries to show how the development of human society creates fatally distorting conditions.

The *First Discourse* seeks not only to show that sciences and fine arts are luxurious and superfluous, but even that they might be regarded as morally perverting. Sciences and artistic production are luxurious, in so far as they presuppose free time and the suspense of efforts to survive. Furthermore, sciences and fine arts are perverting, since they do not only amount to wasting time, precious time that could be spent instead with other prestigious activities, but they make people more dependent on one another and make them seek recognition.² Consequently, Rousseau argues, cultivation of sciences and fine arts inevitably leads to the weakening of morals and human character. This principal objection to sciences, arts, and morals claims at the same time that they contribute to the maintenance of socially constructed false appearances. For Rousseau, these appearances are total and ubiquitous. In light of this, it is somewhat surprising that there are extraordinary personalities, e.g. Socrates, who are able to neutralize the negative effect of society upon them, and thus to step out of it. It is not made clear how this self-liberation from socially produced appearances in the case of Socrates is possible, and so it remains disturbingly vague how the individual's resistance to society's negative influences is possible.

It is the predicament of modern man to live in appearances which reproduce day by day his situation of mutual slavery. In important passage of the *First Discourse* Rousseau writes:

While the Government and the Laws see to the safety and the well-being of men assembled, the Sciences, Letters, and Arts, less despotic and perhaps more powerful, spread garlands of flowers over the iron chains with which they are laden, throttle in them the sentiment of that original freedom for which they seemed to born, make them love their slavery, and fashion them into what is called civilized Peoples. Need raised up Thrones; the Sciences and Arts have made them strong. (Rousseau 1997. 6.)

² As Günter Figal remarks, there is a contradiction in refusing the utility of science, on the one hand, and the project of a scientific contribution to the least developed knowledge, to that of self-knowledge, on the other hand (Figal 1991. 101).

One might discern here two basic propositions: there is (1) original freedom which (2) is transformed into unnoticed slavery in a way that the result is appealing to civilized man. To claim this, Rousseau needs to demonstrate original freedom, and the hypothesis of the original state serves exactly to justify that freedom. Rousseau makes here a fundamental assumption: Existing as a free being before, man becomes, in fact, a slave in modern civilization. In a perplexing manner, this is a slavery which remains unnoticed. This fact is underlined by the idea that pleasant intellectual achievements repress the feeling of freedom.

In a footnote, Rousseau gives a clue to a better understanding of the aforementioned slavery: there is a wide range of acquired needs the satisfaction of which makes us dependent on others. The longing for superfluous things, i.e. the acquired needs, as opposed to natural ones, are a “chaining” of man that is made clear by a contrast: “what yoke could be imposed upon men who need nothing?” (Rousseau 1997. 6). It should also be noticed that this idea makes sense obviously only under the assumption that we have a clear conception of basic and natural needs. Furthermore, for Rousseau superfluous, acquired needs come from the process of civilization. To describe these basic and natural needs, he uses therefore the hypothesis of the original state of savage man developed only later in the *Second Discourse*.

The ideological character of sciences and fine arts suggested by the passage is, however, not at all understandable. If they are pleasant, then they must be pleasant in themselves. But in this case it remains unclear how they could sweeten slavery, since Rousseau seems to suggest a kind of exchange. The characterization of modern man as a slave is, for sure, an overstatement which basically could not be compensated by such pleasures. Rousseau simply neglects the new possibilities of action like sciences and fine arts enabled by the division of labour, and he overemphasizes instead the mutual dependence implied by it. Let us see in more detail whether the description of the development of human society in the *Second Discourse* gives a better understanding of what could be called alienation in our context.

