



2023

A Social Ontological Account of Alienation and Its Place in the History of Alienation Theory

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A SOCIAL ONTOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF ALIENATION AND
ITS PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF ALIENATION THEORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN PHILOSOPHY

BY

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CHICAGO, IL

MAY 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all else I would like to thank those people who exhibited what could only be described as supererogatory patience while I worked on this project and, in so doing, made this dissertation possible. Towards that end, Dr. David Ingram was pivotal in helping me bring this work to fruition through his tireless forbearance of the various vicissitudes – many external, plenty internal – that would have otherwise derailed this venture. His unfailing encouragement from inception to completion was on many days the only thing that kept me moving forward, and for that I am deeply grateful. No less significantly, I also want to thank my wife, Maureen, and my children, Josephine and Peter, who bore with me through what could only have felt like an endless journey. When it comes to my wife especially, I was and am constantly reminded of the Twain witticism: “There is nothing comparable to the endurance of a woman.” To her, and to the many others who both silently and vocally encouraged me, thank you.

For my wife, Maureen,
In honor of my father, Dr. Gary R. Bauchan

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ABSTRACT

Alienation is a sociological term that has found itself severely out of favor as an analytical concept due to what are perceived as inextricable theoretical shortcomings despite having once enjoyed a time when it was taken to be essential for a robust and critical analysis of society. This dissertation looks to contribute to a revitalization of alienation theory by offering an understanding of alienation that is grounded in the framework of social ontology as forwarded in the works of John Searle. This social ontological account conceives of alienation as a fallout fact that arises when there is a performative contradiction between the enactment of a deontic power and the collective recognition of the status function that made possible that self-same deontic power in the first place. Framing alienation in this way provides the means for resolving those central aporias that have otherwise stymied its more widespread usage, namely, the question of alienation theory's fundamental unity, the division between objective and subjective approaches, and the term's normative status. The second half of the project is then dedicated to a critical engagement between the social ontological account and the long and diverse history of alienation theory beginning with its pre-philosophical uses and continuing into its philosophical appropriation in the 19th Century, its golden era in the mid-20th Century, and finally its place in second- and third-wave Critical Theory.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ALIENATION THEORY'S APORIAS

The Context and Approach of This Study

Alienation has throughout its history been a fundamentally protean term. Even the most superficial survey of relevant literature will discover a bewildering variety of circumstances that have been identified as purported instances of alienation: mental insanity, the sale of private property, the development of modern self-consciousness, the oppressive conditions of wage-labor under early capitalism, Christian original sin, psychological malaises such as depression, and even arson.¹ Concomitant to these conceptualizations are found an equally extensive number of potential connotations suggested by the term's usage: powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, separation, disorientation, emptiness, antagonism, and subjugation, to name just a few. During the golden age of alienation theory, which stretches from the early 1930s until its vertiginous denouement starting in the 1970s,² this diversity was seen as a positive testament to the term's unique power for reflecting upon tangled and complex social arrangements. However, the plasticity with which "alienation" was able to operate in dealing with these

¹ Harvey Thompson, "Britain: Sharp rise in arson attacks on schools," World Socialist Web Site, May 7, 2004, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2004/05/arso-m07.html>. Accessed July 2, 2019. In the article the author argues that there is a direct link between the increased incidences of arson attacks on schools and the alienation that students experience as a result of deep flaws in Britain's educational system. The other examples just referenced will be discussed in the review of alienation theory's history found later in the dissertation.

² One helpful way to see the popularity of the term "alienation" is through the use of Google Books' Ngram Viewer (<https://books.google.com/ngrams/>). A search for "alienation" will display a slow increase in the term's usage starting in the 1930s through the 1950s with an extremely rapid increase through the 1960s and peaking in the mid-1970s, only to then see an equally sharp drop off in its popularity in the subsequent decades.

disparate cases became a point of suspicion as the term's ability to seemingly address every possible calamity and pathology of modern society appeared possible only if there was a fundamental equivocation in its meaning. Those suspicions ultimately blossomed into widespread skepticism starting in the 1980s as the rise of postmodernism brought with it a virulent repudiation of grand narratives and essentialist presuppositions of human nature, both of which were seen as indispensable components for alienation's traditional role as a critical sociological term. The end result is that currently alienation has all but totally dropped out of both academic and popular lexicons, and for many, if not most, it is believed that things are best left at that.

Still, there are those who have been unable to completely disavow the belief that the concept of alienation is essential for any attempt at analyzing modern society.³ The most notable instance of this is in the social sciences, where a circumscribed but persistent group of theorists associated with the International Sociological Association Research Committee on Alienation Theory and Research have continued developing alienation theory more or less unabated by the vicissitudes that have afflicted its mainstream popularity over the last several decades.⁴ In philosophical circles, on the other hand, it was only since the advent of the 21st Century that alienation received renewed albeit acutely modest attention as a topic worthy of its own

³ No one is more representative of this conflicted stance with regard to alienation than Theodor Adorno, who as early as the 1960s was already speaking with exasperation about alienation as a term that is both crucial and yet problematic: "the word "alienation" is used *ad nauseum* today, [and so] I try to dispense with it as far as I can. Nevertheless, it does impinge on the subject under discussion [the concept of society], and I shall mention it at least as a general heading for what I mean." Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology* (2000 [1968]), p.43.

⁴ R36 Alienation Theory and Research Committee is a collaborative group established in 1972 in association with the International Sociological Association. It has since its inception regularly hosted seminars and conferences as well as published newsletter and anthologies on the most recent scholarship related to alienation theory in the social sciences and related disciplines. More information can be found at <https://www.isa-sociology.org/en/research-networks/research-committees/rc36-alienation-theory-and-research/>.

treatment after existing for years largely as a casually dropped by-word or a historical artifact.⁵

The biggest reason for this resurgent interest is the belief that the concept of alienation is uniquely suited for dealing with the experience of overwhelming complexity found in increasingly entrenched processes of globalization,⁶ a belief that has been bolstered by the general recognition that dispensing with the term alienation has left a conceptual gap that has for some time now been left unfilled by any more effective replacement.⁷ But whatever burgeoning enthusiasm there might be for alienation theory's return to expanded use, the question of whether or not alienation can be definitively redeemed from those parts of its own history that have caused its widespread abandonment still looms largely unanswered.

With that said, the central purpose of this dissertation is to contribute to the continued revival of alienation theory by engaging directly with those aporias that have arisen from its past and circumvented its widespread contemporary relevance as a critical sociological concept. To accomplish that goal, this dissertation will take up the task of producing for alienation theory a "historical reconstruction with systematic intent,"⁸ that is to say, the aim of this dissertation is to

⁵ Notable works in this regard are Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation* (2005 [2014]), Simon Skempton's *Alienation After Derrida* (2010), and Hartmut Rosa's *Alienation and Acceleration: Towards a Critical Theory of Late-Modern Temporality* (2010).

⁶ Felix Geyer argues that there has been a resurgence of interest in alienation because "postmodernism emerged as an important paradigm to explain the individual's reactions to the increasingly rapid complexification and growing interdependence of international society. Many of the phenomena labeled as characteristics of postmodernity squarely fall under the rubric of alienation." Geyer, "Introduction: Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism" in *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism* (1996), Ed. Felix Geyer, p. xiii. This work is a product of the research activities associated with the aforementioned Research Committee on Alienation Theory and Research of the International Sociological Association.

⁷ Richard Schacht argues to such an effect in the introduction of his *The Future of Alienation* (1994): "An underlying theme of the essays in this volume is that many of the things that have been meant by "alienation" are with us still, and are likely to remain so [...] The notion and theory of alienation therefore seem likely to have a future in discussions of these phenomena," p. 14. See also Axel Honneth's "Foreword" to Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation*, pp. vii-vii: "Yet in recent years it has seemed to more than a few philosophers that our philosophical vocabulary lack something important if it no longer has the concept of alienation at its disposal."

⁸ Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (1981[1984]), p. vii. I take inspiration for this project from Jürgen Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative*

engage with alienation theory's history so as to demonstrate how the most valuable lessons from its past can be sublated into a conceptualization that is able to overcome its most pressing theoretical challenges and once again function as a guide to empirical and analytical investigations of society. Towards that end, I will draw upon ideas taken from the contemporary field of social ontology, in particular the seminal works of John Searle,⁹ in order to construct what I am calling a critical social ontology of alienation. The project of this dissertation builds on social ontology's central concern with identifying the condition for the possibility of social reality, that is, its concern is with understanding the nature and generation of social relations in general as opposed to how those social relations exist in their concrete specificity. Given that, the tools of social ontology utilized herein will be understood as producing an account of alienation that illuminates *the conditions for the possibility of alienation in general*, which is in contrast to an account of alienation as it arises in specific social arrangements. This approach of applying the insights of social ontology to alienation theory is noteworthy for two reasons. On the most immediate level, the methodology is atypical in bringing together a predominately analytic area of concentration—social ontology—with what is usually a continental focus – alienation theory. More importantly, however, is that the characterization of alienation that will be offered exists on a level of abstraction that can avoid being lost in the diverse details of empirical cases of alienation while still being applicable to identifying and understanding those concrete instances of alienation. Alternatively one could say that the intention is to offer a model that is sufficiently

Action, in which he seeks to produce a “reconstructive science” that can revitalize a critical concept of sociology – in his case, the concept of rationality - by engaging productively with the panoply of theorists who came before him so as to show how their insights, though limited, are still richly valuable for regrounding a critical concept.

⁹ The most important relevant works are his *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) and *Making the Social World* (2010), both of which are developments of ideas first forwarded in his *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (1983).

general such that it can operate as an overarching and comprehensive theory but still meaningfully inform and correct empirical research. In summary, I hope to show that the critical social ontological account of alienation provided herein will be able to preserve what has been most attractive in alienation theory and do so in a way that is both reflective of its most prominent historical uses and is responsive to the critiques that undermined its mainstream appeal.

The organization of the dissertation will unfold in the following fashion. The remainder of this first chapter will set out and analyze those aporias that have stalled alienation theory's continued employment as a critical term in order to clarify what exactly is at stake in resolving each of them. Having done that, in the second chapter I will offer the initial presentation of the critical social ontological account of alienation, explain its most important features, and propose how it is able to resolve the aforementioned aporias. The subsequent chapters will then be a test of the hypothesis that the critical social ontological account of alienation can productively engage the history of alienation theory in a way that preserves the most valuable insights all while being able to overcome the specific shortcomings of each historical account. The third chapter, which is the first of this historical study, will look at alienation's pre-philosophical history through its originary uses in ancient Roman property jurisprudence, in social-affective theory, and in psychology. The fourth chapter will then turn to classical presentations of alienation theory as found in G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Martin Heidegger, while the fifth chapter will consider accounts from alienation's golden era that are reflective of the most significant directions in which alienation theory developed, namely, its mainstream usage as seen in the works of Erich Fromm, its place in empirical sociology as found in the works of Melvin Seeman, and its existential expression as represented by Jean-Paul Sartre's writings. The sixth

chapter will then explore alienation's treatment in the history of Critical Theory with a special focus on the works of Jürgen Habermas and Rahel Jaeggi, the latter of which is by far the most developed and important contribution to alienation theory's contemporary revival. Lastly, the final seventh chapter will recapitulate the most important accomplishments and suggest how the critical social ontological account of alienation can contribute to future work in alienation theory.

Alienation Theory's Aporias

Before even getting to the main aporias of alienation theory, the first challenge to confront, which can seem rather baffling even if it is something to be expected of philosophy, is that there is hardly any consensus as to what is even meant by the term itself.¹⁰ As was pointed out in the introduction, when one reviews the history of alienation theory one finds a tremendous diversity of circumstances that are all cited as instances of alienation, but rarely do these accounts offer an explanation for precisely how that term is being used in those specific cases such that it merits a singular designation of "alienation." What one finds instead is that most theorists seem content to focus their attention principally on analyzing the particulars of concrete cases while otherwise leaving it up to their readers to construct a working definition of what is meant when the term is invoked.¹¹ Even when there has been a deliberate and concerted effort to identify some kind of core usage for the term, the end result often cannot avoid eliciting the feeling that one has been given an entirely opaque statement.¹² The problem that this causes is

¹⁰ Richard Schacht's *Alienation* (1970), which Walter Kaufmann calls a "prolegomena to any future study of alienation," p. xvi, offers the most extensive survey of the varied uses of the term alienation throughout its history. Kaufmann, in his introductory essay to Schacht's work, observes that Schacht convincingly "shows that there is no single general meaning of 'alienation.'" Schacht, *Alienation* (1970), p. xvi.

¹¹ Schacht points out how many theorists working with alienation have a tendency "to assume that the term is antecedently understood (and hence requires no careful explanation), and to feel free to use it as idiosyncratically as may be convenient." Schacht, *Alienation* (1970), p. 2.

¹² To give just a few examples of this phenomenon, consider the following examples. Rahel Jaeggi begins her influential work *Alienation* (2005 [2014]) by defining alienation as a "relation of relationlessness," p. 1. Erich

that without a clear and workable statement as to how the term is being used there is no established criteria for determining when it is being used coherently and when it is used as so much smoke and mirrors to make points that seemingly sound significant but, upon further inspection, turn out to be rather vapid. Sadly, such a situation is one of which the history of alienation attests is more common than not.

Now some of this ambiguity comes from the fact that alienation theory has had a long history of associating phenomena that are seen as *prima facie* independent of each other, and so at times different connotations seem to run at different angles from one another even while it is argued that they have some underlying connection. Integrating these divergent elements in a way that is both consistent and yet concise is understandably difficult. To make things even more complicated, in the predominant German-language sources for alienation theory one finds two different terms, *Entäusserung* and *Entfremdung*, which both can be transliterated into English as alienation, albeit with different connotations depending upon the circumstances. From all of this one can easily see how even this seemingly simple task of providing a straightforward definition can become rather challenging. Nevertheless, when the term has faced widespread decline exactly because of a lack of precision, being direct and precise as to what one means by the term, and further being consistent in using it, is an essential first step.

Given the critical importance of this issue, and recognizing that we are already well underway in the project without so much as a provisional definition being established, it would be important for consistency's sake to address this concern immediately. Doing so will help stave off as much as possible the accusation commonly leveled against alienation theory that it slips

Fromm introduces alienation in his *The Sane Society* (1955 [2008]) as “a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien,” p. 117.

into obscurity and ambiguity while thereby serving as a constant reference point for validating progress as the full theory is set out. Still, it must be noted that trying to come up with a complete and holistic definition at the outset is difficult without engaging in an extensive morphological and etymological study, which can then potentially rendered questionable in light of active semantic applications of the term that is found in its various manifestations. Further, a robust attempt to define alienation rigorously at the outset of a theoretical inquiry seems doomed to failure as a complete exposition relies upon the underlying analytical content yet to be laid out. Therefore, it will have to be sufficient to proffer a working definition for alienation that can then be reiterated and potentially expanded in order to maintain both its internal consistency and, given the overarching focus of the project herein, to maintain consistency with its traditionally established uses.

Since the stated goal of this dissertation is to help revive alienation theory in general, and given that the history of alienation theory is as broad as it is deep, it is crucial that the working definition set out here be one that is sufficiently general so as to be potentially seen as reasonably capturing what is at the heart of those different approaches, or at least a sufficient majority of them, differences notwithstanding. Importantly, the intention behind the definition offered is not to exclude *a priori* any conceptualization of alienation but rather to hopefully cast the net wide enough that it can be inclusive even to marginal cases. In doing just that, it would seem one could find no better place to start from than with what is offered in the aptly named *Oxford Dictionary of Difficult Words*: alienation is “the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved.”¹³ Now, in analyzing such a definition, three points should be considered in more detail. First, the definition

¹³ *The Oxford Dictionary of Difficult Words* (2001), Ed. Archie Hobson.

straddles the space between a subjective, psychological approach and an objective, sociological approach by acknowledging how alienation can be either a “state” or an “experience,” respectively. Second, the definition also situates alienation between two commonly contrasted characterizations when on the one hand it labels it as being a kind of *status vis-à-vis* a relationship to a “group” while on the other hand it takes it as a kind of *process* when it is associated with an “activity.” Lastly, it should be noted that this definition also touches upon a normative dimension that is traditionally associated with alienation theory when it casts alienation as an isolation from a group or activity that one “should” be connected with, even though the definition does not go on to substantiate the nature of that “ought.” Now having to already acknowledge these contrasting characteristics within the working definition might already be garnering the judgment that this is all yet more evidence that alienation is inextricably sunk in obfuscations, but for now it simply has to be acknowledged that any attempt at offering a holistic definition of alienation is going to have to encompass both sides of these different perspectives. For the time being it would be the least divisive to simply include both pairs with the recognition that ultimately more needs to be said.

Now to be sure, the terminological challenge that confronts alienation theory is not merely a matter of semantics but instead results from fundamental questions concerning how alienation should be conceptualized. While it is possible to construct a rather extended list of these presumptive deciding questions,¹⁴ there are three that in the history of alienation theory have been the most divisive and so stand most in need of being addressed by attempts at reviving alienation. These three aporias, listed without presumption of importance, are as follows: first, the question of whether the diversity of cases cited as alienation are to be understood as having

¹⁴ See for example Schacht, *Alienation* (1970), pp. 249-256; 267-274.

some underlying connection that tightly unifies them or rather should the term alienation only be understood as denoting a loose conglomeration of purely analogous phenomena. Second, the question of whether alienation is ultimately something that inheres in the subjective experiences of individuals or rather is it an objectively discernible reality that arises out of certain states of affairs. And third, the question of whether alienation is best understood as functioning with an intrinsic normative dimension alongside its descriptive function or rather is it solely a descriptive term. When one looks to the history of alienation, one can readily find characterizations of alienation that fall in line with any combination of responses to these aporias, even though one can also discern common patterns that cluster around certain combinations.¹⁵ While many theorists will acknowledge the merits of both sides in these aporias,¹⁶ it is generally acknowledged that whatever answer one gives to these questions they are irreconcilable with the alternative.¹⁷ That having been said, ultimately the most important upshot of this is that taking a stance on any one of these aporia will require not only justifying why that position is taken but also explaining why a distinct and opposing characterization, one which has garnered substantial support in alienation's long history, is to be rejected as somehow fundamentally mistaken. This

¹⁵ The two most prominent clusters are a traditional Marxist understanding of alienation that sees all instances of alienation emanating from a single source and so having a substantial unity, that it exists primarily as an objective phenomenon, and that it has a clear normative import, while the other is what is commonly found in empirical sociology that sees alienation as functioning only as an analogy for a wide variety of closely associated but still distinct experiences, that alienation functions primarily as a subjective phenomenon, and that it is purely descriptive. See Andrew Oldenquist and Menachem Rosner, "The Search for De-alienation Strategies" in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991), p. 4 for further comments in this regard.

¹⁶ Andrew Oldenquist and Menachem Rosner, "The Search for De-alienation Strategies" in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991), p. 4 point out how, when it comes to the two mainline traditions, "these two types conflict, [while] they also borrow from each other." Similarly, Felix Geyer in "Introduction: Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism" in *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism* (1996) notes "both positions seem to be defensible, and they may not even be that far apart but rather may reflect different priorities," p. x.

¹⁷ Schacht, *The Future of Alienation* (1995), p. 30, when talking about two main approaches to alienation, emphasizes "the distinction they mark reflects the fact that the criteria of the existence of these various forms of alienation differ fundamentally and radically [...] To fail to appreciate this point is to court serious confusion, error, and misunderstanding."

is all the more important when one realizes that these three aporias align with the three elements singled out for special attention in the working definition of alienation previously introduced.¹⁸ Therefore, to understand fully what is at stake it will be important to consider each individual aporia in further detail.

The first aporia is the question of whether there is some substantial unity underlying the various instantiations of alienation or whether what binds them together is merely a loose analogy. For most contemporary alienation theorists, the fact that this would even be listed as an aporia that needs to be addressed would perhaps be a surprise since a majority would unreservedly answer that alienation can at best only be understood as, in the words of one prominent theorist, a broad “umbrella concept, uniting different, but loosely related, dimensions.”¹⁹ If one recalls from the introduction the incredible diversity of experiences that are all cited as alienation, one can easily see why so many theorists simply cannot find it plausible to think that there is some substantial underlying reality that unifies all of these different accounts. Even if it may be true that some of these conceptualizations can be shown to be interlinked, such as in Marx’s analysis of alienation understood as the sale of private property and alienation understood as the oppressive conditions of wage-labor dominated by commodity fetishism, it stretches credulity to say that other forms are somehow fundamentally connected, such as in the case of alienation understood as isolation in modern office work and alienation understood as the

¹⁸ To make the connection explicit, the element in the working definition that identified alienation as either a state or experience aligns with the aporia centered on the objective/subjective distinction, the element focusing on the status versus process aligns with the aporia concerned with a fundamental unity for alienation theory, and the final one is concerned with alienation’s normativity.

¹⁹ Geyer, “Introduction: Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism” in *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism* (1996), Ed. Felix Geyer, p. ix. This anthology is one of several collections that comes from the collaborative work of the R36 Alienation Theory and Research Committee and as such is representative of contemporary alienation theory in empirical sociology.

experience of the separation between God and man found in the Christian account of original sin. As another prominent theorist, Richard Schacht, puts it, in these cases “no grand total synthesis is possible. It is naïve to envisage it, and quixotic to pursue it. In short, *there is no such thing as alienation* [...even while] there are myriad alienations.”²⁰

This conclusion that alienation is best understood as merely an analogical concept is further supported by the belief that attempts at establishing an underlying substantial unity to alienation theory would require being reliant upon problematic presuppositions, namely essentialist assumptions about a universal human nature. Many theorists see in alienation, especially as traditionally conceived in Marx and many of his successors, an inherent dependence upon the belief that there are certain unalterable and universal features of human nature that serves as the relief against which alienated conditions are then identified.²¹ One charge is that such grand theories can be themselves alienating as they project a monolithic unity that belies the complexity of reality and singles out for favor certain understandings of what a flourishing human life looks like in spite of whatever one’s own self-chosen self-conception might be.²² Others hold that it is simply a distraction to engage in a prolonged theoretical debate

²⁰ Richard Schacht in *The Future of Alienation* (1994), italics original, p. 34.

²¹ One finds such a refrain echoes throughout the literature on alienation theory. Melvin Seeman notes that the common Marxist objectivist approach to alienation “typically involves the postulation of a universal external standard – true human nature and its capacities – against which alienation is determined,” Seeman, “Sentiments and Structures,” in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991), pp. 19-20. Similarly, Frederick Neuhauser’s “Translator’s Introduction” to Jaeggi’s *Alienation* (2005 [2014]) acknowledges that “traditional conceptions of alienation generally depend on substantive, essentialist pictures of human nature – accounts of “the human essence,” pp. xi-xii.

²² Rahel Jaeggi notes how “theories of alienation appear to appeal to objective criteria that lie beyond the “sovereignty” of individuals to interpret for themselves what the good life consists in,” and thus involve an intrinsically paternalistic perspective. *Alienation* (2005[2014]), pp. 28-29. Similarly, Richard Schacht, “Social Structure, Social Alienation, and Social Change” in *American Philosophical Quarterly* (Vol. 23, Num. 1, January 1986) points out that “Alienation theorists and social critics who make much of the notion of social alienation often rely upon a conception of society that is questionable at best [...] I refer to what might be called a monolithic model of human societies, according to which they are to be thought of (along the lines of the dictionary definition of this term) as exhibiting “solid uniformity and one harmonious pattern throughout,”” which does not admit of individual variation, p. 47.

concerning the “true” nature of alienation in the face of the more urgent concern of immediate and real conditions of alienation.²³ As the argument goes, it does not seem as though anything is gained from saying one or another circumstance is more truly alienation when the term is equally helpful for analyzing otherwise heterogeneous cases. Working with a conception of alienation theory that predominately holds it as functioning analogically is then seen as being able to avoid a potentially expansive theoretical quagmire which at best can produce only a questionable value.

Yet despite all these points, the position that alienation should be taken as a merely analogical term is far from being unproblematic. The fundamental objection to the analogical understanding of alienation is that it raises the question why one should even use the term in the first place if it lacks any substantial analytic content of its own.²⁴ Posed bluntly, what does the term alienation even add to the discussion if it is merely a proxy for other analytic terms? While some theorists appear perfectly fine with acknowledging the thrust of that question and using the term all the same,²⁵ it is clear such a move makes alienation theory particularly susceptible to the charge that the term is invoked more as a buzzword to attract attention rather than as an especially illuminating clarification. The most common alternative to this situation is to identify and insist upon some singular reality as the ultimate cause of alienation in whatever guise it

²³ Taking inspiration from Marx’s oft-quoted line “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

²⁴ When considering most work in empirical sociology, Oldenquest and Roser note that most approaches “left unanswered was how one distinguished alienated powerlessness from unalienated powerlessness, alienated normlessness from unalienated normlessness, and so on, for surely not all powerlessness and normlessness is alienation.” Oldenquest and Roser, *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991), p. 4.

²⁵ Immediately following the earlier referenced line from Schacht where he says there is no alienation but only alienations, he continues: “There is nothing wrong with the practice of using the term “alienation” in the characterization of the various phenomena in question [...] even if there is no compelling reason to retain and expand it either.” Schacht (1994), p. 34.

might appear. One sees a move such as this most commonly in traditional Marxist interpretations of alienation where the conditions of capitalism are seen as operating at the heart of all experiences of alienation, but the history of alienation theory is full of varying explanations for what is the supposedly true and ultimate source of alienation in all of its particular guises.²⁶ Of course this does not so much solve the problem as simply narrows it as there remains the standing challenge of how to determine on what grounds certain instances are taken to be alienation while others are excluded, and this is in addition to the need for explaining how this causal core accounts for the constellated but otherwise seemingly disconnected instances of alienation. With this there is the risk that in attempting to produce a holistic account there will be relevant details from particular cases that will be more so ignored rather than accommodated into the central account.²⁷ Still, the move to maintain an analytic core to alienation theory is nonetheless believed to be essential because it is seen as the only way to give a clear analytic content to the term and so see it as making a unique contribution in sociological analysis.

In the end, alienation theory finds itself caught here between being sufficiently general to capture a wide diversity of cases but also substantial enough that it makes a meaningful contribution to analyzing those cases. Depending upon one's choices, one risks sacrificing

²⁶ Erich Fromm, for example, situates alienation in the objective-subjective poles of consciousness where an overemphasis on the objective dimension is at the heart of all cases of alienation. Similarly, though it predates alienation's more widespread terminological adoption, one can look to Jean-Jacques Rousseau who saw socialization into modern society as the fundamental cause to all experiences of alienation in whatever form it manifested itself.

²⁷ Schacht in *The Future of Alienation* (1994) expresses concerns that for alienation one ends up "defining such concepts *too exactly* to permit their application beyond the limits of relatively idiosyncratic sets of particular circumstances," p. 33, italics original. For him, alienation is a kind of "cluster concept" that is "capable of extension to previously unconsidered or newly occurring phenomena that likewise may exhibit both extensive similarities and certain dissimilarities to those initially considered," p. 32, which would avoid unnecessarily excluding some examples just because they do not "fit" with the core conceptualization. In general Schacht tends to take the position that alienation is to be treated as an analogical term rather than one as having some deep underlying unity, though his concerns in this specific instance would equally apply to those that push for a more substantial unity.

alienation's potency to try to maintain its relevance, or vice versa. If there is a solution, it would seem that the way forward can be found in identifying the appropriate level of generality at which one seeks to locate unity within alienation theory. For those that argue analogy, that unity is only the most abstract and general, while for those who argue for a substantial unity, the connections are immediate and concrete. To bring the two sides closer together, it needs to be seen whether there is a conceptual space between these two stances in which to situate a theory of alienation that is both broad enough to function as a common tool for different circumstances and yet is narrow enough that it can make substantial contributions to analyzing those specific cases. To anticipate the argument that will be made in this dissertation, such a space can in fact be found with the tools of social ontology, and a theory of alienation that is abstracted beyond the concrete specificity of particular cases but without stretching credulity in maintaining the existence of an underlying unity can be articulated in a way that moves alienation theory beyond this aporia.²⁸

The next major aporia has arguably been the most divisive in alienation theory, and that is the problem of the objective/subjective divide. At the core, it is centered on the question of whether alienation is to be understood as fundamentally *dependent on* or instead largely *independent of* subjectivity, that is, whether alienation is best characterized as a preponderantly individual phenomenon that is grounded in *subjective* personal experience or whether it should be characterized as an *objective* reality that exists most essentially in aspects of definite social

²⁸ Searle, "The Future of Philosophy" in *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* (Dec. 1999), p. 2077. "The problem that we have in attempting to cope with social reality is that our concepts are either immensely abstract, as in traditional political philosophy [...] or they tend to be essentially journalistic, dealing with day-to-day questions of policy and power relations. [...] What we need, I believe, is to develop a set of categories which would enable us to appraise social reality in a way which would be more abstract than that of day-to-day political journalism, but at the same time, would enable us to ask and answer specific questions about specific political realities and institutions in a way that traditional political philosophy was unable to do."

relations. The dialectical opposition between these two approaches arise at the level of what constitutes the sufficient conditions for alienation: for objective accounts alienation is something that arises from the conditions of society and so can exist irrespective of a person's subjective mental states while subjective accounts hold that alienation is intrinsically a subjective experience and so objective social conditions are at best only an incidental variable that explains why some might have this experience but are not constitutive of alienation itself.²⁹ While the classical sources of alienation theory have moments that characterize alienation along each of these two lines,³⁰ and most theorists will acknowledge the importance of both perspectives,³¹ later developments in alienation theory came to see these two positions as intrinsically and definitively opposed to one another. That divide has become more pronounced with each successive iteration of alienation theory through to today when most theorist confronted with such an apparent contradiction simply ignore it and continue working with just one or the other approaches exclusively.³² Even those theorists that acknowledge the aporia and attempt to

²⁹ Schacht in *The Future of Alienation* uses the terminological distinction of S-alienations and O-alienations as a way of distinguishing between the subjective and objective approaches, respectively. As he points out for these two approaches, "In the case of S-alienations, the existence of certain sorts of psychological states is the sole and complete criterion of their occurrence" while for O-alienations "what counts here is rather the character of what the individuals and groups in question actually do in relation to the nature of some existing social structure, regardless of how they may perceive and feel about both what they do and this structure," p. 30.

³⁰ Marx, for example, who is often understood to be analyzing alienation from the objectivist perspective, still described alienation as "a *feeling* of misery rather than well-being," italics added, Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961), p. 98.

³¹ Seeman, the quintessential subjectivist in alienation theory, says the following about the approach he takes: "Let us be clear about what this conception does and does not imply. First, it is a distinctly social-psychological view. It does not treat powerlessness from the standpoint of the objective conditions in society; *but this does not mean that these conditions need be ignored in research dealing with this variety of alienation.* These objective conditions are relevant, for example, in determining the degree of realism involved in the individual's response to his situation." Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," (1959), p. 784, italics mine. Consider the previous citation from Marx for an objectivist who includes a subjectivist moment.

³² Those that take this approach most likely conclude that the approach they take is the only viable one and so ignoring the dichotomy would, on that assumption, be perfectly reasonable. The problem with such a conclusion, however, is that it is so obviously implausible in light of the prominent shortcomings that are recognized with both types of accounts. In such a case it seems that the best explanation for why so many theorists ignore the dilemma is

address it have mostly ended up failing to bring any real resolution to the tensions that exist between the accounts; to cite the most prominent examples, what one finds is that they either end up surreptitiously prioritizing one of the approaches over the other³³ or else the relationship that is reputed to exist fails to establish any deep concord between the two types of accounts.³⁴ In light of this, the common conclusion is that the most one can hope to find in alienation theory is a sort of “family resemblance”³⁵ between the two types of accounts, and so alienation is held to function only as that “umbrella concept” that brings together various loosely related but fundamentally dissimilar ideas.³⁶ If one had to decide upon a single aporia that has most

that of professional inertia within disciplines, that is, the unspoken consensus that takes certain unresolved theoretical issues for granted in order to continue with a particular research project. See also Seeman, “Sentiments and Structure” in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991), p. 18, a subjectivist who acknowledges the “resolute prejudices on both sides” and Mayhew, “Structuralism versus Individualism,” (1980), p. 337, as an objectivist who describes the two sides as largely having “cultivated a trained incapacity to hear any other point of view.”

³³ Melvin Seeman in his article “Sentiment and Structures: Strategies for Research in Alienation” in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991) opens with an argument that more theoretical work needs to be done to bridge the gap between the objectivist and subjectivist approaches, but in the end he ends up being a consistent defender of the subjective approach over and against objective account.

³⁴ Alan Whitehorn’s “In Search of a Praxis of Alienation Research” in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991) argues that the two types of accounts need to be brought together but in the end the most he is able to offer is a pragmatic association in which the two accounts operate as correctives to one another without actually being brought into any definitive unity. Although such a practical relationship is unquestionably a valuable one, there is a further problem in that he offers no method for determining which account one should go with when the two are discordant. In fact, in the example he provides, it is the subjective account that ends up again being prioritized as the corrective on the objective account, thus displaying his presumptive preference. Seeman (1959) also states that the objective conditions can be used “in determining the degree of realism involved in the individual’s response to his situation,” which brings the two approaches together but in a way that still prioritizes the subjective perspective. Seeman (1959), p. 784.

³⁵ Richard Schacht in *The Future of Alienation* (1994) argues that when it comes to the various theories of alienation, one should only seek to find “what is sometimes called a *family resemblance* in [their] relation to one another,” as “the conclusion cannot be avoided that their theoretical integration under the rubric of a single, all-embracing notion of alienation is both an empirical and conceptual impossibility,” pp. 32-33.

³⁶ Geyer Ed. *Alienation, Ethnicity, and Postmodernism* (1996), p. ix. “Alienation is an umbrella concept, with sometimes widely diverging, but nevertheless more or less loosely linked, connotations and dimensions.”

confounded contemporary alienation theory, it would be safe to say that the objective/subjective divide has been and remains the most challenging.³⁷

The differences that arise due to how these two approaches respectively shape alienation theory are fairly straightforward.³⁸ For the subjectivist, alienation is understood as a form of *dissatisfaction* arising from a person's regard for some aspect of their social context, while for the objectivist, alienation is understood as a form of *dysfunction* that exists within some aspect of social relations.³⁹ On a quick view it can appear as though these two approaches are just viewing things from two sides of the same coin, but in fact there is a rather significant difference between the two positions. For the subjectivist, the focus is not so much on what effects social reality has on individuals but rather what kind of perspective a person has of that social reality. The first is external and imposed *upon* the individual, while the second is internal and imposed *by* the individual. Although the effects that society has on a person and that person's respective perspective of society are undoubtedly closely correlated, they are not tied with any kind of strict necessity to one another. For example, it is entirely possible that two people in an identical or at least near-identical social situation will have different perceptions of their social context, and so from the subjectivist stance one of those individuals might be described as alienated while the other is not. In short, from the theoretical perspective of the subjectivist, the conditions of society are ultimately irrelevant for determining whether or not a person is alienated. For the objectivist,

³⁷Seeman, (1991). "The central problem that haunts the alienation literature is [...] the arguments and the misunderstandings that surround the distinction between the individualist-subjectivist approach associated with social psychological research on the one hand, as against the structural-objectivist orientation on the other," p. 19.

³⁸ The following exposition borrows heavily from Richard Schacht's (1994) very helpful discussion of the distinction between what he calls S- and O-type alienations. See Schacht (1994), pp. 20-23 for the full details of his account.

³⁹ Schacht (1994), p. 20.

it is exactly the opposite. Central to the objectivist viewpoint is the stance that alienation is understood as inhering specifically in particular social conditions rather than in some person's regard for those conditions. In this case, it is now the perspective of the participant that is irrelevant as to whether or not the situation is understood as one of alienation, and it is possible from this theoretical viewpoint to see a person as alienated simply because of their social context even if that person would not see themselves as alienated. The differences in how these two approaches conceive of their research program and the conclusions they draw from them then expand exponentially from this one fundamental disagreement.⁴⁰

While one might be tempted to content oneself with accepting a two-track theory of alienation, the implications that arise with either choice of theoretical focus often run at cross currents with one another and so such an alliance seems untenable. For example, the most consistently raised issue with the objectivist perspective is the belief that its understanding of alienation inherently relies upon a standard that functions paternalistically vis-à-vis the individual. As the critique goes, classical objectivist accounts of alienation theorize that a society is deemed alienating if it produces diminished human capacities, and so in order to determine when such a situation occurs one must rely upon a universalistic conception of human capabilities as the standard.⁴¹ The problem is that claiming a society should let flourish "truly human" capacities hardly clarifies things, for, as one theorist points out, both creativity and

⁴⁰ Two important papers that help set out these differences, from each of the respective camps, is Mayhew (1980) and Seeman (1991). Although Mayhew is addressing the issue in the broader context of sociology as a discipline rather than specifically alienation theory, his work is a helpful and very much a self-conscious contrast to Seeman's discussion of these differences, which Seeman does connect directly to alienation theory.

⁴¹ Seeman (1959), pp. 19. "The objectivist stance typically involves the postulation of a universal external standard - true human nature and its capacities - against which alienation is determined."

destruction are universal human realities.⁴² What ends up happening, so the subjectivist continues, is that “the theorist arrogates for themselves a remarkably privileged position as the judge of human nature, of society, and even of the person” in which the purportedly universal standard is more so a reflection of the theorist’s personal predilections than the result of rational justification.⁴³ Additionally, given that the objectivist account establishes its standard in a way that is independent of the personal perspective of the individuals deemed alienated, the supposedly universal standard can itself be seen as an alienating imposition should it and the conclusions drawn from it go against the considered opinion of the person to whom the standard is applied.

For the objectivist, on the other hand, a subjective account of alienation is problematic not so much because it lacks a concrete standard for determining situations of alienation but rather because it is not clear what value there even is in any standard that would be so chosen. Although one can concede that measuring the subjective attitudes of individuals is an internally consistent research project, objectivists question how alienation is to be understood as a *sociological* term if the standard for said research is effectively stripped of any specifically social character by being exclusively grounded in the psychological character of the individual.⁴⁴ While subjectivists might argue that the social context is never that far away as it is a required element in determining the cogency of the subjective perspective,⁴⁵ this does not so much solve the problems pointed out with the objectivist standard as it simply disguises and ignores them; in the

⁴² Seeman (1959), p. 20.

⁴³ Seeman (1959), p. 20

⁴⁴ Mayhew (1980), p. 346. “There are no social characteristics of individuals.”

⁴⁵ See the earlier footnote from Seeman where he argues this point. Seeman (1959), p. 784

end it is still necessary to determine, independently of that individual's perspective, the standard one uses to measure the value of the subjective judgment of that individual. Another related way that one can understand the objectivist criticism of the subjective approach is the claim that the subjectivist has no way of dealing with the phenomenon of false consciousness.⁴⁶ Since the subjective account takes the reports of the individual more or less at face value, it lacks any way of addressing how the subjective experience of the individual may in fact be distorted by the person's social context. The problem is, in short, that the subjectivist account produces data that is either of questionable authenticity or of questionable relevance when it comes to specifically sociological analysis.

In the end, the issues posed by the objective/subjective divide is that one appears to be consigned to a situation in which one either imposes externally a standard that is ultimately arbitrary or one tries to avoid the conundrum of establishing a standard at the cost of stripping alienation of any critical value. Once again, one risks sacrificing alienation's potency to try to maintain its relevancy, or vice versa. The resolution of this divide, if there is one, would then seemingly be in seeking a standard for identifying alienation that is grounded in the subjective states of individuals, and so not paternalistic, while also being able to connect meaningfully to concrete social relations, and so be critical. As will be argued in this dissertation, the tools of social ontology, especially the concept of collective intentionality as developed by Searle, is explicitly aimed at bridging the explanatory gap between the subjectivity of individual person's and the objectivity of social reality.

⁴⁶Seeman (1991), pp. 24-25, offers an interesting attempt at resolving this challenge from the subjectivist perspective.

The last aporia that needs to be addressed is the question of alienation's normativity. Specifically, the question is whether alienation is most appropriately and effectively treated solely as a descriptive term that is used to demarcate certain kinds of circumstances and clarify them or whether it should be treated as an inherently normative term that is used to critically judge exactly those circumstances and so work to transform them. Important to note, this aporia is not whether alienation can be used to a critical effect but whether the term is itself necessarily and inherently normative as those who support a normatively neutral usage of the term are quick to point out how the terms non-evaluative nature need not mean it has no bearing on critical concerns even if the term does not itself function normatively.⁴⁷ That having been said, how one answers this question is often closely tied to how one responds to the previous aporia as the subjectivist approach to alienation theory tends to tilt heavily towards the idea that alienation is best understood solely as a descriptive term while the objectivist approach to alienation theory tends to favor the normative stance.⁴⁸ Now, it needs to be immediately clarified that the reasons for this are largely accidental since, to illustrate with just one example, it is equally possible to conceive of a subjectivist account of alienation that seeks to merely ascertain the existence of an experience of dissatisfaction while bracketing the question of evaluation as it is to envision a subjectivist account that sees the existence of dissatisfaction as intrinsically negative due to it being a disruption to a person's drive for mental equilibrium in the form of satisfaction. As an aporia, then, the challenge posed by the question of alienation's normativity is ultimately a

⁴⁷ Schacht (1971), in talking about alienation, states "One can distinguish between a polemical use of the term, which is understood to *convey* a value commitment, and a nonpolemical use of the term understood to convey no such commitment, *coupled with* an argument or affirmation that the phenomenon under consideration is undesirable." p. 261, italics original.

⁴⁸ Schacht (1971) p. 261. "It is primarily in connection with allegedly objectively determinable separations that the term is employed with critical and polemical intent. On the other hand, the term is for the most part used in a nonevaluative way by those who employ it in connection with the occurrence of feelings of "alienness."

matter of internal consistency and cogency that stands on its own separate from the other aporia, and so it needs to be considered as such.

When it comes to treating alienation as normatively neutral, the most commonly cited advantage to this approach is that alienation operates as a specifically *sociological* term most consistently when it does not try to combine the normative and the descriptive into a single conceptualization. The main reason for this is largely rooted in the classic is-ought distinction whereby it is held that an ought cannot be derived from an is, and so the argument goes that for alienation to work consistently one must treat its empirical character separately from any kind of normative character.⁴⁹ Again, it should be reiterated that this is not the same thing as saying the term cannot be used as *part of* a normative critique. Instead, the point is that if one is able to disentangle the normative and descriptive aspects of alienation from one another, such as when one is able to distinguish between the sheer fact that a person is dissatisfied and the evaluation of that experience of dissatisfaction as something negative, it suggests that the term alienation *can* operate exclusively as a descriptive term and thus, by implication, *would* operate most consistently in such a manner by the principle of parsimony.

While at its core proponents of a normatively neutral understanding of alienation are most concerned that the normative dimension needlessly complicates things since alienation theory can function without it, many of them would also go on to argue that even attempting to include a normative bent is sure to court conceptual disaster. The main issue is how any and all normative standards are fraught with contention as to how exactly one goes about grounding the

⁴⁹ Schacht (1971), p. 261. "It becomes possible for a writer to waver uncertainly between description and criticism [...] it thus would appear desirable for the term to be used consistently either one way or the other." Schacht *The Future of Alienation* (1994) also dedicates an entire chapter to the normative question. See Chapter 1, Varieties of Alienation: Alienation, the "Is-Ought" Gap, and Two Sorts of Discord."

normative standard. In classical accounts of alienation, the normative dimension is seen as arising out of essentialist assumptions about human nature in which alienating conditions are understood as those that prevent full “human flourishing,” which brings with it a whole host of potential concerns, many of which have already been mentioned. Others point out how it is not even clear how the term can be applied consistently as a normative term since, as just one example, one finds in accounts of alienation both the claim that being alienated from society is bad and the claim that a rational and well-balanced person would find modern society alienating, with the implication that in this case it would be good to be alienated in such a situation.⁵⁰ In light of all these points, abandoning the normative dimension of alienation theory is seen by many as a most welcome development.