In contrast to the *First Discourse*, the *Second Discourse* gives an account of the point of reference on the basis of which modern society is evaluated. Furthermore, Rousseau develops here the point of inequality which turns out to be the basis of the critical assessment of sciences and fine arts. In the Preface to the opera *Narcisse* he underlines that inequality is both precondition (inequality of leisure) and major goal (prestige and distinction) of scientific and artistic activity.³ It has to be added that the condemnation of scientific and artistic activity

³ “A taste for letters always heralds the beginning of corruption on a people [...] For, in an entire nation, this taste can only rise from two sources, both of them bad, and both of them perpetuated and increased by study, namely idleness and a craving for distinction” (Rousseau 1997. 97). It is worth mentioning that Rousseau’s view is similar to that of Freud’s sublimation thesis in tracing back scientific and artistic activity to motivations that the actors would not

builds on the strong presupposition that the only goal or at least the primary goal of these activities is prestige, i.e. to distinguish oneself from others (Fetscher 1975. 20). We have, then, two major steps in Rousseau's description: first, he gives a picture of the savage man, and secondly, outlines a complicated process of the constitution of modern society.

The picture of the savage man serves to comprehend the original situation of man that had been abandoned step by step by the process of civilization. Rousseau's argumentation becomes at this point ambiguous. He is undoubtedly aware of the special difficulties implied in reaching a picture of natural human beings.⁴ In the Preface to the *Second Discourse*, he asks:

how will man ever succeed in seeing himself as Nature formed him, through all the changes which the succession of times and of things must have wrought in his original constitution, and to disentangle what he owes to his own stock from what circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state? like the statue of Glaucus which time, sea, and storms had so disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast. (Rousseau 1997. 124.)

In trying to grasp the "original constitution" of human beings, Rousseau thinks necessarily to proceed on the assumption that men were naturally equal among themselves, and so the first origin of the differences between them needs to be found (ibid.). His solution of the problem consists of elaborating a sort of ideal measurement in the framework of a thought experience: "For it is no light undertaking to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man's present Nature, and to know accurately a state which no longer exists, and about which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately to judge of our present state" (Rousseau 1997. 125). The description of the savage man, then, proves to be a theoretical device in order to be able to distinguish the natural from the artificial.

In spite of the hypothetical character of the original constitution, Rousseau believes to have found certain traces of the original human nature in earlier forms of culture. He tries to explain the deforming character of modern developed society also from these findings. Rousseau identifies already in the *Second Discourse* invariant determinations of human nature, first of all, perfectibility, love of the self (*l'amour de soi*) and compassion (*pitié*). He considers these elements to be part of human nature everywhere and every time, although they

admit and would not be able to recognize (craving for distinction in Rousseau, sexual satisfaction in Freud).

⁴ There are some who do not reflect on the status of the original condition of humans, but simply take it as unproblematic.

might be weakened as can be seen in self-interest (*l'amour propre*). Universal features of human nature, however, cannot be observed immediately, they show themselves in human reactions and conduct. Rousseau's problem is that persons are not able to justify these reactions, and similarly, they can identify false needs without being able to demonstrate their falseness (Struma 2001. 73–74).

It is not necessary to follow the complicated declining process of the evolution of human society in order to focus on the essential point. It is that in Rousseau's description of the original, natural position we find an image of man which is hard to relate to what we think to be human life. The savage man has no moral qualities, no reflection and consequently only a reduced form of freedom, almost no sense of time, no self and self-awareness, and a peripheral attitude towards others (empathy put aside which cannot really be explained).⁵ We have here a set of properties and abilities that on the one hand serve as a basis of critique of civilized human life, but on the other hand are not able to offer a plausible concept of human life in general.⁶ The savage and the civilized man differ in their inmost intentions, inclinations, and desires:

The first breathes nothing but repose and freedom, he wants only to live and to remain idle, and even the Stoic's *ataraxia* does not approximate his profound indifference to everything else. By contrast, the Citizen, forever active, sweats, scurries, constantly agonizes in search of ever more strenuous occupations: he works to the death, even rushes toward it in order to be in a position to live, or renounces life in order to acquire immortality. (Rousseau 1997. 186–187.)

It is entirely unclear what the point of freedom could be in “living and remaining idle”. The problematic character of modern man appears, so Rousseau thinks, both on the level of the human species and of the individual. The latter aspect concerns the problem of authenticity which can be grasped but indirectly. Although we do not entirely know who we are, we are still able to realize when certain actions would be against our true selves – at least this is what Rousseau aims to establish.