Of course, with every advantage that purportedly accumulates to the normatively neutral understanding of alienation there are those who will point out comparable problems in disposing with what has historically been seen as the most valuable part of alienation theory, that is, its ability to function as a diagnostic term that identifies problematic circumstances in need of rectification. Nevertheless, the main issue with a normatively neutral conceptualization of alienation is not immediately the fact that such an approach seems to strip the term of all its critical potency since, as was pointed out earlier, theorists have suggested ways the term could be used to a critical effect even without it being a critical term itself. Instead, the claim is that in removing the evaluative dimension from the term it removes everything that makes it distinctive from other terms that generally indicate any kind of separation or foreignness. Without that normative dimension, alienation is indistinguishable from separation *simpliciter*, and so to be

⁵⁰ Schacht (1971), p. 261. For a similar sentiment, see Kellner, “New Technologies and Alienation: Some Critical Reflections” in *The Evolution of Alienation* (2006), Ed. Langman, Lauren and Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, p. 58.

treated as a worthwhile term on its own alienation has to be seen specifically as a kind of *problematic* separation that *ought* to not exist.⁵¹ Now recognizing this fact does not dissipate the challenge previously brought up as to how one can ground that normative dimension of alienation, but apologists for the normative understanding of alienation would argue that such difficulties do nothing to undermine the fact that the term only functions coherently when it is recognized as a normative term. As a further, perhaps cynical, rejoinder it can be argued that the normatively neutral approach is only able to be seen as attractive possibility because it is able to give the appearance of being neutral and so “scientific” all while covertly sneaking in a normative dimension when it associates alienation with terms that to the average person sound far from being evaluatively neutral, such as dissatisfaction, powerlessness, antagonism, etc. For many theorists, then, the only way forward is to recognize alienation has always been treated as a normative term, whatever further work that brings with it regarding how to best ground that normative dimension.

In conclusion, the question of whether alienation is to be understood as normatively-neutral or normatively-charged hinges on the ability to construct an internally consistent account of alienation as both sides accuse their opponents of failing to account for significant challenges to the term’s viability. Here, the normatively neutral account holds that in reserving the critical potency of alienation for a later consideration one is able to maintain alienation theory’s continued relevance, while for the normatively charged perspective it is only in maintaining exactly that critical potency that the term is seen as having its relevance. Yet again this aporia highlights the challenge in maintaining alienation theory’s potency *and* its relevancy. To avoid

⁵¹ See a further exploration of this idea, see “5. What Makes a Separation Problematic?” in Leopold, David, "Alienation", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/alienation/>>.

retreating to one side of the aporia or the other, overcoming this divide requires being able to show how alienation can be at once descriptive and prescriptive, that is, how it is possible to describe circumstances exactly and only because they are inherently normative. Once again, the argument of this dissertation will be that the tools of social ontology, especially the ideas of status functions and deontic powers, are able to demonstrate how describing the operations of social reality reveals its intrinsically normative character.

With the three central aporia now laid out it is important to take note of one final “haunting specter,” if you will, that hovers over all of alienation theory as a final challenge to anyone who attempts to revive it. The problem is that of its long, varied, and otherwise entrenched history. With each of the aporia, every point and counterpoint has its own ardent defenders that would claim that their position, even if not the exclusively correct understanding of alienation, is at least one that is internally viable and with an extended program of research to back it up. It may in this case become a temptation to want to sweep aside the morass and simply start again, but it is important to be cognizant of the fact that many of these approaches have the force of being long-established projects within the wide field of alienation theory. On that, dealing with the contemporary fragmented field of alienation theory requires caution in avoiding the “no true Scotsman” fallacy when making claims about what is and what is not properly understood as alienation theory. However convenient it might be to simply dismiss those parts of alienation theory’s history that are inconvenient and complicated by perhaps being idiosyncratic compared to other more established uses, it is important that one engage with the history as it is and determine a way for establishing when a particular understanding of alienation has convincingly diverged from a coherent understanding of alienation. Of course, doing exactly that is a central premise of this project as the social ontological theory of alienation forwarded will

then be tested and sharpened in light of that long and varied history. The hope is that likewise any well-established, contemporary approach to alienation will be benefited by the theoretical contributions of the approach taken here.

Conclusion

To reiterate and succinctly summarize what has been established thus far, alienation theory is principally hindered by three aporia that have arisen out of and been brought into focus by the long history of the term's employment. Those aporia are, once again, the question of alienation's unity, its subjective/objective divide, and its normative dimension. Alienation theory has in its most recent history maintained continuity as a project largely by prioritizing a conceptualization of alienation that simply selects one of the two sides and tries to maintain a level of internal consistency in spite of the noted shortcomings in whatever side it is that is pursued. Doing so has largely come at the cost of undermining alienation theory's potential for being recognized as a tool of widespread application in social critique. Revitalizing alienation theory, which is a principal goal of this dissertation, will then require accomplishing a resolution of the aporia rather than a simple avoidance. A central claim of this project is that a social ontological account of alienation will be able to accomplish exactly that. The next chapter then sets out the central features of the social ontological account of alienation.

CHAPTER TWO
THE SOCIAL ONTOLOGY OF ALIENATION

Chapter Overview

The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that alienation, as an eminently social phenomenon, can be profitably characterized in the terminology of social ontology and that to do as such is helpful for resolving the aporia set out in the previous chapter. Specifically, the social ontological account of alienation will hold that *alienation is a systematic fallout fact that occurs when the enactment of a deontic power is such that it occludes participation in the collective intention that produced the status function which entailed that self-same deontic power in the first place*. To understand this idea fully, it will first be necessary to set out the key concepts of social ontology, especially as they are forwarded in the seminal works of John Searle. Then, with those ideas established, it will be possible to fully elucidate this social ontological account of alienation and the implications that this has for understanding the nature of alienation. Finally, once this conceptualization is established, it will be possible to address the aporias by explicating how alienation can be understood as having a universal content that is also able to shed light on particular cases all while avoiding problematic essentialist assumptions; how it can be seen to have both an objective and subjective dimension, simultaneously; and how it can operate descriptively as an intrinsically normative phenomenon that can be used to a critical effect without triggering objections of being paternalistic. The subsequent chapters will then turn to an exegesis of alienation theory's varied history in light of the social ontological account of

alienation as a proof of concept that this understanding of alienation is analytically potent and able to avoid the core aporias as they manifest in those historical understandings.

Key Concepts of Social Ontology

The field of social ontology is a study of the nature and properties of social reality. Similar to sociology, social ontology has as its objects of study anything that could be broadly construed as being “social,” whether that be the most minimally cooperative behavior of two individuals, particular organizations or institutions, or even entire societies. However, unlike sociology, social ontology’s interest in these objects is not so much the specific attributes and operations of these social arrangements as it is the abstract and generalizable features that constitute such social arrangements. As a specifically philosophical endeavor, social ontology is less interested in the *conditions of a society* as it is in the *conditions for the possibility of society*, full stop. Now unsurprisingly for philosophy this topic has generated extensive debate and rival theoretical positions, and even narrowing our concerns to just one point of inquiry and setting out every possible response from even just the most prominent theorists would be beyond the scope of this dissertation.¹ Instead, the hope here is to offer a sufficiently detailed but still broadly construed account of the major components of social ontology which can remain plausible while still being open to potential amendment based upon the resolution of these theoretical debates.

When it comes to the social ontological account of alienation, there may be aspects of social

¹ Some of the most influential theoretical works on this topic are the following. David-Hillel Ruben, *The Metaphysics of the Social World* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1985), Margaret Gilbert, *On Social Facts* (New York: Routledge, 1989), Philip Pettit, *The Common Mind: An Essay on Psychology, Society, and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Eerik Lagerspetz, *Opposite Mirrors: An Essay on the Conventionalist Theory of Institutions* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Social Practices: A Collective Acceptance View* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

ontology that, when further refined, could provide additional insight into the workings of alienation; the overarching position taken in this chapter is that where there is consensus in social ontology there is enough of a theoretical framework to construct a coherent and effective theory of alienation.

Towards that end, the exposition of the social ontological account of alienation in this dissertation will rely heavily upon the seminal works of John Searle, most importantly *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995) and what can be seen as the most definitive statement of his social ontology, *Making the Social World* (2010). Again acknowledging the unsettled condition of social ontology, Searle's account has the advantage of being arguably the most well-known and influential attempt at dealing with these ideas, and so if for no other reason it is a defensible place to work from when engaging the analytic tools of social ontology with particular concerns like alienation. More importantly, for the purposes of this project Searle's specific terminology and way of casting the issues at hand is utilized because it is the most helpful for bringing into relief a concept of alienation that can help it move beyond those aporias that have otherwise stifled its continued usage. Still, in those places where there is on-going debate related to the specific points or ideas that Searle's conceptual apparatus is addressing, the stance taken herein is that the social ontological account of alienation that will be produced is ultimately not intrinsically dependent upon the substantive theoretical positions that may be taken. In short, while the social ontological account of alienation is elucidated by Searle's theoretical framework, it does not follow that the account of alienation provided rises or falls solely on the merits of Searle's account since it could, if necessary, be similarly cast in an alternative framework within social ontology. The hope is that all of this can be more so demonstrated as the project progresses rather than accepted merely on faith at this point.

Now, as Searle frames it, the foundational question of social ontology is how we are able to go from the local existence of *individual* and *subjective* brain states to the expansive *shared* and *objective* social world that reaches across the entire globe.² The starting point for working through this question is the realization that should tomorrow all human beings cease to exist, then social reality would cease to exist in any meaningful sense.³ Though it may be true that the physical remnants of human society such as buildings and artifacts would continue to exist, without the actual interactions of individual conscious human beings with those physical features one would have to conclude that in a crucial manner human society has ceased to exist.⁴ What this realization reveals is that at its foundation social reality only is what it is because human beings think, act, and speak as though it were just that way, and if they were to do differently then social reality itself would be different. It is this realization that then draws Searle into social ontology through his work in the philosophy of mind – especially intentionality⁵ – and the philosophy of language – especially speech act theory.⁶ From this background Searle works to elucidate how the features of intentionality embedded in consciousness is able to, through the

² In *Mind, Language, and Society* (1998), which can be understood as Searle's own attempt at providing a systematic introduction to the full corpus of his philosophical work, he specifically frames the chapter on social reality as asking the question "how there can be an epistemically objective social reality that is partly constituted by an ontologically subjective set of attitudes?," p. 113.

³ To be precise, Searle says that when identifying those features of the world that would be associated with social reality, we should ask the question, "Could the feature exist if there had never been any human beings or other sorts of sentient beings?" p. 11. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995). If yes, then it is a feature of physical reality while, if no, it would be considered an aspect of social reality.

⁴ An extended example to illustrate this point would be when archeology finds an artifact from early human civilization. The artifact obviously still exists, and at times there are attempts to guess at the object's function based upon cross-cultural comparisons to objects that are believed to be similar. Nonetheless, there are numerous instances where the significance of some artifact is unknown because the individuals who gave that artifact its meaning have long since vanished.

⁵ Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind*, 1983.

⁶ Searle, *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics*, 1980.

symbolic means of language, construct and represent a kind of reality that can be shared with other conscious individuals and in fact only exists in so far as it is able to be so shared. In what could only be seen as a rather dramatic move, Searle ends up making the claim that in fact *all* of social reality in *any* and *every* guise it may appear can be symbolically represented as an iteration of the same basic logical form: “X counts as Y in context C.”⁷ To understand why Searle comes to this conclusion, and ultimately what its bearing is on alienation theory, it will be necessary to set out and explain the three most important conceptual tools that make up the core of Searle’s approach to social ontology, namely, his understanding of collective intentionality, status functions, and deontic powers.

Collective intentionality is the analytic core of social ontology as it denotes the theoretical space wherein attempts are made to explain what it is that makes certain human activities or behaviors specifically *social*. Consequently, being able to fully account for the mechanisms involved is a critical first step for a complete account of social reality. That having been said, the exact nature of collective intentionality is unsurprisingly the most contested aspect of social ontology as numerous accounts have sought to establish the definitive characteristics of collective intentionality.⁸ Furthermore, as will become apparent as the chapter progresses, the specific mechanisms of collective intentionality has mostly a tangential bearing on a social ontological account of alienation as it is more so what collective intentionality is able to

⁷ Searle (2010), p. 13. Importantly, Searle (2010), p. 20, does acknowledge instances of what he calls “freestanding Y terms,” which are cases where a status function is imposed but without seemingly being a person or object (an X) who is subject of the Y term, such as what happens with the creation of a corporation. Still, he does argue that the deontic powers created in these cases are exercised by particular people, for example, the CEO who acts for the corporation, even if the corporation does not exist as a status *of* the CEO. Pp. 21-22.

⁸ For a helpful overview of the most recent debate on this topic, see Schweikard, David P. and Hans Bernhard Schmid, “Collective Intentionality”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/collective-intentionality/>>.

accomplish through the imposition of status functions and their concomitant deontic powers that undergirds the social ontological account of alienation rather than collective intentionality itself that matters. Still, given the foundational nature of collective intentionality, it is an essential starting place for setting out a social ontological account of alienation even if being more thorough with the features of collective intentionality only works to produce a more robust account without substantially impacting the analytic conclusions.

Now when it comes to collective intentionality there is at least a broad consensus in acknowledging a class of intentional states that cannot be understood as strictly reducible to a simple aggregate of first-person singular intentional states.⁹ After all, one can discern by way of examples a difference between what is going on when two people happen to be watching a sunset at the same time and what is going on when two people are watching a sunset together, or when two individuals are each playing a musical instrument in close physical proximity to one another and when those two individuals are playing a musical instrument as part of a duet. It is this experiential distinction that then serves as the background against which accounts of collective intentionality are constructed. To provide the necessary details to this aspect of the analysis we will begin with important features of Searle's account of intentionality that will bear on his social ontology: the distinction between consciousness and intentionality, the content and type of intentional states, and the conditions of satisfaction and direction of fit.

Although it is easy to conflate consciousness with intentionality in a way that reduces one down to the other, it is important to understand how these two features are conceptually distinct

⁹ "Distributions (summations, aggregates) of individual intentions do not make for collective intentions, even if combined with common knowledge, or mutual belief. This is accepted by an increasing number of contributors to the recent debate." Schweikard, David P. and Hans Bernhard Schmid, "Collective Intentionality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2021/entries/collective-intentionality/>>.

even if they are commonly interconnected. Starting with a working definition that distinguishes between these two terms, we can take consciousness to be a state of mental awareness of what it is like to be having that experience, as Thomas Nagel famously phrased it,¹⁰ while intentionality “is a fancy philosopher’s term for the capacity of the mind by which it is directed at, or about, objects and states of affairs in the world.”¹¹ Out of this distinction Searle constructs a four part schema of possible mental states depending upon whether they are intentional or nonintentional and then whether those are in turn conscious or unconscious.¹² While nonintentional states, such as moods, undoubtedly have a role to play in the construction of social reality, their influence is largely peripheral to intentional mental states, and so the focus here will principally be on understanding the nature of intentionality and its relationship to consciousness. To understand the most salient features of these ideas, one can look to the experience you are having right now in reading this sentence as it involves you being both aware of and directed at the specific words of which it is composed, that is, it is a conscious intentional state. However, even while reading these lines there are numerous other intentional mental states that you have that are not necessarily conscious even if they are to varying degrees predisposed to being conscious, something Searle argues must be the case for all unconscious intentional states.¹³ For example,

¹⁰ Nagel (1974), “What it is like to be a bat?” in *The Philosophical Review*, Oct. 1974, Vol 83, No. 4, pp. 435-450. “An organism has conscious mental states if and only if there is something that it is like to *be* that organism—something it is like *for* the organism,” p. 436, italics original.

¹¹ Searle (2010), p. 25.

¹² Searle (2010), p. 26, “The distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness and the distinction between intentional and nonintentional cut across each other in such a way as to give us four logically possible forms; consciousness intentional states, unconscious intentional states, consciousness nonintentional states, and unconscious nonintentional states.”

¹³ Searle, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (1992), p. 132. “I now want to make a very strong claim [...] The claim is this: Only a being that could have conscious intentional states could have intentional states at all, and *every unconscious intentional state is at least potentially conscious,*” italics mine.

the feeling you have of sitting in your chair while reading this sentence is an intentional mental state insofar as it has as its content the sensation of your body resting in a chair, but until you brought the focus of your conscious awareness to that experience it was something of which you were only aware of in a peripheral manner. Additionally, there are mental states that can be wholly unconscious but nevertheless are intentional in structure. For example, recalling to mind the street address of your home, that mental state has an intentional content of the specific house number and street name where you live, but prior to recalling it that mental state was entirely unconscious. When one is addressing the fact that social reality is dependent upon consciousness it is important to keep these points in mind as it is the general intentional structure of consciousness and not the scope of awareness that is the primary ground of social reality.

Besides understanding how intentionality is related to consciousness, it is also important to understand the two constituent elements of intentionality, content and type, and their role in representing the intentional state's conditions of satisfaction, that is, what must be the case to say that the intentional state has been satisfied in what it is attempting to represent. Starting first with the content of an intentional state, which is also referred to as its propositional content, it is simply that towards which the intentional state is directed.¹⁴ For example, the intentional state of reading the words on this page have as its content the words on this page. Now, despite the terminology, intentional states are not about propositions per se but rather it is that the content of intentional states can be represented propositionally.¹⁵ Realizing this is important to avoid overly

¹⁴ Searle (2010), p. 27.

¹⁵ Searle (2010), p. 27. "Many intentional states come in whole propositions, and for that reason those that do are often described by philosophers as "propositional attitudes." This is bad terminology because it suggests that my intentional state is an attitude to a proposition. [...] The proposition is the content of the belief, not the object of the belief." Searle makes an extended defense of this position on p. 27.

intellectualized understandings of intentionality and equally so collective intentionality.¹⁶ When you read the words on the page it is not the proposition “there are words on the page” that is the content of that intentional mental state but rather it is the words on the page themselves that are the focal point of an intentional state that seeks to represent them. What is represented by that intentional state is then what Searle calls its “conditions of satisfaction,” which he explains is “the conditions in the world which must be satisfied if the intentional state is to be satisfied.”¹⁷ Since an intentional state is inherently about something, then as a representation of that thing there must be salient features—the conditions—which differentiate it as an intentional state about that thing as opposed to some other thing. As an illustration, in the aforementioned example of an intentional state directed at the words on this page, there are elements that are singled out, such as their semantic content or their black color, that make the intentional state about those words and not some other thing. Those are the conditions of satisfaction for that intentional state. An important upshot of this, according to Searle, is that the conditions of satisfaction mean it is possible for an intentional state to be directed at an object and yet fail much like how “an arrow can be fired at a target and miss.”¹⁸ How exactly it can fail, however, will depend not just on the content of the intentional state but also on the type of intentional state it is that determines in what way the intentional state was meant to be a representation.

The role of intentional types, which is that second constituent element of intentionality, is to modulate the intentional state by determining the comportment one has towards the content of

¹⁶ Searle (2010), p. 30. “I want you to understand that I am not claiming that there is always an immediate phenomenological reality to the process of having—and operating with—beliefs, desires, intentions, and other intentional states. It takes a great deal of reflection to see that all of one’s beliefs and desires are representations of their conditions of satisfaction with a direction of fit. That is not immediately obvious phenomenologically.”

¹⁷ Searle (2010), p. 29.

¹⁸ Searle (1998), p. 99.

said state. The idea here is that beyond the wide variety of things that can become the content of intentional states there is also a wide variety of cognitive stances and “psychological modes” with which one can regard that content.¹⁹ So, to continue with the example from the previous paragraph, one can believe that there are words on the page, be frustrated that there are words on the page, or wish that there not be words on the page. In each instance the propositional content is the same in being about the words on this page, but the manner in which the intentional state is directed varies in each instance. The type of intentional state it is is then what produces the wide variety of cognitive and attitudinal stances that one can take with regard to the content of intentional states, although Searle mostly sees these as permutations on just four basic cognitive stances based upon what he terms their direction of fit, that is, what the direction of relationship is between the world and the mind: mind-to-world, world-to-mind, double direction of fit, and null or Presup fit.²⁰ Of those four, the two most common types of intentional states, belief and desire, are considered as having a mind-to-world relationship and a world-to-mind relationship, respectively. With beliefs, one says that the content of one’s mental state has the responsibility, or the aim, of conforming itself to the way that the world is. Desires, on the other hand, are about the world conforming to the mental state. The most important type of intentional state for collective intentionality and social reality, though, is the third possibility and that is what Searle calls a double direction of fit, or what in his philosophy of language he called Declarations.²¹ In this case a reality is created just because it is represented as being that way, that is, in the act of

¹⁹ Searle (2010), p. 27.

²⁰ Searle (2010), pp. 27-29.

²¹ Searle (2010), p. 12.

representing something as being a certain way one actually makes it be just that way. We will come back to explore this idea further in just a bit.²²

So, to briefly recap what has been established thus far, intentionality is the directedness of consciousness. That directedness has both a content – that towards which it is directed – as well as a type – the way in which it is so directed. The way in which consciousness is directed can be represented by its direction of fit, which together with the content determine the conditions of satisfaction for that intentional state. As a final point before turning to how these components of intentionality play out in collective intentionality: Searle acknowledges that these ideas may not seem phenomenological insofar as it is not always immediately apparent to a person that there is a propositional content to their intentional states.²³ What he argues is that with reflection one can see how all intentional states are this way especially when one understands that the idea of intentional states being a representation is stating something about the function of mental states—that they are a representation of the content that can be explicated propositionally—and not about their ontological status—that they are propositions. For the vast majority of our everyday experience we simply do not, and do not need to, reflect upon the propositional character of our intentional states, but that does nothing to contradict the point with regard to how they operate.

Having now established several key features of intentionality, Searle applies it to analyzing instances of collective intentionality. Returning to the earlier examples, there are instances of human activities such as watching a sunset together or playing a duet that, when

²² For completion's sake, the "null" or Presup fit have neither a world-to-word nor a word-to-world relationship as it presupposes a fit for the propositional content. The example he uses is a person saying their a proud of their nose—being proud of their nose presupposes that they have a nose and equally presupposes that they are proud of their nose such that they would be proud of it. Ultimately these intentional types do not play a role in his social ontology.

²³ Searle (2010), p. 30.

analyzed, are not able to be simply reduced to an aggregate of coinciding individual intentional states. At the core of collective intentionality, as Searle analyzes it, is the attempt to provide an account of what differentiates those cases in which people are *coincidentally* working towards a particular goal and when people are *cooperating* in working towards a particular goal.²⁴ Searle admits there might be a temptation to take everything that was said about intentionality usually experienced in the form of I-intend and simply replace the “I” with a “we” and leave it at that.²⁵ The problem with that is one risks having to posit some kind of supra-subject along the lines of a mockingly interpreted “Hegelian world spirit” if one were to go for a simple substitution.²⁶ Instead Searle reiterates: “all human intentionality exists only in individual human brains,” and that explicitly includes collective intentionality.²⁷ The challenge then is being able to bridge the gap between the idea that collective intentionality involves a *collective* of some kind that is expressed with “we-intend” but that also respects the idea that intentionality, as a feature of mental states, can only exist in individual bodies and so always necessarily involves an “I-intend.”

Searle’s solution for this problem begins by first asserting that “collective intentionality is a biologically primitive phenomenon” that is distinct from and not reducible to a series of I-

²⁴ Searle (2010), pp. 47-49 where he gives two examples of business school graduates to illustrate coincidentally working towards the same goal and cooperatively working towards the same goal. In both cases, the graduates will work to be as selfish as they can so that per Adam Smith’s invisible hand they will benefit humanity, but in the first case they just have the same knowledge that they are working towards the same goal while in the second case they all take a solemn vow to act this way. Although both are largely the same, the second Searle would say involves collective intentionality while the first does not.

²⁵ Searle (2010), pp. 43-44.

²⁶ Searle (1995), p. 25.

²⁷ Searle (2010), p. 44.

intentions plus a set of mutual beliefs as to what other people are doing.²⁸ When things are done in a cooperative manner, there is a collective intention to perform that activity together and to accomplish that common goal that is the content of that intentional act. That collective intentionality cannot be reduced down to two or more individual intentions as that is what separates something from being done *together* and something being done in a manner *coincidentally proximate* to one another. To use one of Searle's examples, the difference between a prizefight between boxers and a back-alley brawl is that in the first case there is an intention to cooperate in a competitive behavior while in the second there is no cooperative intention, though the physical activity involved in both examples is largely the same.²⁹ The collective intention is then what explains the "togetherness" of the activity, though more is needed to account for the fact that intentionality in actions is something that not only is only in individual brains but also that intentionality with regard to action is causally self-referential, that is, "the intention itself must function *causally* in the production of the action."³⁰ Said another way, an action can only be understood as being intentional if one formed the intention to perform that action *and* that intention is what then causes the action to occur. Since a person cannot cause another individual to have intentions, at least directly, there is also a need to explicate the intentional content that a person has as it relates to the collective intention.

The way that Searle situates the collective intention in an individual mind is by drawing upon a distinction in how we say a person "does something *by way of* or *by means of* doing

²⁸ Searle (1995), p. 24.

²⁹ Searle (1995), pp. 23-24.

³⁰ Searle (2010), p. 34.

something else.”³¹ As seen by examples that Searle provides, a person performs the action of firing a gun *by means of* pulling the trigger while a person votes in a committee *by means of* raising one’s hand. Searle’s approach is to consider an individual’s actions as the *by way of* or *by means of* action with regard to the collective intention. So, to consider the example of two people playing a duet, it is not exactly accurate to say that either of them play a duet. Rather, each of the two individuals have an individual intention to do their part in the collective intention to play a duet. That is, a person can be said to be playing a duet *by way of* their having the individual intention to play their individual instrument in a context where they take it for granted that the other person is playing their own instrument. In that case it is not accurate to say that a person’s playing a duet has the intentional form “we play a duet” but rather “we play a duet by means of my playing the clarinet.” Since intentions must be causally self-referential, there is nothing in an individual’s collective intention that directly references the intentional states of the others in the collective nor of their particular behavior. Rather, one presupposes that others are cooperating in the collective activity and so share the collective intention even while their individual contributions to the collective intention would vary from one another. The collective intention that exists in the individual mind is then one that has an irreducible collective form even while having an individual content.

Besides the inherent interest that these collective states may hold in the philosophy of mind, a unique characteristic of collective intentionality that has garnered increased attention is the ability for collective intentional states to construct a reality – social reality – that exists only by virtue of the communal aspect of the collective intentional state. For Searle, it is exactly collective intentionality that makes social things “social,” and calling something a “social fact”

³¹ Searle (2010), pp. 51-53.

simply refers to anything involving collective intentionality.³² Searle's account is not without its detractors, however. One of the largest and most consistent objections brought against Searle's account, though admittedly one also aimed at other early progenitors of collective intentionality, is that the cooperative aspect of collective intentionality is seen as being too strong to be applicable in all social circumstances.³³ At the forefront of this objection is the point that almost all of the early examples used to illustrate collective intentionality are based upon activities done with few participants in relatively transparent and egalitarian contexts: duets, walking together, starting a car, to identify just a few. The question that is then raised is whether the conclusions of Searle's account of collective intentionality can address diffuse circumstances involving numerous participants, or that are characterized by a hierarchical or authoritarian element. Recall that Searle characterized collective intentionality as specifically concerning itself with instances of *cooperation*. The question is then can his account explicate cases of social reality that, presumably, rely upon collective intentionality but that cannot be reasonably characterized as cooperative endeavors.

The way that Searle attempts to respond to these concerns is by introducing a distinction between cooperation and collective recognition. When it comes to his analysis of social reality, Searle argues that cooperation of the kind characterized in collective intentionality is typically a prerequisite for the establishment of social institutions even if a strong blooded kind of

³² Searle (1995), p. 38. "Any fact involving collective intentionality is a social fact."

³³ Asa Andersson [now Burman] has Searle, amongst others, explicitly in mind when she writes "Presupposing a cooperative and consensus-oriented view means that focus is on small and egalitarian groups. Consequently, the requirements for collective action are designed to fit examples of such groups, which means that these requirements often are too strong to account for large and hierarchical groups." Much of her book is then trying to find a means to avoid this issue, and some of the insights she has are integrated by Searle in *Making the Social World* (2010). Andersson, *Power and Social Ontology* (2007), pp. 24-25

cooperation is not necessarily involved in the continued maintenance of institutions.³⁴ To use an example from Searle, direct cooperation between individuals was necessary for the creation of the United States by means of the Declaration of Independence, but the continued existence of the United States need not directly rely upon continued cooperation but rather simply collective recognition or acceptance of its institutional existence.³⁵ Searle then summarizes the distinction with the following point: “institutional structures require collective recognition by the participants in the institution in order to function, but particular transactions within the institution require cooperation of the sort that I have been describing.”³⁶ Collective recognition is then necessary to create the context within which particular cooperative actions can be performed. In this case it is possible for a person to be extremely ambivalent with regard to their affirmation of an institution’s existence, but to be acting within the institution still requires a fundamental level of cooperation by the participants in that institution in order to even perform those actions.

While the introduction of the distinction between cooperation and collective recognition has already begun moving into Searle’s account of social reality, there are two more concepts that still need to be set out in order to see his full account. The first of these is status functions. The key to understanding functions of any kind is to realize that they are always intentionality-relative, that is, the designation of something as having a function is in all cases due to an imposed purpose on the object.³⁷ What is typically meant by the term “function,” or what Searle

³⁴ Searle (2010), pp. 56-57.

³⁵ Searle (2010), p. 57.

³⁶ Searle (2010), p. 57

³⁷ Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995), p. 14. “Functions [...] are never intrinsic but are always observer relative.” Searle offers an extended justification for this claim in pp. 13-19

calls “agentive functions,”³⁸ are designated uses for things based upon the physical attributes of the relevant object – like in the case of a hammer it has a function imposed upon it because of how its shaft creates a fulcrum that combined with its metallic head can be used to nail things, but it could be designated as having a different function, such as being a paper weight, or being a weapon. Status functions, on the other hand, denote cases where human beings designate something as having a particular power, and react accordingly, not because of its physical attributes but instead simply because it is treated as having a certain status.³⁹ A ready example is that someone is named President of the United States. That person is so named not because of some biological condition that the person has but rather simply because people recognize that person as being the President. Status functions are then integral to the creation of what Searle calls institutional reality, since the imposition of a status function is the establishment of constitutive rules that make such a reality possible and so literally institutionalize its existence.⁴⁰ Institutional reality and institutional facts are then special instances of social reality and social facts since institutions are dependent upon status functions and, as will be further explained in just a moment, status functions are in turn dependent upon collective intentionality, which again was what Searle stated is indicative of something being considered a part of social reality.⁴¹

³⁸ Searle (1995), p. 20.

³⁹ Searle (1995), p. 40. “Humans, through collective intentionality, impose functions on phenomena where the function cannot be achieved solely in virtue of physics and chemistry but require continued human cooperation in the specific forms of recognition, acceptance, and acknowledgment of a new *status* to which a *function* is assigned,” italics original.

⁴⁰ Constitutive rules are what make it possible for certain things to be the way they are. There are constitutive rules for when a person counts as being the President of the United States, such as the process of the electoral college, which is different from the regulative rule, for example, that the term of a President be four years. If someone is in fact the President, then that fact is only possible within the framework of the institution of American democracy, and the system of American democracy only exists as a status function. Searle (1995), pp. 27-28.

⁴¹ Searle (1995), p. 38. “I have already stipulated that any fact involving collective intentionality is a social fact. [...] Institutional facts, it will turn out, are a special subclass of social facts.”

As for how status functions arise, Searle identifies them as predominantly coming about through the power of collective intentionality.⁴² Recall the idea of direction of fit found as a feature of intentionality. For Searle, status functions are created by instances of collective intentional states that have the double direction of fit, which is when something being taken as being the case (world-to-word) is what makes it the case (word-to-world). In speech act theory Searle calls this double direction of fit Declarations,⁴³ and Searle argues that the imposition of status functions by collective intentionality is the product of speech acts that have the same logical form of Declarations,⁴⁴ though he does also acknowledge that sometimes it is simply a mental regard that people have for something that has the same form as Declarations that creates that institutional fact.⁴⁵ The crux of Searle's account here is the idea that all Status Function Declarations, regardless of their apparent complexity or the lack of an explicit speech act, operate as producing constitutive rules that have the logical form of "X counts as Y in context C"⁴⁶: we have this piece of paper (X) count as legal tender (Y) in the United States (C); this act of expressing our love in the form of vows (X) counts as getting married (Y) in the Catholic Church (C); this pulse of electricity from pushing a button (X) counts as voting (Y) in a local

⁴² While Searle never explicitly addresses the idea of status functions arising for just one person as he typically associates them with collective intentionality exclusively, there does not appear to be anything in principle that would prevent a single person from imposing a status function on something that they and only they recognize even if it would be rather unusual as well as lack much of the power that comes with status functions produced by collective intentionality.

⁴³ Searle (2010), p. 12. "I baptized these as "Declarations." They change the world by declaring that a state of affairs exists and thus bringing that state of affairs into existence.

⁴⁴ Searle (2010), pp. 12-13. "All of institutional reality, and therefore, in a sense, all of human civilization, is created by speech acts that have the same logical form as Declarations. [...] Let us call these cases where we create an institutional reality of status functions by representing them as existing as "Status Function Declarations."

⁴⁵ Searle (2010), p. 13. "Not all of them are, strictly speaking, Declarations, because sometimes we just linguistically treat or describe, or refer to, or talk about, or even think about an object in a way that creates a reality by representing that reality as created."

⁴⁶ Searle (2010), p. 13.

election (C). In all of these cases something is treated as existing simply because people have decided to accept it as existing. Collective intentionality's role in this is specifically to be what gives these their we-form—*we* make it the case by Declaration that X has the status function Y in context C—which then contributes to their enduring character.

Now despite having set out the key elements of status functions, so far all that has really been explicated is what gives something its status, namely collective intentionality by means of Declarations, but what has not been clarified is what makes them status *functions* specifically. It was already established that status functions are conferred on things simply because it is recognized as having a certain status. Recognition in this case, however, does not mean a simple mental acknowledge but rather recognition means accepting certain courses of action vis-à-vis the object that has a status function conferred upon it. If a piece of paper is recognized as having the status function of being money, that just means that a person will treat that piece of paper as if it had monetary value, which means they will, as it says on United States bills, treat them as “legal tender for all debts, public and private.” It does not make sense to say that a person has recognized the piece of paper as money but then say that every action that the person takes is counter to what one would expect if someone understood that paper as being money, such as tearing it up or refusing to accept it as carrying monetary value. Status Function Declarations then carry internally with them commitments to act or refrain from acting with regard to that which has been recognized as having a status function. Said another way, acceptance of status functions is the acceptance of a deontology, that is, a system of duties and obligations to act or refrain from acting in certain ways.⁴⁷ In accepting something as having a status function a person has already accepted that they have desire-independent reasons for acting or refraining from

⁴⁷ Searle (2010), pp. 80-85.

acting in a certain way.⁴⁸ Those commitments that are produced by and are constitutive of the acceptance of the status function Searle then calls deontic powers.⁴⁹ To say that something has a status function is just to say that one's recognition of that status function carries with it deontic powers, and it is the deontic powers that allow the status to "function," that is, to have an effect on things.

Although it might seem that this overview of Searle's account of social ontology begins to lose the forest for the trees, setting out these details are necessary to ensure the requisite elements have been established so as to see how the conceptual schema will apply to alienation theory. That having been said, it might be helpful to give a brief recap of the most important elements of social ontology that have been established so far. Human beings can form collective intentional states that, while having the irreducible form of we-Intend, nevertheless can operate causally in the actions of individuals as a result of the by-means-of or by-way-of relationship to the individual's I-intend. An individual's acceptance of the collective intentional state is then what makes possible the existence of status functions; in the collective recognition of a status function, the individual recognizes the right or the obligation to act in certain ways with regard to the status function. Those reasons for acting in a certain way with regard to the status function is what Searle calls deontic powers. So, to bring it all together one final time, social reality exists insofar as there is collective intentionality that recognizes things as having status functions, and the recognition of a status function is realized in the exercise of deontic powers that carry expectations to act or refrain from acting in specified ways.⁵⁰ Social reality as a totality is then

⁴⁸ Searle (2010), p. 86.

⁴⁹ Searle (2010), pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰ Recognizing that it is often helpful to explain abstract concepts by means of illustration, consider the example of playing the card game Uno. To say that we are playing the card game Uno, which is a Status Function that is imposed upon a certain collection of items—the cards—and movements—the way those cards are used—I

taken as the layered and extensively iterated network of status function declarations and their concomitant deontic powers that, through their combined operations, produce the social world in which we all live and move and have our being.

The Social Ontological Account of Alienation

In applying the insights of social ontology to alienation theory it is important to recall the level of abstraction that social ontology is operating on. Instead of focusing on the concrete instantiations of a particular society, social ontology seeks to lay out the conditions for the possibility of social reality in general. As a result, a social ontological account of alienation is not directed at specific instances of alienation but rather at setting out the conditions for the possibility of alienation as an aspect of sociality in general, and an explication of alienation theory in a social ontological framework would require spelling out alienation in the terms of collective intentionality, status functions, and deontic powers. A problem that one runs into most immediately, however, is that the characteristics typically ascribed to alienation run obliquely to central aspects of these basic elements of social ontology. For example, alienation is often characterized as a kind of powerlessness; alienation in this case is not concerned with being able to do things or even being prohibited from doing things, like what would be entailed by deontic powers, but rather it is concerned with the inability to do something that one should otherwise have the power to do. Similarly, if deontic powers carry normative expectations of behavior, then alienation seems to be a subversion of that dynamic as it is often used to indicate circumstances

understand that there are certain behavioral expectations that I should satisfy, such as waiting to play my card until after every other person has had the opportunity to play their card since the last time I played my card, unless a special card is played that changes those expectations, such as a skip card. By recognizing that there are expectations that I act in these kinds of specified ways I have recognized the existence of the Status Function because I have appropriated for myself the deontic expectations to act in these specified ways. If I fail to satisfy those deontic powers, such as refusing to wait my turn to play my cards, then one can say we are failing to successfully play the game of Uno as that collective activity, which involves a *we-Intend*, requires the *by way of* action of playing a card only once it is my turn, an *I-intend*.

in which a person seemingly has no norms to guide their actions, i.e. normlessness. Furthermore, when classical cases of collective intentionality include deliberative cooperative behavior, alienation is commonly seen as involving instances where a person's is in a sense "dragged along" by their circumstances in which, though acting, they cannot identify themselves with the actions being taken and so be seen as a fully cooperative actor, even if they are not truly being compelled in their actions. What these examples suggest is that alienation manifests more as a condition of collective intentionality itself rather than as a product of it; another way to put it, alienation is something you say *about* collective intentionality rather than something you say *with* it. What the analysis of alienation will require is a derivative category for identifying those aspects of social reality that occur as a result of the workings of collective intentionality but nevertheless are not directly created by it.

Into this conceptual space Searle has offered what he variably calls "systematic fallouts," "third person fallout facts from institutional facts," or "'macro' institutional facts that are constituted by the 'micro' institutional facts," and the main idea is that there are certain social facts that are intentionality-relative insofar as they only exist as a result of intentional states but that are nevertheless intentionality-independent insofar as they are not directly created by intentional states themselves.⁵¹ Over the various iterations of his social ontology, Searle came to realize that with his claim that anything involving collective intentionality can be considered a "social fact," and that "social facts" always involved collective intentionality, that nevertheless there was a set of phenomena that appears unquestionably social all without directly involving collective intentionality in its constitution. Searle identifies economic recessions as a

⁵¹ Searle (2010), p. 116-117.

quintessential example of this;⁵² unlike other aspects of social reality that are created directly by means of Status Function Declarations, recessions do not exist because a group of people have decided that they exist.⁵³ Instead, as Searle analyzes it, recessions come as a *result* of social institutions that are grounded in collective intentionality, in this case market systems composed of cooperative acts of buying, selling, and trading, that produce secondary effects such as recessions. Systematic fallout facts are then a subset of social facts in that they are dependent upon collective intentionality for their existence, which was the criterion for something being deemed a social fact, even if they are not directly created by collective intentionality.

So how should one understand alienation in social ontological terms? First, alienation should be understood as being a social fact because its existence depends upon intentionality; if there were no conscious human beings, there would be no alienation. Still, alienation is not something that is traditionally understood as being intentionally aimed at, which would have allowed it to map neatly onto the operations of collective intentionality establishing a status function. As a result, alienation does not rise to the level of being an institutional fact since status functions were seen as being integral to the establishment of institutional facts. Additionally, since alienation is not something that obtains because it is established as a status function, then that also means that it does not carry with it any deontic powers. Deontic powers would involve some set of behavioral expectations with regard to alienation, but when one reflects upon how alienation is typically conceptualized one does not find any kind of consistent link between

⁵² Searle (2010), p. 117.

⁵³ While technically the National Bureau of Economic Research is in fact charged with declaring that a recession exists such that if they do not make such a declaration then the U.S. is not technically in a recession. Searle recognizes this when, for example, he suggests that a recession could in fact become an institutional fact if Congress were to pass a law saying that when a recession occurs the Federal Reserve must adjust interest rates a certain percentage. In that case a recession would then be something that, as a status function, carries a deontic power, namely, to have the Federal reserve adjust interest rates. Searle (2010), p. 117.

alienation and the expectation that the alienated act in a particular fashion or that one act in a particular way with regard to them. Instead, alienation is a systematic fallout of social institutions because it is something that arises as a secondary effect of actions and choices that are made deliberately. Said another way, alienation does not exist directly because of the collective recognition of its existence but rather it exists as a consequence of the collective recognition of particular social arrangements. Such an understanding aligns with the commonly recognized features of alienation that it is something quintessentially social and that alienation often appears as something imposed from the outside rather than internally chosen by the alienated person. So in conclusion, we can see that alienation can find a space in the conceptual schema of social ontology, and that its location in that space carries important implications for what we should expect from a social ontological account of alienation, such as the fact that alienation is not itself a status function and so carries no deontic powers. Nonetheless, all that has said so far is things *about* alienation from a social ontological approach but it has not actually set out the operations of alienation in social ontological terms itself. Now is the time to get to that.

What one finds when one tries to articulate what is going on with alienation in the conceptual schema of social ontology is that alienation ends up being a much more central phenomenon than what one gets with other systematic fallout facts. Specifically, *alienation is a systematic fallout that occurs as a result of the enactment of deontic powers that occlude participation in the collective intention that created or continues to sustain the status function that had produced that self-same deontic power in the first place.* Since the collective intention that produces the status function and the deontic powers that emanate from the status function are conceptually independent, even if deeply related, there is nothing that makes it logically impossible for status functions to carry with them deontic powers that run directly against the

collective recognition of the status function itself. In this case alienation is a performative contradiction wherein one recognizes a deontic power as binding on one's actions because one has the collective intention to recognize the status function from which the deontic power emanates, and yet the deontic power, when exercised, has the effect of undermining what grounds one's recognition of the deontic power as existing in the first place, that is, it undermines the recognition of the status function which gives it its existence. Importantly, however, that deontic power cannot completely erode the recognition of the status function because then the deontic power would not be binding on one's behavior and so there would be no tension between the enactment of the deontic power and the recognition of the status function; in short, at that point the person would not be alienated. Alienation occurs specifically when a person finds themselves caught between the recognition of a status function and the exercise of a deontic power of that status function. Then unlike other fallout facts, which are things that are incidental to the workings of collective intentionality, alienation always directly involves the workings of collective intentionality. In fact, you could say it is a logical corollary to the picture of collective intentionality producing status functions laid out by Searle.