Rousseau's proposal obviously has several weak points, since it cannot establish a distinction between two classes of feelings that could be traced back to the distinction of self-sufficient love of the self of the savage man and dependent,

⁵ Barbara Zehnpfennig observes that empathy is simply against the logic of the natural state, since human beings live isolated and their contact with others is marginal (Zehnpfennig 2013. 180).

⁶ Rousseau's picture of the savage man which he thinks to be anti-Hobbesian is far not so different as compared to Hobbes. Rousseau claimed in the *Second Discourse* that theories of an original contract in a situation before any society made the mistake of projecting modern man distorted by society into a position before society. See on this point Wolfgang Kersting's comments on *Contrat social* (Kersting 2002. 20).

egoistic *amour propre* of modern man. More importantly, a second weak point is the general refusal of any kind of comparison and competition in human life which seems to exaggerate their disadvantages. Rousseau makes comparison responsible for the mutual dependence of human beings understood as slavery; what he establishes, however, is the fact that in stating or articulating a need or a feature we need others since we rely on their agreement as a kind of guarantee. It is mixing up two functions if intersubjective reliability becomes identified with the relationship of mutual dependence.

Furthermore, society for Rousseau is something that cannot have but destroying effects. This view is obviously reductive, since division of labor is presupposed in various higher intellectual achievements that could not be accomplished without satisfying biological needs with the help of others. The narrow-mindedly negative estimation of these achievements is the prize Rousseau is apparently ready to pay in order to have a perspective to criticize comfort, luxuriousness, and abundance. The ideal of frugality underlying Rousseau's critique enables him to refuse negative social tendencies in human history, but it cannot, in turn, allow higher intellectual achievements. The unreality and implausibility of the original state of humans build the major difficulty in talking about alienation in Rousseau since it simply makes for conceptual reasons impossible to overcome the alienated situation in the sense of returning or reconstructing it. Non-alienated human life would be not human at all.⁷

Concluding this section, it has to be settled that a wider conception of alienation lies in Rousseau's harsh disdain of human culture. The semantic core of this alienation is the loss of original capacities and natural instinctiveness. What Rousseau did not show, except in a very hypothetical manner, is the identification of very human nature with original capacities and instinctiveness. The hypothetical character of the savage man does not even permit the question why culture and education cannot be part of the human essence.

The talk of alienation in Rousseau is made complicated by the fact, as indicated, that the point of departure of the process of becoming strange remains unspecified. If human nature is hypothetical, a thought experience as a methodological device, then alienation in a narrower sense cannot be said to have taken place. For this reason I propose to label Rousseau's description as a conception of alienation only in a broader sense. However, it does not mean a solution to the remaining problem – i.e. what is the status of human nature in Rousseau? It is open to debate whether Rousseau's critique of one-sided Enlightenment

⁷ We have, in fact, two alienation-claims in Rousseau: first, that man gets alienated from nature, and second, that man gets alienated from his- or herself. From this angle, diremption (*Entzweiung*) is the basic problem of stepping out of the original state: diremption with itself and diremption with nature – two in one in Rousseau's version. On alienated fine arts see my paper (Olay 2017).

appreciation of rationality can be formulated in a less radical way so that it does not fall into a similarly one-sided overestimation of feeling and sentiment.

Let us turn to a brief sketch of Marx' theory of alienation.

II. ALIENATION IN MARX

Rousseau described problematic features of modern man which could be labeled as alienation, but only in a broader sense. In contrast to his broader conception of alienation, a more specific theory can be found in the thought of Karl Marx. The following sketch does not aim to give an exhaustive account of alienation in Marx but enables us to see important conceptual differences between his theory and Rousseau's.

In Marx's work, we find a shift from alienation in the early Paris Manuscripts (*Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte*) to reification / objectification in the later work (*Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*). It is debated whether this means a break in treating the issue, or even abandoning it, or rather implies the presence of the topic in the whole work.⁸ Be it as it may, normative basis of alienation for the young Marx is the concept of man's self-realization in the working process: "labor is the self-realizing human activity". The self-realization, in turn, takes place in a double movement of a prior objectification and a following re-appropriation.

Famously, the early Marx claimed that labour in capitalism cannot be but alienated. He talks about alienation of the worker in four different sense: he is alienated a) from the product of his work, b) from the process of his working, c) from species-being (*Gattungswesen*) – i.e. man is not exercising activities proper to true human nature and capacities –, and finally d) from others. Considering the inner dependence of these forms, the essential point can be found in the second one, since the first alienation is a consequence of the "alienation within the activity of work itself" (*Entfremdung... in der Tätigkeit der Arbeit selbst*) which is a kind of self-alienation (*Selbstentfremdung*, 515) of the worker. Talking about

⁸ On various positions see Kolakowski 1978, 263ff. It lies beyond the scope of this paper to clarify the reasons for the shift from the early manuscripts' description of alienation to the later works. Kolakowski makes a case for the continuity thesis by claiming that the Paris Manuscripts "are in effect the first draft of the book that Marx went on writing all his life, and of which *Capital* is the final version" (Kolakowski 1978, 132–33). Tilman Reitz's proposal interestingly differentiates between what philosophy definitely cannot offer (revolutionary changes) and its actual functions (to support ideological agreement with the existing order). Kübler remarks that we do not find any justification of the refusal of capitalism in the later work, only in the *Manuscripts* (Kübler 2013). Zehnpfennig claims that there is no strict separation of the alienation-theorem and the later critique of capitalism: "Seine im *Kapital* entwickelte Kapitalismuskritik und seine Revolutionstheorie lassen sich im Grunde gar nicht verstehen, wenn es nicht die in der Entfremdungstheorie beschriebenen Defizite wären, die durch die Revolution behoben werden sollen." (Zehnpfennig 2013, 185).

self-alienation means that the working activity is “independent” (*äußerlich*) from the worker, it does not belong to his essence, it is forced labour (*körperlich und geistig ruinöse Zwangsarbeit*), so that it is the exact opposite of work as self-realization in the sense of “free psychic and intellectual energy”.⁹ We skip the question whether everything we call labour or work must have these features or not.¹⁰

Marx’s conception of work as the opposite of self-realization contains the characterization of work as “abstract”. He follows here Adam Smith’s description of the poverty of workers, and considers his identification of work with pain as naturalization of alienated work. Marx regarded property as something that should be explained, not simply accepted, as leading figures of political economy like Smith and Locke did. Whereas he explicitly acknowledges categories and “laws” of national economy, he refuses it as being an ahistorical perspective without offering a basic principle for the explanation of property.¹¹

Without entering further into the complexities of Marx’s conception of alienation, it can be stated that he thinks the transformation of alienated work into a non-alienated situation possible.¹² Provided that alienated work can be traced back to private property, it is consequent to see the main purpose of the process of history, in a situation without private property, i.e. in Communism. In the present context, it is enough to emphasize that even if the realization of Communism might be regarded as problematic from a practical point of view, it cannot be doubted that in Marx’s eyes it would mean a non-alienated state. With this we have a basically different semantics of alienation in Marx as compared to Rousseau, since Marx thinks a sequence of possession – disappropriation – re-appropriation possible, whereas the latter has but a short version in the form of hypothetical possession – disappropriation.

Let us turn now to Lukács’s theory of alienation and reification.

⁹ “Der Arbeiter fühlt sich “nicht wohl, sondern unglücklich [...], [...] fühlt sich daher erst außer der Arbeit bei sich und bei der Arbeit außer sich” (514) (quoted in Elbe, 6).

¹⁰ It is not here to discuss an alternative conception to this in the work of Mihály Csíkszentmihályi. His deeply Aristotelean conception of “flow” develops the basic point that each activity, even monotone and mechanic ones, might be the source of a pleasant contentedness.

¹¹ “Die Nationalökonomie geht vom Faktum des Privateigentums aus. Sie erklärt uns das selbe nicht.” (510) Sie fixiert “die *entfremdete* Form des geselligen Verkehrs als die *wesentliche* und *ursprüngliche* und der menschlichen Bestimmung entsprechende” (451).