To illustrate all of this by means of an example, consider the following.⁵⁴ When you welcome someone into your house you and the person who is visiting come to recognize that person as having the status of "guest." Your collective recognition of such a status is what then produces the status function "guest" that will then inform your interactions with one another for the duration of the visit. Now a deontic power commonly ascribed to a guest is that one "make yourself at home," which can mean being permitted to act in ways that otherwise would be seen

⁵⁴ The following example is inspired by the children's story *A Weekend with Wendell* (1986) written by Kevin Henkes.

as inappropriate; for example, a guest would be “allowed” to help themselves to a drink in your refrigerator in a way that a plumber fixing your sink would “not be allowed.” However, it is possible for a person to act on this deontic power of “making yourself at home” in such a way that it undermines one’s willingness to recognize the status function as standing. In these cases the guest crosses a line in their behavior that begins to erode your willingness to confer the status function that made them a “guest” such that they can “make themselves at home” in the first place. In this case one finds oneself in the situation where they both recognize the person as a guest and have reason to not recognize that person as a guest, though without definitively rejecting that status since, one should note, the status function of being a “host” also requires a level of hospitality and flexibility in your assessments of your “guest’s” behavior. In fact, if you ceased to see that person as a guest and so went to throw them out of your house, you would at that time cease to be alienated by their behavior, though you could still be annoyed by it. It is then this tension-filled circumstance, being caught between acknowledging the status function by way of recognizing the deontic power while also having reasons for rejecting the status function in the first place, that would fit the characterization of alienation. The expectations of the involved deontic powers run directly against the status function that produced those selfsame deontic powers that are guiding the actions of the two individuals.

Such an experience can produce the three most common characteristics associated with alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness. The situation involves one of powerlessness because the host is unable to stop the behavior of the guest because the recognition of the person as a guest is what enables the guest to act this way, at least as long as one continues to recognize the person as a guest. Although you may dislike your in-laws, your unwillingness to treat them with the cold indifference of a stranger is exactly what makes it

possible for your experience of their presence to be one so fraught with frustration when it comes to their behavior in your own home. That feeling of frustration can easily be seen as an experience of alienation since one feels that one is trapped by one's situation and powerless to change it. Continuing, the situation so described can be considered as one conditioned by meaninglessness exactly because it is contradictory. I can feel meaninglessness as I question why I even allow this to happen as I have reasons to reject the status function and yet do not. The quality of the relationship with one's "guest" can be debased as one finds oneself being resigned to one's situation, going along with it but unable to identify with its circumstances, despite having been given reason to reject it. Finally, the alienated situated can be seen as one of normlessness because while the deontic power, when recognized, provides binding reasons for acting upon it, the fact that the deontic power also works to undermine the status function it also undermines the binding character of the deontic power. In short, recognizing reasons for acting upon the deontic power *involve* one having reasons for rejecting acting upon the deontic power. I can have an experience of normlessness as I feel I have no guidance on how to act in this situation seeing as how the deontic power is being properly acted upon, to a degree, and so I have no norm to act upon in response. You could say that, given the status function and its deontic powers, everything is going according to expectations and yet also clearly sense that something is not as it should be. In the end, I should not feel isolated and separated from someone who is my guest since that is a part of what it means to be a "guest," which I have recognized as a status function, and yet I do experience isolation based upon their behavior, which is only possible as a result of me seeing them as a guest.

While the foregoing has hopefully established the initial plausibility of the social ontological account of alienation, it will be helpful to work through in greater detail how the

three main components of Searle's social ontology – collective intentionality, status functions, and deontic powers – operate when it comes to alienation. The most important significance of collective intentionality is that it provides a way to comprehend the context or relationship that leads to the commonly accepted feature of alienation that one is separated from a group or activity with which one should be involved or related to, as was stipulated in the dictionary definition established earlier. Alienation theory has long struggled with coherently establishing in what way alienation captures this dynamic, and it was specifically this issue that became a prime target for poststructuralist critique that saw alienation as dependent upon essentialist assumptions of human nature that a person has in some way fallen away from. The idea of collective intentionality gives a way of specifying the initial conditions from which a person is then said to be alienated but without needing to appeal to any kind of transcendent standard. In a person's engagement with social reality, they become involved by means of their individual participation in the collective recognition of certain status functions. Without that participation in the collective recognition the idea that one is alienated ceases to be tenable. To support this conclusion with an example, ancient Greek politics may be "alien" to one's everyday existence but one cannot be meaningfully "alienated" from said politics since it does not form a context for one's actions through your individual participation in the collective recognition of its existence. Alienation requires collective recognition as its precondition given that it is an impingement on that participation in the collective recognition that characterizes alienation rather than a total lack of participation.

Another important aspect in which the workings of collective intentionality bear on alienation is in how it provides a mechanism for understanding the commonly held idea that alienation is often experienced as something wherein one is unable to see oneself as the author of

one's own actions. Said another way, alienation is commonly understood as being a situation in which one is unquestionably the cause of one's actions but in a way in which the concept of responsibility seems misaligned with what one does.⁵⁵ Collective intentionality taps into this idea by acknowledging the irreducible collective nature of collective intentionality – Searle's "we-intend" – while also acknowledging the fact that such collective intentionality, qua intentionality, can only exist in individual human minds. Since alienation requires collective intentionality to create the context within which one can be said to be alienated, there is an element in which the conditions of one's actions are determined by forces outside of one's power since it is dependent upon a *collective* acknowledgement and not merely that of a single individual. However, because collective intentionality is always grounded in individual minds, it must also be acknowledged that that external power is only able to influence because of an individual's choice to participate in that aspect of social reality. Alienation is ultimately only possible if we let it happen to ourselves, though that should not be equated with the idea that we are solely responsible for what happens; it is a question of necessary versus sufficient conditions. Collective intentionality still requires that an individual take a stance with regard to that collective recognition, and in so far as intentionality is something that an individual has control over, the applicability of the social reality, and ergo the alienated dimension of said reality, created by the collective recognition is dependent upon the individual's choices.

Furthermore, it is important to remember the important detail that intentionality is not identical with consciousness, and so even if an individual's intentional states have a causal role

⁵⁵ Jaeggi (2005 [2014]) frames it as follows: "the feeling of powerlessness or of loss of control over one's own life. It involves the (not uncommon) impression that one's life confronts one as an independent event over which one has no influence without, however, being able to describe oneself as determined by alien causes, or heteronomous, in any straightforward sense," p. 51.

in producing their alienation that is not the same thing as saying that they are consciously aware of such a circumstance. In fact, throughout the long history of alienation it has been recognized that awareness-raising with regard to one's alienated conditions is the first step to rectifying conditions of alienation since more often than not the "givenness" of one's condition in alienation masks one's own role in the causes of one's alienation.⁵⁶ The fact that a collective intention can form even without deliberate conscious decisions is also an important factor for explaining how alienation can be seen as an experience in which a person feels as though they are not the responsible actor for the actions that they themselves have taken. Human beings are naturally and rather extensively tractable to accepting social reality all without conscious decision-making;⁵⁷ the process by which a person "reads the room" is a ready example of exactly this kind of unconscious ability to pick up on social expectations. Similarly, the majority of the process of enculturation is one in which individuals pick up social cues in such a way that they readily grasp the behavior expectations produced by a social situation, usually by simply observing how others behave in the same situation and acting similarly. We can often find ourselves living and acting in ways that we have not consciously decided upon, even if the inherent intentional form that undergirds all of social reality always makes such reality amenable to conscious deliberation. Given that alienation is rarely if ever a directly intended outcome of behaviors since it exists as a systematic fallout from micro-institutional facts, one can see how

⁵⁶ The entire idea of class consciousness is tied to operations aimed at making people aware of their circumstances and how they are constructed to be that way rather than the natural order of things, which is the first step to overcoming them.

⁵⁷ Searle (2010), in responding to the question "How do we get away with it?," makes the point that while the underlying social ontology can be explicated to show how all of social reality is constructed, that is not how human beings themselves typically experience their environment. As he states, "people do not typically understand what is going on. They do not think of private property, and the institutions for allocating private property, or human rights, or governments as human creations. They tend to think of them as part of the natural order of things, to be taken for granted in the same way they take for granted the weather or the force of gravity," p. 107.

the opacity of social reality can easily contribute to the opacity that often accompanies alienation.

Turning now to the role of status functions and deontic powers in producing conditions of alienation, it is important to reiterate that it is the recognition of a status function that produces the context for designating something as possibly alienating. Ultimately, however, it is not the status function itself but rather the deontic powers that accompany the status function that produce alienation since properly speaking a status function only functions insofar as it involves deontic powers. The status function is a placeholder for the amalgamation of various deontic powers, and since the convenience of summarizing those various expectations in a singular reality we tend to do exactly that when something is conferred with a status function.⁵⁸ Said another way, it is simply easier to say that a person is the President of the United States rather than, every time we refer to such a status, one were to list off all of the powers enumerated in the U.S. Constitution. Keeping this in mind is important because it prevents one from mistakenly identifying what causes alienation. To illustrate by means of an example, if one holds that gendered roles like “father” or “mother” are always intrinsically alienating that can only be so if one sees such roles as carrying with them certain deontic powers. One could just as readily afford something the status of “father” or “mother” that has none of the deontic powers typically associated with those designations. It is exactly because those statuses always carry connotations of certain kinds of behaviors, that is, deontic powers, that one could potentially designate them as alienating, but not because of some intrinsic character of those statuses.

⁵⁸ Searle (2010) makes a point to this effect when discussing the creation of a corporation. In the case of a corporation, “no preexisting object was operated on to turn it into a corporation. [...] the whole point of doing this [making a corporation] is to create a rather elaborate set of power relationships between actual people; indeed, the corporation consists of such relationships,” p. 98. The status function “corporation” *just is* the “power relations,” that is, the network of deontic powers, that exist between a group of people.

Deontic powers put forth expectations for behavior – either that one act in a certain way or refrain from acting in a certain way. When a person is recognized as having a certain status, such as being President of the United States, that involves both our acceptance that they be able to act in ways that otherwise they would be unable to do, such as granting an executive pardon to a criminal, but also that we act in certain ways with regard to that individual, such as affording them a certain level of deference. On a smaller and more informal scale, as an example, when a group of people collectively understand themselves as participants in a social activity, such as when having a barbeque, one expects the other participants to be gregarious and affable and that one refrain from wearing headphones throughout the party or insulting everyone else present. Alienation occurs when our recognition of deontic powers such as these induce us to accept behaviors whether in ourselves or in others that would undermine our participation in the collective intention that produces these social realities. As long as we recognize the expectations of deontic powers, we find ourselves in the context that makes the experience of alienation possible. Alienation then occurs when we continue to accept that social reality even while being given reasons to reject it, that is, when we find ourselves accepting contradictory reasons for acting or refraining from acting in a particular context.

While it has been established that alienation occurs when there is a performative contradiction between the collective recognition of a status function and the exercise of the deontic powers of a status function, it is crucial to realize that the contradiction can arise in numerous different ways. Since deontic powers are shaped by collective intentionality, all deontic powers have conditions of satisfaction, that is, they specify what would need to be the case to say that the action taken satisfies the expectations that one has for that action. So far what has been offered is the most minimalistic conception of alienation that holds that the

contradiction arises between just a single status function and one particular deontic power associated with that status function. However, due to the fact that society is an immensely multilayered reality, the full network of social reality that a person finds themselves in can lead to innumerable contradictory expectations. In fact, the complexity of modern society is often identified as a core source of alienation as a person finds themselves adrift in a morass without orientation or guide.⁵⁹ Furthermore, one can identify cases where the contradiction arises due to external conditions while in others it can be understood as being purely internal to the alienated individual. For example, a person may struggle with appropriating the behavioral expectations of a deontic power which, in other conditions, would not be seen as alienating. Said another way, the subjective condition of the individual is what differentiates the instances of alienation in this case because one person may rather truthfully not find themselves subject to the performative contradiction in a way that causes others to struggle. On the other hand, there are conditions where the alienating conditions are most appropriately identified as resulting from the objective circumstances. For example, behavioral expectations of a deontic power can directly undermine a status function, such as when the economic demands put on a person are of such intensity that it undermines the self-determination of the individual, which is a necessary condition of democratic participation in a market economy. Still, in the end, it is an extension of the previously made point that, to the degree that our individual participation in the collective recognition of a status function depends upon our individual participation *and* the collective, a complete account of social reality would have to acknowledge that most cases of alienation will

⁵⁹Hartmut Rosa in *Alienation and Acceleration* (2010) identifies the rapidity with which the late-modern world operates as both a key characteristic and a key cause of alienation.

include some amalgamation of both internal subjective factors and external objective factors in producing alienation.

Having made it now this far with the social ontological account of alienation we can look all the way back to where we began with the dictionary definition of alienation that was first offered as a point of reference in constructing our account. Recall our definition of alienation as being “the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved.” The social ontological account of alienation would identify alienation as fundamentally a state of affairs as opposed to constitutively being an experience given that it most primarily manifests itself as a fallout fact that arises as the unintended consequence of collective intentionality. Of course, that does not mean that one cannot directly experience alienation, nor does this point have to preclude attempts to understand that psychological dimension, but none of that can be taken as superseding the foundation character of alienation that distinguishes it from other phenomenon of being a state of affairs wherein the exercise of a deontic power undermines the collective recognition of the status function that produced the deontic power. As for the idea of being isolated or removed from either a group or activity, the social ontological account of alienation would see these two as more or less synonymous; there is no group that is not bound by the activity of collective recognition since it is collective recognition that makes something intrinsically a social phenomenon, i.e. a group. Once more, it is entirely possible that the experience of alienation manifests itself more as an isolation from a person or group of persons or alternatively as a separation from a certain kind of activity, but social ontology would see the kinds of activities that are associated with alienation being coextensive with social groups that confer on actions a significant by means of collective recognition. Finally, with the normative dimension, the social

ontological account of alienation need not take an essentialistic or paternalistic understanding of that “should” since instead it is the collective recognition that the alienated individual themselves have also accepted that creates the context within which the alienation occurs. However, once one participates in the collective recognition, then the deontology of the status function, that is the deontic powers, is what determines the normativity of the alienated situation. All in all, the social ontological account of alienation fits neatly within the parameters expected with the dictionary definition.

With the foregoing, the main contours of the social ontological account of alienation are set out. Although the characterization of alienation just offered may appear to be overly simplistic, especially in light of the at-times grandiose accounts seen from alienation theory’s history, the argument that will continue to be defended here is that this understanding captures the essential core of alienation such that it is able to straightforwardly represent the most basic instances of alienation while also being able to accurately work with more complicated cases of alienation. To bring this chapter to a close, the final task will be to show how having a social ontology of alienation helps to resolve the central aporias that have long dogged alienation theory and stymied its revival as a critical term.

Social Ontology and the Aporias of Alienation Theory

In the introductory chapter it was acknowledged that there are three aporias in alienation theory that have predominately circumvented alienation’s continued acceptance as a useful and critical term in social philosophy. To recall these to mind, the first aporia is concerned with whether or not alienation is best understood as possessing an underlying fundamental unity or does it function in a purely analogous fashion by pointing to roughly similar but ultimately disparate phenomena. The second aporia is the question of the objective/subjective divide in

alienation, and it is concerned with whether alienation is best characterized as a subjective psychological phenomenon that arises as a result of mental states or is it something that exists because of the material conditions of society. Finally, the third aporia is the question of whether alienation can itself function as a normative term or is it something that is best characterized as a descriptive term, even if it can be used to a normative effect. Failing to see a way through these issues, many saw it as necessary to drop alienation as a useful term even if it meant abandoning focus on what was unquestionably recognized as important issues in sociological analysis. Now, with the social ontological account of alienation set out, we can return to these three aporias to see how this account is able to address and resolve them.

When it comes to the aporia of alienation's fundamental unity, the social ontological account draws upon the strengths of both of the main approaches to alienation. As social ontology is not focused so much on the material conditions of a particular society but rather with the conditions for the possibility of society, a social ontological account of alienation does not set out to directly address the circumstances of a specific historical society. As a result, a social ontological account of alienation does not try to set out some singular empirical cause to alienation, whether that be private property, human sin, or whatever else might be specified as the concrete cause of alienation. From this perspective, one could say that the social ontological account of alienation finds itself denying that there is some singular underlying reality to alienation but rather it functions more so as an analogy. However, it is important to be clear as to what level the concept is functioning. While it is true that the social ontological account of alienation does not hold to a singular empirical cause as the underlying cause to alienation in any of its guises, it does hold to there being a singular formal mechanism that makes alienation possible. So, while it may be so that the social ontological account of alienation disavows a

unifying empirical cause, this position is more substantial than one that holds that alienation is merely analogous across its various instantiations since it does ground all instances of alienation in the same underlying reality, namely, social reality as constructed by collective intentionality. The social ontological account is then more robust and substantial than for those in the analogy camp while it also does not overextend itself and strain credulity by trying to provide an extended explanation for how dramatically different phenomena are somehow connected causally.

Still, all that has been demonstrated thus far is that in abstraction the social ontological theory of alienation can bridge the two camps regarding its unity. The greater challenge is to demonstrate that this approach to alienation can bring some semblance of unity to the concrete history of alienation theory. While it may be tempting to simply disregard any other approach to alienation as not being “real alienation” unless it conforms directly to the social ontological account, the problem is that there is an expansive and well-established—one might even say immutable—history of alienation theory being populated by widely diverging accounts of alienation that will not simply disappear just because one has decided to wave them away. The main task of the subsequent chapters is then to demonstrate that other historical approaches to alienation can be appropriately recast in the social ontological account in such that it maintains a unity throughout its historical diversity or, if need be, to offer a plausible account for why a particular approach, despite using the terminology “alienation,” fails to fit clearly in the tradition. In those cases any insistence in maintaining a particular approach would then require resolving substantial objections rather than simply trying to assert that they are simply distinct alternatives. One must understand that a complete resolution of the aporia of alienation’s unity then requires

more work, to be done shortly, even if what has been offered thus far can be conditionally accepted.

Now the foremost challenge to alienation theory is the second aporia, which is the entrenched divide between the philosophical tradition that has predominately conceptualized alienation as part of the objective conditions of society and the more recent history of alienation theory as found in psychology and sociology which has focused on alienation principally as a subjective mental state of individuals. While neither approach unreservedly ignores the perspective offered by the other, the two each have distinct and seemingly irreconcilable foundational assumptions that shape what points are taken to be the most salient and which are minimized and relegated to a secondary role. Ultimately this produces a situation where one is left with two seemingly unconnected conceptualizations and very little guidance as to how they can be brought together into a single holistic account that is useful for dealing with alienation in all of its various guises, which means that this aporia also reflects upon the aporia concerning alienation's underlying unity.

First, it needs to be noted that the conceptual distinction that the terms "objective" and "subjective" provide is indispensable even while being regularly invoked in a manner that is less than consistent. In everyday usage these terms are typically used to designate the epistemic status of an assertion, with the general idea being that subjective means based upon the beliefs or opinions of individuals, which can vary, while objective means being grounded in indisputable fact and evidence, with the physical sciences broadly invoked as the ideal for what counts as definitive certainty and truth in this regard. Wielding the distinction in the manner just described, various expanses of human experience have been dismissed as "subjective" and so essentially foundationless or at best epiphenomenal, especially when those experiences are believed to be

unassimilable to the model of objectivity found in the natural sciences. While most often such repudiations are focused narrowly on areas like morality and religion, in other cases the dismissal is more widespread as all kinds of human social arrangements, from family and football clubs all the way up to the international economic and political order, are viewed as imaginary constructs with no enduring reality because of their grounding in human subjectivity. Underlying this conclusion, however, is a basic confusion with regard to different senses in which one can describe something as being objective or subjective, and there is a profound conflation that occurs when one moves from the idea that something is grounded in consciousness to the conclusion that it is therefore precariously mutable and so untrustworthy.

While the colloquial uses of the terms objective and subjective largely turn on the quality of epistemic beliefs, the primordial origins for this distinction rather reside with a basic feature of consciousness's intentional nature. John Searle offers a reconceptualization of the objective/subjective distinction by first clarifying how the terms designate the relationship that exists between particular features of reality and us, their observers. The key point Searle makes is relatively straightforward: there are observer-dependent features of reality that are reliant on conscious subjects as a necessary and often sufficient condition for their existence, and there are observer-independent features of reality that, at most, have a merely contingent connection to conscious observers when it comes to their existence. In the first case the point is that human consciousness has an essential role in actually making something what it is, and thus subjective, while in the second case consciousness is simply irrelevant for what makes something what it is, and thus objective. As far as this goes the distinction might not seem to add anything beyond what is already found with the everyday usage of objective and subjective, but Searle enhances the analysis by setting out how this presumed twofold distinction can actually be identified on

either the ontological or epistemological levels such that one actually ends up with a fourfold distinction. How this fourfold distinction pans out will then be critical to understanding the nature of social reality and what sort of claims one can make about it, which then bears directly on the objective/subjective divide in alienation. As a result, it will be helpful to consider each of the four modes in detail.

When it comes to the objective/subjective distinction for ontology, Searle offers a simple “rough-and-ready” test for distinguishing between observer-dependent and observer-independent features of reality: “Could it have existed if there had been no conscious agents at all?”⁶⁰ If the answer is yes, as it is for features of physical reality like mountains and molecules, then we can consider those features of reality as ontologically objective, that is, their existence is independent of any conscious observers. If the answer is no, such as in the case of money and masquerade balls, then we can consider these features of reality as ontologically subjective, that is, their existence is dependent upon there being subjective beings who experience them. Although it is true that paper bills, gold bullion, and papier-mâché masks would all continue to exist as physical objects if conscious agents cease to exist, they nevertheless would cease to exist *as* money and masks as those designations are only a reality conferred on them by conscious subjects. Approaching the same point but from another direction, the configuration of protons in gold would make it gold even if conscious agents did not exist, but the specific proton configuration that is known as gold would only be money if there were conscious agents around who treated it as money.

The upshot of the objective/subjective distinction in ontology is that reality as humans experience it can be categorized according to whether it exists in an unqualified sense as

⁶⁰ Searle (1995), p. 11.

observer independent reality that is ontologically objective or in a qualified sense as observer dependent reality that is ontologically subjective. However, despite the clear divide between what constitutes these two categories, one should not take it that those differences thereby produce an overwhelming dissimilarity between the two types in such a way that ontologically subjective reality is then taken to be somehow “not real.” Although taking the stance that only ontologically objective reality is truly “real” is an understandable temptation, such a conclusion is not incontrovertible if for no other reason such usage stands contrary to what people regularly mean by and take to be true experiences of what is “real.” To illustrate in the simplest of terms, the person who would argue that ontologically subjective reality is “not real” would find themselves in the difficult situation of needing to explain why things like money and political systems are simply “not real,” while the person who was advocating for the similitude of ontologically subjective reality to ontologically objective reality would merely need to reference the profound power that these things clearly have on individuals. To speak of reality in the way human beings experience it, one needs to include discussions of money just as much as mountains, even if there are important differences between the two ontologically.

Once the objective/subjective distinction in ontology is made clear, we can further explore the significance of this distinction for epistemology in order to see how it is similar and how it diverges from both its ontological usage and its typical everyday usage. Analogous to how the distinction operates in ontology, the fundamental concern for epistemology is once again the connection something has to conscious observers. More specifically, Searle sets out the objective/subjective distinction for epistemology in the following way: “a statement is considered objective if it can be known to be true or false independently of the feelings, attitudes, and prejudices of people. A statement is epistemically subjective if its truth depends essentially

on the attitudes and feelings of observers.”⁶¹ Here the key idea is that every statement, in virtue of it claiming that “X is the case,” contains within it the conditions that must obtain in the world in order for one to be able to say that the statement is either true or false. The statement can be deemed epistemically objective if none of the conditions that must be met in order for the statement to be true involves or depends upon the content of any specific person’s mental state(s). As an example, an assertion about who is the current president of the United States can be assessed as true or false independently of any one particular person’s opinions, beliefs, or feelings since the conditions that determine who is the current U.S. president, such as whether or not that person has obtained at least 270 votes in the electoral college during a presidential election, do not include a reference to any particular person’s opinions, beliefs, or feelings. Alternatively, if the truth of a statement depends at least in part on the content of a specific person’s mental state, then the assertion is understood to be epistemically subjective. For example, an assertion about the congeniality of the current president of the United States depends at least in part upon the mental states of the particular person making the assertion, such as their feelings about or opinion of the president’s character and actions. The determining factor for something being considered objective or subjective in epistemology is then simply whether or not the assertion includes conditions that are dependent upon a particular person’s mental states. Therefore, unlike the everyday usage of the objective/subjective distinction, the primary issue is not the quality of one’s beliefs per se as instead it is concerned with the nature of different types of assertions and what state of affairs must be the case in order for them to be true or false.

⁶¹ Searle (1998), p. 44.

An important corollary that arises out of the foregoing discussion is that a person can have both epistemically objective as well as epistemically subjective beliefs with regard to either ontologically objective or ontologically subjective facts. For example, when it comes to mountains, an ontologically objective feature of reality, one can take an epistemically objective stance with regard to the physical composition or genealogical genesis of the mountain or one can take an epistemically subjective stance and talk about the affection one has for that particular mountain. Equally so, in the case of an ontologically subjective feature like the current U.S. president, one can have an epistemically subjective belief about whether or not one likes the president or one can have an epistemically objective belief about who is the current U.S. president. In short, the ontological status of something has no necessary connection to the possible epistemic stances one can take towards that thing. It is therefore critical to realize that the dichotomous division between objective and subjective as it is usually portrayed is both imprecise and misleading; instead, the regular usage of the designations “objective” and “subjective” needs to be brought in line with the fourfold distinction that exists between the terms on an ontological and an epistemological level. When it comes to alienation, the clarity gained from this elucidation is especially valuable because it will help to reveal that much of the division between objective and subjective accounts arises simply out of a failure to be precise with regard to this fourfold distinction.

To work through the objective/subjective divide in alienation theory it is first important to see how that same divide has influenced the way alienation theorists have understood the nature of human society in general since that understanding in turn undergirds how alienation has been understood. Setting out the issue in the broadest of strokes, the divide has forced most theorists to either tilt towards the position that human society is at its most basic an intractable

reality that is grounded by its material conditions, and hence objective, or else to envision human society as an essentially malleable product of human whims, and thus subjective. The problem, however, is that both positions are rife with questionable assumptions and unwarranted conclusions, even though one must also recognize that they both contain a kernel of truth, albeit inchoately. For example, when considering the objective position in the traditional dichotomy, the fact that a large part of society is centered on and seemingly determined by material conditions gives credence to the idea that society is an objective reality, but the exact nature of that association is less explained and more assumed in light of the fact that physical reality is taken to be objective reality. Similarly, the fact that society is fundamentally *human* society is regularly taken by those from the subjective perspective to necessarily imply that this means human beings are able to fully determine the nature of society without any concrete connection being established between these two. What is needed, then, is a way of understanding how human society can be in a sense both objective and subjective, that is, rigid and yet malleable, and the key to doing just that is abandoning the rather rough and imprecise characterizations offered by the traditional dichotomous objective/subjective distinction in favor of the more finely-tuned conceptual apparatus provided by the fourfold objective/subjective distinction.

Working from the ground up, the first issue that should be addressed is how the fourfold objective/subjective distinction helps to characterize the ontological status of social reality. The central criterion for determining the ontological status of something is the question of whether or not the thing under consideration could exist independently of conscious observers. On this point, there is some plausibility to the idea that human society is an ontologically objective reality since a consistent feature of human social arrangements is that they are resistant to change from individual intentions, desires, and whims and so in a sense they exist independently of

human consciousness. However, such a conclusion is only warranted on a misunderstood characterization of the ontological criterion since it needs to be clear that the question is whether or not the thing under consideration could exist independently of conscious observers as a general category and not in terms of specific individuals. So, although it is true that for the most part social reality exists independently of any one individual's personal existence, that is, society would for all intents and purposes be largely unchanged even if that person did not exist, it is a separate question as to whether or not social reality itself would be able to exist without there being any conscious observers at all. To answer this question it will be necessary to investigate in greater detail the specific relationship that human society has both to material reality and to consciousness, each in turn.

Traditionally alienation theorists that have followed Marx defend the position that human society is an objective reality that exists independently of human intentions and whims based upon the belief that social relations are always embedded in material conditions which are themselves independent of human consciousness. The justification for this argument is that since human beings must always find some way to provide for their essential physical needs, i.e. food and shelter, and since human beings are social animals, the way in which those necessities are produced from the material world will therefore always be linked to particular social formations. For many who are inspired by Marx, understanding the concrete material conditions of a society then becomes the primary locus of social analysis as those conditions are seen as strictly determining the type of social arrangements that are possible for that society in addition to conferring upon those arrangements their objectivity. In fact, the logical conclusion of this interpretation is that depending upon its material conditions, society could be no other way as talking about certain social phenomena just *means* a certain configuration of material conditions.

The reason for this arises out of the implication that if society is objective because it is fundamentally reducible to objective physical reality, then the physical properties of material reality will strictly determine how a society will be organized in the exact same way that a chemical reaction will always be precisely shaped by the physical properties of its ingredients. From this perspective, social reality is then the sum total of the individual physical properties of the various objects that make it up, and therefore, to illustrate by way of example, social phenomena like female liberation just means that society has widespread usage of mechanical dishwashers and washing machines that reduce the amount of time needed to clean household articles, thus freeing women from their traditional role of being relegated to the domestic sphere because less time is needed there. In this case, if you are to have gender equality, then you need to have the material conditions that constitute female liberation, and so economic freedom for women depends upon there being mechanical dishwashers and washing machines, or at least some devices that accomplish the same material ends.

The problem with the idea that social reality can be strictly reduced to the material properties of its constituent objects in just this way is that it assumes as much as it explains. Once certain technological forces have been adopted it can appear as though there is an obvious, even logical, connection that it shares with the resultant social arrangements, but it is not always obvious that such a connection has a strict determinacy since, not least of all, in hindsight literally everything can seem as though it had to happen the way in which it did. For example, it may seem that the introduction of assembly line production necessitates that there be a large pool of largely low-educated, low-skilled workers to serve as a labor force, but it is not unquestionable that it *must* be this way. As reasonable as such conclusions may be, it is quite another thing to demonstrate that it definitely could not have been different. Related to this point

is an additional problem. In the terminology of the fourfold objective/subjective distinction, if human society is understood as being ontologically objective due to the fact that it is directly reducible to ontologically objective physical reality, then taken to the logical conclusion this is arguing that human society could effectively exist even if there were no human beings. Stated another way, it would be no different than claiming that just as the physical properties of subatomic particles are what produce nuclear radiation regardless of whether or not there are any conscious observers, so the particular accumulation and arrangement of atomic elements in an area are what would produce factories and football games regardless of whether or not there were any conscious beings to populate them. Such a position is clearly untenable, and so we are forced to conclude that human society cannot be understood as ontologically objective in the same way that material reality is understood as being ontologically objective. Instead, it needs to be realized that human society has a much more oblique relationship to physical reality than is often presumed from certain Marxist treatments of society reality's material conditions.

Before further exploring the kind of objectivity that can be said to inhere to human society, we would do well to clarify the connection that actually does exist between social reality and physical reality if it is not that of a simple reduction. Instead of seeing physical reality as directly determining the particular arrangements that will be found in human society, it rather needs to be understood that the principal role that physical reality has for social arrangements is in being an anchor upon which human beings are able to construct the social meaning and significance that a particular aspect of physical reality will have, and this is true even in cases where physical functionality appears to significantly determine the relevance something has for human beings. In those cases, it is a better understanding to realize that the properties of physical reality have more of a guiding influence rather than a determining influence as the question of

something's relevance is a separate point than its functionality. John Searle demonstrates this basic idea by means of a thought experiment in which he analyzes how a group of individuals might go about interacting with and treating a stone wall that borders their village.⁶² Initially the importance of the wall relies upon its physical properties as its height and durability allows it to function as a barrier against outsiders. With time, however, one can imagine that the wall decays to the point at which it is nothing more than a line of stones in the ground which people could easily step over. In such a situation, the villagers might still treat that line of stones as if it were a wall by refraining from walking over it or otherwise preventing outsiders from entering the area demarcated by the stones. In the first case, the role that the wall plays predominantly relies upon its physical properties and how it is able to function as a material object. In the second case, the stones are able to continue functioning as if it were a wall even though it no longer actually does so in virtue of its physical properties. Although both instances are able to serve as examples for how social reality operates, the second, Searle argues, is more forthcoming in revealing just how it operates by pointing out how physical reality is able to anchor subjective reality.

In analyzing the thought experiment, Searle's claim is that a predominant part of what determines the particular social arrangements of a society is not as much the physical functioning of the objects involved, although this is also not to say that they have no role, but rather the most important feature is the status function, that is, the status that is conferred by the members of society on something such that there is an expectation that it be treated as having a certain function. Physical functions will always be determined by the material properties of the object, but physical objects can also have functions conferred on them in virtue of human beings treating them as such, such as with Searle's example of the decayed wall. In fact, what Searle fails to

⁶² Searle (1998), pp. 124-12; Searle (1995), pp. 39-40.

point out is that even in the initial case of the wall being fully erect the significance of the wall is still predominantly shaped by how the villagers decide to treat it rather than directly because of its physical function. Whether the wall is able to operate as the last line of defense for rallying fighters deflecting invaders, or whether it can simply be a marker of what location counts as their village, in both of these cases it is not the physical properties per se that give it that role but rather the fact that human beings treat those physical properties as if they also had an additional significance of being a final line of defense or a border. The main upshot is that while the physical functioning of objects may provide a basis upon which something is given its significance, so in that sense the physical properties of something may place certain limitations on what kind of significance can be placed on it, that physical function does not determine in any direct sense the relevance that that object has for a particular social arrangement. To illustrate, gold can be used as a part of semiconductors just as much as it can be used as jewelry, and so even though in both cases gold has the role that it does because of its physical properties, namely electrical conductivity and malleability, respectively, which role a particular piece of gold plays is determined not as much by its physical properties as it is by the individuals who decide to use it in one way or the other. The connection that social reality has to physical reality is then one in which physical reality has a logical priority to social reality by being the foundation upon which status functions are conferred, but in the end that conferred status is one that is determined by human beings.

Having pursued the relationship between physical reality and human society to its end, we still have yet to find a solid basis for conceptualizing how social reality can be understood as being objective now that physical reality's ontological objectivity has been removed as a possibility. Nevertheless, we have already skirted past the foundation for establishing exactly

that by elucidating the significance of status functions for the creation of social institutions. By eliminating the idea that society is ontologically objective in the way specified by the fourfold objective/subjective distinction, we can now fully explore the idea of social reality being ontologically subjective. Most importantly, by recognizing that consciousness has a central role in producing social reality, then the epistemological status of social reality becomes a key for understanding how social reality can be both objective *and* subjective. The idea of status functions has already been invoked as a way of talking about how consciousness is able to construct social reality by conferring on something its significance in virtue not of its physical properties but rather in virtue of the status it is given. If gold is not money because of its physical properties but rather because of the particular status that people give to gold, then that points to the idea that it is the interaction of consciousness with physical objects that then give those objects their social meaning and significance. We can now complete the diagram when it comes to the ontological status of human society in showing that although it is not directly reducible to ontologically objective physical reality, it nevertheless is logically dependent upon physical reality as a point upon which consciousness is able to confer meaning in order to give form to social arrangements, that is, it is ontologically subjective. However, at least as things stand, it can thus appear that in the end it is the traditional subjective treatment of social arrangements that is the correct viewpoint since social reality is subject to the powers of consciousness. What needs to be shown now is how even though consciousness is what produces social reality, the manner by which that happens also provides a level of stability and rigidity to social arrangements, especially when it comes to individuals.

Although it is true to say that ontologically subjective reality is what it is because of human consciousness in a way that is similar to how one says that the truth of epistemically

subjective statements is dependent upon the subjective mental states of conscious beings, there is nevertheless an important even if subtle difference between these two cases. The distinction largely relies on what Searle refers to as the direction of fit for intentional states, which is the idea that for some intentional states it is about the mind conforming to the world, such as is the case with truth, while for other intentional states it is about the world conforming to the mind, such as in the case of promises. When it comes to ontologically subjective reality it is about consciousness making something the case, that is, it has a direction of fit of world-to-mind in which consciousness shapes the world to be a certain way. On the other hand, with epistemically subjective assertions, and all objective assertions for that matter, it is a question of whether consciousness has got it right vis-à-vis the world, and so in that case it has a direction of fit of mind-to-world. While it is the case that subjectivity is what makes something be what it is when it comes to ontologically subjective reality, when it comes to epistemically subjective assertions one only has the ability to decide what assertion one makes in the first place, which only then can be evaluated as to whether or not it conforms to what is the case, but one is not directly in control of whether or not something is the case when it comes to the assertion. In short, consciousness directly makes ontologically subjective reality be what it is but it only indirectly makes epistemically subjective assertions true.

At this point it is now possible to see how these ideas all come together to give social reality both its objective and its subjective aspects. Social reality resides in an expansive middle ground between the features of ontologically objective reality which are resistant to the attitudes and feelings of any one individual and those things that are completely subject to the whims of a single individual. For social reality it is the fact that it is built upon the interconnected recognition by multiple individuals that it has its objectivity insofar as assertions about social

reality are independent of the feelings and attitudes of any one person in particular. In this case, social reality has both permeable and implacable aspects to it, and to what degree any particular social institution has either characteristic is largely determined by its place in a network of other social institutions. For example, even if significant portions of society found the current president illegitimate, the layered reality of institutions that are supported in turn by other institutions such as the media, courts, and military compels public acceptance and recognition. More localized institutions, being less layered by other social institutions, may be more tenuous but nonetheless they still are still characterized as being constituted independently of any one particular observer. The intractableness of social institutions as a result of their collective nature forms a central aspect of what leads to the degree of resistance any individual can mount against the influence of particular dimensions of social reality. Even if the individual consciously rejects the influence a particular social institution has on one's behavior, the collective recognition of that social fact by others will still provide that institution with a weight that cannot be easily dismissed by that individual.

To explore how this fourfold distinction can help to re-envision alienation theory in a way that can move it past the objective/subjective divide, let us now briefly recap what has been established. It was seen that the central problem with the traditional dichotomous objective/subjective distinction is that it has overestimated the role that physical reality has in producing social reality due to how it conflates all instances of objectivity with materiality while conversely it has mischaracterized the nature of human consciousness and underestimated its powers for producing enduring and independent phenomena. Alternatively, the fourfold objective/subjective distinction offers a more precise understanding of the specific dynamics that exist between physical reality, social reality, and consciousness. Instead of looking to physical

reality as the source of social reality's objectivity, we instead need to look to the way that human beings collectively produce the conditions that determine the meaning and significance of the material world for sociality. Of course, we should not overestimate the direct control that human beings therefore have over their social conditions as they are produced from a network of overlapping institutions that are both individually unyielding due to their foundation in a collectivity that produces the layered character of social reality in which institutions reinforce one another. As will be seen, social reality is more often than not an intractable reality for individuals, and that intractability will be especially relevant for the phenomenon of alienation.

Whether alienation is seen as being a part of capitalist exploitation, as in Marx and Fromm, or simply an inevitable consequence of human sociality, as in Sartre, alienation is unanimously recognized as being an inherently social phenomenon. Nevertheless, despite the universal agreement on this one point, alienation theory has found itself significantly divided over the last century between those that advocate a perspective that emphasizes alienation's objective features and those that emphasize alienation's subjective dimension. While there have been attempts to reconcile these two perspectives, little headway has been found and even less has come to be expected given how they offer irreducibly distinct ways of approaching the most basic question of what constitutes alienation. Part of what produces this problematic divide is that the two perspectives have tended to focus on empirical manifestations of alienation, but the major reason for the divide comes from the fact that there has been an endemic misunderstanding of the objective/subjective distinction that purportedly undergirds the disagreement. Given this, the analysis of human society in terms of the fourfold objective/subjective distinction in the previous section has already established much of what needs to be done in order to demonstrate how alienation theory can bridge the traditional objective/subjective divide that has dominated

recent work in alienation theory. The key here will be in showing specifically how alienation exists as an ontologically subjective reality that is encountered principally as an epistemically objective phenomenon same as most other social phenomena.

When it comes to the two main approaches to alienation, most recent treatments have been overwhelmingly from the subjective standpoint, especially as the project of alienation has largely continued unabated in the academic disciplines of psychology and sociology. The thing that all subjective accounts of alienation share is taking it to be a particular psychological state or attitude in which an individual feels separated from others in society, although how specifically that separation is characterized can vary widely. In this case the necessary and sufficient conditions for alienation are that an individual articulate, or at least potentially be able to articulate, their experience as one of alienation; whether or not it is fully conscious or not, alienation is purported to primarily be something that is *felt*. Alternatively, in the philosophical tradition alienation has been most commonly seen as an objective phenomenon that is best characterized by a particular kind of relationship between individuals. The necessary and sufficient condition for alienation in this interpretation is a particular kind of social status; ultimately alienation is a particular way of *being*. It is important to note, however, that there is nothing contradictory in an objective account pointing to ways in which the social status of the person can be felt or personally experienced as alienating. The point is just that for objective considerations the subjective experiences of a person is not what primarily determines whether or not they are alienated as those feelings are at best epiphenomenal to its existence.

The problem for alienation theory is that typical subjective and objective accounts are both inconsistent in how they specify what exactly makes their accounts subjective and objective, respectively, as those terms are regularly used in a way that equivocates between the

ontological and epistemological levels. What needs to be shown is that the characterization of alienation as an objective phenomenon is correct insofar as its epistemological characterization but wrong insofar as its ontological nature, while the characterization of alienation as a subjective phenomenon is correct insofar as its ontological nature but wrong with regard to its epistemological nature. Since the phenomenon of alienation is one that is grounded in the relationship between the self and society, both of which are dependent upon consciousness for their existence, alienation is ultimately a feature of reality that could only exist for conscious beings and so is ontologically subjective. To use the rough-and-ready test for determining observer-dependent phenomena, one can see that should human beings all disappear tomorrow that alienation would not exist. However, just as it is with all of social reality, alienation is not dependent exclusively on any single consciousness. Instead, the self, society, and alienation as a relationship between the two are all modalities of human intersubjectivity, and so while they are encountered only through the individual subjective consciousness, it is not any singular consciousness that constitutes its existence. An individual has tremendous power over how they conceive of their own self and how they relate to society at large, but their self-conceptions are never purely self-determined as they are always dependent upon a context of social relations that are to varying degrees unyielding to personal desires. It is for this reason that it is not enough for people to believe themselves to be whatever they want to be but rather ultimately such a self-conception must be recognized by others and in turn cultivated and instantiated in particular institutions. Therefore, one can conclude that while alienation is an ontologically subjective feature of reality and so dependent upon human consciousness for its existence, it is nevertheless not wholly constituted by any one person. Said another way, alienation has necessary but not sufficient conditions in the individual self-consciousness.

The problem with traditionally subjective accounts of alienation is that they consider the individual's conscious state, understood principally as awareness, as not only the necessary but also the sufficient condition for determining whether one is alienated. Psychologically-based theories of alienation invariably take the self-reporting of individuals as the datum that allows one to infer whether they are alienated, but rarely is there any attempt to justify why this is sufficient for determining alienation except in a tautological manner of defining alienation as the feeling of being alienated. The biggest reason for this misidentification is because of the desire for empirically quantifiable data, and the self-reporting of individuals can easily be transcribed in such a manner. However, this simply avoids rather than deals with the underlying and more substantive question as to whether one should consider that empirical data as stating anything meaningful or worthwhile, and that can only be done by engaging with the deeper philosophical question of what would constitute alienation in an ontological sense. The fact is that even if the self-reporting of individuals is a signal that alienation may be occurring and so further investigation is merited, that is, there may not be a good reason *prima facie* to reject their claims as mistaken, it is not at all clear on what grounds this could be said to fully exhaust much less substantially constitute what it means to be alienated. It is worth noting the problem of false-consciousness, which can exist both in *failing* to identify oneself as being alienated but could also theoretically be the case where one *mistakenly* identifies oneself as alienated. Understood this way, subjective self-awareness of alienation then not only cannot be seen as a sufficient condition for alienation but does not in itself even merit being a necessary condition; that having been said, there is no question that subjective self-awareness can be a significant element that arises in cases of alienation.