¹² Kolakowski regards a series of “critiques” of Marx – including among others the *Paris Manuscripts* and *Capital* itself – as more and more elaborated versions of the same basic idea which he formulates as follows: “We live in an age in which dehumanization of man, that is to say the alienation between him and his own works, is growing to a climax which must end in a revolutionary upheaval; this will originate from the particular interest of the class which has suffered the most from dehumanization, but its effect will be to restore humanity to all mankind” (Kolakowski 1978. 262).

III. LUKÁCS'S THEORY OF ALIENATION

Lukács's contribution to the theory of alienation has also often been seen in his concept of reification (*Verdinglichung*) – the heading of his critique of capitalist society. As indicated at the outset, I will focus in this section on the clarification of how non-reified or de-reified conditions are, rather implicitly, described by Lukács. The presupposition of a concept of non-reified or non-alienated conditions lies at the heart of every theory of reification or alienation including Marx' conception, too. By the discussion of the concept of reification developed in the chapter "The Phenomenon of Reification" in *History and Class Consciousness* I try to show that Lukács's contribution to the theory of reification lies not in a proposed solution, but rather in differentiation and extension of the phenomenon or reification along broader social dimensions. At the same time, Lukács, as Marx before him, still owes an answer to the question how non-reified relations and non-alienated conditions should be conceived of.

As to Lukács's analysis of reification, his famous conception in *History and Class Consciousness* has proved to be one of his most influential ideas. His contribution to the theory of alienation has also often been seen in his concept of reification (*Verdinglichung*). With his concept of reification Lukács not only "found out", as it were, what came to be published in Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* only nine years later, but continued at the same time to develop his "romantic anti-capitalism" from his pre-Marxist period.

The first important point with regard to *History and Class-Consciousness* is that Lukács declares to revive Marx's method in Hegelian spirit. As explained in *What is Orthodox Marxism?*, Lukács sees the center of Marx's thought in the demand for a revolutionary transformation of the world. With this move against the main line of the Second International, the core of Marxism is grasped as an activist, revolutionary attitude towards the existing conditions, instead of the scientific-economic self-interpretation of the late Marx. Lukács touches here a sensible point in the Marxist tradition, viz. the tension between economic analysis of capitalism and class-struggle in Marx's conception. The ambiguity of an activist-voluntarist strand and an economic-scientific strand could be traced back to the early writings of Marx. Lukács himself, however, does not hesitate to make the fundamental presupposition that late capitalist society needs revolution, not only political ameliorations and amendments. It is not easy to isolate for what reasons he entertains this conviction. Lukács possibly takes it over from Marx himself who was persuaded of the inevitability of revolution, too.¹³ For Marx, the idea depends on the structural problems of capitalist production he considers to be irreparable by a step-by-step procedure or evolution.

¹³ Thesis 11 on Feuerbach.

Lukács's collection of essays is basically a reaction to the theoretical crisis of Marxism after World War I. The crisis comes from the fact that the proletariat, against Marx's predictions, does not seem to bring revolutionary changes, and seems even less to move towards a revolution. Still worse, social democracy appears as an alternative reaction, both theoretical and practical, to the fact that revolution does not arrive. *History and Class Consciousness* is, thus, to a high extent a political work, and some features of Lukács's Marxism are consequences of this. First of all, the significance of dialectics as primacy of the whole against the parts needs to be underlined. As Lukács puts it, "[t]his absolute primacy of the whole, its unity over and above the abstract isolation of its parts – such is the essence of Marx's conception of society and of the dialectical method" (Lukács 1971. 27). In terms of this reading of dialectics, he takes the Marxist method as the attempt to consider the social world as a single whole of "totality".¹⁴ In doing so, the underlying premise is "the belief that in Marx's theory and method the true method by which to understand society and history has finally been discovered". For Lukács, then, the Marxist method serves the pre-eminent aim of the "knowledge of the present" (Lukács 1971. xliii).

As a second essential moment, the explicitly revolutionary aspect of Lukács's reading of Marxian dialectics should also be accentuated. To understand society and history, the "knowledge of the present" is not merely theoretical and contemplative, as clearly indicated by Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach which is the motto for the study on orthodox Marxism: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" (Lukács 1971. 1). Correspondingly, a revolutionary action is prepared by "a dialectical knowledge of reality, which discovers the tendencies pointing towards the ultimate objective not in isolated facts, but in the dynamic totality" (Löwy 1979. 174). It is within this theoretical framework that the central essay – "Reification and the consciousness of the proletariat" – should be understood: the two major components of the title express well the theoretical program. "Reification" stands for the description of the crisis of capitalist society, and "the consciousness of the proletariat" is the revolutionary impetus which needs to be actualized in order to overcome reification.

Lukács's concept of reification (*Verdinglichung*) is a theory of objectified or reified relationships that relies on Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Some have already suggested that reification is a special case of alienation, as a widespread form characteristic of modern capitalist society. The most important argument against this identification is the fundamentally different scope of al-

¹⁴ "His view that this is the key to Marxist theory did not alter from 1919 to 1971. [...] Marxism, according to Lukács, would be impossible if it did not involve the principle that the social 'totality' cannot be reconstructed by accumulating facts. Facts do not interpret themselves: their meaning is only revealed in relation to the whole, which must be known in advance and is thus logically prior to the facts" (Kolakowski 1978 III. 265).

ienation and reification. Alienation is apparently a much wider phenomenon than reification, since there are cases of alienation not being necessarily cases of reification, e.g. alienation from other human beings.

Lukács begins the explanation of reification with an analysis of commodity-structure which he states to be *the* basic problem of capitalist society. With a surprising universality, he declares that in the age of capitalist society “there is no problem that does not ultimately lead back to that question and there is no solution that could not be found in the solution to the riddle of commodity-*structure*” (Lukács 1971. 83). Lukács not only stresses the central character of commodity-structure but assumes its model-character for all aspects of capitalist society. The commodity-structure is the central, structural problem of capitalism because it yields a “model” of objective and corresponding subjective forms in bourgeois society (*ibid.*). The description of reification is, thus, grounded on the commodity-fetishism described by Marx in *Capital*. What complicates matters is that Lukács’s argumentation exhibits deep affinity also with Marx’s early theory of alienation, even if he could not know it. The question must be suspended here whether the perspective of *Capital* carries on the early writings on alienation as some think.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in our context, however, it is worth noting that the theory of alienation in the young Marx made essential assumptions concerning a “human being”, whereas the theory of commodity fetishism doesn’t need such assumptions. Furthermore, the core of Marx’s idea of alienation is not an objectifying relationship that would make an object out of human skills, properties or human beings. The point of reification in Lukács’s sense is exactly this move of making something/somebody into an object or considering something/somebody as a mere object.

Even more important is the extension of the analysis of reification as compared to Marx. In Lukács’s view it is not only market and exchange processes, but all dimensions of capitalist society that show reification processes. In other words, he broadens the scope of the reification structure processes in capitalism that are, he adds, infinite in tendency. By extending reification to all aspects of society, he arrives at an overall diagnosis of his time. With regard to the phenomenon of alienation, the novelty in Lukács’s description of reification lies less in

¹⁵ See for example Karl Korsch’s claim that what Marx baptized “self-alienation” in his early philosophical period, became “commodity fetishism” in his later critical-scientific period. See also Leszek Kolakowski’s comment: “Although the word ‘alienation’ occurs less often, the theory is present in Marx’s social philosophy until the end of his life; ‘commodity fetishism’ in *Capital* is nothing but a particularization of it. When Marx writes that commodities produced for the market take on an independent form, that social relations in the commercial process appear to the participants as relations among things over which they have no control (exchange value being falsely represented as inherent in the object and not as an embodiment of labour), and that the supreme type of this fetishism is money as a standard of value and means of exchange – in all this Marx is reproducing the theory of self-alienation that he had formulated in 1844.” (Kolakowski 1978. I. 173.)

new forms or variations, but in the universality of reification in all social forms and dimensions of capitalist society.