The fact that alienation is grounded generally in human consciousness but not any single individual consciousness per se is the reason that alienation can be understood as being epistemologically objective, that is, the knowledge that a person is alienated does not necessarily depend upon the individual person being able to recognize or acknowledge that they are as such. In fact, even from the perspective of traditionally conceived subjective accounts of alienation what is most often felt is not so much alienation per se but rather a constellation of experiences that are collectively labeled as alienation. So, while it is the individual who experiences alienation, and the individual can know whether or not they are alienated, it is not the individual per se that determines the truth of whether or not they are alienated. For this reason alienation is epistemologically objective, that is, the belief that someone is alienated has conditions of satisfaction that are not exclusively tied to that individual person's subjective states. Unlike experiences of pleasure and pain or that of aesthetic beauty, the truth of statements about alienation is not exclusively dependent upon individuals asserting them. It is possible to be alienated and be unable to articulate one's experiences as that of alienation either because of a lack of competency or, what is even more problematic, exactly because alienation has a tendency towards concealment as appearing to be the "natural" state of affairs for things and so ineluctable. To argue that alienation is something that is primarily felt in this way is to prioritize the idea of alienation being experienced in the focus of one's conscious attention while ignoring the way in which alienation more often than not operates on the periphery of conscious awareness.

On the other hand, typical objective accounts of alienation often overemphasize the reliance of social institutions on their material conditions. The inherent reductionism found in these approaches is that they fail to grasp a significant part of what makes those material

conditions “objective”; money, for example, may be the “matter” of which society is made, but it is hardly on the same ontological level as mountains in terms of its objectivity. Instead, what these objective accounts tend to single out are those aspects of social reality that are the least susceptible to individual transformation, and those features are often identified as the “true source” of alienation because they are unyielding to personal whim in a way analogous to ontologically objective reality. However, when one presses for a reason why certain conditions are considered as more foundational or “objective,” what one finds is that that intractability is a result of deeply layered instances of collective recognition rather than because these conditions are somehow more “real” ontologically speaking. In short, it puts the cart before the horse because it is not that these conditions are more objective and so therefore have a greater sway on society but rather their existence within a network of reinforcing institutions constructed by collective recognition is what makes them less resistant to individual actions such that they have the appearance of being more “objective.” Said another way, it is the location of these social institutions in the network of social institutions that give the appearance of them being more objective, but that is because epistemic stances with regard to these features of social reality are less subject to individual influence when it comes to their conditions of satisfaction and not because of some kind of metaphysical reason. Still, it does need to be recognized that there is an expansive range of possible configurations regarding epistemic conditions of satisfaction that range between the extremes of objectivity and subjectivity. While some social arrangements are more deeply entrenched in networks of collective recognitions that they can easily appear almost immovable, and so objective, there are also aspects of social reality that can be more tenuously established and so ultimately more liable to subjective influence even while remaining a product of collective intentionality. So, although it remains the case that social reality, and alienation in

turn, only is what it is because we make it so, that is not something that is solely accomplished by just one person. Social reality has an epistemic objectivity to it that is produced by intersubjective recognition and collective intentionality, and the extent of that collective recognition determines the degree to which it can be considered as objective, but at the end of the day it is always squarely grounded within the realm of subjective ontology.

The last aporia to address from the perspective of the social ontological account of alienation is that of the term's normativity. For many of the earliest proponents of alienation theory, and especially for those who turned to the term at the height of its popularity, alienation was seen as being especially valuable as a sociological term because of how it was able to identify a unique situation distinct from other sociological terms but which also had the added bonus of being able to clearly highlight a negative dimension to this situation that was worthy of being critiqued. As a result, alienation was seen as having the ability to function as both a descriptive and normative term, simultaneously. Detractors of this position, however, pointed out that for alienation to function this way would require that it be an exception to the well-worn is-ought distinction that sees a strict bifurcation between describing a situation and critically evaluating a situation. With time this view came to be the dominant one in alienation theory, especially in empirical sociology, though it should again be acknowledged that these theorists were willing to acknowledge that it could work in concert with a separate normative critique even without *being* a normative term. The question here is then whether there is a way to revitalize the traditional aspect of alienation theory that sees it as having a dual function as a descriptive and normative term or whether the empirical sociologists are right in ejecting the normative aspect in favor exclusively of the descriptive function.

As it would happen, in relying upon Searle's social ontology there is a way forward for seeing that the is-ought distinction is not as hard and fast as one might be led to believe, especially in the realm of social reality. In his essay, "How to Derive "Ought" from "Is"" Searle makes the argument that naturalistic fallacy that motivates the is-ought distinction is in fact itself a fallacy and that one can present an argument that convincingly demonstrates a situation where would can clearly derive an ought from an is.⁶³ The argument hinges upon his idea of Declarations from the philosophy of language and how Declarations create institutional facts, although at the time he first wrote the article he had not yet articulated the idea in those terms. Recall that the fundamental idea of Declarations is that they have the dual fit of world-to-word and word-to-world, that is, they are a class of speech acts where in stating something as being the case one makes it the case that it is that way. The quintessential instance of this phenomenon for Searle is the act of promising wherein by saying "I promise" one is both describing what one does and making it the case that one is doing said thing. With this idea Searle makes the argument in the article that if one starts with the initial premise "Jones uttered the words "I hereby promise to pay you, Smith, five dollars,"" which can be recognized as purely descriptive, one can logically derive from it the premise "Jones ought to pay Smith five dollars," which not only indicates a normative component for Jones but also commits *us* to having expectations that Jones ought to do something.⁶⁴ The reason for this is because understanding what a promise is entails that one accepts that one *ought* to do a certain actions in light of said promise since promises are defined as "creating, undertakings of, or simply acceptances of obligations," and so

⁶³ Searle, J. (1964). How to derive "ought" from "is". *Philosophical Review*, 73(1), 43-58.

⁶⁴ Searle (1964), p. 44.

it is tautologically true that in making a promise one is saying one ought to do something.⁶⁵

Similarly, to recognize that a person has made a promise is also to be committed to the idea that they have an obligation to keep it, with all of the normative implications that come from that stance, since again to recognize that they have made a promise is to recognize that they have put themselves under an obligation to act or refrain from acting a certain way.

The critical upshot of recognizing this inherent power of Declarations to establish institutional facts that are both descriptive and normative is that Declarations are also the foundation of social reality in Searle's ontology in the form of Status Declarations and the concomitant idea of deontic powers. For Searle, to recognize a social fact as being the case is just to recognize that there are certain obligations that come with that recognition, namely deontic powers. As he points out, to recognize that something is someone's property, a status function, is to recognize that one ought to not steal it, a deontic power, since being the property owner entails being able to dispose of it only according to their own wishes, also a deontic power. Similarly, to recognize something as a debt, a status function, is to recognize that one ought to pay that debt since recognizing something as a debt entails recognizing an obligation to pay it, a deontic power. In short, all of social reality is rife with normative obligations as the behavioral expectations that they produce are what gives social reality its force and power. One cannot understand the nature of social reality without also understanding the normative implications that come with social reality since the very existence of these institutional facts necessarily involve normative expectations in order for them to function.

Now as auspicious as this may seem to be for revitalizing the position that alienation is inherently a normative and descriptive term, there is an added level of complexity because it was

⁶⁵ Searle (1964), p. 45.

argued that alienation was not itself something directly produced by collective recognition but rather it is a “systematic fallout fact” that is derivable from these institutional facts. Unlike deontic powers, which are intrinsically normative, fallout facts need not be since they do not directly involve these behavioral expectations but rather they are facts that happen to be true rather as a result of these behavioral expectations. For example, the fact that people are buying, selling, providing services, etc. are all things that involve institutional facts involving deontic powers, but the idea that a particular amount of this activity, or lack thereof, is a recession is not something that inherently involves normative concerns since recessions are not produced by collective recognition and deontic powers, at least not directly, and so do not inherently carry normative rights or obligations for the actors involved. Since alienation is also a fallout fact, it would seem that as close as we may have gotten to discovering the foundation for an intrinsic link between its descriptive and normative dimensions, we might be forced to recognize that alienation is only something that happens to be true as a result of collective intentionality rather than something directly produced by it, which was a necessary foundation for Searle’s critique of the is-ought distinction.

As will be argued, however, alienation’s existence as a systematic fallout fact is rather unique because, while true that it is a “macro” institutional fact that is derived from “micro” institutional facts, it is not *merely* something that happens to be true as a result of micro institutional facts but rather is directly concerned with the character and nature of the deontic powers involved in said institutional facts. To get right to the point, alienation is metanormative in that it is directed at the conditions for the possibility of deontic powers rather than the fulfillment of said conditions. While traditional normative ideas like morality and justice address the actions of moral agents, metanormative concerns would seek to address, in part, the context

that enable those agentive activities to occur. Alienation is not produced by collective intentionality and so marked by deontic powers itself, and thus directly normative, it is nonetheless concerned with the conditions of satisfaction of deontic powers as it is used to describe an objective circumstance in which there is a performative contradiction between recognizing the Status Function and the fulfillment of one or more of its deontic powers. The fact that the normative dimension of alienation functions on a different level than these other normative terms is what makes it such an important addition to social critique since it both identifies and evaluates a unique circumstance that is not otherwise reducible to other descriptive and normative ideas.

To illustrate the way that alienation functions normatively, then, consider the example of promising that Searle introduced as a demonstration of how one can derive an ought from an is. In the case of promising, Searle shows that in recognizing that something is a promise one is committing oneself to the belief that one ought to keep said promise. To refuse to keep one's promise would then be a violation of the obligation that is created by the act of promising. Alienation, on the other hand, would in this case be concerned with conditions that are outside of the direct control of the moral agents but that enable the making and keeping of promises. Consider a case where a parent promises to bring a child to their favorite store but, upon arrival, they find that the store is closed. The parent has made a promise and ought to keep it; in being promised something, the child has expectations that the parent keep it. Now in some cases the situation can be simply resolved by changing the expectations of the two parties. Recall it was argued that collective recognition is the necessary context for something being alienating, and so if the collective recognition of the status of the promises changes the normative expectations that go with it would also be likewise altered. But what if such expectations are not so easily

changed? The parent, recognizing they have made a promise, recognizes that they ought to keep it, but if they continually recognize their inability to fulfill it there is the kind of performative contradiction that could easily produce in them the kind of angst, feeling of powerlessness, etc. that is commonly associated with alienation. The same would be with the child: having an expectation that their parent ought to perform a certain action but does not, but not in a way that the parent could be directly blamed for some kind of moral failing, would also continue to experience the kind of negative emotions that would be rightly analogous to what is typically identified as alienation. Again, it would be hard to make the argument that the parent in this case did something wrong, which would be the case if they merely made the promise to placate the child with no intention to fulfill it, and so normatively condemnable, but nonetheless it seems inaccurate to say that the situation is merely normatively neutral as there remains the expectations with regard to the promising remain in force.

From all of this it can be seen that alienation can and does in fact operate as both a descriptive and normative idea simultaneously. Since the foundation of social reality involves deontic powers, social reality functions by relying upon normative rights and obligations in order to exist and operate. Alienation, as concerned with how the deontic powers are instantiated, is likewise a normative concern because it addresses concerns involving the conditions of satisfaction for these deontic powers. Due to the fact that alienation addresses those circumstances where there is a failure of the deontic powers from being satisfactorily realized, but in a way that does not necessarily involve a clear way to identify an agentive role in said failure, alienation's normative dimension is able to be connected to the normative dimension of deontic powers while also highlighting a unique space for addressing normative concerns related to social reality. Unlike other normative terms like morality and justice, which involve the direct

action of moral agents, alienation is a metanormative concern that involves the conditions for the possibility of the normative actions involved with deontic powers. In the end, if the foregoing analysis is successful, it shows that alienation does have grounds for functioning as both a descriptive and normative term in a way that can avoid the paternalistic concerns associated with traditional conceptualizations of alienation, especially since the obligations produced by deontic powers are ostensible assumed by the individual through their participation in the collective recognition of the status function that made them possible. The normative aspects of alienation arise because the agents involved have themselves taken on the normative expectations by participating in the collective recognition that gives these social institutions and their associated deontic powers their existence. The social ontological account of alienation is then able to maintain this traditional hope that alienation operates as a critical analytic term but in a way that avoids all of the well-identified pitfalls that have typically come with attempts to accomplish this. In short, the aporia is dissolved.

Conclusion

The greatest potential that social ontology has for alienation theory is in providing a conceptual apparatus that can identify the conditions for the possibility of a phenomenon like alienation to even occur in the first place. Since social ontology is directed not so much at concrete instantiations of social reality but instead at the underlying logical form of social reality in general, an account of alienation grounded in social ontological terms would operate on a theoretical level that is one step below what is typically relied upon for the analysis of specific instances of alienation. As a result, a social ontological account of alienation is ideally situated vis-à-vis alienation's historical legacy because it operates with a degree of generality that can readily pick out common features that connect the various historical accounts of alienation

without being tangled in the disparate details that otherwise stymie attempts at producing a holistic account of alienation. That having been said, a social ontological account of alienation is also not so abstract that it becomes devoid of meaningful analytic content, and so with regard to the future potentiality of alienation theory, a social ontological account of alienation remains accessible to empirical concerns while being able to provide more consistent guidance to continued investigations of alienation regardless of its orientation or purview. Additionally, relying upon the conceptual apparatus of Searle's social ontology also shows a clear path forward for resolving the core aporia that have otherwise stymied alienation's continued use as a critical sociological term. The future of alienation theory seems bright.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRE-PHILOSOPHICAL USAGE OF “ALIENATION”

The Historical Component of This Project and Chapter Overview

Typically in works on alienation theory one finds at the beginning an obligatory historical survey of the term's most significant historical uses before one is quickly moved to what the author really cares about, namely, their own position. In these cases the intention of the historical survey is to show how their usage of the term is to a greater or lesser degree in alignment with some passably acceptable subset of the term's usage so as to prove, however loosely, that the author's approach can be seen as fitting within the larger tradition. In the case of this dissertation, the approach has been inverted because the sought after goal is the exact opposite of what it typically intended; instead of showing that the social ontological account of alienation flows from the earlier historical uses and so aligns with them, the aim here is to show that the social ontological account can put into clearer relief the central intuitions that have guided these historical uses and point to an underlying formal unity between them. Stated in the boldest terms, the intention is to show that the social ontological account does more to illuminate the historical uses than the historical uses help to explain the social ontological account. Now before his is taken as simple bravado, it is important to point out that this is at least in part due to the fact that the social ontological account of alienation is meant to operate on a level of abstraction that is more generalized than what is typically sought in most instances of alienation theory. Still, recognizing how alienation theory has largely fallen by the wayside based upon how the term has been used and abused, it is important to work through that history in order to show how the

social ontological account of alienation is able to contribute to alienation theory's continued development.

Now in the development of alienation theory there are several distinct historical stages that can be broadly discerned based upon a particular seminal usage that then shaped subsequent adaptations in that period more generally. In fact, the employment of the term was rather extensive even prior to the more familiar form that takes through its appropriation by the philosophical and sociological circles of the 19th Century, and so it is necessary to start with those earliest usages in order to fully trace the historical arc of alienation theory's development. There are two main benefits that will come from this analysis. First, these pre-philosophical uses capture the most basic connotations that are implied by alienation in its broadest application, and in that way they serve as the most foundational test of the social ontological account's ability to function in the most general of circumstances. The second benefit is to put into context how alienation's philosophical prehistory came to influence the nascent appropriation of alienation as a specifically philosophical concept, particularly in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* but also further in Marx's critique of capitalism and in existential philosophy. Only having worked through that historical era is it possible to understand the term's more popular reception by theorists from alienation theory's golden age as well as in the period since its more widespread diminution. Importantly, working through each of these phases of alienation theory's development will help to highlight how the main aporias developed, and if the thesis that the social ontological account is able to resolve them is correct, then it should be possible to show how the social ontological account of alienation is able shine light on these formulations in a way that can avoid falling into their conceptual traps. Ultimately, the most important but perhaps simple goal of this chapter is just to demonstrate that the social ontological account does in fact

work to capture what is alienating about these foundational instances and so is successful conceptually.

To provide further context for considering alienation theory's earliest phase of development, it helps to look more closely at etymology. The English word 'alienation' is directly descended from the Latin word *alienatio*, which comes from the Latin noun *alius*, meaning 'other,' and the suffix *-tio*, which functions identically to the English suffix *-ation* and designates the result of an action.¹ *Alienatio*, then, literally denotes a process of something becoming other, that is, of something transitioning from an identity relationship to one of alterity, or what might awkwardly be phrased simply as "othering." With regard to the specific usage of the term *alienatio* in classical Latin there are several distinct applications that developed out of the basic underlying intuition of a transition from identity to difference. First, *alienatio* had a specific technical meaning as a legal term that designated the transference of property from one individual to another. To this day the word "alienation" in English still retains this technical meaning in property law, while it should be noted that the German equivalent *Entäußerung* is what Hegel and Marx used in the context of their discussions of private property. Yet *alienatio* also had a broader usage as a term indicating an aversive separation between people that ultimately had its most developed and conceptually consistent utilization as a part of Christian theological discourse. It is this usage of the term *alienatio* that has close affinities to the particular connotation of alienation in English that is meant to evoke a sense of hostility or estrangement, which the German captures with the closely related term *Entfremdung*.² A third

¹ Schacht (1970), p. 9.

² It is important to note that both the English words 'alienation' and 'estrangement' as well as the German parallels *Entäußerung* and *Entfremdung*, though having different connotations, nevertheless all have roughly identical literal meanings, namely, "other-making." Being mindful of this underlying identity is important not least of all when it

distinct usage of *alienatio* develops in classical Latin that is used to designate the loss of one's mental faculties, whether temporarily as in the case of acute shock or permanently in the case of insanity. Although now a largely archaic term, the English word "alienist" was used to designate what most people today would refer to as a psychologist or psychiatrist, particularly those who worked in psychiatric hospitals.

Now the purpose in parsing these connotations of *alienatio* and their modern day derivatives is not to be pedantic but to be specifically mindful of how these various interpretations of alienation allow one to draw out by means of contrast an underlying formal structure to alienation. While the concrete specificity of these pre-philosophical³ uses will each individually come to influence the philosophical tradition of alienation, it is in the end the underlying logical form of alienation that will be most important as it will be the key to tracing the continuity throughout its history and also to establishing ways in which the term can be revitalized for contemporary usage. Toward this end it will be helpful to see in greater detail what exactly was being "othered" in each of these forms of alienation, how it occurs, and to what significance. Having done that, these different understandings of alienation will be recast in the terminology of social ontology in order to show how that framework can both accurately capture but also highlight important dynamics that might otherwise be missed in their traditional expressions.

comes to analyzing the concept in Hegelian and Marxian uses as at times the terms are used interchangeably, as they literally can be, while at other times they are seen as designating disparate phenomena.

³ Although these three usages of the term alienation have been designated as its pre-philosophical applications in order to highlight the genealogical heritage of philosophical alienation theory, it is important to note that all three of these terms have continued to be used well after the point of its philosophical appropriation. It may for this reason perhaps be more genuine to term them extra- or non-philosophical uses insofar as they have been consistently invoked in these narrowly technical scopes more or less still to this day.

Alienation as the Transfer of Property

A cornerstone of Roman law was the idea that an individual could have absolute and unrestricted ownership of property, referred to as Quiritarian ownership.⁴ Unlike the system of property law in the United States, for instance, in which ultimate jurisdiction for property resides with the states within which the property exists and so is subject to various restrictions such as zoning for its usage or potential expropriation according to eminent domain, Quiritarian ownership was for Romans the ideal for property ownership especially when it came to a class of objects referred to as *res mancipi*, which included property principally associated with agriculture, such as arable land, slaves, and beasts of burden. In particular the ownership of this type of property was symbolically charged for the Roman imagination: only Roman citizens (*Quirites*) could have this absolute ownership (Quiritarian), and the agriculture-based property in question was always within the borders of Italy and so tied to the Roman agrarian ideal. In this way Quiritarian ownership was tied up with all of the rights and privileges of being a Roman man⁵ and even more significantly with all of the *ideals* of being a Roman: wealthy, self-possessed, and with an agrarian occupation to rely upon for independence. Throughout Ancient Rome's history, but particularly during the Republican era, the ideal of owning and working a self-sustaining farm was the pinnacle of what one strived for as a Roman.⁶ In many ways Roman ownership of land was not just a legal reality but was also a profound cultural reality that shaped and was in turn shaped by Roman self-identity.

⁴ Birks (1985) points to the idea in Roman law of ownership as absolute on a conceptual level while recognizing various practical restrictions on use, that is, the specific content of ownership. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that ownership was minimally restricted. P. 31.

⁵ Gendered word choice deliberate since only men could be considered as Roman citizens.

⁶ In this regard the legendary statesman Cincinnatus (519-430 BC) set the standard when, after being made dictator with total power during a Roman political emergency, retired back to his farm after successfully resolving the crisis.

Yet the reality of ownership, especially the Quiritarian sort that idealized absolute ownership, is only coherent when it is possible to relinquish ownership, that is, for property to be alienated (*alienatio*). Although the unencumbered employment of property is certainly an important aspect of what it means to be an owner, it is clear that the inability to sell or transfer ownership of that selfsame property would make it questionable whether it could really be called ownership in the first place.⁷ The paradox of ownership is that one is only able to say that one fully owns something, that it is possessed in its entirety, if it is possible for that thing to not be owned by that selfsame person through a process of sale or relinquishment. This paradox plays out in a unique way in Roman law regarding procedures of *alienatio* since Quiritarian ownership had strong overtones of personal worth and significance as a Roman citizen, and so a complex ritual procedure known as *mancipatio* developed to ensure that this symbolically potent form of property was appropriately transferred, that is, alienated. The *mancipatio* ceremony required the public witness by multiple Roman citizens, a formal oath, and a symbolic act of measuring the money for purchase all as part of the process of formally declaring the alienation of the property in question.⁸ Ultimately this ritual preserved the integrity of the sale but more importantly it preserved the standing of the individual who was divesting himself of property that inherently contributed to his status as a Roman citizen. The charged nature of *alienatio*, the essential but negative reality of ownership, was something that needed to be formalized in order to ensure that the divestment of property was not also a divestment of one's self as a Roman.

⁷ Consider, for example in the instance of software, the difference between ownership, which includes rights to distribute, and licensing, which includes rights to use but not distribute.

⁸ Gaius, *Institutes*, I.119

What is the most interesting about the Roman jurisprudential understanding of alienation is how it existed as a confluence of two distinct acts of alienation. On the one hand, there is the paradoxical reality found with the conflict between ownership as possession and ownership as the divestment of said property as the pinnacle manifestation of ownership. Layered on top of this was then the paradoxical reality of Roman self-esteem and self-identity being tied to specifically land ownership, which then runs against the reality of ownership being principally realized in the form of not owning one's land through the process of sale. The example of the Roman jurisprudential understanding of alienation is then a potent one for analysis because it not only involves a relatively simple and straightforward accounting of alienation in the dynamics of property ownership but it also demonstrates the often multi-layered social dynamics that exist with alienation where there are not only internal conflicts with particular activities but then also conflicts with other distinct social processes.

In the end, the paradoxical nature of ownership – of something being “one's own” only if it is possible for it to not be one's own – is laid bare in the Roman institution of property and its inextricable connection to *alienatio*. Ultimately there are three distinct formal elements that can be discerned in the jurisprudential conception of alienation that come to be appropriated and re-appropriated by each of the subsequent conceptualizations of alienation throughout its history. The first is the feature of loss that stands central to the meaning of alienation and the manner in which what is one's own and what is other are inextricably interrelated. In the case of property, the formal structure of ownership that makes it possible for one person to own something makes it equally possible for another to own that self-same property due to the fact that ownership is only fully realized when it can be fully dispossessed. Property's potentiality for otherness is then what makes it possible for it to belong as someone's own property in the first place. This leads

directly to the second aspect of alienation and that is its paradoxical nature. The Roman jurisprudential conception of alienation is fundamentally an act of self-possession that is directed as dispossession. In alienating one's property by transferring it to another person, one is acting uniquely as the owner of said property as all other actions potentially done with a piece of property could potentially be done under a guardianship or licensing situation. The paradox, of course, is that in this act in which one is most essentially acting as an owner that one is acting such that one ceases to be an owner. The final aspect is the negative connotation associated with alienation. Although Quiritarian ownership was a central feature of what constituted a person's standing as a Roman, such ownership was predicated on the possibility of alienating said property, and hence the need for developing a ceremony that normalized the transference in a socially stabilizing manner since otherwise the process of being alienated from one's property would in fact be understood as the worst possible fate in this context. The fact that *alienatio* is normatively tinged throughout is without question. In the end, these three dynamics inherent in the jurisprudential concept of alienation will be significant elements in all various pre-philosophic concepts of alienation and so in this way will serve as a guide for the reconstruction of alienation.

Having laid out the key features of the Roman jurisprudential concept of alienation, we can now seek to recast its core dynamics in the terminology of social ontology. Most immediately it needs to be pointed out that the concept of *alienatio* presented goes directly against one of the essential claims made about the social ontological account of alienation; in that case, alienation is not so much something that is directly intended through the operations of collective intentionality but instead it is a "systemic fallout fact" that arises as a result of collective intentionality. With the Roman jurisprudential concept, however, it is exactly

something that is intended by collective intentionality and that intended action is literally named *alienatio*. However, before this is taken as immediately disproving the entire project thus far, there are two important points that need to be made. First, as was suggested, there are in fact two dynamics of alienation involved in what one finds with the Roman jurisprudential concept: there is the act of divesting oneself of one's property and there is the fact that in so doing this one puts at risk one's standing as a Roman citizen. While the direct act of alienating one's property is something that can be understood as being directly aimed at by collective intentionality, that is not the case with the potentiality for alienation with regard to one's standing as a Roman citizen. In the second case, the potential alienation that occurs as a result of the actions of *alienatio* are very much not something that is sought, and the *mancipatio* ceremony is aimed directly at preventing such systemic fallouts from becoming entrenched. The second important point is that although it was established that alienation is generally a systemic fallout, it was also pointed out that such facts can nevertheless be something that becomes intended and so institutionalized, such as was suggested in the case of a recession. Even if in general alienation is understood as a systemic fallout fact, there is nothing that requires that it always be as such, and so the fact that *alienatio* is directly intended in the case of the Roman jurisprudential concept need not be seen as contradicting what would be expected with the social ontological account of alienation.

Turning now to the details, each process of alienation involved in the Roman jurisprudential concept needs to be treated independently before showing how they are interconnected. First we will work through the dynamics involved in *alienatio*, the sale of property. The status function "property" is easily one of the more tangible examples of collective recognition conferring upon something a property that is not strictly dependent upon its physical composition. A tract of land does not alter in the smallest iota based upon which person or entity

is designated as being the owner of it. Instead, being someone's "property" is determined entirely by a collective recognition that a thing has such a status. In the case of *alienatio*, this takes an even more refined example since the only kinds of property that are under its purview is what, to the collective recognition of ancient Romans, was the special class of objects called *res mancipi*. The recognition of the institution of *res mancipi* is then what creates the context within which instances of *alienatio* can occur as deontic powers that are produced by the status function come into conflict with the conferral of that status function. Specifically, the relevant deontic power is the ability to divest oneself of the property that one owns, the act that was explicitly called *alienatio*. The paradoxical situation that occurs with *alienatio* is that an action that is only possible if the status function exists, and in fact an action that could be seen as the quintessential deontic power that arises for the property owner themselves, is, when acted upon, what brings about the dissolution of the status function. Selling your property is how you most definitively show that you own said property, which of course ironically is exactly what dissolves the existence of that status function. The dynamics of the social ontological account of alienation then perfectly capture what exactly is so alienating about *alienatio*.

The same thing goes for the second, implicit dynamic of alienation associated with the the *mancipatio* ceremony. Since the ownership of *res mancipi* was a sign of one's status as a Roman citizen—it is literally what is involved in the collectively recognition of someone as having the status function "Roman citizen"—the sale of said property has the potential to undermine that status function because it would mean one no longer has the quality that grounds said status function. Of course the paradoxical nature of this situation is that it is exactly the sale of said property that is most expressive of the ownership of said property, and so in the layered relationship between *alienatio* and the alienation involved in the *mancipatio* ceremony, the

deontic power of selling one's property as conferred by the status function "property" also runs against the status function "Roman citizen" that made it possible for one to own property like the *res Mancipi* in the first place. Once again we have a deontic power that is associated with a status function being directed in such a way that when it is acted upon it potentially undermines the existence of that status function that made the deontic power possible. In this case, unlike with *alienatio* of property, one does have an instance of alienation that arises as a systemic fallout fact since the alienation in this case is not something that is directly intended. The dynamic of Roman citizenship being dependent upon property ownership, which then finds expression in the divestment of said property, carries with it the seeds of powerlessness, normlessness, and meaninglessness so commonly associated with alienation. It is exactly for this reason that the Romans developed the *manipatio* ceremony, in order to sustain that status function in the face of its alienating features. Without the direct intervention by a group of peers—the five required witnesses—who maintain the collective recognition of that person's status as a Roman citizen one is otherwise powerless to maintain that status since otherwise they have acted in a way that would strip them of that status. The *manipatio* ceremony is one that is then deeply symbolic in order to restore order and meaning to the situation, and likewise functions normatively as a process to restore what otherwise would be a situation where the usual norms break down. In the end, the *manipatio* ceremony was developed specifically to counteract this negative potential of *alienatio*, and so the *manipatio* ceremony is the creation of collective intentionality while the kind of alienation that the ceremony is seeking to address is not something that exists because collective intentionality aims to establish its existence but rather it is an unintended outcome of an otherwise intended action.

Alienation as Aversive Separation

Despite the centrality of *alienatio* to Roman jurisprudential discourse, the term was not utilized in that realm exclusively as it also found an application by way of analogy to the wider context of human-to-human relationships. In this non-technical usage of the term, *alienatio* denoted an affective separation between people in which the emotional bond that originally joined them together was either lost or damaged due to the actions of one or the other party. Furthermore, this separation typically had strong undertones that such a division is one that ought not to exist given the otherwise close if not necessary connection between the two parties. For example, one representative instance of *alienatio* being used in this manner is in Tacitus' *Histories* in which he writes about how Emperor Vitellius's execution of the centurions of the previous Emperor "did more than anything else to alienate [*alienatio*] the armies of Illyricum."⁹ Here, the relationship between the Emperor and the army is understood as being one that ought to be very strong as the purpose of the Roman military is to serve Rome by serving the Emperor. However, as a result of Emperor Vitellius' actions, which was not necessarily an intrinsic violation of the norms and expectations between an Emperor and the army since the Emperor could dispose of the army as he saw fit, nevertheless the relationship between them is weakened in a way that harms the fundamental loyalty and connection that is meant to exist between Emperor and army because of his actions. While this usage of *alienatio* in Classical Latin to indicate the sense of disaffection is relatively common, albeit admittedly changed from its more institutionalized meaning as found in the jurisprudential use, with time the idea of *alienatio* as an aversive separation actually comes to take on its own independent technical precision and

⁹ Tacitus, *The Histories*, Book II. 60.

meaning as the term is developed within the Christian theological tradition.¹⁰ It is this second branch in alienation's history that will also be important to later periods as it equally comes to influence the later philosophical appropriation of alienation as found in Hegel and Marx.

Although the term *alienatio* is not used extensively in the text of the New Testament itself, which in the original Greek would have used the parallel transliteration *apallotrió*,¹¹ over time the term alienation developed as a shorthand in the Christian tradition for denoting humanity's fallen condition and separation from God. The root of this theological development resides principally in how the Epistle to the Ephesians employs the term to make sense of its central theme of ecclesiology, that is, the relationship between the Church as a community of believers and God. In an early chapter from Ephesians, the author initially draws a distinction between Gentiles and Jews and their respective relationships with God by describing the Gentile audience to whom the letter is addressed as being originally "alienated from the ways of Israel" (Eph 2:12). The significance of this idea in the Pauline theology of the Epistle to the Ephesians comes from an understanding in which Israel is held to be in a unique and definitive relationship with God that, under the tutelage of the Law, is called to rehabilitate the original rupture between humanity and God that is thematized in the Book of Genesis. In the Genesis creation accounts humanity is portrayed as being in an intimate relationship with God, who is presented as not only the source but also the purpose of all human life. This relationship is profoundly changed by humanity's disobedience to God when they eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and are thereafter cast from the Garden of Eden and into an experience of division and antagonism

¹⁰ The term came to be almost exclusively associated with its theological connotation, as mentioned in Schacht (1970), p. 11, notes that in the *Middle English Dictionary* the term alienation was explicitly identified as "chiefly theological" in nature.

¹¹ From *apo* meaning "away from" and *allotrios* meaning "belonging to another."

with one another, God, and all of creation. Furthermore, since God is both the source and summit of each human life, alienated humans are also in an important sense cut off from their very selves as being separated from God, who is the source of their being, finds them also unable to be in a proper relationship to their own selves.

The author of the Epistle to the Ephesians later continues that in the time the letter is being written, however, the alienated separation that originally existed for Gentiles and was overcome for Jews has been completely surpassed by Jesus and so no longer applies to the letter's non-Jewish audience. Through their relationship with Jesus, even Gentiles believers have become "coheirs" of the promise originally given to Israel (Eph 3:6), and so the means for reconciliation is open to all of humanity. Now what determines whether one is alienated from God, the author exhorts, is living out the calling of a life in Christ: "you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds; darkened in understanding, *alienated* from the life of God" (Eph 4:17-18, emphasis mine).¹² Here the contrast is no longer an inherent one but rather it is characterized by two manners of living; on the one side is "the old self of your former way of life" (Eph 4:22) and "the new self created in God's way" (Eph 4:24). If alienation is a loss of that communion with God that also produced a division between and within human beings, then the life of faith is seen as fulfilling God's original intention for communal unity and self-integrity as laid out in the opening of Genesis. The theological schema in Pauline theology can thus be understood as producing a "divine economy" in which an original state of unity that is lost by human beings and disrupted into a state of alienation is regained and restored through

¹²This same sort of usage is found in the roughly contemporaneous Letter to the Colossians where again the experience of alienation is the distinguishing feature between believers who are in a right relationship with God and those who are "alienated and hostile in mind because of evil deeds" (Col 1:21).

the grace of God and a deliberate choice to live in accordance with the life set out by Jesus Christ.

With the Christian conception of *alienatio* the same three elements that were seen in the jurisprudential concept are reiterated, only with different specifics. When it comes to the feature of loss, the emphasis is on an originary belonging in which alienated human beings come to lose their connection to the very source of their being, God. The theological conceptualization works with the idea that, given human free will, there is a fundamental choice for all of humanity between a life with God that is truly one's own and an alienated life that loses what is most crucial to it and so is characterized by antagonism, division, and loss. The paradoxical nature of alienation is again present as the alienated life of humanity is characterized as being a less-than life that is spiritually dead even if physically living. Starting from the theological assumption that God is the source of all life, the experience of alienation is one caught between being necessarily related to God as the source of all life while also simultaneously being separated from and opposed to the very thing that gives life, namely God. The third aspect, the negative dimension, is overwhelmingly apparent as the theological tradition always associates a life alienated from God as a destructive life rife with envy, hatred, disordered passions, and falsity (Eph 4:31). The division that is experienced is one that needs to be overcome and done away with as humanity reconciles itself to God. While setting out these three features highlight the continuity between the Christian and jurisprudential conceptualizations of alienation, ultimately both of these interpretations come to contribute unique elements to the philosophical appropriation of the term.

Applying the social ontological account of alienation to the examples of aversive separation we find the same underlying dynamic occurring as we did with the Roman jurisprudential concept of *alienatio*. Most importantly, we see clearly in both examples cited that

the alienation that occurs arises as a fallout fact as a result of a conflict between the recognition of a status function and the exercise of a deontic power that arose as a result of that status function. In the case of the aversive separation caused by the Roman Emperor Vitellius's actions, it is the status function of being the emperor that creates the context within which the alienation arises. The emperor's status as emperor was something that was established through the collective recognition of the military, or at least a sufficient subset, as it was the swearing of allegiance by the Roman legions that literally elevated an individual to that status. In fact, the action that signaled the fall of the Emperor Vitellius was when several legions proclaimed their commander, Vespasian, a rival emperor, which brought a dramatic conclusion to the Roman civil war known as the Year of the Four Emperors. The status of being Roman emperor then involved the deontic power of being able to command the Roman army, which derived directly from the fact that the status itself was conferred upon an individual by the Roman army itself; in swearing their allegiance to an individual and proclaiming them emperor they conferred on that person the deontic power to direct them as they see fit. As commander in chief, the emperor would also be empowered to appropriately punish his legions for derelictions of duty, and that would, in general, include ordering a *decimation*—the execution of every tenth soldier—or even an execution of the legion's centurions. The problem for Vitellius is that his attempt to consolidate power to himself by removing military leaders that had been supportive of his predecessor also undermined the allegiance of these legions to him because they were also still largely sympathetic and supportive of their centurions despite the recent shift in allegiance. Exercising the deontic power to punish members of the military worked directly against the collective recognition of the Emperor by the military that gave Vitellius the ability to act upon this deontic power to execute his predecessor's centurions. This conflict between the exercise of the deontic

power and the status function that enables that deontic power is then what lead Tacitus to describe the situation as doing “more than anything else to alienate [*alienatio*] the armies of Illyricum” that eventually lead to Vitellius’s fall.

The dynamic of alienation in the Epistle to the Ephesians operates in a similar way but with a few notable distinctions that will help us further explore more related issues from alienation theory’s history. In the case of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the concern revolves around one’s ecclesiological status and recognizing the kind of relationship one has with God. Unlike the case with the Emperor Vitellius, however, it does not at first glance appear that we have a case of collective recognition *creating* a status function but rather, at best, a collective recognition of a status that exists whether one wants it to be the case or not, that is, a status that purportedly exists naturally. That status is with God being the source and summit of one’s individual life; human beings are described as being lost when they fail to recognize this truth, a truth that purportedly exists independently of one’s opinions or desires. There are two different routes one can go with when it comes to interpreting this situation from the perspective of social ontology—the reductionistic approach and the theologically-informed approach. For the sake of maintaining our focus on demonstrating that the social ontological account of alienation is able to explicate what is going on in all of these various historical instances, we will focus only as the reductionistic approach here as it is both one that Searle explicitly advocates for and also it is sufficient to demonstrate the overall thesis of these historical chapters.¹³

¹³ To lay out the theologically informed approach only briefly, that is, one that tries to respect the underlying assumptions of those who are so involved, one could say that the supposed “naturalness” of one’s status regarding God’s existence is in fact created through the collective recognition by God of one’s status in connection to the Church rather than the recognition by any human being. In this case, one could say that God’s collective recognition is sufficiently strong to create a reality that induces in us a propensity to also accept that collective recognition, in the same way that the action so the United States Congress are sufficiently powerful as to induce in me a recognition of the same status function irrespective of my own interests or desires. Such an idea especially fits in with traditional Christian theology, strongly influenced by Aristotle and Plato, that holds reality as being an expression of God’s thought. Still, in discussing collective intentionality it is important to not slip into a perspective of pure voluntarism

In the reductionistic approach, one takes the position that however “natural” such a status function might appear to the participants it is in fact something that exists only in virtue of its imposition by collective intentionality. Searle makes this point regarding the Catholic belief that the pope, in being pope, has a capacity to operate infallibly in certain conditions. Here Searle makes the point that “the pope now is believed to have an additional, physical (supernatural) power where the belief [that Catholics have regarding the pope] goes beyond the fact, and the status function only works as a status function precisely because it is believed not to be a status function but a brute intentionality-independent fact about the universe.”¹⁴ Even if the belief is that the status function is somehow “natural,” the operation of the status function can still be fully accounted for from the presupposition that it is collective recognition that ultimately grounds the status function. For the pope to be understood as being infallible there needs to be people who collectively recognize the pope as having this deontic power as a part of their status function. Applying this to the case of the Epistle, we can characterize alienation in social ontological terms while remaining neutral with regard to the claim about the “natural” state of affairs concerning one’s relationship with God. Even if there is a presupposition of a “natural” state regarding one’s relationship with God, the words of the author are clearly directed at exhorting the recipients to take on the *perspective* of a collective recognition of one’s status as a member of the Church and so reconciled to God. The New Testament letters in general are exhortations to take on a certain kind of perspective, and in this case the Epistle to the Ephesians

where if and only if something is consciously and deliberately accepted is it able to become a status function for someone. Human beings find themselves in a wide network of status functions that they do not otherwise have a conscious role in producing. Importantly, intentionality must play some role in all of this since trees and stones are also in a certain kind of relationship with God, but one does not apply the language of alienation to those relationships.

¹⁴ Searle (2010), p. 119.

is less about convincing the audience of some fact that there are people who are unaware of their objective conditions related to God but rather with convincing the audience themselves that, now that they have accepted a life of Christ, that is, now that they have accepted a certain status function, they must understand their lives from a certain perspective. It is then possible to remain consistent in characterizing the alienation involved in the Epistle even without needing to take a stance on the claim regarding the objectivity of one's relationship with God. It is sufficient to understand that the alienation that is addressed arises as a result of acting upon a deontic power that then runs in conflict with the acceptance of the relevant status function.

Having established the relevant status function that will create the context within which the alienation occurs, we can look at how exactly that happens with regard to the relevant deontic power. Early Christian theology is deeply shaped by the idea that the Christian is faced with two different choices in their life, something that was captured in the earliest name for Christianity, "the Way," as in, the way to live. According to the author of the Epistle to the Ephesians, if one has accepted a life in Christ, then one must then continually choose the proper path in order to avoid being alienated from God. In the terminology of social ontology, if you accept the collective recognition of the status function that one is a member of the Church of Christ, then the deontic power that one must *choose* to live what that life expects also involves the ability to reject and so fail to live what that life expects. Again we find in this example of alienation the paradoxical fact that the core deontic power produced by the status function is the same deontic power that, when exercised, would completely undermine the existence of the status function. Notwithstanding the added complexity that comes from the claim of "naturalness" regarding the

status function involved, it is still possible to account for the basic dynamic of the alienation involved in the Epistle to the Ephesians in the terminology of social ontology.¹⁵

Alienation as Mental Insanity

The third pre-philosophical usage of the term “alienation” comes from the early history of professional psychiatry wherein those who worked in the first public asylums were commonly referred to as “alienists,” while those who were being treated were described as experiencing *alienatio mentis*, that is, “mental alienation,” which today would be more commonly referred to as insanity. While applying the term alienation to issues of mental well-being has its roots in various medical texts of ancient Rome,¹⁶ usage of the term with this specific meaning gained new purchase when concerns about mental insanity became culturally potent in 19th Century Europe.¹⁷ At that time, philosophical idealism was also reaching its cultural ascendancy, which, as a broad characterization, held that the subjectivity of the mind is the fundamental constituent of reality and that thereby all of reality is ultimately mentally constructed. Whether the wider cultural concerns precipitated the rise of philosophical idealism or vice versa is for the purposes here largely moot; what philosophical idealism did at least do was provide a means to

¹⁵ What is most important to be mindful of is that there is a difference between the purported naturalness of a status function and the objectivity of a status function. Rejecting a mode of pure voluntarism where status functions exist if and only if a person consciously and deliberately recognizes it as existing, it is possible for status functions to exist objectively, that is, independently of any one individual’s will and so still function as the context within which alienation can occur. This is separate from the claim of naturalness, which is the idea that status function exists entirely independently of intentionality.

¹⁶ See Celsus, *De Medicina*, 4.2. Also Tacitus, *Annals*, 6.24.

¹⁷ In England concerns about mental insanity became especially prominent due to the publicity surrounding the trial of James Hadfield in 1800. After attempting to assassinate King George III, Hadfield was acquitted of the crime by reason of insanity. While previously those deemed insane after having committed a crime were released back to the private care of their own family, the concern that Hadfield posed a continual threat to society led to the passage of the Criminal Lunatics Act of 1800 which allowed for the perpetual detainment of those deemed criminally insane. Shortly thereafter, undoubtedly riding the rising wave of anxiety about possible violence from those deemed insane, the County Asylums Act of 1808 established publicly funded mental asylums throughout England for anyone, criminal or not, that was believed to be suffering from *alienatio mentis*.

conceptualize what was at stake with *alienatio mentis*. From such a perspective, mental alienation becomes acutely troubling as it involves not only a loss of control over one's mental faculties, as bad as that is, but it also entails a complete disconnect from reality itself. Even if Hegel's philosophical appropriation of the term alienation does not have as explicit of a connection to this usage as it does to the jurisprudential and affective uses, it is hard not to see an affinity between the underlying thesis of *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* and the dialectic between mind and reality that undergirds *alienatio mentis*.