The core of the phenomenon of reification is that a relation between human beings “takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a ‘phantom objectivity’, an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature” (Lukács 1971. 83). As already indicated, Lukács does not confine his analysis to the economic sphere, but tries to show that it is necessary “for the commodity structure to penetrate society in all its aspects and to remould it in its own image” (ibid. 85). Although he seems to promise here a kind of justification for this penetration, there is no real explanation, not even an attempt to spell out why the thing-structure should become pervasive in every dimension of capitalist society. The lack of explicit explanation is particularly unfortunate since the connection of the economic sphere with other dimensions of society, the one-sided dependence of the latter on the former was an often criticized idea in Marx’s oversimplifying base-superstructure scheme. One might object that there are fields – e.g. human relationships such as friendship – that are, or at least, can be resistant to commercialization and commodification.

Lukács’s comment on the famous Marxian passage on the fetishism of commodity helps to highlight his position: “a man’s own activity, his own labor becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man” (ibid. 87). The argumentation, then, differentiates between an objective and a subjective side of the phenomenon. In terms of his example of the unchangeable, but knowable laws of market, Lukács suggests that his very problem is not the strange character of reified phenomena, but the independence of reified phenomena and man’s loss of influence upon them. In contrast to this, as we saw above, alienation in Marx is a kind of distanciation from different aspects of the working activity, but not an objectifying relationship that would make an object out of human factors or human beings.

The specific negative evaluation of this objectifying relationship is not really justified by Lukács. The single fact that we regard human capacities, performances as properties of objects could not yet warrant a negative evaluation. Axel Honneth also stresses that the type of reification is unclear, since Lukács misses to specify whether it is an epistemic category mistake, morally wrong behavior, or a distorted form of praxis (Honneth 2008. 25–27). Lukács’s point on the negativity of reification is that the worker loses its organic relationship to his or her own skills and capacities: “With the modern ‘psychological’ analysis of the work-process (in Taylorism) this rational mechanisation extends right into the worker’s ‘soul’: even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed into specialised rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts” (Lukács 1971. 88). He thinks the rational fragmentation of “the subjects of labour” to be far-reaching, both individually and

collectively. The objectification of the worker's labour-power into something opposed to his total personality becomes now a permanent reality of his daily life. And Lukács adds:

Here, too, the personality can do no more than look helplessly while its own existence is reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system. On the other hand, the mechanical disintegration of the process of production into its components also destroys those bonds that had bound individuals to a community in the days when production was still "organic". (Ibid. 90.)

What makes Lukács's analysis distinctively different from the commodity-fetishism, is an additional essential aspect which had been inspired by Max Weber. Weber connected the process of rationalization with specialization, and this connection is especially important for Lukács: "the principle of rationalisation based on what is and *can be calculated*" (ibid. 88). Rationalization, in his view, intensifies the process of reification:

...the principle of rational mechanisation and calculability must embrace every aspect of life. Consumer articles no longer appear as the products of an organic process within a community [...] They now appear, on the one hand, as abstract members of a species identical by definition with its other members and, on the other hand, as isolated objects the possession of which depends on rational calculations. Only when the whole life of society is thus fragmented into the isolated acts of commodity exchange can the "free" worker come into being. (Ibid. 91.)

It is interesting to note that Lukács doesn't really explain the necessity of rationalization in the production process; he simply claims it, and goes on to an argument we already find in Marx about the anarchic nature of capitalism, viz. that capitalist production seeks profit and doesn't follow real needs of a real community.

While integrating Marx and Weber, Lukács claims that commodity production revolutionizes the production process. He combines here two traditions, in so far as he adds to the Marxian critique of capitalism the dimension of philosophy of life in the form of a rather unorthodox reading of Weber's rationalization thesis. This combination is even stranger, the more clearly we see that Weber attempted an explanation of capitalism in contrast to Marx. It is, however, less clear how the two threads of argumentation intensify each other. To put it otherwise, it is undecided which explanatory factors stem from Marx and which from Weber.