At the core of *alienatio mentis* is a realization that although our thoughts, feelings, and experiences are seemingly so close to the core of who we are as to be practically indistinguishable from our very selves, experience points to numerous instances where even these things can appear as alien and foreign, such as in the case of unwanted thoughts and desires. Whether mild or severe, episodic or persistent, the term mental alienation came to designate any condition that resulted in the loss of control over these internal states and in particular when it produced a demonstrable change in one's outward behavior. Yet the primary focus of *alienatio mentis* was not so much on the change in a particular behavior but rather the way in which that change in behavior suggested a fundamental change in the person's sense of self; with dementia personality changes are regularly cited as one of the most common indicators of its onset, while in cases of drunkenness one hears phrases like "he's a different person when under the influence." Often closely related to the sense that the individual's personality has changed is also the sense that the self-possession that the person displays is significantly curtailed in comparison to the sort one would expect from someone with an unaltered consciousness. Not only are they expressing a different personality, they are also in an important sense not even in possession of that differing personality as their behavior is seen as being

uncontrolled and impulsive. The situation of *alienatio mentis* then points to subjective experiences that are in a sense without a subject, that is, they are without a self who can take possession of them as their own, at least in the sense we usually understand as being the case for people.

With *alienatio mentis* the three elements of loss, paradox, and negativity are once again present while expanding them in novel ways. Similar to the Christian conception of alienation, mental alienation maintains a focus on the connection between creator and created although now the emphasis now is no longer on an external creator but rather on how humanity itself is the creator of reality, and like the jurisprudential conception, mental alienation is centered on an experience in which one is separated from something that is essential to constituting one's very self. Loss occurs in this understanding of alienation as an internal experience in which one's self becomes separated not only from reality but even from one's own mind, as captured in the common expression regarding insanity of "losing one's mind." While the self possessing thoughts, feelings, etc. is typically seen as just an extension of consciousness's qualitative dimension, or what Thomas Nagel calls the "what-it's-likeness" of one's subjective experiences, mental alienation highlights that this is not necessarily the case as there is both an analytic as well as real distinction between consciousness's intentional aspect and its possessive aspect. Stated another way, the intentional states of consciousness do not come fully assimilated to the self but in fact there is a certain distance between the self and subjective experience such that a person has to actually appropriate them as their own. The paradoxical aspect of *alienatio mentis* is then quite apparent; that which seemingly is most readily designated as being one's own, that is, one's mind and its conscious experiences, is nevertheless something that is not predetermined as one's own but can in fact be variably possessed or dispossessed. As will be seen in later

chapters, this idea will be significant for understanding the nature of alienation in its philosophical development. Lastly, when it comes to the third element of negativity, psychiatry maps the experiences of mental alienation onto the medical models of health and sickness, and as such *alienatio mentis* is inherently characterized as a negative phenomenon, and one requiring varying degrees of treatment at that. In the end, even though this particular usage of the term alienation has been more or less abandoned in contemporary scientific discourse, the connotations of *alienatio mentis* nevertheless come to be influential on later philosophical treatments.¹⁸

Alienatio mentis is, on first glance, seemingly the greatest challenge to the claim that social ontology is able to capture the dynamics found in multiple understandings of alienation because it appears to clearly and unambiguously revolve around a physical condition rather than a socially constructed one. If the issue involves a physical reality, then the social ontological model does not appear applicable since a central thesis is that the status functions that serve as the foundation of social reality only are what they are not because of some physical characteristic but rather simply because human beings regard them in a particular way. However, we faced a similar concern with the Christian theological account that seemingly posited a “natural” condition, but relying upon Searle we were able to see a way through it and still ground our analysis of that model in a socially constructed status function. Applying the same reasoning we used in that case, we can actually see that *alienatio mentis* devolves into a circumstance of socially constructed status functions. Said directly, the concern with *alienatio mentis* is not so much the physical condition as it is what it is we do with that condition, that is, how do we treat

¹⁸ Fromm’s *Sane Society*, which treats alienation as a central concept for societal critique, heavily relies upon the health/sickness interpretation of alienation that is traceable back to this pre-philosophical usage.

a person based upon that physical condition. We can find numerous examples where what constitutes a person being a self-determining actor does not hinge on a physical characteristic as much as it does on how a society regards those characteristics. For example, even though the age of majority is eighteen in the United States, ostensibly tied to a level of physical and mental maturity, it is possible under certain conditions to be recognized as emancipated from one's parents at an age that is younger than that and so seen as a legal adult. Similarly, it is commonly stated in disability advocacy that it is not the physical condition that makes one disabled but rather how society responds to and treats one's condition that makes one disabled. When it comes to conditions involving the mind, it is no secret that society has evolved rather dramatically in its perception of and treatment of conditions such that many behaviors that had once been labeled as "insane" and dangerous are now normalized and destigmatized. Acknowledging this requires that we understand a phenomenon like *alienatio mentis* as fundamentally concerning itself with the status functions that are applied to a physical condition rather than the physical condition itself.

Turning to the details, the status function that stands at the center of a phenomenon like *alienatio mentis* is that of being a self-determining actor. It is the collective recognition that a person has the status of being a "self-determining actor" that leads to the idea that a person is to be held responsible for their own actions and choices that then creates the context within which a situation like *alienatio mentis* can arise. Now paradoxically, the status function of being a self-determining actor necessarily involves a deontic power that makes it possible for one to *not* act in a self-determining fashion. Most simply, if a person is going to be treated as having the status of being a self-determining agent, then it must be possible that they decide to act in a way that is not fully self-determining since otherwise they could not fail to always act in a certain way, that

is, they would in fact be determined in their actions independently of their own choices and so not actually self-determining. As radical as this might sound, phenomenologically we are aware of circumstances where a person acts in such a way that, though we would not say they are strictly determined in their actions by some other cause, one also cannot quite state that they are the determining factor in their own actions. A person “going through the motions” would be a classical example of this non-self-determined self-determined activity, and *alienatio mentis* would be a rather extreme example of it. What these examples reveal is that as much as it may be presumed that a person is a self-determining agent, it is in fact an achievement rather than a ready-made reality. Even if we recognize that many of the cases of *alienatio mentis* were seen more as something a person suffered rather than accomplished, the context needed for something to be declared *alienatio mentis* is one in which it is presumed the person is a self-determining actor that is then contradicted by a behavior or action taken, ironically enough, by that person. So, in spite of the first impression that *alienatio mentis* would be an outlier to the social ontological approach, the conclusion is that once again we can fully account for the dynamics involved entirely in terms of status functions and deontic powers operating in contradictory manners.

Conclusion

After having reviewed the three pre-philosophical uses of alienation it would seem the goal of demonstrating the power of the social ontological account of alienation for explicating alienation theory’s history is off to a strong start. Importantly, the three uses considered capture the widest and most generalized examples of alienation’s terminological use, and so being able to show the applicability of the social ontological account to these instances goes far to show its overall usefulness. Additionally, since these three uses also come to be deeply influential on later

historical uses, having worked through this foundation has done much to preemptively establish the social ontological account's value for working through those later iterations. Finally, and most importantly, working through the diversity of alienation theory found with these three pre-philosophical uses helps to demonstrate the social ontological account's ability to explicate the essential unity that underlies all of these different approaches. Despite the appearance of there being little connection between the Roman jurisprudential, the Christian theological, and the psychological uses, the social ontological approach has made it possible to show that all three of these have the same underlying form of a collectively recognized status function having a deontic power that, when exercised, undermines the collective recognition of the status function that made the deontic power possible in the first place. As for the other two aporias, that concerning alienation's objectivity or subjectivity and alienation's normativity, they will show up more prominently in the later stages where those concerns have a more central role in how alienation theory is developed.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EARLY PHILOSOPHICAL APPROPRIATION OF “ALIENATION”

Chapter Overview

The various connotations found in alienation’s pre-philosophical history undergo a simple but profound transformation in the earliest phase of alienation’s appropriation to a specifically philosophical usage. This nascent development takes on three distinct forms with Hegel’s groundwork *Phenomenology of Spirit* serving as the foundation. Hegel’s analysis of the development of human society from a pre-modern to early modern form casts alienation as a moment in which the expansion of humanity’s self-reflective capacity finds itself encountering as foreign what once was familiar. Specifically, Hegel delineates alienation as a dynamic that arises out of the relationship between an individual and their social world that is characterized by elements of both creativity and conformity. The broad outline of his theory is then taken up and inverted by the so-called “Left Hegelians,” especially Marx in his posthumously published *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. For Marx, alienation occurs when labor is commodified in the early capitalist system, and so creative labor finds itself stripped of its significance as it becomes a tool of oppression as opposed to liberation. There is then a four-fold bifurcation that occurs in alienation between the individual and their labor, the product of their labor, their human nature, and their relationship with concrete others. The third model of alienation to be considered in this era is the existentialist reaction to Hegel, represented most

proximally by Kierkegaard but most fully established by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.¹

Alienation shows up as a relatively minor component of Heidegger's overall analysis, but its appearance in the central passages of his work suggest an outsized significance. Specifically, alienation is designated as a characteristic of inauthentic Da-sein that finds itself losing even the potential for authenticity as it becomes fallen in *das Man*.

A central theme that stands out in this phase of alienation's development is that all three of these authors come to see the paradoxical or tension-laden dimension of alienation as invaluable for identifying a manner of breakdown in the individual's relationship to social reality. While later treatments of alienation will come to see this paradoxical element as a negative feature that ought to be minimized if not completely eliminated, these three all see the paradoxical nature of alienation as playing a crucial structural or developmental role in human social reality in the grander scheme of things. It is then in this phase of alienation theory's development that the term gets its clear sociological leaning, even while it must be acknowledged that this was heavily implicit in the pre-philosophical uses. In the end, these works, even more than the pre-philosophical uses, come to definitively and inextricably shape the future development of alienation theory. Most significantly, one begins to see the early formation of those aporias that come to undermine alienation theory's widespread acceptance.

Applying the social ontological account of alienation to these theories will then help both to

¹ Although it would be wrong to say that Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) was a reaction to Hegel per se, it is clear that Heidegger develops out of the existentialist reaction to Hegel that is embodied in Kierkegaard. Similar to Rousseau, Kierkegaard never uses the term alienation in any systematic fashion but the themes that he deals with are taken up by others who do explicitly refer to the idea of alienation. This, and the important fact that *Being and Time* was published before the rediscovery of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* in German in 1932 and so presumably independent of that text's influence, situates Heidegger in this incipient stage despite being significantly later in years. Furthermore, and in spite of all the controversy surrounding Heidegger's life, one cannot deny the influence that his works had on later developments in existentialism, and so analyzing how Heidegger used the term alienation would situate his works as one of if not the most important for tracing the existentialist development of alienation theory.

highlight the significant insights of these early models but also to help shed light on the impact that their understanding comes to have on later theories of alienation.

Hegel and the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

Although many that deal with the concept of alienation will trace its history back through its theological or jurisprudential sources, Hegel's appropriation of the term in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can be seen as a unique starting point when dealing with the relevance of alienation for sociology and philosophy.² Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that Hegel draws to varying degrees upon all three pre-philosophical threads in alienation's genealogy, and in many ways one could say he stays entirely within the conceptual bounds of their classical usages. For this reason it is partially disingenuous to say that Hegel had a unique and completely original meaning for alienation; instead, his contributions to alienation theory come from his innovative application of otherwise traditional conceptualizations to new circumstances. Now, part of the reason Hegel is able to wield the idea of alienation with such elasticity is due to the fact that there are actually three distinct terms in German—*Entfremdung*, *Entäusserung*, and *Veräusserung*—that can be direct transliterations of alienation, each with their own unique subtext. Although it is only the first two terms that come to be used in novel ways by Hegel, the various connotations that these terms carry are employed in such a manner that each brings out a particular emphasis in Hegel's treatment and together they work in concert to address the nuances of the phenomena under his consideration. It is therefore important to note

² Here proper due must be accorded to Rousseau's extensive analysis of the phenomena that are associated with alienation even though he never used the selfsame term. As Bronislaw Baczko puts it in his monograph on Rousseau, "The Hegelian-Marxian term [alienation] corresponds precisely to the condition for which Rousseau has no name but which he constantly describes." Baczko (1970), cited in Jaeggi (2014), p. 222 n.10.

how the terms diverge from one another in ways that become either central or peripheral to the mainline development of alienation theory.

Starting with a broad overview of Hegel's basic terminology before moving on to the particulars of how he uses them, the differences between the three German terms for alienation can most readily be seen when comparing his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) to the later *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). In the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, for example, Hegel completely abstains from *Entfremdung* in favor of *Entäußerung* and *Veräußerung*, which he rigidly employs in the precise manner found with the jurisprudential conceptualization that denotes either the divestment of one's property or the sale of property to another person, respectively. Comparing this to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel entirely avoids *Veräußerung* and instead alternates between *Entfremdung* and *Entäußerung*, which both come to entail a kind of "othering," broadly construed. In the case of *Entfremdung*, which is most commonly translated into English as "estrangement," the "othering" is one of separation or loss in the sense found in the theological tradition, and Hegel connects his usage explicitly in this fashion when he states in the Preface that the goal of his project in the *Phenomenology* is to unfold "the life of God and divine cognition" which is characterized by "untroubled equality and unity with itself, for which otherness and *alienation* [...] are not serious matters."³ However, Hegel's treatment of *Entfremdung* is not entirely reducible to the theological conceptualization as the term instead comes to be used in dealing principally with the reflective distance that arises between the individual and their culture in modern societies rather than the separation of humanity from God. On the other hand, the "othering" of *Entäußerung* in the *Phenomenology*,

³ Hegel, *PS*, p. 10, emphasis mine.

which is most often translated into English as “externalization,”⁴ relates to the property law tradition of alienation, though again without being strictly constrained by that usage. While the jurisprudential concept of alienation contained the idea that being able to alienate one’s property is crucial for expressing one’s ownership over said property, Hegel uses it to capture the paradoxical idea that to have a self one must give up one’s self. More expressly, to have a self that is recognized by others and is embedded in social relations one must alienate (*entäussert*) one’s particular self, which is understood as one’s unique biological existence that stands as inherently separate and independent from others, in order to align with the form of the self expected in society.⁵ Together, these two transposed understandings of alienation will work in parallel as the alienation in the sense of separation comes to denote the initial condition of those in modernity while alienation in the sense of externalization is part of the process of overcoming that initial separation through a different kind of separation.

Turning now to the specifics of Hegel’s philosophical appropriation of alienation as it is found in the *Phenomenology*, the most important section to consider is the one entitled “Self-alienated Spirit. Culture.” Here, alienation (*Entfremdung*) occurs as a moment in the unfolding of Spirit that, as a historical stage, demarcates the transition from the Roman era to the time before the French Revolution. In earlier stages of humanity, society had been marked by a simple unity between the consciousness of individuals and the *ethos* of their social milieu; custom simply dictated what constituted that society’s way of being, and for the most part individuals in that

⁴ With the jurisprudential concept of alienation, recall that alienation is the process whereby one divests ownership of something, and so what was once “internal” and one’s own now becomes a separate reality as the property of some *other* person, that is, it becomes something “external.”

⁵ “For the power of the individual consists in conforming itself to that substance, i.e. in externalizing [*entäußert*] its own self and thus establishing itself as substance that has an objective existence.” Hegel, *PS.*, p. 299.

society readily and with little reflection lived as such.⁶ With the advent of modernity, however, human beings become more self-conscious and reflective in their social relations such that they are no longer able to perceive directly and immediately the connection between who they are in their particular individuality and where they belong in the social world in which they find themselves. Now, human beings find the social world appearing as though it were “an alien reality already present and given”⁷ that confronts them as an external and unfamiliar phenomenon. Hegel’s conceptualization of alienation is then in short the experience of social reality that is a product of human beings, and thus dependent upon human construction, nevertheless appearing as if it were like physical reality, which is independent of human construction and already given.

As for how and why alienation (*Entfremdung*) occurs, Hegel explains that it is because humanity has entered into a new stage of existence in which humanity has begun to actively posit its own reality, a second nature, which first appears as something separate and existing independently from humanity despite the fact that it is humanity’s own existence now externalized and projected onto the world. What humanity must come to recognize in the process of the unfolding of Spirit is that the social world is not an alien entity that stands in opposition to one’s particular self but rather is just the self in a universal expression, that is, it is the self as it is cognizable according to the particular way a society understands the significance and meaning of a person’s life. In this case, as one conforms oneself to society by self-consciously living out the imperatives of the culture (*Entäusserung*), one is able to transcend one’s merely particular,

⁶ “Essence has, therefore, the simple determinateness of mere being for consciousness, which is directed *immediately* upon it, and is the essence in the form of custom. Consciousness neither thinks of itself as *this particular exclusive self*, nor has substance the significance of an existence excluded from it.” Italics original, *Ibid.*, p. 294.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

physical existence and instead attain a new, higher level of reality as an *individual*. Hegel's point in this is that as physical beings we are all particular beings, that is, we are intrinsically distinguishable from others in virtue of our concrete material existence, and so in that sense can be said to be "individual." However, as merely natural beings we are individual only in quantity but not quality, that is, we are numerically distinguishable from others but there is nothing distinctive about us from the perspective of people in a society. In order to be recognized as a distinct individual there must be something that transcends our merely natural existence, and culture is what provides the universal form of our existence that allows for a rational comprehension by others of our individual existence. In modernity, culture, or *Bildung*,⁸ thus replaces custom, and so in self-consciously acculturating oneself to one's society one makes that previously estranged world into one's own. Importantly, the relationship between the self and society is also reciprocal: as an individual conforms their life to the society they give society its reality or "substance" as culture can only exist in the lives of individuals, while on the opposite side it is only through appropriating the culture of one's society that the individual is able to become an individual person rather than merely a particular person.

After having set up this underlying dynamic in the opening sections, Hegel's analysis goes on to work through various ways in which this integration tries to take place, namely through the unifying powers of morality in the form of the noble-minded consciousness, wealth in the haughty vassal, state power in the monarch, and language in the form of flattery and wit. Although each of these operate as a means for overcoming alienation, they only initially appear

⁸ The word choice of Hegel in the German is able to capture a depth of meaning that does not have a strict parallel in English. The word *Bildung* in German can mean culture but also has the connotations of being educated or even coming of age like in the case of a *Bildungsroman*, and so Hegel is able to emphasize the idea that culture has a developmental aspect to it whereby a human becomes "cultured." The English words culture and acculturation have a similar relationship but the everyday usage of "culture" in English does not quite have the same implicit connotation as it does in German.

as successful but instead end up reproducing the experience of alienation in new forms.

Ultimately, what is needed to overcome the experience of alienation is a societal form that is able to maintain both the moment of universality that is found in culture without doing violence to the particularity of the members of that society, which is something that, according to later sections, will only be found in the modern liberal state that arises after the French Revolution. In the end, modernity for Hegel is uniquely marked by the self-conscious manner in which individuals encounter both their own selves and their society and in doing so find themselves alienated (*Entfremdung*). Inherent in the transformation that brings about this new perspective, however, is a moment in which what was originally familiar begins to appear strange as self-consciousness engenders a new mode of looking at things. Human beings must then bring about a new form of alienation (*Entausserung*) where they reconcile themselves to that social world that had originally stood as a foreign reality by giving up their separate existence and conform to that social reality by embracing it as their own.

Hegel's adaptation of the concept of alienation to this new philosophical use establishes what will be a hallmark of the philosophical approach to alienation theory, namely, that alienation is an experience of the social world, which is inherently a human construct, nevertheless appearing to human beings as something fixed and given like it were a natural entity. This turn to social reality in general nevertheless maintains the underlying dynamics of alienation seen in its pre-philosophical employments while adapting it in a potent new way. Looking back to the three elements discerned in the pre-philosophical uses of alienation, the first feature of loss remains central to Hegel's concern with how human beings experience the transition from pre-modern to modern society. As human beings reach a higher level of self-awareness that marks modernity, the simple and immediate identity that a person could enjoy

with their culture in pre-modern society ceases to be a ready possibility as now the person must struggle simply to obtain their place within their own society, and the fact that they must struggle tinges their self-conscious experience with a sense of loss over the absence of that idyllic unity with society that was once possible. In a similar vein, Hegel's characterization of the loss of alienation reflects those of the three pre-philosophical uses when it comes to emphasizing the loss of standing in the social world as a result of alienation. While the pre-philosophical uses all had as an implicit element the idea that what is lost in alienation impacts one's place in the social world, Hegel explicitly thematizes that impact to explain how alienation is subjectively experienced as a disharmony between the individual and society such that the individual feels like an outsider or foreigner in their own society.

Turning to the second element, what is paradoxical in this loss is that this perceived division is just that, a mere perception, as there can be no real or enduring antinomy between the members of society and its culture. As Hegel indicates, the culture only has its actuality, that is, exists, in the lives of the members of that society, and conversely the members of that society are only distinctive individuals, that is, more than merely particular beings, when they find a place and status of recognition by others through the lens of culture. Neither can exist independently of one another. What is more, the paradoxical nature of alienation as Hegel conceptualizes it continues with his proposed solution to this societal estrangement. Since the individual can only see themselves as separate from their society if they assert their particularity over and against the universality of their culture, the means to overcome this alienation is by means of another, different type of alienation, namely, the abdication from the self-assertion of one's own concrete particularity as separate from society by conforming to the culture of that society. The paradox,

as Hegel treats it, is that it is only by giving up a part of ourselves that we are able to fully express ourselves as individuals.

When it comes to the last feature of alienation, its negative dimension, Hegel's treatment perhaps stands the most incongruous when compared to the pre-philosophical uses. Although the estrangement that humanity experiences as a part of societal alienation is characterized as an antagonistic opposition, Hegel clearly considers alienation as an important stage in the development of human consciousness and so does not explicitly condemn its occurrence or argue for its total elimination. In fact, he takes it that this experience of alienation is a necessary and unavoidable moment in the logical development of consciousness, while the antagonistic opposition contains within itself the seeds of its own supersession. In this sense, Hegel's characterization of alienation would be more akin to the pain of exercise than the pain of disease in terms of its negativity, that is, one can be overlooked as a means to a more valuable end while the other is intrinsically negative. Since Hegel's analysis situates itself in a progressive account of human development, it is hard to see how one could construct a critical Hegelian account of alienation since it is not something that is bad in itself and so ought to be avoided. One possibility, though not one that Hegel considers largely because it is besides the point of his analysis, is that one could be critical of alienation's occurrence if human development stalled at that stage and so one remained in its antagonistic opposition. However, since Hegel's analysis takes for granted that alienation is only one part of a *necessary* development, the possibility of humanity stalling in experiences of alienation seems to not be something that he considered. Even if the resolution of alienation is an on-going process rather than a completed condition,

Hegel largely takes it that the problem of alienation is solved in the modern liberal state,⁹ which is an argument that ultimately becomes the central target of Marx's repudiation of Hegel.

When we approach Hegel from the perspective of social ontology we can see in his working out of the issues surrounding alienation is his own attempt at a kind of nascent social ontology. In his treatment of culture Hegel is dealing with very much the same basic question that Searle is concerned with: how do human beings manage to construct their social world? By addressing this question in the most general of terms without tying it to a particular cultural form of life,¹⁰ namely, how does a person find themselves as an individual member of their respective society, and by exploring the ways societies have typically sought to integrate themselves, namely through money, power, norms, and language, Hegel seeks to identify the basic logical form that grounds social reality in the modern world. At the heart of his account is his application of the term alienation, which in the two German terms *Entfremdung* and *Entäusserung* capture the basic dynamic that shapes how self-conscious human beings form the social world and integrate themselves into it. Searle would, if he understood Hegel,¹¹ recognize in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* many similar points and conclusions made about the construction of social reality. Hegel, much like Searle, does take it that the consciousness of the individual is the ultimate ground of social reality when he points out that culture is just the externalization of

⁹ Hardimon, Michael O. *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (1994), p. 122n33.

¹⁰ To be overly precise, Hegel does think his analysis applies to specifically *modern* cultures, and he certainly would have had in mind very specific societies such as his own that he takes as being "universal" examples. Nevertheless I only wish to acknowledge here that he at least attempts to frame his analysis in terms that are generalized and non-specific.

¹¹ Like most analytic philosophers from a certain generation, Searle is almost entirely dismissive of Hegel's philosophical project, though when one looks at how Searle understands Hegel it is evident he has a rather superficial and equally mistaken conception of Hegel. This shows itself in Searle's discussion of collective intentionality where he references an interpretation of Hegel's "world-spirit" that hovers over humanity. That idea was referenced earlier in a footnote from Chapter Two.

the self, and it is literally the individual's appropriation of their culture through their social roles which gives that culture its existence, or as he terms it, its "actuality." Equally so, Hegel also recognizes the importance of collective intentionality when he zeroes in on the need for a person to integrate themselves into their society by appropriating for themselves a social role that, in Hegel's terminology, makes them an "individual" with standing as a part of their culture as it allows others in that culture to see them, through their roles, as having a certain status. Furthermore, Hegel's focus on social roles, and especially in his exploration of the four integrating mediums, is aimed at explicating the deontological expectations that guide an individual's place in their social world given their status as a member of that society. While it would be possible to consider a number of other similarities between Hegel's overall approach and Searle's social ontology,¹² doing so is largely peripheral to the main concern of this section which is to show specifically how social ontology can be used to explicate Hegel's theory of alienation and not his general theory.

When working through the details of Hegel's account of alienation it is important to keep in mind that while Searle's social ontology is a formal analysis concerned with logical structures, Hegel is, true to title of his text, more so concerned with the phenomenological unfolding of those logical forms rather than the forms themselves. As such, bringing the social ontological account to bear on Hegel's account will certainly miss concerns that would have been important to Hegel, but the task of this chapter is only to show that the social ontological account can in fact make sense of his account, that is, that Hegel's account can be reformulated in the terminology of social ontology. Since Hegel is approaching things from a phenomenological

¹² To just briefly hint at other similarities, both Hegel and Searle are concerned with showing how a quasi-natural given that is social reality is in fact constructed by the workings of consciousness. Hegel also has a similar interest as Searle in showing the unique role that language has in the production and reproduction of social reality.

perspective, the starting point for his account of alienation is the viewpoint held through most of human history that the social order is a fixed and given reality, which in the early modern era is now perceived as being a foreign and alien entity when in previous eras the fixedness of social reality was seen as familiar and stabilizing.¹³ From a social ontological perspective, we can treat the broad characterization of the social world as analogous to Searle's concept of the status function; just as the social world is a product of humanity positing its "second nature," a status function is a "second reality" that is posited onto the world through collective recognition. That status function then creates the context within which alienation, understood as *Entfremdung*, occurs. As Hegel analyzes it, this posited reality of the social world, the status function, is able to function because it is a reality that transcends the individual and thus provides a moment for the individual to step outside of their isolated individuality and into a shared social existence. The problem is that in the early modern world this status function now carries with it a deontic power that, because it is a specifically modern social world, requires the individual participants to be self-reflective and see themselves as the creator of that social reality. The alienation (*Entfremdung*) that Hegel is concerned with here is that the deontic power that one be self-reflective that arises from the status function of the modern social world works to undermine the status function's existence as a "second nature" that otherwise appears as a fixed reality. It is the self-reflective moment that makes one's culture appear as alien and thus characterizes alienation qua *Entfremdung*.

¹³ It is worth noting that Searle makes the point—introduced in Chapter Two—that as much as one can lay out the logical underpinnings of social reality as he does in his account of social ontology, the fact is most people experience it as a fixed reality rather than a socially constructed one, and in actuality, social reality tends to work best when people take it in this unreflective way. So even if Hegel's analysis is more so historical rather than formal, the basic logical concern is one that arises in social ontology as well.

There is a second sense of alienation that Hegel uses, however, and that is *Entäusserung*. This form of alienation operates as a moment in the overcoming of the alienation understood as *Entfremdung*, and so must be treated separately, but as will be seen shortly also fits into the same basic schema for alienation set out in the social ontological account. Remember again that Hegel's understanding of alienation as *Entäusserung* is closely associated with the Roman jurisprudential concept of alienation, and so the general idea is of someone divesting themselves of something that they possess. In Hegel's case, the kind of alienation we have with *Entäusserung* appears to be something that is potentially endemic to all instances of social reality due to the nature of status functions and deontic powers, or as Hegel frames it, due to the relationship between society and an individual's societal role. Status functions, to exist, must be created through the collective recognition of individuals, and in that sense status functions are things that are subject to the power of individual decisions. On the other hand, status functions only "function" through deontic powers, and deontic powers are desire-independent reasons for acting, which is a fancy way of saying they are not subject to the power of individual decision-making.¹⁴ We then find ourselves in a paradoxical situation where the existence of status functions are, to a degree, dependent upon individual choice while their actual functioning as a status function is dependent upon deontic powers, which are not subject to individual choice if they are to operate in a deontological fashion. Social reality requires an obligation that we voluntarily accept and, in so doing, also accept that it is no longer voluntary for us since it is an

¹⁴ To ensure that this point is abundantly clear, if one is going to recognize that one has an obligation to do something, that just means that they recognize that it should be done in spite of their individual preferences or desires. It is in that sense that obligations are not subject to an individual's choice, even though we can still recognize that nothing physically compels them to do it, and so obligations always in this sense remain voluntary. A person can choose not to fulfill an obligation but they cannot choose whether an obligation is obligatory.

obligation. We once again find a situation of a deontic power that, when exercised, works against the status function that made the deontic power possible in the first place.

Although it has now been shown that Hegel's treatment of alienation in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* can fit within the schema of the social ontological account, we ended on what could be seen as a rather problematic conclusion in finding an *intrinsic* dimension of alienation found in *all* cases of social reality give the way status functions and deontic powers operate. If we do find ourselves having to accept this conclusion, then it throws the entire idea of alienation operating as a *critical* sociological term into doubt because if it is something that exists always and everywhere no matter what, then it seems hard to build a case that alienation is something that is negative and so should be *eliminated*.¹⁵ Therefore, it is important to take some time to see how Hegel tries to conceptualize a solution to this second form of alienation as it can point to a possible way out of this conundrum.¹⁶ As it so happens, Hegel's ultimate solution was already mentioned: while alienation is characteristic of the phase in the unfolding of spirit that aligns with the early modern era, Hegel's story does not end there but rather continues through to the ultimate reconciliation that he thinks occurs in the modern nation-state. Focusing just on the issue of alienation, the simple solution for Hegel is to recognize that although it is true that appropriating one's place in the social world means putting oneself under an obligation to live and act a certain way, there is a difference between that obligation being something that is imposed and one that is voluntarily chosen and identified with. Hegel draws attention to the fact that it is possible for people to take on an obligation that they themselves have set and in so

¹⁵ To paraphrase Kant, we can only have a moral obligation if it were possible for us to fulfill that obligation.

¹⁶ As will be seen in the next chapter with Sartre, there are those in alienation theory who end with the conclusion that alienation is an inextricable feature of modern society.

doing fully identify with it in such a way that it no longer appears as an imposed and foreign reality but rather an extension of one's very self. In the words of social ontology, when the deontic power of a status function is taken on voluntarily because one identifies with it and recognizes its value, then one can see that deontic power as a reality that is freely chosen even while its nature is to be an obligation that imposes on one's freedom. In the end, Hegel's belief is that in the modern nation-state it is possible for people to be reconciled to their social world in such a way that societal obligations that we take on in our social roles are not a burden but rather directly align with what it is that we intrinsically and authentically desire; of course there are obligations that we choose and those that we do not, and Hegel's concern is that, if we are going to truly overcome alienation, we must create a society where the obligations that we bind ourselves to are, ultimately, obligations that we freely choose to take on.

To bring this section to a close, it is necessary to explicitly state that Hegel's influence on alienation theory cannot be overstated, and the power of Hegel's analysis lies in his having worked to establish the concept of alienation on the same level of abstraction as social ontology. If truth be told, it is easy to see in Hegel many if not all of the major points that are developed in the social ontological account, even if it does not use the same terminology or conceptual framework. As we continue on in the history of alienation, I want to highlight a few elements found in Hegel that will come to have an outsized influence on subsequent theorists. First, the significance of alienation as an experience of social reality in which the elements of one's culture appear as fixed and given realities that press themselves upon individuals is explicitly thematized by Hegel and comes to be a consistent characterization that manifests itself time and again in alienation theory's history. Second, even though Hegel does not himself consider alienation to be a normative term as it is merely a stage in the development of spirit, the manner in which he

treats the concept in terms of *Entfremdung* points to the ways in which it can and will be so construed in the subsequent philosophical tradition, that is, as a problematic circumstance that needs to be overcome. Lastly, Hegel's account of alienation as a subjective experience of the individual in modern society with objective implications in the relationship between society and individual already begins to lay the groundwork for the later objective/subjective divide that arises in future phases of alienation theory. All in all, Hegel's work in the *Phenomenology* is an immensely rich source to return to again and again for alienation theory as well as for social ontology.

Marx and the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*

One of the most challenging aspects of reconstructing Marx's appropriation of alienation from Hegel¹⁷ is being able to distinguish where there are substantial points of disagreement between the two and where their seeming differences are merely polemic but otherwise minor, and this is especially important since the history of Marxist scholarship has largely come to shape the popular reception of Hegel's theory of alienation ex post facto.¹⁸ However, it would be wrong to singularly accuse the tradition as uncharitably shaping how Hegel's account was subsequently viewed since, from the broadest viewpoint, the mainline critiques of Hegel do actually trace back to Marx himself. In what is his most extensive textual treatment of alienation, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1927), Marx very explicitly attempted to distance himself from Hegel, and so there are moments where for rhetorical purposes one can

¹⁷ Another, perhaps equally important source for understanding Marx's treatment of alienation is Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), the influence of which can most principally be seen in Marx's posthumously published "Theses on Feuerbach" (1845/1888). Although Marx's later works were principally concerned with sociology rather than theology, if nothing else, Feuerbach's work undoubtedly opened up for Marx the realization that the underlying logic found in Hegel's treatment of alienation could be understood in a way that stood counter to Hegel's analysis.

¹⁸ See Sayers, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (2011), p. x.

discern exaggerations and mischaracterizations of the differences between the two by Marx himself.¹⁹ Toward this end, recent Hegelian scholarship has consistently taken an interest in returning to Hegel's texts themselves rather than the received tradition of them in order to consider anew Hegel's original thoughts on alienation both for its own interest but also to more clearly trace the influence of Hegel on Marx's conception.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is illuminating in its own right to consider how Marx saw his conceptualization of alienation as distinguishable from Hegel's account, however accurate, and the treatment to follow will attempt to be sensitive to both the perceived and actual differences between the two.

Approaching the relationship between Marx and Hegel at a distance, the formal similarities between the two appear quite extensive. For Marx, just like Hegel, alienation is ultimately the result of a social world that confronts human beings as a fixed and given reality that is independent of human influence; while for Hegel it appears as "an alien reality already present and given,"²¹ for Marx it appears "as something alien, as a power independent" of humanity.²² Additionally, both hold that the social world that stands in opposition to human beings is in fact only possible as a result of human activity, and both believe that the way alienation is overcome is by means of a radical transformation of the relationship between the alienated individual and their social world. Furthermore, both Marx and Hegel judge that in spite of the negative implications of alienation it is nevertheless a necessary moment in the development of human society, and so they both argue not so much for alienation's elimination

¹⁹ David MacGregor (2014) *Hegel and Marx: After the Fall of Communism*, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ See especially Hardimon *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (1994) and Sayers *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes* (2011).

²¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), p. 294.

²² Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844* (1959), p. 29

as its supersession into a new societal form. Viewed from this perspective, one could easily make the case that as a basic concept there is no significant difference between their accounts.

When one considers the concrete features of their accounts, however, the differences become much more apparent. The central point at which Marx's account differentiates itself is that he holds, contrary to Hegel's belief, that alienation has not been overcome in the modern liberal state but rather it continues and intensifies in the conditions of the working poor under the economic system of capitalism. The key to Marx's revision is an inversion of not only where alienation takes place but also what drives the development of human society into and beyond the conditions of alienation. While Hegel was seen as identifying the experience of alienation as more or less a fundamentally subjective experience of the bourgeois that called for reconciliation in the mind of these societal actors,²³ Marx identifies the locus of alienation in the objective conditions of the proletariat that can only be addressed via a supersession of capitalism. The transformation here is two-fold: first, Marx contends that Hegel's account privileges the bourgeois in a way that misses where the real engine of progress is, namely the mass of wage-workers that populate industrial society, and second, Marx makes the transition from an idealist conception to what he calls a material conception of society and societal progress by arguing that what needs to be changed is not primarily the consciousness of the members of society but rather the objective societal structures. In this way, Marx's analysis adds one more step to the progressive development of society seen in Hegel's account, and Marx does this by forwarding the thesis that while the stultifying features of capitalism are lamentable they are the corollary to

²³ See Marx, *1844*, pp. 65-66. Although the charge of subjectivism is often levied against Hegel, especially from Marxian camps, it should be clear that this is inaccurate to the *Phenomenology* wherein Hegel is concerned with both the subjective dimension of self-consciousness but also the objective conditions of society in its cultural forms. Nevertheless, it is understandable how this interpretation of Hegel could arise given his strong insistence on his account tracing the development of human consciousness, albeit for Hegel this has both subjective and objective implications, something which he attempts to capture with the term *Geist*, or Spirit. See Hardimon (1994) p. 122n34.

the development of the material basis for human flourishing that occurs under capitalism.

According to Marx, however, the material basis will eventually rise to the point at which the alienating features of capitalism become the overwhelming problem facing society, and it is this point where the transition to communism will usher in the era of reconciliation between the individual and society that Hegel believed had already been reached in the modern state of his day.

Having set out the general outline of Marx's theory of alienation it is important to focus on a few pertinent details as they relate to the historical development of alienation theory. For Marx, alienation arises for humanity when the material conditions of modern society, namely capitalism, stand in contradiction to human nature. Following closely the logic of Hegel's conceptualization of alienation as externalization (*Entäußerung*), Marx holds that the product of human labor is the manifestation of the individual's personality and identity into a concrete reality. When labor was dominated by the model of independent craftworkers, then what was produced could be seen as an expression of that worker's creativity and self-expression which stood separately from the laborer. However, in the capitalist system underpinned by private property, the individual laborer is a wage-earner and so the product of labor is not principally what is being offered by the worker but rather it is their labor itself while the product of labor is something expropriated by the capitalist class. As wage-labor, that is, when the product of labor is just the labor itself that is then sold to another human being, laborers find themselves confronted with an alien product that they have themselves helped create but now, rather than being an extension of that person's individuality, it "confronts [labor] as something alien, as a power independent of the producer."²⁴

²⁴ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts 1844*, p.29.

According to Marx, in capitalism man's externalization (*Entäusserung*) of himself is always and necessarily an experience of alienation (*Entfremdung*), and so humanity's very essence is transformed into the forces that dehumanize the individual worker. The result of this commodification of labor is a four-fold alienation. First, the worker is alienated from the productive activity of the work as with the form of wage-labor it is the very activity of work itself that is commodified in a way that stands in opposition to the worker. Second, the worker is alienated from the product of their work as whatever is produced by means of their labor is not owned and controlled by the laborer but rather it is appropriated by the factory owner as profit. Third, the worker is alienated from their own human nature as the distinctive activity of humanity, labor, is deprived of its role in the actualization of the individual in a self-conscious and self-directing manner.²⁵ Lastly, the worker is alienated from other human beings, that is, other workers, as their commodified wage-labor is in constant conflict with each other in a capitalist system driven by competition. Under the conditions of capitalism this fourfold experience points to alienation's overwhelming reality; it is both phenomenologically diverse and totalizing in its impact.

Looking at Marx's account of alienation there are elements of loss, paradox, and negativity that align similarly to Hegel's account, which should be unsurprising given the close relationship between the two. In spite of this close relationship, however, Marx's analysis adds a unique facet to each of these elements in a way that comes to have a bigger influence on the subsequent history of alienation than even Hegel's seminal account. First, with regards to the element of loss, Marx characterizes the experience of alienation as one in which human beings

²⁵ "The productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life. The whole character of a species, its species-character, is contained in the character of its life activity; and free, conscious activity is man's species-character." Marx, *Economic Manuscripts*, p. 31

have been stripped of their human nature as the historical situation of capitalism is a point at which human society has lost, in a certain sense, what makes it human. More specifically, what has been lost is the ability for individuals to direct their own life activities in a way that gives expression to themselves as human beings since capitalism has transformed the productive capacities of human beings into a commodity that can be appropriated by others rather than a means for self-actualization. The idea that alienation is predicated on the belief of an essential human nature, which comes to dominate alienation theory so extensively that the postmodern rejection of essentialism was seen as necessitating a wholesale rejection of alienation, then finds its explicit origins in Marx's theory.

The second two elements of alienation, its paradoxical nature and its negativity, are in turn closely related to Marx's claim that alienation is an experience of a certain kind of dehumanization. While alienation is the loss of what makes one distinctively human, this does not mean that somehow human beings begin to act like some other animal species since capitalism, even in its dehumanizing tendencies, is still a distinctively human reality. What Marx means is that while capitalism has been produced by the productive capacities of human beings it is nevertheless a social arrangement organized such that the primary experience of those within the society itself is one of curtailed human capacities such that those activities in which humanity maintains its freedom are largely "animal" in nature.²⁶ The paradox inherent in alienation is that a capitalist social system, which is the direct outgrowth of human capabilities, has been able to form in such a way that it undermines the very conditions that made it possible, and while being

²⁶ "Man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal." Marx, p. 30.

a product of humanity nevertheless causes humanity to cease to be, in an important sense, human.

As for the negative aspect of alienation, Marx's account is again similar to Hegel's in not fully condemning its existence even while it must be admitted that Marx was more willing than Hegel to condemn alienation as it was experienced by laborers. Although Marx acknowledges that the industrial capacities of capitalism is beneficial for expanding the satisfaction of human needs, it nevertheless has left that potential benefit unrealized as the specific form in which capitalism exists in fact transforms the productive powers of humanity into an antagonistic relationship with itself.²⁷ In the hands of an exploitative class,²⁸ the creative capacities of human beings come to serve only the most base of human needs to the detriment of full human actualization.²⁹ The experience of alienation is then unquestionably a deplorable one for Marx even if it is a necessary step in the development of humanity. However, what is unique compared to Hegel's critique is that while both believed that alienation was a necessary stage of development, Hegel saw it as a phenomenon that had principally been overcome already while for Marx that future stage is still being waited upon. In that case, Marx's negative evaluation of alienation comes from the fact that, from his vantage point, humanity is still caught in a detrimental historical stage even if it will eventually be superseded.

²⁷ At no point does Marx denigrate what good does manage to come from expansions in human production, although that good produced is far overshadowed by the negative: "It is true that labor produces for the rich wonderful things – but for the worker it produces privation." *Ibid.*, p. 30. Further he states, "the miracles of the gods were rendered superfluous by the miracles of industry." *Ibid.*, p. 33

²⁸ "If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, then this can only be because it belongs to some other man than the worker. If the worker's activity is a torment to him, to another it must give satisfaction and pleasure." *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁹ "In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him his species-life, his real objectivity as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him." *Ibid.*, p. 32.

In bringing the social ontological account to bear on Marx, the most valuable outcome is being able to show that Marx's theory can still be rendered operational in much the same way he envisioned only extricated from its essentialist presuppositions. The solution to the problem of essentialism, which has otherwise vexed alienation theory for generations, will be similar to how the social ontological account dealt with the Christian theological conception and its *prima facie* presumption of "naturalness." To be an effective model, the social ontological account only requires that there be a collective recognition that certain capacities exist, which can and does operate independently of any naturalistic assumption about said capacities that might be made by the individuals involved. Said another way, the question of whether certain capacities exist naturally and the question of whether they are believed to exist at all are conceptually distinct; one may be able to disprove that a collectively recognized capacity exists naturally but one cannot disprove that a collectively recognized capacity is collectively recognized, at least not in the same way.³⁰ While Marx took it for granted that creative labor was a natural capacity of human beings, which ultimately became a contested claim, what is not contestable is that Marx was attentive to a social and historical context in which creative labor was a widespread presupposition that was being undermined by the developments of early capitalism. Focusing primarily on textile production, Marx was dealing with an era in which there was a transition from the independent craftsperson to that of the wage-earning proletariat, and with it there was a transition from an expectation of self-directed and creative labor to that of externally controlled and commodified labor.³¹ One does not need to work from the presupposition of "naturalness"

³⁰ Recall Searle's example when dealing with the idea of naturalness. The claim that the pope has the supernatural power of infallibility might be contested, but what is not contested is that there is a collective recognition by Catholics that the pope has said capacity. The status function of infallibility can exist whether or not the capacity exists naturally, as is presumed by the involved participants.