The central claim of Lukács is, then, that in capitalism reification becomes the second nature of man. He asserts that human beings in capitalism inevitably get accustomed to perceiving themselves and their environment as mere

objects. Lukács concentrates here on transformations on the subject's side, especially on transformations under the pressure of commodity exchange. Persons under conditions of permanent commodity exchange, he suggests, change their basic attitude to their whole environment, in so far as they acquire a contemplative stance, they become "detached observers" of their own existences which are "reduced to an isolated particle and fed into an alien system" (ibid. 90). By contemplative attitude, Lukács means the aspect of the passivity of the observer who is contemplating the independent processes where he or she does not grasp himself or herself as an active participant of what happens.¹⁶ Interestingly, Lukács considers the structure of detachment, viz. "the split between the worker's labour power and his personality" a pervasive feature of every field of capitalist society (ibid. 99).

With the claim that capitalist society has arrived into a final stage of reification, Lukács reproduces a similar diagnosis to that of Marx. The criteria to judge that society has entered into a final stage are *eo ipso* precarious, even if they carry a heavy burden of proof. In fact, the final, irreversible character of capitalist society is the reason why Lukács, as already mentioned at the outset, does not even consider the possibility of a step-by-step or piecemeal improvement of society. There is no other way out of this situation than a revolution of the proletariat, and Lukács's efforts are directed from this point on to solve theoretical difficulties with regard to this revolution.

Two main connected difficulties arise for him. First, the proletariat in its reified status should be revolutionized, and secondly, in order to solve the first problem, a non-reified point of departure is needed. Lukács presupposes that it is impossible to change society's reified status from within so that a factor not touched by reification is needed to initiate the process of dereification. For this purpose, he follows Lenin's proposal concerning the role of a political avant-garde embodied by the Communist Party. The Communist Party should be the non-reified beginning of the revolution disembarassing from society's reification. But this is a theoretical requirement, not a factual description. And it is, finally, the reason why Lukács's description of the Communist Party is entirely unreal, unfounded Romanticism. In our context, however, we cannot follow his theory of the party in detail. Let us turn to the conclusion.

¹⁶ See Honneth's remarks: "Unlike Martha Nussbaum, Lukács isn't interested in determining the point at which the reification of other persons becomes a morally reproachable act. Instead, he sees all members of capitalist society as being socialized in the same manner into a reifying system of behavior, so that the instrumental treatment of others initially represents a mere social fact and not a moral wrong" (Honneth 2008. 26).

IV. CONCLUSION

The overview of these three conceptions served to make clear the basic structure of alienation, following the question of what should be reappropriated in overcoming alienation and how we experience our being alienated. It has been shown that Rousseau developed a simplified version of alienation in the form of hypothetical possession – disappropriation, whereas Marx elaborated the general structure of alienation that might be described with the possession – disappropriation – reappropriation formula. Furthermore, it has been argued that the novelty of Lukács's analysis in contrast to Marx lies in the extension of the scope of reification, since he thinks that not only market and exchange processes, but all dimensions of capitalist society show reification processes which are in capitalism infinite in tendency.

Two conclusions should be stressed here: the problem of non-alienated conditions, on the one hand, and the neglect of the individual's individuality, on the other hand. It is easy to see that the problem of describing non-alienated conditions remains a hard theoretical nut to crack, as can be seen from contemporary examples. Some contemporary thinkers, mainly in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, pay special attention to alienation. Axel Honneth, Rahel Jaeggi, Hartmut Rosa, János Weiss published in the last decade books on alienation. The usage of alienation and reification is somewhat confuse, or at least, complex. For example, it is characteristic that Jaeggi suggests relying on Heidegger to distinguish two aspects of self-alienation: it means, first, to make oneself to a thing, and second to adjust one's decisions and conduct to what others do (Jaeggi 2005. 38) In doing so, Jaeggi mixes alienation with authenticity and tries to integrate the latter problem into the former. Her case leads to the second conclusion.

Descriptions of alienation and reification processes are relevant and interesting for an existential analysis of human beings. They argue against a – conscious or unconscious – reduction or objectification of distinctively human features. In doing so, they theorize and defend what is human in human beings. However, they characteristically lack a sensibility for the individuality of the individual. It seems to be a consequence of the focus on alienation and reification that the distinctive particularity of the human individual cannot be grasped sufficiently. The descriptive interest in what is essentially human loses sight of individuality. Therefore the theories of alienation remain to be complemented with an account of what it is like to be an individual.

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