³¹ Sayers (2011), pp. 38-39.

with regard to creative labor as an intrinsic human characteristic, as Marx does, as the alienation in this context is equally explicable in terms of the contradictory impulses of creative labor that arose in the pre-modern era and the demands of capitalist production that isolated and minimized that creative impulse, which is a historical phenomenon. In short, the alienation of early capitalism need not be seen as the product of a natural capacity being undermined as the overwhelming analytical thrust of Marx's account can be conceptualized from the presupposition that alienation arises due to the undermining of a widespread presupposition of creative labor by independent craftsmen.

The alienation that Marx concerned himself with arises due to the transformation of a societal form that introduces new expectations that run contrary to what had already been established. The societal form used to be that of the independent craftsperson who would make a product that could then be sold. In this situation, the craftsperson had complete control over the activity and product of their labor as their individual inputs in producing the product had a direct impact on the type and quality of the product being produced, which inculcated an expectation of creativity in one's labor. Additionally, in this situation there was less conflict because while it was true that the collection of craftspeople in the same trade were all generally producing similar products, the uniqueness of their product based upon their individualized labor made them less substitutable and thus less likely to bring about direct competition. Under capitalism, however, it is the labor itself that is commodified rather than the product of the work as what was produced was made largely homogenous. In a factory setting aimed at producing a uniform product, the input by the individual laborer had little to no impact on the outcome, and so creative labor was no longer an integral part of production as there arises a disconnect between what was being sold by workers, namely their labor, and the product of their labor. This had the added effect that in

capitalism the commodification of labor means that it is the laborers themselves who are put into conflict with one another as they try to out-compete to sell their abstract labor capacity that existed independently of what it is that they produced. It is then the contradictory expectations that workers had with regard to their own labor and the expectations imposed upon them by the capitalist system that produced the alienation Marx was concerned with in his analysis.

Explicating all of this directly in the terms of social ontology, the status function that creates that context within which alienation arises is that of being a manual laborer, especially in the textile industry. In earlier eras this status was associated with that of the independent craftsperson while in Marx's era it has come to be associated with the wage-earning proletariat. In either case, however, this status is something produced by the collective recognition of the society within which these professions developed as certain types of work, as well as various class expectations, come to be associated with the status of being a manual laborer. Now the collective recognition of this status accrues various deontic powers, such as the responsibility to contribute to the creation of a product as well as the right to recompense based upon one's contributions. Under the framework that developed around that of the independent craftsperson, that contribution to the creation of a product is entirely self-directed and creative as the individual craftsperson has near total control over the product of their labor, and as highly valued and skilled crafters their pay is sufficient to provide for their well-being. Under the early capitalist system, however, these deontic powers are subverted: the individual's contribution to production becomes tightly regulated and stripped of any creative input, while the commodification of labor leads to the degradation of the worker's quality of life as the profit motive leads to exploitation. The performative contradiction at the heart of Marx's analysis of alienation is that the capitalist system's treatment of the deontic powers associated with manual

labor are transformed so dramatically that they stand at odds with the expectations of the status function of being a textile work as it was previously conceived in the era of independent craftworkers. In this understanding, it is not a contradiction between the demands and capitalism and some intrinsic human characteristic but instead it is a contradiction between the status function that previously carried connotations of creative and independent manual labor and the deontic power as realized in the capitalist system that directly undermines that expectation. Once again we find the exercise of deontic powers standing at odds with their respective status functions, and by working through Marx's account from the perspective of social ontology it was possible to show how his account could be divested of its essentialist presuppositions but still retain its analytic insights.

Although it was nearly one hundred years after Marx penned his commentary on Hegel's concept of alienation that his work was publicly published, the influence the *Economic Manuscripts* had on the development of alienation theory is tremendous. Besides the direct impact that this account of alienation had on subsequent social critics, there are a number of formal features of his account that also came to influence those subsequent theorists that sought to add their own twist to the conceptualization of alienation. One of these features is Marx's insistence that in order for alienation to be overcome there are objective features of society that must be changed and not just the subjective attitudes of the actors. Although it is disingenuous to say that Hegel does not think that there are actual features of society that would need to be changed, it must be acknowledged that Hegel's emphasis on this point is not nearly as strong as Marx's. In a similar vein, an underrated but profound dimension of Marx's contributions to alienation theory is his insistence that alienation is always alienation from concrete and particular others, not only from the capitalists who exploit but also other workers who become one's

competitors rather than compatriots. Although alienation may have impersonal features as a part of social institutions, such as private property, Marx's analysis points to the fact that the experience of alienation will always have a locus in immediate human relationships. One last feature of Marx's account, one that comes to be problematic for future accounts of alienation that take him as a starting point, is the so-called humanistic or essentialist claims that ground his theory. After the initial enthusiastic reception of his work, this dimension is arguably the feature that has the largest impact on the most recent decades of alienation theory as the essentialist features of Marx's theory serve as the primary catalyst that precipitated its widespread abandonment in light of postmodern critique. All of these points will need to be considered once again in the next stage of alienation theory's development, but before that can be done there is one other significant account of alienation is also a reaction to Hegel while being competitive to Marxian-inspired accounts, and that is existentialism.

Heidegger and *Being and Time*

Although Kierkegaard is the most proximate to Hegel in terms of an existentialist reaction, it is Heidegger's work in *Being and Time* (1927) that comes to have the bigger influence on existentialist interpretations of alienation specifically. Furthermore, while Heidegger's treatment of alienation has strong parallels to Kierkegaard, Kierkegaard himself largely eschews the term itself.³² One additional reason to consider Heidegger's account in this stage of alienation theory's development is that *Being and Time* was published several years before Marx's *Economic Manuscripts* were publically known in Europe, and so for that reason

³² One can easily draw an analogy between Kierkegaard's influence on Heidegger and Rousseau's influence on Hegel. Although the latter in each pair relies on and builds upon the work of the previous, it is only the latter that makes explicit use of the term alienation in order to draw upon its historical connotations in their unique application of the term.

Heidegger can be seen as working in a tradition of alienation theory that, unlike subsequent theorists, can be reasonably considered as independent of Marx's account. Still, despite all of this, Heidegger's treatment of alienation is admittedly a very small part of his overall analysis in *Being and Time*, taking up just a few sections from his analysis of the central existential structure of Da-sein, Being-in as such. Nevertheless, given that the term is introduced during the central exposition of his analysis, one can take it that that indicates the importance that the phenomenon has in his account of Da-sein. That importance became even more pronounced with subsequent existentialists that tended to focus on the quasi-ethical dimensions of Heidegger's account, including his analysis of inauthenticity and alienation, as opposed to its ontological features, which were Heidegger's own interests.

If we follow Heidegger's famous definition of Da-sein as "that entity for which in its Being its Being is an issue for it,"³³ then the ontological configuration of Da-sein existentially being its Being is "Being-in as such." To drop the Heideggerese for just a moment, what this means is that the central structure of Being-in as such is a concern not so much with *what* a person does with their life, its content, but rather *how* a person lives their life, its style or mode. Pivotal to the mode by which one lives out one's life is what Heidegger calls *das Man*, which can be understood as the particular way one's culture, broadly speaking, conceives of how and in what manner one should think, act, and in general live one's life. As a part of its everyday way of being, Da-sein encounters an expanse of situations that vary depending upon the concrete particularities of each circumstance and so the unique demands of the situation call for a unique response from Da-sein. However, Da-sein does not find itself simply and directly related to its life circumstances in all of its particularities as it "always already" finds these situations

³³ Heidegger, p. 10.

mediated by the socio-cultural interpretation that *das Man* provides as the “initially and for the most part” way in which a person encounters and lives out their life.³⁴ The influence of one’s culture by means of *das Man* in this case offers a generalized, typical way of responding to one’s life circumstances. It should be clear, however, that unlike Rousseau and others of his ilk, Heidegger does not take the influence of one’s culture by means of *das Man* as being inherently problematic as it is exactly in virtue of the average everyday way being of *das Man* that one is able to access a shared world of meaning rather than being stuck with every individual’s unique and idiosyncratic interpretation. All the same, as Heidegger will point out, it is also this accessibility that makes possible two radically divergent comportments for Da-sein depending upon how one responds to the influence of *das Man* – authenticity and inauthenticity.

The terminology of authenticity and inauthenticity, though seemingly charged with an evaluative dimension, is to Heidegger’s explicit avowal strictly a structural distinction at the ontological level between whether one takes *das Man* as *the* way to live one’s life or whether one takes it as an initial model from which one can then further shape and determine one’s own life.³⁵ Inauthenticity is in this case the ontological structure of Da-sein that is living fully absorbed or “fallen” into the world of *das Man* instead of living according to its own unique potentiality for being, and Heidegger identifies this loss of Da-sein’s own way of being with the phenomenon of alienation. With alienation Da-sein finds itself not only so caught up in the world of *das Man* that it loses its ownmost way of being but, what is even further, alienation “closes off”³⁶ the very possibility of Da-sein being its own; alienation is not only being inauthentic but also not even

³⁴ Heidegger, p. 156.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 164.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 166

being able to be authentic.³⁷ The reason this happens is because Da-sein becomes fully occupied with the various possible ways that one is supposed to live one's life as indicated by *das Man*, or, as Heidegger says, Da-sein becomes "intent upon the most exaggerated "self-dissection" which tries out all kinds of possibilities of interpretation."³⁸ Even though this diversity of appearances seems to inauthentic Da-sein as "living concretely"³⁹ and so being individuated and unique, it is really only a "sham of authenticity"⁴⁰ that is the superficial uniqueness of being modish.⁴¹

Alienation, according to Heidegger, is then not fundamentally an experience in which Da-sein surrenders itself to some other entity, which is largely how alienation had traditionally been characterized, but instead alienation is essentially a form of self-alienation.⁴² Furthermore, this self-alienation is not so much a loss of a self in general, as if one is no longer the impetus behind one's actions and so becomes an object,⁴³ but rather it is the specific loss of one's unique way of

³⁷ Although this is qualified in that it is not a permanent closure, Heidegger's point is that there is an aspect of alienation in which one does not even realize that one is alienated and so living out authentically is, in a sense, not even a possibility for alienated Da-sein.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 166. Here there are strong echoes to the way that Hegel's account of self-alienated Spirit casts consciousness as constantly oscillating from one perspective to another, from denigrating wealth to praising it, from serving the monarch to using the monarch for favors, etc.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴¹ Although Heidegger's characterization of this "exaggerated self-dissection" is highly elliptical, the context of the discussion points to the idea that Da-sein, instead of just straightforwardly acting and living according to its ownmost way of being, instead becomes obsessed with "what one should do." In this way Da-sein focuses in a sort of list-like fashion on what one should be doing: when one goes to the park one should bring a checkered blanket for the picnic because that is what one does, when one goes to a dinner party one should bring a bottle of wine for the hosts because that is what one does, etc. The additional element of authenticity being closed off to Da-sein arguably comes from the fact that not only does one do "what one should do" but what is further one does not even consider why one does it and instead one just accepts that it is how everyone does it.

⁴² "This alienation [...] still does not surrender it to beings which it itself is not, but forces it into its inauthenticity, into a possible kind of being of *itself*." Emphasis original, Heidegger, p. 166.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 167. "Only if Da-sein is posited as an isolated I-subject, as a self-point from which it moves away. [...] Falling prey to the world is then reinterpreted ontologically as objective presence in the manner of innerworldly beings."

being, and so alienation remains for Da-sein a comportment of itself even if it is in accord with a standard set by others instead of oneself.

Although Heidegger's treatment of alienation has its own unique emphases when compared to the term's historical treatments, one can still trace the three-fold elements of alienation that connect his account to those of Hegel and the various pre-philosophical accounts. When it comes to the dimension of loss as part of the alienation's three-fold moment it is always of something that is crucial or integral to the subject of the loss, and Heidegger's account is no different as Da-sein's alienation is the loss of its own authentic way of being, although one needs to be careful in precisely characterizing the manner of this loss. First and foremost, authenticity is not a state temporally prior to inauthenticity, such as might be indicated in the Christian creation story in which humanity is initially perfect but then falls away.⁴⁴ Instead what is lost in Da-sein's alienation is a particular ontological possibility, namely, the possibility to be its own *vis-à-vis das Man*; alienation "closes off"⁴⁵ the very possibility of Da-sein being its own and so authentic.

This immediately leads to the second element of alienation as a paradoxical reality, one that Heidegger openly acknowledges when he states, "have we not set forth a phenomenon which directly speaks *against* the definition in which the formal idea of existence was indicated."⁴⁶ Heidegger's point is that if we start with the understanding that Da-sein is at the core of its existence a being that is concerned with its own being, then how would it be possible

⁴⁴Although Heidegger's discussion of the ontological priority as distinct from an ontic priority is couched in the theological language of the Christian tradition where he writes of the *status corruptionis* and *status gratiae*, etc. Ibid., p. 168.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 167, italics original.

for Da-sein to not only fail to be in possession of its own being but also, as a further point, to no longer be concerned with its own being. The solution to this conundrum, according to Heidegger, is to realize that even if it is a paradox it is not a contradiction. Authenticity and inauthenticity are not opposing realities as they are actually both modes of the same existential structure of being-in-the-world; it is only through Da-sein being concerned with its being that it is possible for it to become “fallen” in *das Man*, albeit it is not in the same manner as authentic Da-sein’s interest in *das Man*.⁴⁷ In being alienated Da-sein does not stop being concerned with its being, it does not stop being involved with *das Man*, and it does not stop being itself, but it does stop being fully concerned with itself as a *unique* and *individuated* Da-sein. The paradox, then, is that Da-sein, in the very act of being concerned with its own being, can actually fail to be fully concerned with its own *personal* being, and what is more, fail to realize that it is not fully concerned with its own authentic being.

When it comes to the third element of alienation, its negative connotation, Heidegger’s account can on the surface of things appear to violate this established constellation in alienation’s abstract characterization as he insistently states throughout his analysis that the terminology of alienation and other related concepts are not value terms as normative concerns are an ontic rather than ontological reality.⁴⁸ On a first pass there is at least an initial plausibility to his assertion even if the charged connotations of the terms, compounded by the fact that he needs to continually remind his readers that he does not mean to use them in a normatively charged manner, cannot help but garner skepticism with regard to his claimed distance from normativity.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 167.

⁴⁸ As one example, when he introduces the concept of “idle talk” shortly before his analysis of alienation he immediately indicates that the term is “not to be used here in a disparaging sense,” i.e. as a normative term. Ibid., p. 157. In the paragraph immediately before he introduces “idle talk” he comments that “our interpretation has a purely ontological intention and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday Dasein,” p. 156.

Heidegger's ontological analysis is concerned with possibilities rather than actualities of *Da-sein* insofar as authenticity is a possible comportment that one can take with regard to *das Man*, but his analysis never touches upon the particular forms that *das Man* can take as a temporal reality in concrete circumstances. The structure of authenticity is about whether we can make a cultural form of life our own and so it is antecedent, or at least simply independent, of whether one's cultural life is one with which one ought to be authentic. So, in the end authenticity and inauthenticity appear to be normatively neutral designations. Yet what seems to be missed by Heidegger is that there is a latent dimension in which being authentic is itself a normative concern independent of the ethical or moral dimension of *das Man*, or more properly one might say it is a meta-normative concern since the question of authorship in one's actions involves elements that are foundational to any kind of ethical conception. One can leave aside moral questions with regard to actions taken or ethical concerns regarding the kind of life that one lives, but the idea that a person needs to be an author of their own actions in order to be a normative agent is a foundational concern that cannot be simply dismissed because it is not one's primary concern. On this reading, alienation is clearly a negative phenomenon even by Heidegger's standards even if it does not deal with the usual scope of concerns with which everyday morality is concerned.

Heidegger's account of alienation displays a ready affinity with the social ontological account of alienation. One can see in Heidegger an attempt to deal with many of the same concerns as social ontology, albeit from a very different starting point, and similar to what was stated with Hegel, one can see moments where it would be possible to make a direct translation between Heidegger and Searle when the two accounts are properly understood. However, since our focus in this dissertation is only with alienation, we will have to restrict ourselves to

comparisons between these two accounts only in so far as it relates to alienation. With this in mind, reading Heidegger through the lens of social ontology yields the realization that his account of alienation explicitly focuses on the paradoxical and contradictory way in which the exercise of deontic powers can undermine the very possibility of the status function that made the deontic power possible, or as Heidegger phrases it, the way that authenticity or inauthenticity is a mode of being of Da-sein, which takes an interest in its own way of being. The status function in this case is that of the Being-in of Da-sein. While for Heidegger Being-in is the basic way in which Da-sein takes an inherent interest in its comportment towards the world, one can see this idea as roughly analogous to Searle's conception of a status function insofar as both are concerned with being a certain way or acting in a certain way with regard to the world. This idea is bolstered when one remembers that Heidegger tied Da-sein's basic way of Being-in to that of *das Man*, which is the general and most immediate way that Da-sein finds itself in the world as informed by its social context, that is, the place one has within the purview of collective intentionality. Framed in the terms of social ontology, the individual finds itself as possessing a status function that is largely shaped by the collective recognition of those around them.⁴⁹ All of this then provides the context within which alienation arises.

Alienation for Heidegger is a possibility for Da-sein because there is a basic disjunct in how a status function can be realized through its deontic powers, namely as either authentically or inauthentically. This is a decidedly more subjective focus than what one finds in Searle's social ontology, although one does find that Searle is aware of the wide diversity of cognitive

⁴⁹ Heidegger could be understood as saying Da-sein finds itself "always already" under the auspices of a status function given our essential social nature as expressed by *das Man*.

dispositions that a person may have with collective recognition.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, one can see in Heidegger's approach a helpful compliment to the more formal, objective analysis found in Searle because of how it illustrates how radically different social reality can be simply because of the disposition of the individual involved. In Heidegger's understanding of alienation, it is not so much the concrete matter of a deontic power that comes into conflict with the status function as it is the *subjective realization* of the deontic power *by* the involved individual, though all the same it is a conflict between the deontic power of a status function and the status function itself. More specifically, alienation occurs when Da-sein, which is intrinsically interested in how it is comported towards the world, is so directed that it does not have an interest in how *it* comports *itself* to the world, which Heidegger identifies as inauthenticity. Inauthenticity is then the paradoxical circumstance where, given one's existence as Da-sein, one must take an interest in one's situation, but this occurs without being interested in being the one who *determines* the situation one is in. To tie this back to the terminology of social ontology, Heidegger's understanding of alienation is that a status function is constructed by collective recognition, namely Being-in as shaped by *das Man*, and that collective recognition must ultimately have its ground in the individual mind of a singular person, which is the interest Da-sein has with its own being in Being-in, but because the deontic power is not something that the individual has appropriated for themselves but instead is merely assumed due to the influence of *das Man*, which is inauthenticity, there is a conflict between the status function and the exercise of the deontic power. In everyday terms one can see this as a situation where a person simply "goes with the flow" in accepting a social arrangement rather than being an active agent in determining

⁵⁰ Searle (2010), p. 8. When he talks about collective recognition, he indicates that "acceptance, as I construe it, goes all the way from enthusiastic endorsement to grudging acknowledgement, even acknowledgement that one is simply helpless to do anything about, or reject."

the terms by which they participate in that social arrangement. Alienation of this kind, though very different than the more objective approaches, still maintains its existence as a systemic fallout fact because again it is not something that is directly aimed at but rather occurs as a secondary effect of choices and actions that are taken directly. It further still fits within the same basic schema laid out in the social ontological account in which alienation is understood as being a performative contradiction between the exercise of a deontic power, in this case the possibility of acting inauthentically, that then works to undermine the status function, in this case Being-in understood as Da-sein's existential comportment towards the world, that otherwise can only exist when it is accepted by the individual's participation in the collective recognition of that social situation.

The legacy and impact of Heidegger's analysis of alienation and especially inauthenticity is extensive as his work largely shapes the existentialist concern with alienation. Beyond that historical influence there are also various points in his analysis that offer unique contributions to the development of alienation theory. The first feature that stands out in Heidegger's account of alienation is the concept of *das Man* and its role in shaping an individual. Although Hegel and Marx both recognize the importance of society and culture, Heidegger is unique in being able to draw out the abstract and generalized way in which "the other" can often bring its influence to bear, even if as a result there is the tendency in his analysis to underemphasize if not outright miss the role of concrete others.⁵¹ A second significant feature of Heidegger's account of alienation is its sensitivity to the fact that the line between authenticity and inauthenticity is very narrow and that in many ways both modes of being can appear to Da-sein itself in a similar

⁵¹ This shortcoming appears most pronounced in Heidegger's complete silence on the topic of embodied being. Habermas's essay "Work and *Weltanschauung*: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective" (1989) is the most extensive critique of Heidegger that argues it has an inherent solipsistic leaning.

fashion, that is, both can appear as if one were living one's life as fully one's own. In this way Heidegger is exceptional in recognizing the perfidiousness of alienation as a phenomenon that operates to an extent by masking itself from those that are alienated, an important point that needs to be addressed in any account of alienation. All in all, Heidegger's analysis gives a strong impetus to the subjective and cultural dimensions of alienation in a way that serves as a useful counterpoint to Marx's more objective and institutional analysis of alienation.

Conclusion

These three accounts of alienation in this historical stage are the bedrock on which all later analyses of alienation are founded. In particular, the works of Marx and Heidegger come to have the most profound influence, even if Hegel's influence continued largely mediated through these two, and subsequent theorists tend to align themselves with one or the other of these two authors in being shaped by the particular emphasis of these classical accounts. That division, which begins to manifest itself as a divide between subjective and objective accounts of alienation, becomes more and more prominent as alienation reaches its heyday during the 1960s and 1970s. As alienation becomes more and more its own explicit concern and begins receiving independent treatment as a self-standing term worthy of its own investigation, the traces of the pre-philosophical uses become weaker as the seeds of the central aporias are sown in the next historical stage of alienation theory's development.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ALIENATION THEORY

Excursus on Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Chapter Overview

Had Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* never been rediscovered in 1927,¹ there is almost no doubt that the concept of alienation would have failed to register as a prominent topic of philosophical interest. Although the various pre-philosophical conceptions of alienation would have presumably continued to be utilized within the confines of their narrow technical applications, the manner in which the term alienation is most commonly invoked today bears the indelible marks of a tradition that arose out an engagement with Marx's early texts, especially the *Manuscripts of 1844*. Most prominent in this regard was the efforts of the early Frankfurt School to ground a *ressourcement* of Marx that was independent of the then-dominant Leninist school and for which the discovery of a previously unpublished text of Marx offered an ideal starting point as it would be unburdened by expectations of a purported orthodox interpretation. It was in this context that the concept of alienation found in the *Manuscripts* rose to prominence as it was a concept that shared affinities with the received corpus of Marx while also relying upon a theoretical foundation that was altogether distinct from what was found in his more widely known works. As a result, in the hands of these early critical theorists, alienation theory became a key programmatic interest for Marxist research, and thus the second stage of alienation theory's philosophical development began as the insights produced by its initial

¹ The *Manuscripts* were first made public in Russian in 1927 and then subsequently in German in 1932 from where it was more widely disseminated.

appropriation were expanded and sharpened into a unique analytic tool for critical social analysis.

However, before it is possible to get a full sense of the main figures and features of this next stage in alienation theory's development, it is essential to first address a work that for all intents and purposes is as influential as Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844* for the development of alienation theory. While written prior to the rediscovery of the *Manuscripts of 1844*, and so therefore void of direct references to alienation, Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) is significant not only because it helped precipitate the intellectual movement that is most commonly referred to as Western Marxism, of which the Frankfurt School was a part, but also because the specific manner by which Lukács appropriates concepts from Marx provides a helpful propaedeutic for understanding the way in which Marx's theory of alienation will in turn come to be popularly received.² Most significantly, there are two features of Lukács analysis that will most stand out for our purposes. First and foremost, the general approach that Lukács takes in expanding Marx's original analysis beyond the narrow confines of wage labor relations and into a wider nexus of social realities comes to present a basic pattern for how various aspects of Marxian theory will be appropriated by subsequent generations. Secondly, Lukács adds an additional conceptual layer to Marx's analysis by explicitly thematizing an objective-subjective dimension that ultimately becomes a commonplace distinction in later Marxist thinkers and especially alienation theory. Seeing how exactly Lukács

² It is worthwhile to note here that Lucien Goldmann's posthumously published *Lukács and Heidegger* (1973 [1977]) makes the argument that Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) was an unacknowledged foil for Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927). On this account, Lukács not only served as a bridge within the Marxist tradition of alienation theory but he also functioned as a point of transition within the existentialist tradition due to his role in influencing Heidegger's thought. However, this claim is countered by Laurence Paul Hemming in his *Heidegger and Marx* (2013) who argues that Goldmann ignores how the commonalities that exist between Lukács and Heidegger stem more from their place within the broader legacy of Hegel and Marx rather than from any direct engagement with one another. See Hemming, p. 34.

develops these lines will then be valuable for appreciating the origins of two of the most distinctive features that will arise in this phase of alienation theory's history.

At the core of *History and Class Consciousness* is an engagement with and an appropriation of Marx's theory of the commodity structure that resides at the heart of capitalist society, and in that way one can understand Lukács as attempting to construct an analysis that re-envisions roughly the same conceptual space as Marx's theory of alienation. The primary insight that Lukács gleans from Marx is that things do not simply spring into existence as economically valuable objects, that is, as commodities, but rather human beings must first come to conceive of them as such. What this ultimately means is that the commodity structure, which is the abstract and general character something has in being taken specifically as an economically valuable object, always has a corresponding manifestation of human subjectivity. The form of that subjective perspective that accompanies the commodity structure Lukács identifies as *Verdinglichung*, or reification, because of how the perspective transforms everything into an object possessing only thing-like qualities ready for economic exploitation.³ Now according to Lukács the commodity structure has existed in most human societies, but the reifying subjective perspective that is associated with the commodity structure has predominately displayed itself only in an episodic and circumscribed manner because the commodity structure has not dominated human society in its entirety.⁴ That changes with the development of modern capitalist societies, however, because in those societies the commodity structure has expanded so much and penetrated so deeply as to have an impact on every single aspect of that society, and

³ Lukács (1971), p. 86.

⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

that quantitative expansion brings with it a qualitative change in how reification expresses itself.⁵

Lukács's unique contributions take off at this point and focus on explicating what happens on both a societal level and on the level of individual consciousness when the commodity structure has thus ceased to be "one form among many regulating the metabolism of human society"⁶ and instead has become "the universal category of society as a whole."⁷

For Lukács the central problem with the expansion of the commodity structure and its concomitant reification is that as they become more pervasive in a society they begin to insulate themselves from any possible resistance and thus further entrench themselves as the fundamental elements shaping society. Because the internal logic of capitalism is predicated upon the assumption that commodities are actually the fundamental feature of society, capitalism first and foremost covers over the commodity structure's true foundation in the relationship between people and in its place enshrines the perspective of reification in which everything is treated according to their economically valuable characteristics, characteristics which are believed, albeit inaccurately, to exist as objectively given realities that are autonomous of human consciousness.⁸ Once the commodity structure becomes the overwhelming determinant of society, however, reification becomes the default stance for members of a particular society and so it makes the possibility of critique difficult if not impossible because of how it causes the world to appear as if it were a fixed and given reality that is externally imposed instead of as a

⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁷ Ibid., p. 86.

⁸ As Lukács states it, the commodity structure is one in which "a relation between people 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." Ibid., p. 83.

reality produced by human interactions and thus subject to transformation.⁹ If the members of that society are unable to conceive of the world as being potentially different, then the imposed reality of the commodity structure becomes the only possible option even though it always remains true that the capitalist system is grounded in human subjectivity and thus perpetually open to the possibility of alteration. On Lukács's analysis, then, the most troublesome aspect of the commodity structure is actually the way the accompanying reification shapes the consciousness of the members of that society in such a way that it both entrenches and leads to a further expansion of the commodity structure's role in society in an exponentially increasing and seemingly unstoppable feedback loop.

The focused attention on the subjective aspect of reification as a part of the commodity structure in capitalist society is largely what leads Lukács to introduce the objective/subjective distinction into his analysis as the terminology provides a means to conceptually distinguish the two phenomena while simultaneously being able to maintain their close association. On the objective side of society taken as a whole, Lukács analysis follows Marx's presentation of the commodity structure quite closely by arguing that capitalist society builds up a world in which the system of capitalism appears as if it were an inherent feature of nature that is composed of immutable "natural laws," such as supply and demand, that "confront [individuals] as invisible forces that generate their own power."¹⁰ On the subjective level of consciousness, reification not only bolsters the capitalist system directly by undergirding the commodity structure within the economic realm but it also turns inward and thereby leads individuals to view even their own

⁹ In Lukács's own words, once the commodity structure becomes the predominate principle of society it becomes "crucial for the subjugation of men's consciousness [...] and for their attempts to comprehend the process or to rebel against its disastrous effects and liberate themselves from servitude to the 'second nature' so created," *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

inner self as composed of quantifiable features that can be commodified.¹¹ Reification then drives this inner commodification to the extreme by leading people to transform every aspect of their internal world so as to better conform to the expectations of the capitalist system that otherwise finds the person's unique individuality as "mere sources of error" in the abstract computations of production.¹² The end result is people "mechanically conforming to fixed laws [...] impervious to human intervention" that in turn leads to a "fragmentation of [the] subject" as individuals become more and more detached and isolated from the world, other people, and even themselves.¹³ At this point, things have come full circle with people having produced a society that they are estranged from even though they themselves have helped to bring it into existence.

Lukács's project is significant for considerations of alienation's history due to the procedural and substantial similarities that exist between his account of reification and those of alienation theory that will soon follow. First off, the general approach that Lukács takes to Marx is paradigmatic for how alienation theory develops after the rediscovery of Marx's *Manuscripts*. Lukács begins with an idea that has its origins in Marx but then expands it in new ways, most importantly by arguing that the scope to which it applies has expanded beyond its original purview. More specifically, both Lukács's account of reification and the form alienation theory will take in its second stage of development start from the assumption that the capitalist system has expanded so much that all corners of society are implicated by the critique that these terms offer even if they are not obviously or directly tied to the operations of the economy per se. The range of application for both concepts is then seen as going well beyond the narrow confines of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 87.

¹² Ibid., p. 89.

¹³ Ibid., p. 89.

economic exchange and instead are viewed as integral elements for a holistic and critical understanding of contemporary society.

The second influential upshot for alienation theory is how in Lukács's analysis of reification there is introduced a two-fold objective and subjective perspective when it comes to understanding how things are manifested. While Lukács holds that these two perspectives are just two dimensions of the same reality and thus mutually inform one another, for alienation theory the introduction of the subjective and objective elements will eventually bifurcate into those accounts that emphasize one over the other. The one-sided emphasis of mainstream accounts of alienation, combined with the sheer diversity of underlying theories that are offered for justifying alienation, will be what ultimately weakens alienation theory's popular appeal as either type of account will be seen as having significant and obvious shortcomings. In the end, the aporias that arise out of this second phase of alienation theory's development, especially the problem of the objective/subjective divide, will then become critical sticking points that will need to be addressed in order to envision alienation's future viability.

Having set out this prolegomena, the current chapter of this dissertation works through the golden age of alienation theory's popularity as well as the subsequent fallout that leads to its near total abandonment, and towards this end particular attention will be paid to how the accounts during this time both contribute to and seek to deal with the various difficulties that arise within alienation theory. Just as the era of alienation's philosophical appropriation was dominated by Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the second phase in alienation theory's development was dominated by Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. The rediscovery of Marx's early works lead to a rapid and widespread appropriation of his theory of alienation that, in its new ratiocinations, took a definitive turn toward the polemic as alienation

was put to direct use as an evaluative tool for critiquing various aspects of modern society.

Foremost in this regard was the work of Erich Fromm in *The Sane Society* (1955), which was one of the first works in English to explicitly draw upon the *Manuscripts of 1844* and thereby did much to popularize Marx's theory of alienation in the United States and beyond. Working within the self-styled "humanist" interpretation of Marx, Fromm's analysis relies heavily upon the idea that there exists an objective human nature that is composed of various essential attributes which, when curtailed by the person's social conditions, produce an experience of alienation that is unquestionably negative insofar as it denotes an experience of diminished human capabilities.

Another influential theorist during this era is the American sociologist Melvin Seeman, who, in his article "On the Meaning of Alienation" (1959), provides a point of contrast to Fromm both in his approach as well as long-term influence. Generally acknowledged as a seminal work of alienation theory in empirical sociology, Seeman's article provided the impetus to develop consistent and quantifiable models for alienation that ultimately rely upon a recasting of alienation as a predominately subjective, psychological phenomenon that, unlike Fromm, operates without a central normative aspect. Distinct from either of these two works, although closely situated to the same Marxian source, is Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960). Building upon his existentialist conception of alienation offered in *Being and Nothingness* (1943), the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* works to blend the Heideggerian-inspired ontological conception of alienation with the Marxist historical-material conception, and so Sartre's account exists as a kind of "third way" to the more common approaches represented by Fromm and Seeman. In the end, however, what will be seen is that rather than being indicators of alienation's diverse utility, these three accounts and their divergent perspectives are signs of

alienation theory's impending fragmentation and abandonment as seemingly insurmountable aporias amass around the various attempts to substantiate the concept of alienation.

Fromm and *The Sane Society*

While the second stage of alienation's development found its philosophical fountainhead in Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844*, that text was initially only made accessible to the English speaking world through the mediation of Erich Fromm. Foremost in this regard was Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1955),¹⁴ which built heavily on ideas gleaned directly from the *Manuscripts of 1844* and which accorded a central role to the concept of alienation in his analysis of contemporary society.¹⁵ Taking the perspective of a psychologist, Fromm's profession by training, the general approach of *The Sane Society* is one in which social arrangements and their concomitant behavioral expectations are analyzed through the schema of mental insanity.¹⁶ By means of this analogy, modern society is diagnosed as either sane or insane depending upon whether the particular arrangements of that society produce unresolved social pathologies, that is, whether the particular form that society takes contributes to its members developing social behaviors that are destructive to themselves and/or society as a whole. The ultimate conclusion of Fromm's evaluation is that in the 20th Century both Western capitalism and Soviet-style communism, the two dominant social systems at the time of his writing, have produced an era of

¹⁴ Another text of Fromm's that was influential for the popular reception of Marx's theory of alienation was his *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961), which included the first published English translation of selections from Marx's *Manuscripts of 1844*.

¹⁵ In Fromm's own words: "In the following analysis I have chosen the concept of alienation as the central point from which I am going to develop the analysis of the contemporary social character." Fromm, p. 107.

¹⁶ It is worth recalling at this point the extra-philosophical use of "alienation" considered in Chapter Three in which mental insanity was understood as being a kind of "mental alienation." Fromm harkens back to this traditional usage (Fromm 117), which just a generation before would still have been in regular usage in psychology, and in so doing he also gives this particular connotation of alienation new life as the idea of alienation as a "social sickness" becomes prevalent in the following decades.

humanity racked by deep and endemic pathologies, with alienation being the most pervasive and paramount problem experienced across societal forms. From this one can understand that Fromm's analysis will take the normatively negative aspects of alienation as being of central concern throughout his investigation.

The question of how it is possible for alienation to occur then delves deep into a paradoxical reality that sits at the heart of human experience. Unlike Marx, who associated the experience of alienation with the dynamic of wage workers being confronted by the product of their own labor as an alien power in the hands of capitalists, Fromm traces the experience of alienation to an even more fundamental reality: the subject-object relationship inherent in consciousness. A popular theme amongst the first generation of Critical Theorists,¹⁷ influenced by Lukács's privileged placement of the objective/subjective distinction in his appropriation of Marx, the basic idea is that when one phenomenologically considers a conscious experience, whether it be a sensation or cognition, etc., one can conceptually distinguish within it the subject of the experience—the one who is feeling or thinking—and the object of the experience—the thing being felt or thought about—all while being unable to completely isolate either pole completely from the other. Now early Critical Theorists generally accepted that this basic dichotomy exists as a universal feature of human consciousness but they argued that the precise shape that this relationship takes is historical in nature and so is therefore significantly influenced by one's culture and society. More specifically, early Critical Theorists argued that the trajectory of modernity is one in which consciousness comes to be shaped more and more by a tendency to

¹⁷ The anthology *Subject and Object: Frankfurt School Writings on Epistemology, Ontology, and Method* (2014) edited by Ruth Groff brings together a number of essays from the founders of the Frankfurt School that either directly or indirectly touch upon this theme. The title of the collection is itself taken from the essay by Adorno, "Subject and Object," that explores this theme explicitly and is included in the anthology.

assert both a greater independence from objective reality while also finding subjectivity bent towards exerting greater power and control over the objective pole.¹⁸ As a result, modernity at the most fundamental level is seen as indelibly colored by patterns of antagonism and domination that has a ripple effect through all aspects of modern life.

Fromm's own approach to this dynamic of consciousness leads him to see a unique objectifying tendency in modern consciousness, and he focuses in particular on how it manifests itself in a process of abstractification and quantification, that is, the tendency to see things only based upon their generalizable and empirically measurable features. While acknowledging that treating objects according to their generalizable features is a natural perspective that is crucial for the development of humanity,¹⁹ Fromm argues that modernity takes an exclusive preference for this mindset and in so doing ignores the equally important perspective that sees objects in all of their concrete particularity. While both perspectives, the abstract and the concrete, are needed to achieve "the full and productive relatedness to an object,"²⁰ regrettably the adoption of mass production by both capitalist and communist²¹ political systems has encouraged the widespread abandonment of this "full and productive relatedness to an object" in favor of the logic of abstractification and quantification that underlies assembly line manufacturing. The development and expansion of mass production becomes the key in this transformation of modern

¹⁸ The most prominent work from this period that argued this basic thesis is Max Horkheimer's treatment of instrumental reason in *The Critique of Instrumental Reason* (1967).

¹⁹ "An increasing ability to form abstractions is characteristic of the cultural development of the human race." Fromm (1955), p. 110.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²¹ Perhaps this specific point was more relevant when, at the time of Fromm's writing, he was dealing with the United States and the USSR, which were the two political entities that overwhelmingly determined the social systems adopted by countries throughout the entire globe. Nevertheless, its relevance is not lost when one thinks of the increasing influence of China and its communist system, even if there is reason for thinking that capitalism has effectively penetrated into all political systems today.

consciousness because its success in producing gains for one realm of society, namely the economy, enticed the adoption of its underlying objectifying perspective into other social realms where this perspective then becomes distortive of human experience.²²

In the end it is this expansion of abstractification beyond the economic realm that produces what Fromm identifies as alienation. Specifically, alienation is defined as “the fact that man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished "thing," dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance.”²³ By this Fromm means that the predominate objectifying perspective found in modernity has become so endemic that it shapes not only the view that people have of the external world but it has also become the fundamental stance that one takes even towards one’s own internal world, an idea that strongly echoes Lukács’s conceptualization of reification. Under this guise the individual no longer understands themselves as an active agent with particular desires, interests, hopes, etc., that is, in possession of his or her own existence, but instead the person only sees themselves in terms of an abstract social role with pre-given expectations and behaviors to which they must conform.²⁴ With this baseline analysis established, Fromm then works through an expansive litany of experiences that are proffered as instances of alienation, including more general experiences such as consumerism, bureaucratization, and routinization, as well as fairly specific situations such as taking snapshots while on vacation,²⁵ the popular

²² “This process of quantification and abstractification has transcended the realm of economic production, and spread to the attitude of man to things, to people, and to himself,” *ibid.*, p. 110.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

obsession with crime stories,²⁶ and walking only because it is an “investment” in one’s health instead of walking for its own sake.²⁷ As just one detailed example of how totalizing this self-alienation has become, Fromm points to its manifestation in even the most mundane of activities: eating one’s daily meal. In the case of food, instead of a person being interested in the concrete particularity of the food, that is, the sustenance it offers or the simple enjoyment of its flavor, which are the proper objects of one’s interest in food, the person instead is only interested in its abstract connotations such as the status that potentially accompanies its consumption.²⁸ To summarize Fromm’s analysis in one sentence, alienation is the quintessential experience at the root of practically everything and anything that happens in contemporary society.

While Fromm was singularly influential in helping alienation get its life in English-speaking discourse, it was also his particular interpretation of alienation that arguably most contributed to its eventual abandonment as a popular term. The basic problem arises directly from his central claim that modern society is marked by a pervasive and “almost total” alienation.²⁹ Without disputing his claim *per se*, the difficulty for his account is that if everyone is alienated everywhere at all times and in all that they do, it is not clear how much alienation is able to contribute as an analytic and critical term since it does little to help distinguish between cases.³⁰ The problem is that there is no clear brightline for distinguishing between cases of

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²⁸ “We eat bread which is tasteless and not nourishing because it appeals to our phantasy [sic] of wealth and distinction.” *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³⁰ Schacht makes the following point about Fromm: “By being used in so many different contexts, the term loses all specific conceptual content, and serves merely to suggest dissatisfaction” – which is of course selective as nonconformity is “good” while photos on vacation are “bad.” Schacht (1972), pp. 147-148

appropriate and beneficial abstractification, which Fromm acknowledges can and ought to happen, and those that produce alienation.³¹ Instead, the extreme specificity of some examples that Fromm provides, combined with overly broad generalizations employed in others, contribute to an impression that his analysis of alienation amounts to little more than an emotivist proclamation of disapproval for various phenomena of unclear association other than the author's distaste for them. Additionally, Fromm's approach to alienation is reliant on an essentialist account of human nature in which certain core or universal traits of human beings are taken for granted as providing the necessary analytic standard against which instances of alienation can be identified and critiqued.³² Beyond the most immediate issue that this has for Fromm's account in that essential standards are more so assumed than justified, this approach in general becomes increasingly suspect in succeeding generations because of the air of paternalism that it exudes in assuming and projecting these traits from a disengaged and timeless perspective rather than arising out of concrete experience. The end result is that whatever one's personal estimation is of Fromm's specific account, it is precisely these two issues that come to afflict alienation theory and which contributes to its widespread repudiation in subsequent decades.

When one approaches Fromm's account from the perspective of social ontology, the first thing worth noting is that they try to accomplish very similar goals when it comes to alienation theory. Much like the social ontological account, Fromm is attempting to provide a generalized

³¹ To give an example of this, just consider the instances of extreme body modification. On the one hand, Fromm would probably have seen them as examples where the individual has taken the perspective of extreme objectivity towards their own body where it is merely a tool or "canvas." The problem with this especially is the paternalistic stance this works from where their own individual subjective claims, which would argue that the body *is* just an object for the expression of subjectivity, and that those who argue a kind of inherent integrity or "sanctity" of the body that would askew these kinds of modifications is in fact the extreme objectifying view.

³² Or at least certainly a strongly paternalistic viewpoint, which is commonly associated with an essentialist viewpoint given how ready it is to proclaim certain circumstances, irrespective of the opinion of those involved, as being alienated.

account of alienation that can be situated in social circumstances broadly construed, and he does this by constructing a more formal account, much like the social ontological account, that tries to identify the conditions for the possibility of alienation rather than being primarily concerned with the concrete and empirical conditions themselves. Given this, the value of bringing these two accounts into relief with one another is moreso in highlighting the crucial points of divergence rather than using the social ontological account to help illuminate the underlying theory of Fromm's account as was the kind of approach taken with the earlier historical accounts. Further, as the accounts explored in this chapter are more contemporaneous to the social ontological account, it is perhaps more natural to see them as competing accounts that can function as foils rather than predecessors that can help to flesh out core intuitions.

Turning to the critique, it was already pointed out how Fromm's account struggles to provide a justifiable, and especially non-paternalistic, criterion for determining a situation as being one of alienation even if it does give a clear definition of what that should technically entail. Again, for Fromm alienation occurs when there is an over-emphasis on the objective pole of consciousness rather than maintaining "the full and productive relatedness to an object," which does at least have the value of providing a clear formula for identifying instances of alienation. But as was seen, in the actual application to particular cases one is left with the impression that Fromm sees cases of this more so in things he personally dislikes rather than due to some kind of justifiable reason. The social ontological account, on the other hand, not only has specific criterion for alienation, which is the exercise of a deontic power that undermines the collective recognition of the status function that the deontic power is associated with, this model also provides objective conditions for determining when alienation occurs and in a way that avoids paternalism because of how the individual's participation in the collective recognition of

the status function is what provides the context within which the alienation occurs and without which alienation could not occur. Secondary to this, there is also the concern that Fromm, in situating alienation in such an abstract category as the objective/subjective poles of consciousness, has perhaps gone too far on the levels of generalization to be able to deal meaningfully with a social phenomenon like alienation. Social ontology, on the other hand, is only one level of abstraction away from the social sciences in being directly aimed at explicating the conditions for the possibility of social phenomenon, which would be a subset of the purview of philosophy of consciousness from which Fromm's account more so operates. In the end, Fromm's approach is from the exact same theoretical direction as social ontology, and should be commended as such even if it falls short on the details.

Besides his large influence on the development of alienation theory due to his role in making the early works of Marx accessible, Fromm was also a trailblazer in reconceptualizing the idea of alienation in a way that extracted it from the confines of wage labor analysis found in Marx to a basis in which alienation's occurrence is more broadly situated within the conditions of society generally. One cannot overstate the importance that this approach had to alienation theory not only as it was actually developed by later theorists but also for alienation theory's future viability. On the one hand, during its golden age the idea that all aspects of society come to be shaped by alienation in the modern era becomes such a prominent idea in alienation theory that it is practically a foundational assumption for all who came to work in this conceptual space. Working from that starting point, the need for a theory of alienation that could encapsulate more scenarios that were less tenably linked to the economics became a crucial theoretical development for alienation theory's development, and Fromm's was a powerful early account in this regard. For the perspective of the social ontological account of alienation, Fromm's work

should be acknowledged for its attempt to accomplish what social ontology is ultimately successful at, namely, in providing a generalized account for alienation that does not get drowned in empirical minutiae by being a more formal approach. All the same, given the virtues of Fromm's approach, the reality is his work laid the groundwork for all three of the aporias that came to eventually undermine alienation theory over the subsequent decades.

Seeman and "On the Meaning of Alienation"

Melvin Seeman's 1959 article "On the Meaning of Alienation" was another influential approach to alienation during this period and his account stands as the paradigmatic example of alienation theory's development in empirical sociology. Although by the time Seeman wrote his article alienation was already well-established as an analytical point of interest for sociology,³³ and so his work was not foundational in that regard, the seminal contribution of his work was to provide a consistent methodological framework for dealing with the various understandings of alienation that were, and are, typically found in contemporary sociological literature. Eschewing the traditional position that tends to hold alienation as principally an objective condition of social relations, Seeman's approach is to recast alienation from a "distinctly social-psychological view" that conceives of alienation as a definitively subjective phenomenon.³⁴ When it comes to the objective/subjective divide, then, the approach that Seeman is representative of offers a radically different but not altogether disconnected way of understanding the nature of alienation from those that came before him.³⁵

³³ Seeman acknowledges as such, and while including the classical works of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, he has in mind most immediately his contemporaries in the field who were directly and explicitly investigating alienation in empirical sociology. Seeman (1959), p. 783.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 784.

³⁵ Seeman in his essay "Sentiments and Structures: Strategies for Research in Alienation" in *Alienation, Community, and Work* (1991), p. 20 furthers this argument by claiming that even Marx's purportedly "objective" account

In his treatment of alienation, Seeman identifies five varieties or connotations of alienation used by sociologists – alienation as powerlessness, as meaninglessness, as normlessness, as isolation, and as self-alienation³⁶ – and he endeavors to make them “more amenable to sharp empirical statements” by framing them in the terms of an individual’s expectations for future outcomes given their assumptions about particular states of affairs in society.³⁷ The rationale offered for this approach is based upon social learning theory,³⁸ which is a sociological theory that builds upon the simple stimulus-response models of classical behaviorism but includes elements of cognitive learning that also recognizes learned behavior through the observation of others. The basic idea is that if a person has appropriated socially-learned cues that certain rewards are associated with certain kinds of behavior, then if that person desires those rewards they will perform those behaviors. What this looks like for alienation theory is that there is a mismatch or shortfall of some kind between the expected rewards and the kind of behavior it takes to obtain those rewards. So, for example, in the case of alienation as powerlessness, alienation is measured as the individual’s expectancy that their actions will be unable to obtain their desired outcome when it comes to socio-political events,³⁹ while alienation as normlessness, as a further example, is taken to be a measure of the expectancy that socially

regularly made reference to subjective characterizations, such as when Marx argues that alienation is “a *feeling* of misery rather than well-being,” quoted from Fromm (1961), p. 98, italics added.

³⁶ Seeman’s later work adds a sixth connotation, that of cultural estrangement. Seeman, M. (1991). “Alienation and anomie.” In J. P. Robinson, P. R. Shaver, & L. S. Wrightsman (Eds.) *Measures of personality and social psychological attitudes* (pp. 291-371), New York: Academic Press.

³⁷ Seeman (1959), p. 783.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 784n6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 784-785.

unapproved behaviors are needed to obtain a desired outcome.⁴⁰ One is then able to measure the discrepancy as the mark of alienation and consider a scalar approach in which the degree of variance in the individual's expectations characterizes the extent of the alienation. Although Seeman does not include any extensive empirical analysis utilizing these characterizations in the article itself,⁴¹ the programmatic approach that he sets for these five connotations of alienation becomes deeply influential for how alienation theory develops in empirical sociology, especially as social learning theory and cognitive models move to greater prominence in the discipline.

Now there are several significant consequences for how alienation is to be understood in light of Seeman's re-grounding of alienation as a subjective phenomenon. Arguably the most commonly cited one is that the subjective shift in alienation theory makes it difficult if not outright impossible to deal with the problem of false consciousness. When subjective accounts of alienation are dependent upon the self-reports of individuals, the phenomenon of false consciousness is seen as uniquely problematic as it recognizes how social relations can be of such a nature that they warp the experiences a person has of themselves and their relationship with others and thus it calls into question the meaningfulness and value of empirical measures that come in the form of individual survey responses. Although not addressed in his original seminal article, Seeman in a later piece, "Sentiments and Structures: Strategies for Research in Alienation" (1991), briefly addresses this issue by arguing that subjective accounts can still be constructed without requiring that the subject be able to directly articulate their alienation.⁴² He explains how this is possible by utilizing an early study of his on African-American grade school

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 788.

⁴¹ He does, however, set out to apply his approach shortly thereafter, as seen in Seeman and Evans (1962) "Alienation and Learning in a Hospital Setting." *American Sociological Review* 27:772-82.

⁴² Seeman (1991), pp. 24-25.

students which showed that the students reported lighter skin tones to themselves and attached negative evaluations for those with darker skin tones, which to Seeman suggested reveal internalized stereotypes akin to false consciousness. As he argues it, there is nothing that leads one to believe that the students are doing this consciously, and yet their subjective reports are still able to capture the discrepancy in a way that points to an alienated situation. So even while acknowledging that most empirical studies of alienation do in fact rely upon direct measures of an individual's subjectively reported attitudes, and so would potentially be subject to the charge of being unable to account for false consciousness, he argues that this is far from a foregone conclusion.⁴³

An additional ramification of Seeman's overall approach is that by deliberately bracketing "the standpoint of the objective conditions in society"⁴⁴ and shifting the ontological criteria for alienation to the subjectively reported beliefs of individuals, one is presumably able to produce a concept of alienation which easily avoids the paternalistic leanings often found in alienation's classical instantiations.⁴⁵ For methodological reasons this also has the simple advantage for empirical approaches in that the criteria for identifying situations of alienation will be relatively straightforward since the direct responses of individuals will be sufficient for collecting the relevant data. Comparing that to classical objectivistic approaches to alienation, which tend to exclusively rely upon evidence that is anecdotal or hermeneutical in nature,⁴⁶ it is

⁴³ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁴ Seeman (1959), p. 784.

⁴⁵ As he states it in Seeman (1991), unlike the subjectivistic accounts that take as its cue the internal status of an individual, objectivistic accounts requires that the "analyst arrogates for himself a remarkably privileged position as the judge of human nature, of society, and even of the person." P. 20.

⁴⁶ Consider especially Fromm in *The Sane Society*, in which all of the examples that he cites as examples of alienation are anecdotal and all but devoid of quantified analysis.

clear how Seeman's approach would appeal to those who would seek a more consistently measurable characterization for alienation. Related to the shift in emphasis on empirical measures is the fact that taking alienation as a subjective phenomenon would also eliminate, or at least significantly sideline, the polemic and evaluative dimensions that were seen as intrinsic to alienation's most popular formulations. While it is certainly possible to construct a subjective account of alienation that has an evaluative dimension to it,⁴⁷ Seeman distances his account from such a formulation by arguing that the empirical focus should be exclusively on an individual's expectation of congruency between behaviors and outcomes and not on the *evaluation* that the individual has of the concurrence or divergence of those behaviors and outcomes.⁴⁸ The normative question is then secondary to the primary empirical question of a person's behavioral expectations. Part of the motivation for this shift in focus is undoubtedly the desire to avoid the kind of essentialist and paternalistic assumptions about human nature that come to be seen as a hallmark of Marxist normative alienation theory, although the justification Seeman explicitly offers in this article is methodological and not necessarily ideological.⁴⁹ All the same, Seeman does acknowledge the importance of the value-laden usage of alienation, especially in its Marxian origins, but in the end he argues that the social-psychological approach he offers is able

⁴⁷ Seeman (1991), p. 26, offers a brief outline of what such a subjective-critical account might look like through his interpretation of his own study on powerlessness and its effect on health in Seeman and Seeman "Alienation and Personal Autonomy: A Longitudinal Study of the Sense of Control in Illness" (1983).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 784.

⁴⁹ Nevertheless, later treatments by Seeman do thematize the justification for alienation as a subjective phenomenon for exactly the reason of distancing it from contemporary Marxist approaches. See Seeman (1991) "Sentiments and Structures: Strategies for Research in Alienation," p. 21.

to contribute a necessary psychological dimension that can and should exist in tandem to any external and evaluative judgment of society derived from objective accounts of alienation.⁵⁰

When these points are revisited from the perspective of a critical appraisal of Seeman's work, the two main upshots end up becoming central challenges to the viability of his project. The primary concern raised even by some in his own discipline of sociology is that subjective approaches avoid providing a structural analysis of society that is otherwise necessary for any account of alienation.⁵¹ Seeman at least partially addresses this issue by arguing that it is not that his subjective account ignores the objective features of society but rather the conditions of society are something that must be controlled for "as the research question demand," such as when one needs to determine "the degree of realism involved in the individual's response to his situation."⁵² Of course such a characterization shows that his transformation of alienation simply moves the problem rather than addresses it, but the more substantial difficulty for his account is that by bracketing the social context it removes the very grounds for determining when an experience can be considered as alienating in the first place.⁵³ By focusing only on the discrepancy between expectations and behavioral outcomes, one must already have assumed

⁵⁰ Seeman (1959), p. 785.

⁵¹ See especially Mayhew (1980 and 1981) "Structuralism versus Individualism," Part One and Two.

⁵² Seeman (1959), p. 784.

⁵³ To consider a more extended example, consider the following. Seeman defines the empirical sociological concept of alienation as normlessness as a measure of the expectancy that socially unapproved behaviors are needed to obtain a desired outcome. If I wanted an acquaintance of mine to go to the mall with me, and I knew that this acquaintance was a person that regularly backed out of social engagements, I could consider telling them that their favorite band is putting on a flash concert in order to get them to go to the mall so that I might just so happen to bump into them. Now according to Seeman's model, it would seem that I find myself as being alienated. I need to engage in social unapproved behaviors, namely deceit, in order to attain my desired outcome. According to this definition, I would have to say that this is a situation of alienation, however much it might seem that this is a rather trivial example. Now it might be true to say it is alienating, such as perhaps would be the case if this was found to be a widespread phenomenon because certain social groups find their peers as a challenge to plan social outings with, but doing so would put us in the same predicament as we found with Fromm where *everything* would have to be seen as alienating, or at least every situation where we had to act in socially undesirable ways to attain our goals.

what expectations and behavioral outcomes are relevant. For example, when he considers alienation as powerlessness, without the social context directly bearing on the characterization it is not clear what precisely makes this an experience of powerlessness *as alienation* rather than just an experience of powerlessness per se. If one takes it that powerlessness is alienating, however reasonable of an assumption that would seemingly be, it begs the question of what exactly the terminology of alienation adds when otherwise the focus is exclusively on characterizing experiences of powerlessness. In summary, the subjectivistic account of alienation does more to hide the purported heavy hand of the paternalistic analyst rather than truly clarify and isolate it.

The problem of alienation being stripped of its social context also bears on the issue of alienation's normativity given that in traditional accounts of alienation it is because there is a lack of a relationship that *ought* to exist that a person is said to be alienated. Without the normative and societal-structural element, there is no way to distinguish between, for example, the powerlessness one feels with regard to one's own political system and the powerlessness one feels with regard to a completely foreign political system. The subjective measures of the sociological approach could potentially pick up similar results in both cases, and so again one either must conclude that alienation adds nothing beyond it being characterized as powerlessness, normlessness, etc. or else it requires a predetermined understanding of what "actually" counts as a person's social context, which then reintroduces the question of what grounds such judgment. The problem again is that without a normative dimension, it is not even clear why alienation matters since there are untold plethora of experiences a person may have wherein there is a discrepancy between what they thought would occur as a result of their

behavior and what actually does occur. In the end, it would seem that more is thrown out than fully realized when it comes to bracketing alienation's normative and objective dimensions.

The value of bringing the social ontological account of alienation to bear on the approach set out by Seeman is that it can provide the necessary conceptual ground for clearly and consistently identifying those conditions of alienation that would ground the empirical investigation. On the most general level, both the social-psychological approach of Seeman and the social ontological account see alienation as a kind of performative contradiction where there is a disconnect between the expectations for behavior and the actions actually taken. While the social ontological account is aimed at identifying the social forms that create the *context* within which alienation can arise, the social-psychological approach is trying to directly measure the *degree* of disjunct between expectations and reality as experienced by those in the social situation. There is no way to see these approaches as being fundamentally opposed unless one needlessly insists that one or the other fully delineates any and everything that can be said about alienation; said another way, one can only conclude that they are opposing approaches if one predetermined being as such. However much one may try to dismiss the psychological focus espoused by Seeman as somehow missing the point of alienation theory, it is impossible to deny the internal consistency of the approach and, most importantly, the value of a developed and granular empirical approach to the subjective dimensions of alienation even if it must be realized that that subjective approach can only gain its significance within the kind of context that the social ontological account of alienation provides. It is better to see the social-psychological approach as being incomplete rather than mistaken, and from this perspective it can be seen as an important extension of the conceptual work initially accomplished by the social ontological account. Again the problem with the social-psychological approach is that much of the hard

work of appropriately identifying potential circumstances of alienation has already been done by the empirical researcher largely outside of view, and in that case it is more so assumed than justified. One starts as it were *in medias res*. Once one has appropriately identified the context within which to investigate then the project is consistent, but without an extensively justified context it is unmoored and open to counter examples that would undermine its insights by bringing into question its conceptual framework. That weakness is something that can ultimately be shored up by using the conceptual apparatus of the social ontological account to justifiably and rigorously establish the appropriate scope within which to direct the empirical investigation.

As the usage of alienation as a normative term came to wane in popularity, alienation theory largely retreated into the exclusive domain of academic sociology where Seeman's contributions had a significant impact in creating the space for alienation theory to continue developing. Seeman's turn to social learning theory to account for the loss of congruency between a person's expectations and the actual results of their behavior, which, though paradoxical given the fact that a person would not deliberately engage in an action if they did not think it would have the effect that was intended, nevertheless is treated as lacking any normative connotation. Unfortunately, however, the cost for fortifying alienation as an exclusively empirical sociological endeavor does as much to fragment alienation as any other movements at the time; stripped of its normative and societal dimension, it is not clear how a concept like alienation could be meaningful without presuming more than it proves. Looking at the five connotations of alienation that Seeman attempts to systematize, it is not obvious how, for example, his definition of powerlessness is specifically an experience of alienation and not just a measure for the feeling of powerlessness *simpliciter*. Further, the avoidance rather than the resolution of the fundamental aporias of alienation theory simply kicked the can of major issues

down the road. In spite of the support this approach was able to give to an extant and sustained movement of empirical sociologists focused on alienation theory, it is undeniable that the fundamental approach taken lacked the substance necessary to revive it as a key term in social analysis as its narrow focus undermined this possibility.

Sartre and *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*

Jean-Paul Sartre, the quintessential existentialist philosopher, took up alienation as an analytic starting point for deeper reflection throughout his philosophical career. By considering alienation from the perspective of existentialism, which brings together an empirically-oriented phenomenological sensitivity coupled with a normative inclination, Sartre's approach is in many ways able to mediate the two extremes represented by Fromm and Seeman. In his philosophical magnum opus *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Sartre follows closely Heidegger's characterization of alienation as an ontological structure of human experience, though in Sartre's case it singles out more strongly the role of alterity in producing alienation. The scenario that Sartre relies upon for his analysis is when a person, peering through a keyhole, experiences the feeling of shame in being caught.⁵⁴ Within the text his analysis had up until this point focused on the perspective of the person who finds their own conscious experiences shaped exclusively by the possible projects and compartments that they themselves take with regard to the world wherein everything is perceived as meaningful exclusively in relationship to those projects and compartments. From this perspective, the being of the subject is marked by an infinite range of possibilities while the being of the object is constrained to its potential role in the projects of the subject. To this person who is fully absorbed in their own practical concerns, which is what happens when a person bends to peer through a keyhole to see what has made a noise in the

⁵⁴ Sartre (1992 [1943]), pp. 347-358.

hallway, the person in the hallway, that is, “the Other,” only appears as an object and not as a subject. However, in being spotted by “the Other” while peering through the keyhole, the subject is confronted by the perspective of “the Other” who likewise sees other people only as objects in relation to their own projects. Now the person, who initially saw themselves exclusively as a “free project of my possibilities,”⁵⁵ internalizes the look of the Other that sees them as an object and so finds in “the Other’s look [...] the solidification and alienation of my own possibilities.”⁵⁶ In short, the person no longer has the simple self-understanding of being a person engaging in a project that is independently set upon; instead, they understand themselves as a “peeper,” that is, as someone who is seen and categorized as a person who peers through keyholes at others rather than as a subject with extended possibilities for action. Alienation for Sartre in this case is then the experience of the sudden encroachment of “the Other” on the boundless freedom of one’s subjectivity whereby one comes to see oneself for the first time as a possible object to be used by others.

In Sartre’s later work, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), the main thread of the analysis found in *Being and Nothingness* is continued albeit with a slight transformation in that the *Critique* reflects Sartre’s attempt to re-appropriate Marxism through existentialist categories. This time the alienating look of the other is grounded in material scarcity that forces competition between one’s own projects and those of other people.⁵⁷ Due to the fact that only so many human projects can be achieved with the same limited materials, people conform to the expectations and projections of others in the attempt to maximize the possibility of their own projects, but in doing

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 348.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 352.

⁵⁷ Sartre (1960), pp. 123-124.

so they also internalize an alien will contrary to their own. Sartre's example of this is where people alter their behavior when traveling by public bus in order to avoid a crowd; although they are orientated towards the same goal, namely, travel, their experience of that goal is of separation and ultimately domination insofar as individuals alter their own behavior in light of the expected behavior of others, such as by showing up early, taking a different bus line, etc..⁵⁸ Alterity is once again the focal point for alienation in Sartre's account, though in this reading it is not an ineluctable feature of subjectivity per se but instead it is rather the result of the material conditions that influence and shape subjectivity, which works to give alienation a historical dimension that was absent in his earlier ontological conception.

One unique consequence of this newly added historical dimension is that due to the fact that the conditions for alienation are contingent realities, it means that it is at least in principle possible to overcome alienation, which was something that was categorically excluded in the purely existentialist conception presented in *Being and Nothingness*. That having been said, while Sartre's account of alienation in the *Critique* opens up the possibility for non-alienating social relationships, the conditions that would satisfy this are recognized as being exceptionally narrow. In fact, from the perspective of the overall analysis, it is clear that Sartre has an extremely pessimistic take on the likelihood of a person being able to avoid alienation, and even if they are, he would hardly think it to be a situation that will last given that alienation is presented as the inevitable outcome of societal development that comes in the form of functional differentiation in capitalist production. To be more specific, alienation is brought about by an individual internalizing the projects, and thereby the will, of another, and this occurs in such a way that the person becomes responsive to the project and not the other person themselves. The

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 259-260.

institutionalization of societal relationships of this kind would then be necessarily alienating as it can only be brought about by the formalization of the common unity amongst the members as a coincidental alignment of self-interest in the continued existence of their common project and not because there is a fundamental unity between persons. What this means is that the members of that society will only be responding to the disembodied norms that they all commit themselves to, what Sartre calls “the pledge,” and not the concrete existence of each other, and thus what was initially the product of dynamic and deliberate social actions has now become a status quo arrangement motivated mostly by inertia, what Sartre terms the “pratico-inert.”⁵⁹ Non-alienating social relations, or the “group praxis” of “fused groups” as Sartre calls them,⁶⁰ are only possible in decentralized and impromptu social relationships where multiple individuals are able to spontaneously orient themselves to the same goal, for the same purposes, at the same time, and in all other relevant respects. In other words, the only time alienation is able to be overcome is when the other ceases to be an Other and instead essentially becomes formally identical to but materially distinct from oneself as the intentions of everyone align themselves with one another.⁶¹

Sartre’s conception of alienation in the *Critique* is a unique contribution to the development of alienation theory as it was a deliberate attempt to bring together the insights of Heideggerian phenomenology and existentialism with the social and historical analysis of Marx. Sartre’s account casts alienation as the loss of subjectivity’s unbridled freedom to constitute itself, which occurs paradoxically as a result of subjectivity’s encounter with other subjectivities,

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 419.

⁶⁰ For his full discussion of this idea, see: Ibid., pp. 345-404.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 446.

and this has the unquestioned normative implication summarized in Sartre's well-known dictum, "hell is other people." Nevertheless, Sartre's approach is particularly insightful insofar as it enables alienation theory a way to conceptualize how it can be ontologically grounded in human experience writ large but in a way that also allows for an historical analysis that accounts for contingent empirical realities. Still, in many respects Sartre's analysis remains unchanged from its earlier iteration in *Being and Nothingness* insofar as his characterization of alienation points to a near totalized experience, and not, as it is for Fromm, just in modern capitalist society. For Sartre, any trace of other people acting in such a way that they do not align with one's own self-chosen goals and actions is a potential moment of alienation, and even when groups of people do manage to spontaneously find themselves identically aligned, he takes it that human groups will always end up institutionalized in a way that reproduces alienation by curbing individual freedom.⁶² Sartre sees any curb to one's unfettered subjectivity that would come about by internalizing the perspective of the other as necessarily alienating and so dismisses a point that was key to Hegel's account, which is that de-alienation is an act of reconciliation between one's individuality and one's sociality where the individual must "alienate" a part of themselves in order to be recognized by others. In Sartre's picture, alienation just is alterity, and there is no way to meaningfully distinguish between situations that are normatively concerning as distortions to one's self-articulation and those that come as a result of simply not being able to do whatever it is that we want to do. Sartre's concept of alienation is then a step towards capturing the logical underpinnings of alienation in a way that includes both its ontological and historical dynamics but ultimately it does so in a way that is unable to function normatively because of its inability to distinguish between alterity and alienation.

⁶² See Sartre (1960), section VI. "The Institution" for his full discussion of this idea.

Turning now to a comparison of the social ontological account of alienation and the one provided by Sartre, it is once again interesting to note the strong parallels between the two even if they come from decidedly different directions. Sartre's analysis, much like Searle's, is concerned with conceptualizing how individuals come together in order to form a collective or group, but while Searle approaches it from the perspective of formal logical categories Sartre approaches it from an existentialist perspective. The differences between the two then largely occur as a result of this difference in approach. Because Searle is only concerned with the underlying logical form, his analysis of collective intentionality is essentially the same whether he is talking about a small, intimate, and egalitarian activity like working together to jump start a car or he is analyzing a large and impersonal system like the mortgage industry. Sartre, on the other hand, is informed by his existentialist leanings to see these two situations as dramatically different realities in spite of any similarities one might draw exactly because the experience that individuals have in these two social circumstances are so profoundly different. The starting point for Sartre is an individual and their various life projects through which they comport themselves to the world, and the analytic concern is how sets of individuals bring their various projects into harmony with others in the formation of groups. When the size of the group is small, such as when two people are trying to jump start a car, Sartre takes it that it is possible for the separate projects of the two individuals to be harmonized spontaneously given the relative simplicity of the situation.⁶³ With larger groups, on the other hand, which tend to be more impersonal and institutionalized, Sartre sees a harmonization of wills as possible only when one or more of those

⁶³ To further elucidate the point, think of a person coming to the aid of another person who finds themselves struggling with a physical burden. The individual who was walking by finds themselves coming to the aid of the burdened individual in a way that is essentially spontaneous. The burdened individual did not need to formalize their need for help, and the helper found themselves acting without needing to reflect upon their actions. It is this kind of spontaneous harmonization that Sartre is getting at with his idea of fused group praxis.

involved have to sacrifice their individual projects in order to conform to that of the group.⁶⁴ In short, there is no harmonization but rather only domination. It is the establishment of the pledge, which has parallels to Searle's idea of collective recognition, and its production of the practico-inert, which has parallels to Searle's ideas of status functions and their concomitant deontic powers, that then characterizes Sartre's analysis of large groups.

The problem with Sartre's account, however, is that he draws categorical conclusions from incidental occurrences, which has profound implications for understanding alienation. There is no denying that Sartre's analysis is correct in arguing that status functions can become ossified in a way that is more so oppressive than empowering, which is how Searle's more optimistic analysis tends to regard them. The problem is that Sartre takes this belief more as a foregone conclusion, which however probable as a general estimation of things is still beyond the data itself. Even if large-scale social situations have a tendency towards "the practico-inert," there is nothing that requires that this be so. In fact, the conclusion of Hegel's project started in the *Phenomenology* is exactly aimed at finding a way to see how the individual can be reconciled to the group in a way that does not require a suppression of their individuality. It is hard to avoid the belief that Sartre's rather pessimistic conclusions regarding group formation largely comes from his own preferences rather than an intrinsic reality. When this comes to alienation, Sartre's analysis might be right in warning of the strong tendency for social relations to devolve in a way that becomes oppressive and alienating to the individuals involved. However, it goes beyond what can be rigorously defended to say that only the smallest and most spontaneous groupings are able to escape the clutches of alienation. Ultimately Searle is right in identifying the

⁶⁴ While generally this distinction comes as a result of group size, it is important to see that these kinds of dynamics can in principle occur in small group settings as well.

tremendous power that status functions accrue to humanity even if one must always be vigilant against the asymmetrical accumulation of said power.

Sartre's theory of alienation is a powerful but mostly neglected account when it comes to the broader development of alienation theory. Perhaps due to his idiosyncratic views or simply due to the waning popularity of existential approaches, Sartre's account just never quite received the attention that the other major theorists in this era did. Nonetheless, when viewing his work from the lens of social ontology one can see in his account many crucial ideas that anticipated major conceptual features of Searle's social ontology, even if there is no concrete link leading from one to the other. Sartre's ideas of the pledge and the practico-inert, though tinged heavily by his more cynical leanings, nevertheless align strongly with Searle's ideas of collective recognition and status function. In short, the primary concerns with Sartre's account of alienation is less about substantial failings in his analysis itself and more so in his inability to see beyond his strongly individualistic leanings to consider how large social groups can potentially form in ways that are non-alienating even when formalized and institutionalized.

Conclusion

The second phase of alienation theory's philosophical development is significant if for no other reason that there was a tremendous amount of scholarship dedicated to the topic, of which only three paradigmatic examples were considered here. In that mass of works, alienation theory was pushed to its logical limits and explored from a vast array of perspectives in a way that advanced the concept well beyond what may have appeared possible in its earlier stages. Of course, as has already been noted numerous times, this phase of alienation theory also saw its all but total abandonment as a term of worth for social analysis and critique. Now, given the fact that the idea was pursued so extensively, it might seem that the most reasonable conclusion to

draw is that the idea was tried and ultimately found wanting. While this is undoubtedly persuasive, there is also reason to see this perspective as mistaken. The truth of it comes in recognizing that the particular way that alienation was substantiated had deep flaws, whether that was Fromm's overgeneralized and ambiguous usage, empirical sociology's consistent but overly narrow and vacuous designations, or Sartre's failure to distinguish alterity from alienation. However, despite these major issues, there was also much progress made, for example, in firmly establishing alienation as an element of human sociality in general rather than merely as a narrow economic term, or in how the multifaceted nature of alienation was brought into greater focus with its objective and subjective aspects. From here the next step is to see exactly why alienation theory was abandoned by turning to its specific reception within the school of Critical Theory, which heretofore had been where the most significant philosophical developments of alienation theory had occurred. The next stage of this chapter then turns to the dominant figure of second wave Critical Theory, Jürgen Habermas, before finally being able to see how alienation might be revitalized by turning to the third wave of Critical Theory with the work of Rahel Jaeggi.

CHAPTER SIX

ALIENATION IN SECOND AND THIRD WAVE CRITICAL THEORY

Chapter Overview

After initially being taken as an essential concept by those aligned with the school of Critical Theory, alienation began to be viewed with greater skepticism as the term became more popular. While theorists such as Adorno were already decrying the terms excessive usage shortly after the time of Fromm's release of *The Sane Society*,¹ it nevertheless continued to see popularity largely due to the works of critical theorists. Still, with the advent of so-called second wave Critical Theory, which is broadly and generally marked by the works of Jürgen Habermas, one sees a definitive repudiation of alienation that is mirrored in the term's wider reception. In this regard, the key work of Habermas is his *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), especially volume two on lifeworld and system, wherein he introduces the idea of the colonization of the lifeworld that in many ways conceptually supplants the role of Marx's theory of alienation in a critical analysis of modern society. While Habermas will ultimately reject the concept of alienation, at least as it is explicitly formulated in Marx, it is important to understand why he does so as the analysis that he offers is representative of a general trend in Critical Theory away from essentialism and towards proceduralist interpretations of key sociological terms. In this regard, the so-called third wave of Critical Theorists, most prominently represented

¹ Quotation presented in footnote 3 of Chapter One.

by Axel Honneth,² turned to a proceduralist framework as a way to ground a renaissance of many of the key terms that guided early Critical Theory so as to unleash what is believed to be their critical potency from problematic foundations and assumptions. When it comes to alienation, Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation* (2014) is a watershed work that has unquestionably done more to revitalize alienation theory after its widespread abandonment than any other work. The centerpiece of her approach is an anthropological model that understands alienation as a disruption of the process of self-realizing activity. This procedural approach is intended to avoid the charges of paternalism and perfectionism that have otherwise plagued alienation theory in its traditional formulations. While the end result is that one does find alienation slowly working its way back into the popular lexicon, especially as it is used to address issues of societal acceleration and processes of globalization, the term remains far from enjoying the same level of popularity it once had.

Habermas and *The Theory of Communicative Action*

Jürgen Habermas's two-volume *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) was a watershed moment in the development of Critical Theory as it marked a radical reorientation in the understanding of modern society from what was generally presumed by theorists in first wave Critical Theory. The central key to Habermas's approach is his reconstruction of the concept of reason that has been seen as foundational to understanding the unique dynamics of society since the onset of modernity.³ While reason had been predominately understood in social

² The most representative work of this approach is found in Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (2008).

³ Habermas is inspired in his approach by his engagement with Max Weber's theory of societal rationalization which holds that the process of modernization in the West is marked by an increased reliance on the principle of reason. Ibid., Volume I Section II, "Max Weber's Theory of Rationalization," pp. 143-216.

theory as the individualistic and subjectivistic form of means/end purposive rationality,⁴ Habermas's wishes to expand the purview for conceptualizing reason to include an understanding of reason as a social and intersubjective phenomenon that it is oriented towards mutual understanding between interlocutors grounded in a shared social world,⁵ which he terms communicative rationality.⁶ While a full exposition of the stand alone theory of communicative reason lies outside of the immediate focus of this dissertation, the crucial upshot for the purposes here is in how Habermas uses it to construct a two-level or dual perspective theory of society split between system and lifeworld. In this model, the system is understood as the organizational structure of the various components of a society operating according to rational purposive action that is typically captured by an external perspective while the lifeworld is the communicatively-based and shared world of meaning for members of a society that is typically found in the internal perspective of participants. The two-level model of society as system and lifeworld is then what will sensitize Habermas to the unique pathologies of modern society and lead him to revisit key critical terms such as reification and alienation in order to explore the possibility of reinvigorating their potency.

The most important advantage of the two-level model of society, according to Habermas, is that it is best suited for analytically distinguishing between two divergent developments in

⁴ At other times Habermas also refers to this as the cognitive-instrumental understanding of reason. See Vol I, p. 10.

⁵ Ibid., p. 303. "Weber studies the rationalization of action systems only under the aspect of purposive rationality. If [...] we want to arrive at a more adequate description and explanation of the pathologies of modernity, we shall have to deploy a more complex concept of rationality that enables us to delineate the scope for modernizing society opened up by the rationalization of worldviews in the West."

⁶ Vol I, p. 10. "This concept of communicative rationality carries with it connotations based ultimately on the central experience of the unconstrained, unifying, and consensus-bringing force of argumentative speech, in which different participants overcome their merely subjective views and, owing to the mutuality of rationally motivated conviction, assure themselves of both the unity of the objective world and the intersubjectivity of their lifeworld."

modern society – that of the structural differentiation of functional roles and that of the increased need for processes of societal integration.⁷ The paradox of modern society is that there is simultaneously a greater need for the coordination of human activity due to the increased differentiation of societal functions a la the “division of labor” and a dearth of sufficient means for societal integration that can overcome the eroding effect that functional differentiation has had on traditional forms of life that heretofore have coordinated human actions. While more often than not the conclusion that is drawn in light of this state of affairs is a pessimistic one that sees the internal tension inevitably leading to a permanent rupture,⁸ Habermas is cautiously optimistic that there remains the possibility for authentic activity by individuals despite the growing power of autonomous systems over and against modes of societal integration grounded in the lifeworld. First off, Habermas does not see systems differentiation as a purely negative phenomenon but rather one that can bring with it certain advantages for societal functioning.⁹ The most important outcome of increased systems differentiation is the expanded capacity for fulfilling the needs of society’s material reproduction, which is accomplished through the coordination of action consequences by means of the steering media of money and power.¹⁰ Ideally, with systems functioning in their appropriate sphere, the system provides for society’s material basis, thus making it possible for the linguistically constituted lifeworld to operate

⁷ Habermas is motivated in this idea by his engagement with Émile Durkheim. Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 113-118.

⁸ Durkheim’s “anomie” and Weber’s “iron cage” are the most well-known examples of this, but Horkheimer and Adorno’s analysis of instrumental reason in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) came to a similarly pessimistic conclusion.

⁹ Habermas makes this point, for example, when critiquing Marx: “[Marx] excludes from the start the question of whether the systemic interconnection of the capitalist economy and the modern state administration do not also represent a higher evolutionarily advantageous level of integration by comparison to traditional societies. Marx conceives of capitalist society so strongly as a totality that he fails to recognize the intrinsic evolutionary value that media-steered subsystems possess.” Ibid., Vol II, p. 339.

¹⁰ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 267-273

according to its own internal logic of communicative reason, which in turn makes it possible for the lifeworld to accomplish its socially integrating effects. Taken together, the system and lifeworld are meant to be mutually supportive of one another with a robust lifeworld grounding and legitimating the material maintenance provided by systems.

Nevertheless, despite the cautious optimism, Habermas is deeply worried about how the steering media of money and power are readily able to undermine the communicatively grounded lifeworld through what he terms “the colonization of the lifeworld.”¹¹ Habermas argues that divergent developments in the system and the lifeworld arise specifically because they operate according to divergent principles of societal integration with the lifeworld reliant on the linguistic medium of communicative rationality and the system reliant on the “de-linguistified steering media” of money and power.¹² Since both the system and the lifeworld operate according to mutually exclusive principles of integration, it is possible for them to enter into competition with one another in a way that becomes problematic when the steering media of the system comes to co-opt the communicative proceedings of the lifeworld.¹³ Habermas situates his analysis of how this conflict can arise in a historical account that traces the development of the modern welfare state that expands the system imperatives into the lifeworld at the same time that increased rationalization of the lifeworld has undermined the ability for participants to

¹¹ Ibid. Vol. II, p. 196.

¹² Ibid., Vol. I, p. 342. “Thus there is a competition not between the types of action oriented to understanding and to success, but between principles of societal integration – between the mechanisms of linguistic communication that is oriented to validity claims – a mechanism that emerges in increasing purity from the rationalization of the lifeworld – and those de-linguistified steering media through which systems of success-oriented action are differentiated out.”

¹³ Habermas recognizes a conceptual priority to communicatively rationality such that in theory it would be able to coordinate the processes of the system, and so his concern is with the impact of the system on the lifeworld: “This latter model of the lifeworld would be adequate for human societies only if that process of semanticization absorbed all natural meanings – that is, if all systemic interconnections in which interactions stand were brought into the horizon of the lifeworld and thereby into the intuitive knowledge of participants.” Ibid., Vol II, p. 118.

articulate a shared horizon that can produce societal integration.¹⁴ When the communicative medium by which the lifeworld operates is rendered ineffective, such as what happens in the historical process by which former religiously-grounded modes of consensus building were rendered suspect by rationalization, then it makes it possible for the steering media of the system to supplant the lifeworld's integrating powers.¹⁵ The expansion of the welfare state also has this effect as it diffuses the tensions of class conflict by staving off the negative impacts of the capitalist economic system through monetary transfers, thus circumventing a legitimation crisis in the system's operation, but at the cost of undermining the communicatively based lifeworld.¹⁶ The end result is a decoupled system and lifeworld that no longer works symbiotically but rather has transformed into a parasite-host relationship that finds the system needing to continually exploit the lifeworld in an ever expanding and increasing manner so as to maintain its own functioning.

The most important aspect of Habermas's grand project for the purposes of this dissertation is internal to his exposition of the theory of the colonization of the lifeworld wherein Habermas engages with competitive concepts for treating the pathologies of modernity in order to evaluate their viability – reification and alienation foremost amongst them. With regard to the concept of reification as forwarded by Lukács, Habermas sees it as problematically tied to the philosophy of consciousness that also influenced the understanding of reason as purposive

¹⁴ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 354-355.

¹⁵ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 355. “[When] Everyday consciousness sees itself thrown back on traditions whose claims to validity have already been suspended [...] The imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way into the lifeworld from the outside – like colonial masters coming into a tribal society – and force a process of assimilation upon it.”

¹⁶ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 347-348

rationality.¹⁷ In its place, Habermas wishes to recast the basic intuition of reification from the philosophy of consciousness to his theory of communicative action and thereby ground the normative content of reification in his two-level theory of society by way of his thesis of the colonization of the lifeworld.¹⁸ What this garners is a historical and empirical dimension to the normative source of reification's critical content by grounding it imminently in the stages of societal rationalization that inform his two-level theory. Besides reification, Habermas also revisits Marx's theory of alienation as a part of his concluding chapter that looks to situate his theory of communicative action in the wider context of critical theory's history. Despite the fact that Marx's theory of alienation is only treated in a single section of the concluding chapter of the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1981),¹⁹ and in the end it is dismissed as a concept rife with problems, Habermas's overall project demonstrates the same concern with the contradictions in capitalist society that motivated Marx's analysis of alienation.²⁰ Nevertheless, Habermas approaches Marx's concept of alienation from multiple directions and at each point he finds the idea untenable. The main issue that Habermas has with alienation stems from his own analysis that there needs to be a clear delineation between stages

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 355-365.

¹⁸ Ibid., Vol. II, p. 355. "The theory of late-capitalist reification, reformulated in terms of system and lifeworld, has to be supplemented by an analysis of cultural modernity, which replaces the now superseded theory of consciousness."

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 338-343.

²⁰ Habermas (1981), p. xl, identifies three principal interests in his project: 1) a theory of communicative rationality, 2) a sociological model that harmonizes the lifeworld and system paradigms, and 3) a critical theory of modern social pathologies. As someone unquestionably motivated by Marx's dictum that the role of the philosopher goes beyond merely trying to understand the world (as Habermas confesses in his Preface, p. xxxix, "The more I sought to satisfy the explicative claims of the philosopher, the further I moved from the interests of the sociologist, who has to ask what purpose such conceptual analysis should serve."), it seems to be warranted to conclude that his ultimate interest is the third point as the productive employment for the first two points.

of systems differentiation and the progressive rationalization of the lifeworld.²¹ Although he acknowledges that the disruption of the traditional lifeworld for those that were subsumed into the working class of early capitalism is experienced at the same time as the increased differentiation within the economic system that produces said working class, Habermas argues that Marx is unable to distinguish between the way that the rupture comes as a result of the rationalization of the lifeworld and the way that it was caused by the detrimental effects that can arise out of systems differentiation.²² What is more, Habermas argues that Marx's failure to account for the distinction between systems differentiation and lifeworld rationalization also means that he is only able to identify a single dimension of alienation, the exploitation of wage workers by capitalists, instead of the multi-dimensional analysis that Habermas's system-lifeworld model provides.²³ In the end, Habermas holds that Marx's analysis is only able to hypostatize manifestations from a transitional period in the increased differentiation of modern capitalism into elements that supposedly hold true for modern society in general.²⁴

Regarding the theoretical content of alienation directly, Habermas considers two different instantiations of Marx's theory of alienation – the expressivist model found in Marx's early

²¹ Ibid., p. 340. "Marx's error stems in the end from dialectically clamping together system and lifeworld in a way that does not allow for a sufficiently sharp separation."

²² Ibid., p. 341. "Marx uses [alienation] to criticize the conditions of life that arose with the proletarianizing of craftsmen, farmers, and rural plebians in the course of capitalist modernization. But he is unable to distinguish in the repressive uprooting of traditional forms of life between the aspects of reification and that of structural differentiation of the lifeworld."

²³ Ibid., p. 342. "Processes of reification need not appear only in the sphere in which they were caused [...] the process of reification can manifest itself just as well in public as in private domains. [...] By contrast, [Marx's] theory of value allows for only one channel through which the monetization of labor power expropriates from producers' work activities."

²⁴ Ibid., p. 349. "From the model of alienated factory work in the early stages of industrialization, Marx developed a concept of alienation that he carried over to the proletarian lifeworld as a whole. This concept makes no distinction between the dislocation of traditional lifeworlds and the destruction of posttraditional lifeworlds. And it also does not discriminate between impoverishment, which concerns the material reproduction of the life world, and disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld."

works and the model found in Marx's later works that is based on his labor theory of value. When it comes to the expressivist model, which Habermas acknowledges still has currency in contemporary praxis philosophy,²⁵ he summarily dismisses it as being romantic in the double sense of being influenced by the Romantic ideal of the creative artist who produces their self *ex nihilo* and in the pejorative sense of being unworkable.²⁶ Habermas main focus is then on the model that is based upon Marx's theory of value, which he characterizes as alternatively deriving its normative content from "the instrumentalization of a life that is represented as an end in itself,"²⁷ and it is here that his specific critique of how alienation is conceptualized aligns with his more generalized critique of Marx's approach. The problem with alienation, according to Habermas, is that the idea of it being based upon "a life that is represented as an end in itself" lacks a clear empirical content that can be historically grounded. As Habermas puts it himself, "Marx speaks in the abstract about life and life's possibilities; he has no concept of a rationalization to which the lifeworld is subject to the extent that its symbolic structures get differentiated. Thus, in the historical context of his investigations, the concept of alienation remains peculiarly ambiguous."²⁸ Habermas's critique is then similar to the broad line that is often taken against alienation that its invocation is of uncertain specificity and that it lacks a coherent and consistent normative standard.

²⁵ Habermas cites Axel Honneth's *Arbeit, Handlung, Normativitat* (1980) as representative of this position, p. 431n9. It is also the perspective on alienation that will be seen as informing Rahel Jaeggi's approach taken up in the next section.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 341. After acknowledging the continued viability of this approach in contemporary praxis philosophy, he immediately goes on in the next sentence to say, "Marx himself, however, *broke free* of this ideal of self-formation inherited from Herder and Romanticism," emphasis mine. All together Habermas only dedicates two sentences to this perspective.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 341.

However, when considered critically, and despite Habermas's rather extensive criticism of Marx's theory of alienation, it is not clear that the basic intuition that motivates Marx's idea of alienation ought to be abandoned or whether it is only a particular way of understanding alienation that needs to be dropped. While Habermas may be technically right in arguing that Marx's concept of alienation is unable to deal with various historical contingencies, such as the pacifying effects of the welfare state,²⁹ this is largely the case due to the underlying justification being based upon the theory of value rather than a problem with the phenomenon being grasped at by the concept of alienation itself.³⁰ It would appear that Habermas, in his desire to show the independent strength of his new critical concept, rejects alienation as if it were a direct competitor for the conceptual space within which his idea resides, but in so doing he misses how the term, or at least the phenomenon it is trying to address, can have independent currency from his own analysis. Furthermore, it is telling that Habermas completely ignores the rather extensive literature concerned with re-envisioning the idea of alienation that was published in the decades before *The Theory of Communicative Action*, such as those works that were highlighted in the last chapter, and what is more, Habermas's acknowledgement of the work of praxis philosophers who sought to continue the viability of Marx's expressivist model only for him to immediately sidestep engaging with it.³¹ What criticism Habermas actually does levy against Marx's theory of

²⁹ Ibid., p. 348. "Structures of late capitalism take shapes that have to appear as paradoxical from the perspective of a Marxian theory with a narrowly economic approach. The welfare-state pacification of class conflict comes about under the condition of a continuation of the accumulation process whose capitalist drive mechanism is protected and not altered by the interventions of the state." The failure of Marx on these points seems to stem more from the lack of experiencing them rather than a direct failure to account for them.

³⁰ When it came to reification, Habermas had no obvious misgivings in reconceptualizing reification in a way that made it more amendable to his theoretical approach despite its problematic foundation in the philosophy of consciousness.

³¹ Although, it must be admitted that the works most relevant to Habermas's project that came out of this vein of Marxist thought—Axel Honneth's *Reification* (2008) and Rahel Jaeggi's *Alienation* (2014)—were not published until well after his own work. Regardless, the possible justification of this approach was not even entertained.

alienation then principally falls on the underlying theoretical justification rather than on the concept itself. That this is so can be further supported by the fact that he maintains the terminology of alienation in his own analysis of the pacifying effects of the welfare state.³² It is here that he constructs a parallel between the relationship that exists for citizens turned into “clients” of the welfare state and that of the negative effects of alienated labor being unloaded onto their role as consumers.³³ In both cases Habermas sees the role of client and consumer as being partially constituted by an internalized and “alienated” form of existence of citizen and producer, respectively. The idea of alienation then appears live and well in Habermas even as he seeks to centralize his critical theory on his revised conception of reification as the colonization of the lifeworld. Regardless, it is clear that alienation is a marginal concern in his take on critical theory, and that fact is reflective of the broader trend in alienation theory at the time Habermas published his work.

Bringing the social ontological account to bear on Habermas’s theory, the first thing that should be noted is that Habermas’s critique of Marx’s theory of alienation is in agreement with what was argued for in the earlier section on Marx. As Marx’s theory stands, its drive to provide a universal basis in essentialist presuppositions removes it from its historical circumstances, but as the social ontological account was able to demonstrate, the underlying dynamic can easily be recast in a way that restores the historicity all while maintaining the same fundamental critical thrust. Most importantly, reenvisioning alienation from the perspective of social ontology also

³² Ibid., p. 348-351.

³³ Ibid., p. 350. “The client role is the companion piece that makes political participation that has been evaporated into an abstraction and robbed of its effectiveness acceptable. The negative side effects of institutionalizing an alienated mode of having a say in matters of public interest are passed off onto the client role in much the same way as the burdens of normalizing alienated labor are passed off onto the consumer role. It is primarily in these two channels that new conflict potentials of late capitalist society are gathering.”

more clearly reveals how alienation theory is a necessary conceptual tool that would work in tandem with the analysis provided by Habermas's concept of the colonization of the lifeworld. In short, Habermas's focus on the negative effects of the colonization of the lifeworld ends up being too narrow to capture the various ways in which dysfunctions can arise not only across system and lifeworld but also internally to either system or lifeworld as the performative contradiction that alienation highlights is something that can arise just as much in the workings of the system as it can in the lifeworld. Consider for example the historical shift from power being determined by ancestral holdings to that of capital captured in the rise of the *nouveau riche*. As much as this could be understood as a shift in the lifeworld between traditional forms of life and the increasing rationalization of modern society, as Habermas's analysis would lean, these dynamics also played out in ways that were entirely contained within the workings of money and power as generational wealth increasingly became marginalized.³⁴ On the other hand, Habermas's concern with the colonization of the lifeworld tend to have concerns with the system supplanting the lifeworld, but doing so also fails to account for how the lifeworld can have its own internal issues. While Habermas tended to focus on the rationalization of traditional forms of life as the principal cause of the dissolution of the integrating effects of the lifeworld, to presume that circumscribing the effects of the system would automatically produce a sufficiently powerful form of societal integration to develop in the wake of the loss of traditional forms of life is simply too optimistic. Habermas's later works on religion perhaps suggest a recognition that rationalized forms of life do not always, standing on their own, have sufficient resources to

³⁴ Consider, as a further example, how the selection of higher ranking military officers made a shift from being determined by one's social standing, with generalships typically being given both in the American Civil War and the first World War to those with ancestral wealth entirely independently of capability. While the shift in how military power was ascribed certainly overlapped with developments in the lifeworld, the increased specialization of the military was just as much the result of an increasing contradiction between leadership that lacked capacity for their specific roles and the increased specialization of combat due to technological developments.

produce societal integration in non-alienating, that is, in non-contradictory ways.³⁵ The social ontological account of alienation reveals ways in which performative contradictions can potentially arise in any social situation, not only when the imperatives of the system come to dominate those of the lifeworld.

The opening chapter of this dissertation already acknowledged how much the trajectory of this project of revitalizing alienation is modeled on Habermas's work,³⁶ and so there is a tremendous debt to Habermas despite the critique of his treatment of alienation theory. While his reconstruction of reason, which brought with it the postulation of the system/lifeworld model, is tremendously powerful in capturing many of the most prominent developments of the modern social world, the argument of this section has been that the social ontological account of alienation identifies a fundamental possibility for social forms regardless of whether they are systems-based or lifeworld-based as the kind of performative contradictions that is alienation can arise simply given the basic way that societal forms arise in general. Ultimately this generates an understanding of alienation that, while always grounded in historical and empirical circumstances, nevertheless has a universal import given its existence at the most fundamental level of social reality. The specific concern found with the colonization of the lifeworld, though arguably a perennial one, is on the other hand one that arises most prominently in the transition from traditional forms of life to ones of increasing rationalization that are found in the modern period. Alienation, on the other hand, would still be a potential risk even in a post-traditional, rationalized forms of life as the 21st Century made it more than clear that purportedly modern societies are as subject to contradiction as are traditions-based societies. As a result, one can see

³⁵ Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (2008) as just one of his more extended takes related to this topic.

³⁶ See footnote 8 in Chapter One.

that the analytic tool of alienation as conceptualized through social ontology would function as a foundational tool of social critique.

Jaeggi and *Alienation*

Rahel Jaeggi's treatment of alienation is by far the most significant attempt at revitalizing the concept as a philosophical project after having seemingly seen its demise at the hands of wanton overgeneralizations and postmodern critiques.³⁷ Her strategy, which follows in the footsteps of her mentor, Axel Honneth, is to restore an originary concept that motivated Critical Theory by turning to a formal or procedural interpretation as opposed to the substantive accounts more typically found in the tradition.³⁸ Underpinning her procedural account of alienation is what Jaeggi terms the "performative-constructivist account of the self,"³⁹ which is meant to reground alienation in juxtaposition to two prominent theories of the self, the modern essentialist self that has grounded traditional theories of alienation and the postmodern fragmented self which significantly challenged alienation's tenability. Alongside this theory of the self, Jaeggi's project of revitalizing alienation also rigorously engages with a wide variety of comparable concepts and alternative interpretations in order to precisely delineate the unique contributions that alienation theory has to offer. Understanding Jaeggi's account of alienation then requires that one understand the context within which her conceptualization is situated both as she relates

³⁷ See reviews of Jaeggi in Neuhauser, Frederick. Review of *Entfremdung: Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Problems* by Rahel Jaeggi. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 02 July 2007 and that Tobias Müller and Eva-Maria Reinwald. Review of *Entfremdung: Zur Aktualität eines sozialphilosophischen Problems* by Rahel Jaeggi. *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory*, Vol. 14, 2010.

³⁸ Honneth's *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (2008) sought to revitalize that other key normative term of the critical tradition, reification, and his approach is similar insofar as he also sought to establish as structurally formal or proceduralist account that would reground that concept for continued critical analysis.

³⁹ Jaeggi (2014), p. 161. "I will propose a performative-constructivist interpretation of "the human being, who simultaneously produces himself and his world."

it to other critical concepts that are competitive with alienation as well as the anthropological foundation of her account. Once that conceptual scaffolding is explicated it is then possible to consider her specific understanding of alienation as a “relation of relationlessness”⁴⁰ in which one is unable to identify oneself in one’s actions due to a disturbed process of self-appropriating willing.

Jaeggi, undeterred by the near total consensus that alienation is a hopelessly problematic term for philosophical analysis, dives into the fray of competing terms and disparate formulations in order to carve out a clear space to develop her theory of alienation. One of those terms, heteronomy, plays a useful role in acting as a foil for exploring alienation insofar as both are meant to indicate situations in which an individual is not the one exerting control over their own life and actions.⁴¹ When it comes to heteronomy specifically, the focus falls directly on instances in which a foreign will dominates over and against the will of the individual, whether that be overt coercion or more subtle forms of manipulation.⁴² As important as this idea is, Jaeggi notes that typical applications of the concept of heteronomy struggles to maintain a bright-line as to when one transitions from the inextricable influence of others in simply being socialized to the purportedly heteronymous influence of others, and so the question of what belongs to the self and what is an alien imposition goes without any clear answer.⁴³ Furthermore, the limitation of

⁴⁰ Jaeggi (2014), p. 1.

⁴¹ Jaeggi (2014), pp. 58-59.

⁴² Ibid., p. 58n11. Jaeggi offers the following “minimal definition of heteronomy”: “I am heteronomous, or determined by something alien to me, when someone or something influences me in such a way that I end up following her (or its) will instead of my own. In this definition “someone or something” can be anonymous (e.g., a law or a convention), and influence admits of various degrees, up to and including outright coercion.”

⁴³ Jaeggi (2014), p. 120: “The exclusion of manipulation and the idea of optimal conditions or acceptable alternatives are clearly two basic conditions that must be satisfied. But they help to clarify only the preconditions of authentic will formation. And the difficulties they suggest are obvious. Given that one is always influenced by one’s environment – is always in some ways socialized- when is the boundary of manipulation crossed?”

heteronomy's usefulness as a philosophical tool is that it ends up casting its inverse, autonomy, in exclusively negative terms as being merely the freedom from the distorting influences of others.⁴⁴ The picture that heteronomy presents then makes the assumption that an absence of the influence of others—a questionable ideal in light of basic human sociality—necessarily entails that one is self-determining in what one does, as if these are logical contradictories.⁴⁵ What this misses is that heteronomy and autonomy are instead logical *contraries*, that is, one may be both free of the influence of an outside will and yet still not be determined by one's own will as these two do not exhaust all possible alternatives. To illustrate by way of a simple example, it may be true that no one is stopping me nor making me travel to the next town over, but that does not in itself entail that I have a self-determined reason for my travel there as I may be simply drifting from place to place with no particular intention.⁴⁶ As a result, there is a need to supplement the analysis that heteronomy provides with a positive account of what it means for a person to be self-determining in a way that goes beyond the merely negative standard of being uninfluenced by others while also being able to clearly distinguish between those cases when a person is

⁴⁴ When discussing the most prominent theories of personal autonomy in Chapter 10, Jaeggi argues that they tend to cast self-determination principally in negative terms as being uninfluenced by others, which would then place autonomy as the inverse of heteronomy. *Ibid.*, p. 204. "Because "one's own" desires are conceived of exclusively as those that come about in the absence of manipulation or interference by others – successful identification with oneself comes down, in the end, to the absence of manipulative influences and so is defined purely negatively."

⁴⁵ Jaeggi makes this point in her engagement with Joseph Raz's understanding of autonomy. *Ibid.*, p. 204. "When Raz defines autonomy as the capacity to be the author of one's own life – to give it a shape and meaning – he is not only claiming that the autonomous person must independently and actively shape her life. In addition, she must presuppose that something matters in her life."

⁴⁶ It may be important to note that in both cases – those of heteronym and of alienation – are both ultimately actions that I must in some sense choose to do. Unless we are talking about instances where someone is literally physically causing you to do what you do – e.g. they push you – there is still some sense in which the person is deciding to do what they do even in instances of coercion, even if their responsibility is obviously extremely curtailed. What discussions of heteronomy and alienation are directed at, however, is in what sense can we meaningfully ascribe actions as being self-determined, and the shortcoming of heteronomy is that it leaves out the considerations of actions that are free of the influence of others yet are still not self-determined. In short, it identifies what is often most obvious in undermining self-determination, but it does not thereby identify what it actually takes to be self-determined.

influenced by others due to our basic sociality and when that influence is problematic for self-determination.

To make this transition from the negative conditions stipulated by heteronomy to the positive requirements for personal autonomy, Jaeggi identifies what she calls the “material conditions of realizing autonomy” that must be satisfied for one to be able to say that someone is fully self-determining. Approached from the perspective of a person who engages with the world by asking themselves the practical question, “What should I do?,” three conditions are singled out as being indispensable: the person must “(a) see the question as such and be able to identify it as a possibility, (b) be interested in it (and in answering it), and (c) be in agreement with myself (as the one who poses the question).”⁴⁷ The significance of the first condition resides in the simple fact that if one is able to say that a person is self-determined then in the first place there must be something that that person is potentially able to determine themselves as, that is, they must see themselves as having the power to enact a course of action. Being able to see a possible course of action is then a necessary prerequisite to making that course of action one’s own in a self-determined fashion.⁴⁸ The second material condition builds off of the first by saying that it is not enough that one sees a possible course of action as available but the person must also have the motivational disposition to act upon that possibility. If a person has all of the means in the world to enact a course of action but has no desire to do as such, then one would be hard pressed to claim that they have actually determined themselves to act. The last criterion is a culmination of the previous two, and although it can seem somewhat cryptic, it arises out of Jaeggi’s

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 202.

⁴⁸ This characteristic will figure heavily in Jaeggi’s treatment of alienation as a central part of her conception is that it is an obfuscation of possible practical alternatives. Ibid., p. 201. “Alienation does not consist – as heteronomy does – in practical questions being answered by others but in the masking of practical questions.”

consideration of an experience in which a person finds themselves divided by conflicting desires.⁴⁹ The intuition that Jaeggi is driving at can be illuminated most readily in cases where a person acts contrary to their intentions despite understanding that they are acting in such a contradictory manner.⁵⁰ In such a situation, the person may satisfy the first two material conditions by being able to perceive a particular course of action as possible and have an interest in acting upon it but then ultimately find themselves acting in a manner that makes them unable to self-satisfactorily identify with the action and/or the intention precipitating the action. Being unable to identify with their course of action taken, Jaeggi argues that the person has failed to be self-determined in a positive fashion because what is motivating the action is not something that they identify as being fully their own. In conclusion, when taken together the three conditions trace the arc of self-determined action in which one must first see the practical concern at hand, next be interested in responding to the concern, and finally, in so responding, identify with the intention that motivates the response and the action taken.

Now if left only at this point the account of autonomy is incomplete as Jaeggi also wishes to avoid a solipsistic framing of self-determination that pits the individual against their social environment and instead looks to ground self-determination *in* sociality. Her foil for working through this idea is another term competitive with alienation, namely, the “romantic conception” of inauthenticity that sees self-determination as requiring individual uniqueness forming over and against one’s social situation.⁵¹ In this case, the competition between alienation and

⁴⁹ Jaeggi Part II Ch. 7 pp. 99-130.

⁵⁰ Jaeggi’s concern in this regard is quite similar to the philosophical topic of *akrasia*, or weakness of the will, although she never casts it in those terms.

⁵¹ What Jaeggi means by this appellation are those philosophical trajectories that take their lead from the romantic response to the Enlightenment and its perceived over-emphasis on rationality. Jaeggi identifies Richard Rorty as the clearest philosophical proponent of this position, who in turn quotes the literary critic Harold Bloom: “The greatest “horror” for the (romantic) individual lies in having to acknowledge that she is a mere copy: “One will not have

inauthenticity arises because both call attention to a situation in which a person is seen as failing to be the true self-directing author of their own life. With inauthenticity, the concern is with failing to be the author of a life that is unique or original as instead one merely copies a pattern that has been set by others, whether it is through the imitation of a particular individual or more diffuse cases such as conventionalism or conformity. For Jaeggi, much like how it was with heteronomy, the problem with this conceptualization of inauthenticity is that it implies its opposite, authenticity, is a merely negative achievement in which one avoids being influenced by others. Even more problematic, however, is that authenticity ends up being unable to function as a practical aim insofar as it reintroduces the subjugation of one's own will to others in the very attempt to extricate it. Jaeggi, who quotes Ernst Tugendhat favorably in this regard, argues that if one's concern is primarily with being different then one is no longer asking "What kind of person do I want to be?" but instead "How can I be different than other people,"⁵² and so trying to avoid the influence of others by being different comes back in the end as a form of being determined by other people as their behavior becomes the standard that determines how one acts. The romantic conception of inauthenticity then ends in a self-contradiction where it idolizes novelty for the sake of novelty, which thus reifies the self as mere means to this required and purportedly superior end. If simply aiming to be different from others is not enough to be authentic, then what is needed is a more nuanced take on the interplay between the self and society that avoids pitting them against one another while still being attentive to how the individual can live in a self-realizing way within their social context.

impressed one's mark on the language but, rather, will have spent one's life shoving about already coined pieces. So one will not really have had an I at all. One's creations, and one's self, will just be a better or worse instance of familiar types." Jaeggi (2014) p. 209. Cf. p.209n6.

⁵² Jaeggi (2014), p. 211. Following Tugendhat, Jaeggi likens this concern of the romantic conceptions of authenticity as being related to the Heideggerian phenomenon of "distantiality."

To work through this, Jaeggi makes a distinction between two conceptualizations of self-realization, a worldless one and a worldly one, in which the first focuses on self-realization as independent of any particular context while the second considers self-realization as inherently contextual.⁵³ The worldly conception, which undergirds the romantic understanding of inauthenticity, takes the self and society as things separate and opposed, which is what precipitated the conclusion that self-realization demands that we form ourselves in a way that is independent of the influence of the world. As the reasoning goes, if the self and society are separate, then it is only a self formed independently from society that can be acknowledged as *self*-realized rather than being world-realized, that is, a self that is shaped and influenced by something other than itself. In juxtaposition to this view, Jaeggi aligns herself with the existentialist tradition that points out the various ways that human beings find themselves always already thrust into a world and so situated in a pre-given context. Since we cannot help but take our cues from our social world, and further it is those socially-informed understandings that make our lives intelligible to others,⁵⁴ what matters for self-realization in this understanding is not that we avoid taking our cues from our social world but rather whether we are able to take those cues and make them our own. In this case, there is nothing about the material conditions for self-determination introduced earlier that would preclude a person from making aspects of one's social reality one's own in a self-determined fashion; just because the social role of "mother" is something informed by society, one can still see the practical question of how to live one's life, be interested in answering it, and see in that pre-formed social role of being a mother a way that aligns with one's own reasons for acting. As a result, instead of seeing uniqueness as

⁵³ Ibid., p. 208.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 71.

difference, Jaeggi's account takes uniqueness as particularity, that is, what makes one's life unique and authentic is the fact that it is irreducibly *one's own*, even if it is a life suggested by one's social context.⁵⁵ Realizing the inherently contextual nature of self-realization then makes space for acknowledging the inextricable influence of the social world on the self but without foreclosing the possibility of critiquing when that influence can impinge upon self-determination.

With this groundwork laid out, we can turn our attention to how the insights achieved thus far all coalesce into the performative-constructivist account of the self that undergirds Jaeggi's theory of alienation. Importantly, Jaeggi wants to distinguish her model of the self from two possible alternatives – a model of self-discovery in which one must uncover what one already is in terms of a human essence and a model of self-invention in which, lacking any predetermined nature, one must set out to create who one is from scratch. The model of self-discovery she associates with what she calls the “core model” of the self,⁵⁶ which holds that there is a “true” self at the “core” of every person that serves as the central metric for evaluating individual lives. From this perspective, the task for an individual is to discover this essential core and to allow it to express itself without being distorted by outside influences. In this regard, Rousseau is the quintessential representative of the core model of the self. The model of self-invention, on the other hand, is one that takes it that there is no essential or permanent self that one discovers but instead the question of who one is is a continual process of invention and creation that is without a predetermined result and without a strong and definitive statement of

⁵⁵ “An individual's uniqueness, so my claim, cannot be directly grasped, striven for, or intended. Individual uniqueness is merely a by-product of realizing oneself in the world in a self-determined way.” Jaeggi, p. 209.

⁵⁶ “The “core model” of the self [includes] those views that operate with the idea that one is “with oneself” (*bei sich*) or authentic when one is in agreement with an inner essence or with a kind of internal “original pattern” of oneself.” Jaeggi (2014), p.157.

unity at any point in the process.⁵⁷ Jaeggi cites Foucault as the quintessential advocate of this perspective, who she quotes as stating the position in a summative fashion, “we have to create ourselves as a work of art.”⁵⁸ These two positions, the model of self-discovery and the model of self-creation, then form the two extremes for understanding philosophical anthropology for Jaeggi, and her performative-constructivist account is meant to offer a third alternative that is able to balance both the fixed as well as flexible dimensions of the self that these two models otherwise prioritize.

To see how Jaeggi’s performative-constructive account of the self is able to thread this needle, as it were, it is critical to understand her account of articulation. Drawing heavily on the work of Charles Taylor,⁵⁹ Jaeggi forwards the idea of articulation as a template for capturing the relationship between, on the one hand, what one finds to be fixed or given in one’s self and, on the other hand, what appears to be plastic and indeterminate. When a person is trying to articulate into words an idea or a point they wish to make, there is a sense in which they are “searching for the right word” along the lines of the self-discovery model. In this case there is something already given, namely the idea that one wishes to express, and so the proper words for the situation are the ones that best correspond with the intended expression. Yet the search for the right words is not as simplistic as piecing together the precise grammatical arrangement that one intended all along as if a sort of internal game of *Wheel of Fortune*. Rather, as Taylor argues, an articulation “attempts to formulate what is initially inchoate, or confused, or badly formulated.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 186.

⁵⁹ See the section, “Taylor’s Concept of Articulation” in Jaeggi (2014), pp. 161-164.

But this kind of formulation or reformulation does not leave its object unchanged.”⁶⁰ Depending upon the particular formulation that one goes with one can articulate the original intention in different ways, or at least with different nuances, and so ultimately what is expressed is something that is not pre-given but rather creatively produced in the very act of being expressed. In fact, it is only in being expressed that it can be said to exist. Self-articulation shapes and ultimately gives reality to, that is, *makes*, what one sets out to express since without the final expression of one’s articulation there is no expression at all. The model of articulation then focuses on the continual need to navigate what is already structured and what is as of yet unformed so as to find “the right words” that will bring into reality the particular way by which one wishes to express oneself.

Extrapolating the model of articulation to the performative-constructive account of the self, Jaeggi argues that the self manifests itself only by appropriating an aspect of the world—a social role, one’s emotions, particular events, etc. —and articulating oneself by means of it. There is in these cases always some pre-given reality that one is confronted by, but what is left indeterminate is precisely how that given reality will manifest in one’s life. For example, social roles provide various normative and behavioral expectations for how one can pattern one’s life, and those expectations form the background of shared understandings that make it possible for one’s actions to become intelligible to others much like how the grammar and diction of a language provide the basis for verbal communication. However, for self-determination, it is insufficient for a person’s actions to merely conform to the expectations of a social role as the individual must also identify with those expectations and act upon them as their own. Doing so requires that the person appropriate the social role as their own and find in its expectations a way

⁶⁰ Taylor, quoted in Jaeggi (2014) pp. 161-162.

to meaningfully express themselves, which on the analogy to language is akin to how, when one speaks, one is not just trying to say certain words or merely follow specific grammatical rules but rather one is trying to express oneself in a specific way by means of those words and grammatical rules. This model of articulation then gives a way to capture those elements that are fixed and given—the behavioral expectations of the social role—but still preserve room for the individual to find in it a means to express themselves in a self-determining fashion by highlighting those ways what is fixed and given are left flexible and incomplete until that individual substantiates those behavioral expectations of a social role in their own life in a particular way.⁶¹ It is for this reason that Jaeggi terms it a performative-constructivist account: on the one hand, the individual must creatively appropriate what is given and recompose it in a way that allows for self-articulation akin to putting on a performance of a screenplay, while in so doing one also simultaneously constructs the world as being a certain way as without an individual realizing themselves in and through what is given social reality lacks its own existence.⁶²

⁶¹ Jaeggi (2014), pp. 189-190, also expresses this idea by availing herself of the Aristotelean distinction between *poiesis*, which is production, and *praxis*, which is action or activity.[1] Unlike the models of essentialism and self-invention, which take the self as a product that is extrinsic to practical activity, the performative-constructivist model takes the self as being an activity in which the goal of the activity is the realization of the activity itself. Who one is is ultimately something that is determined in how one acts as the manner by which one acts itself shapes and gives substance to the self. To draw on an example directly from Aristotle, it is in acting courageously that one is courageous. This is as opposed to the idea that the self is some fixed reality that always is the way it is and that then produces certain kinds of actions in certain circumstances based upon its settled character. The implications of this theoretical line of praxis is that the self is manifested only in acting as opposed to being a separate ontological entity that then acts; quite explicitly, Jaeggi argues that there is “no self that exists prior to and apart from the deed,” p. 160. For self-determination, what the model of praxis means is that it is in identifying with a particular course of action, by taking it as one’s end and comporting oneself in reference to that course, that one realizes a certain kind of self.

⁶² One can see in this conceptualization a strong affinity with Hegel’s presentation of the interplay between the singular and universal finding expression in the particular, that is, in the play between the numerically *singular* individual and their *universal* social context coming together and so finding their reality in the *particular* way that person is self-realizing within their society. That there is such an obvious affinity should be unsurprising since, as the translator of Jaeggi’s text, Frederick Neuhouser, points out, her book “illuminates far better than any purely

To summarize briefly what has been established thus far so that we can now turn directly to her account of alienation, Jaeggi's formal-procedural account clears analytic space for the concept of alienation by juxtaposing it to various other critical terms to which one can avail oneself for social analysis. The shortcomings of heteronomy as an analytic tool help Jaeggi construct criteria for the material conditions of self-determination while the failings of the romantic conception of inauthenticity contribute to her worldly conception of the self that works to bridge the antinomy between the self and society. Having laid out this groundwork, Jaeggi develops an alternative anthropological foundation from what is traditionally found in alienation theory so as to avoid what are otherwise taken to be endemic shortcomings to alienation's tenability. The performative-constructive account of the self contrasts itself with the model of self-discovery that sees the self as a kind of essential "core" and from the model of self-invention that sees the characteristics of one's self as fundamentally fungible. Building upon Charles Taylor's idea of articulation, Jaeggi sees the performative constructive account of the self as centering on the idea of the self-appropriation as world-appropriation; in taking up an aspect of the world and making it one's own one takes possession of oneself as the determiner of one's own life and one's world. The end result for Jaeggi is an understanding of the self that is a dynamic rather than fixed reality and that has procedural characteristics that will form a basis for a revitalized normative dimension to alienation theory. With that having been said, it is time to see how Jaeggi's anthropological account translates into a normative theory of alienation and then to evaluate how effective alienation critique can be under these formalistic conditions.

historical study could do, fundamental ideas of one of the most obscure figures in the history of philosophy (G. W. F. Hegel)," Jaeggi (2014), p. xi.

The very first line of Jaeggi's text succinctly states her thesis with regard to alienation: "alienation is a relation of relationlessness."⁶³ Of course the brevity of this statement belies the theoretical complexity that goes into justifying this claim, but more pressingly when one simply considers what it says one has to realize that this statement does not so much tell us what alienation *is* but rather only tells us something *about* alienation. It points to the fact that we will find with alienation a paradoxical reality where, though there is a relationship, it nevertheless appears or is experienced as if there was no relationship, all while still remaining as a relationship. As for what that "relationship" is, Jaeggi identifies it as being a relationship *to oneself* which also always entails a relationship *to the world*.⁶⁴ Recall that in her defense of the worldly conception of the self, Jaeggi made the point that the self is always in a relationship to the world, and in fact the self just *is* a particular relationship to the world, or as she phrases it, the self is a process of appropriation.⁶⁵ What is at stake in alienation is then one's ability to appropriate an aspect of the world and, in so doing, to appropriate themselves as the self-possessed and self-determining agent of their life; ultimately, alienation is "an inadequate *power* and a lack of *presence* in what one does, a failure to *identify* with one's own actions and desires and to take part in one's own life."⁶⁶ One important upshot of this is that for Jaeggi alienation and self-alienation are interchangeable as being alienated from oneself always means being alienated from the world, and vice versa. But what precisely does it mean to have a disturbed appropriation of one self and world such that one is alienated, and how does that happen?

⁶³ Jaeggi (2014), p. 1.

⁶⁴ Jaeggi (2014), p. 2. "Alienation [is] a relation of disturbed or inhibited appropriation of *world* and *self*," italics mine.

⁶⁵ See Jaeggi (2014), Chapter 9, Section 1 entitled "The Self as a Process of Appropriation," pp. 156-164.

⁶⁶ Jaeggi (2014), p. 155, italics original.

The answer to this question has, in short, already been answered with the material conditions of self-determination elucidated earlier. To briefly reiterate, those three conditions established criteria for identifying a person as being self-determined in a positive rather than merely negative fashion, and they were introduced in the form of necessary components for answering the practical question “What should I do?”: one must see the question and be able to identify it as a possibility, be interested in it and in answering it, and one must be in agreement with oneself as the one posing the question. Failing to ask oneself the practical question of what kind of life should be lived, being indifferent to how that question is answered, and being unable to identify with the life that one in fact lives are then all ways that alienation occurs. As it so happens, those three criteria align with the major components of how Jaeggi characterizes self-alienation as found in the previous paragraph: to be alienated is to be *powerless* to act because one does not even see the practical possibilities for acting, or to be *withdrawn* rather than present in one’s actions because one is disinterested in one’s practical possibilities, or one is *divided* and *conflicted* rather than identifying with one’s practical possibilities. These three points of rupture are then explored in the case studies that make up the bulk of Jaeggi’s work: the young academic who finds that his life has taken on a dynamic of its own and that he is powerless to change it in Chapter 5, the role player who becomes so heavily absorbed in living according to the dictates of social roles that he loses personal authenticity in Chapter 6, the woman who’s coquettish reactions to her love leave her feeling conflicted with her feminist ideals in Chapter 7, and finally the man who is indifferent to the world and to his own life in Chapter 8. Each of these examples are considered as instances of alienation, which has the important implication that if there is a failure to meet *any* of the material conditions of self-determination then that is sufficient to say that the person is alienated.

While this now sets out what alienation means for Jaeggi, it is essential to see how she understands the term as not only descriptive but also prescriptive. Looking to revitalize rather than renounce alienation's normative thrust, Jaeggi's alternative anthropological foundation for alienation theory has the distinct advantage of bringing with it a shift from a transcendental analysis of human nature to an immanent critique of self-realizing praxis. The normative critique embedded in alienation is in this case not based on an external standard that remains independent of the individual actor but is instead inherent in and determined by the individual's own self-chosen activity as the self-directing agent of their own life.⁶⁷ Elucidating the requirements for successful self-realization is seen as uncovering the normative standards for critiquing self-realizing activity as either successful or not, that is, as actually self-realizing or self-alienating, and such a move is seen as avoiding the charge of paternalism because it is a standard that the individual has already subsumed as their own in the very moment of acting. On the assumption that when people act they intend to act according to their own reasons and purposes, the normative standard of alienation is internal to the activity itself.

Of course one might ask whether this assumption of a normative standard derived from self-determination ends up being equally problematic as it assumes either perfectionistic standards as to what people are able to accomplish or else simply prioritizes a specifically modern, but ultimately narrow and circumscribed, normative standard centered on self-realization. Jaeggi gives two different responses to this charge, one maximalist and one minimalist. The maximalist position insists upon the idea that self-realization is an inherent aspect of human existence, even if it may be true that certain societies operate in a way that

⁶⁷ Jaeggi (2014), pp. 157-158. "One is not alienated from something (one's authentic self) but rather in one's performance of actions and hence in what one does or how one does it."

minimizes or even eskew it. Jaeggi quotes Joseph Raz in this regard: “The value of personal autonomy is a *fact of life*.”⁶⁸ Alternatively, wanting to be as nuanced as possible, not to avoid the more difficult challenges but rather to be more sensitive to the complex reality of things, Jaeggi offers a more limited justification in arguing that while alienation is an immanent critique and so always bounded by its horizon, we find ourselves in a society that takes self-realization as an *a priori* expectation and so an intrinsic normative standard in that regard. For Jaeggi, this immanent critique of alienation functions on two levels.⁶⁹ First, it works as a critique of society when there is a contradiction between the modern ideals of freedom and the institutions and forms of life that one finds in modern society. Second, it works on an individual level when there is a contradiction between the modern self-conception of autonomous and responsible agents and ways of life in modern society that run contrary to this ideal. In both of these cases the normative standards that alienation applies comes directly from the subjects of the critique as opposed to being an external standard. Furthermore, as we ourselves are members of the same social horizon it is possible to raise the question of alienation critique because of the shared normative standard that one be self-realizing and autonomous. In either case, Jaeggi sees the normativity of alienation as something that can be revived alongside the term itself.

Jaeggi’s analysis of alienation is unquestionably a powerful, nuanced, and robust attempt at revitalizing alienation theory with renewed analytic potency. The accomplishments of Jaeggi’s theoretical justifications in revitalizing alienation are impossible to downplay, and anyone writing on this topic, myself included, are indebted to her insights that allow one to see a way out of the seemingly overwhelming morass of problems besetting alienation. That all having been

⁶⁸ Jaeggi (2014), p. 42.

⁶⁹ Jaeggi (2014), p. 41.

said, one is left with a worry that rather than finding an account of alienation that directly revitalizes its function as a tool of *social* critique all one finds is, in the words of one reviewer of her book, “broadly speaking, [an] ethical phenomenon, together with an underlying “theory of the self.””⁷⁰ In short, there are sincere concerns that Jaeggi’s account overly psychologizes alienation theory to the point at which the objective conditions of social reality largely drops out of the picture. As Jaeggi acknowledges, her approach remains “from the perspective of how the subject is constituted,”⁷¹ and while her reviewer looks to defender her by arguing that the proper place for developing the social critique occurs more appropriately in a later project,⁷² a project which Jaeggi acknowledges in her text⁷³ and has tried, though indirectly, to account for in her later works,⁷⁴ this acknowledgment does little to support that idea that we have on our hands a theory of alienation that is immediately applicable to specifically sociological analysis.

That problem is seen most clearly when one looks at how Jaeggi grounds her account of alienation in the model of self-articulation. Although this approach has the helpful upshot of pointing to a way in which we can understand why social institutions do not with strict necessity determine whether any one in particular is alienated or not, since the same social circumstances can be variably alienating or not depending upon a person’s individual abilities, the

⁷⁰ Frederick Neuhouser in Jaeggi (2014), p. XV: “I would be remiss in introducing Jaeggi’s book to an English-reading public if I failed to mention the one noteworthy respect in which it fails to deliver what it originally promised. The book’s original subtitle (omitted in this translation)—“A Contemporary Problem of Social Philosophy”—led its readers to expect a work that investigates the social causes of alienation rather than what one in fact finds: a philosophical account of, broadly speaking, an ethical phenomenon, together with an underlying “theory of the self” (or theory of human subjectivity”).

⁷¹ Jaeggi (2014), 220.

⁷² Neuhouser in Jaeggi (2014), p. XV. It would be “foolish, however, to criticize Jaeggi for not having said more.”

⁷³ Jaeggi (2014), p. 220. “The corresponding analysis and evaluation—of how institutions are constituted—remains to be carried out.”

⁷⁴ Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life* (2018).

conceptual independence that is gained here is also its weakness insofar as it can equally give the impression that *any* social arrangement could be one in which a person finds themselves unalienated if they approach it with the appropriate degree of self-determination. By overly psychologizing alienation, it becomes independent of how self-determining actions *themselves* are a part of forming social institutions and so inextricably caught up with social ontology, even while her performative-constructivist theory of the self was meant to capture this dynamic by insisting upon an underlying worldly conception of the self. Since an individual acting according to a particular social role is what gives that social role its reality, there is a significant part of the picture of alienation that is missing when considerations of social ontology are left out.

Additionally, what is ignored is the normative aspect in which, beyond talking about a person being alienated, we are able to talk about institutions as being alienating, that is, their structure that makes them *prima facie* resistant to appropriation, if not outright intrinsically impossible to be appropriated. The overly psychologized picture that Jaeggi presents ends up reifying social institutions into a separate entity that appears to exist independently of their realization in the particular actions of individuals instead of seeing them exactly as a particular manner in which individuals realize, or fail to realize, themselves.

Approaching Jaeggi's theory of alienation from the perspective of the social ontological account of alienation, it needs to be said immediately that the primary failing of her account is met by the central virtue of the social ontological account. While there is tremendous value in the nuanced psychological analysis that she offers, and much of it is necessary for a holistic understanding of alienation, the social ontological account is able to directly mediate the subjective and the objective perspectives as it centers on the specific locus that unites the two, namely, collective intentionality. The analysis provided by the social ontological account then

cannot be completed without simultaneously referencing both the subjective states of the individuals involved and the objective conditions of the social relationships that they construct through their interactions. This also brings into immediate relief the normative dimension of the social ontological account in its emphasis on the contradictory relationship between the normative expectations of one's social reality in the form of status functions and deontic powers, which can simultaneously explain rather than simply assert Jaeggi's maximalist interpretation as well as contextualize her minimalist account. Recall her maximalist interpretation argued that the ideals of personal autonomy are simply a fact of life, which without a justification teeters on the precipice of falling into alienation's traditional dependence upon an essentialist understanding of human nature. The social ontological account, on the other hand, demonstrates procedurally why this ideal, even if not always realized to its fullest, is nevertheless a kind of teleological aim intrinsic to the operation of social reality insofar as it depends upon individuals participating in collective intentionality. Social reality, to even exist, requires that people take it to be as such, and that requires that that reality be appropriated in such a way that makes it their own and thereby instantiates it. As for her minimalist interpretation, which argues that at least modern societies value personal autonomy and so violations of it can be seen as normatively problematic, it fits in directly with how the social ontological account conceptualizes the normative dimension of alienation, namely, there being a contradiction between the deontic powers that have been assumed by the individual that participate in the collective intention that establishes the status function that made the deontic power. In this case, the status function is the modern understanding of autonomy and self-realization that is held as an ideal for every person, while social realities that are realized in such a way that they violate that expectation are the exercise of the deontic powers. The advantage that the social ontological account offers on this, however, is

that it is not tied exclusively to the modern era as the fundamental issue is not linked to empirical realities but rather those that are intrinsic to sociality in whatever form it takes. For Jaeggi, this minimalist interpretation would mean that alienation arises *exclusively* for modern societies, which thereby limits the scope of her conceptualization.

In the end, while Jaeggi's account makes tremendous progress in re-establishing alienation on a newly invigorated foundation, it is hard not to be left with the impression that, to borrow an analogy from football, she fumbles the play on the one-yard line. To her credit, once again, the exceptional nuance with which she is able to navigate through the conceptual thicket surrounding alienation theory was an absolute prerequisite if there was to be any hope of restoring alienation theory to its former glory as a critical sociological term. Her focus on the subjective conditions that go into conditions of alienation was a much neglected area in alienation theory's history, and in that regard her work is peerless in the insights it offers. Still, the shortcomings in her approach when it comes to the normative dimension of alienation as well as the objective social aspects of alienation are critical inflection points that make it difficult to see how her approach would be able to maintain the momentum necessary to see alienation's more widespread adoption.

Conclusion

After gaining much of its popularity due to the work of Critical Theorists, alienation theory as traditionally conceived came to be viewed with greater suspicion even while the underlying issues that the term was seen as addressing still loomed large. Habermas's work was significant as it charted a new direction for Critical Theory even while remaining firmly within the same circle of concerns identified by alienation theory. The proceduralist approach that sought to operationalize what had been a traditionally substantialist position opened a new path

forward for alienation theory by offering a radically new ground for its justification.

Nevertheless, familiar issues remained throughout this phase of alienation theory. When comparing Habermas's approach to Jaeggi's, one still sees the familiar bifurcation between objective and subjective accounts. As much as Habermas focuses on the subject-perspective realm of the lifeworld, it is clear that his attention still remains with that of the external observer tracing the broader structural changes that precipitate the sort of phenomena more broadly identified by alienation. Jaeggi, on the other hand, almost exclusively focused on the subjective aspects of alienation. Furthermore, while both theorists are able to identify new grounds for establishing the normative dimension of critical theory in an immanent standard, both do as such by largely rejecting the possibility of finding a standard that would apply outside the realm of modernity. While doing as such helps provide a normative theory of alienation with a new lease on life, especially as it relates to contemporary society, it does end up having to do so at the cost of separating definitively from alienation theory's history. In short, while showing how alienation is a particular problem for modern societies it does so by finding it as exclusively a modern problem. It is clear that, on this basis, more work would be needed for the revitalization of alienation theory if it is to avoid requiring an absolute break from its own conceptual history, and on this point it is hoped that the advantages of the social ontological account of alienation have been clearly demonstrated.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Now at the end of the dissertation it is important to take stock of all that has been done, highlight what are the most important claims that have been made and justified, and give some recommendations for where things go from here in terms of revitalizing alienation theory. The most overarching intention in this project has been to reappropriate alienation theory in a way that preserves as much as is possible from its long and storied history while being able to offer new grounds that save it from the morass of aporias that have otherwise beset its popular use. Towards that end, it was essential that the theory forwarded be able to engage with a wide diversity of both traditional and contemporary approaches to alienation in a way that is able to productively explicate their shortcomings and ultimately supplement their limitations. However, the goal was not simply to offer a backward looking assessment of alienation theory's history but rather it was to show that alienation still has a role to play in critical social theory, and a most important one at that. If this dissertation has been successful, then it should already be clear that these accomplishments have been achieved. Still, it is important to take stock of all that has been done in a succinct and summary fashion.

The social ontological account of alienation argues that alienation is a logical possibility that arises out of the nature of social reality as generally construed. Since all of social reality is composed of deontic powers conferred by status functions that are created by collective intentionality, the fact that alienation is a performative contradiction that arises when a deontic power is enacted in such a way that it occludes the collective recognition of the status function

entails that alienation can arise in any social arrangement. As such, the social ontological account of alienation reaffirms the foundational importance of the concept of alienation for any sociological analysis given its ever-present possibility. While those who have an affinity for alienation theory might not see anything particularly profound in arguing that alienation is a fundamental concern for sociological analysis, this conclusion drawn specifically from the conceptual underpinning of the account itself is critical because it does not base the argument for alienation's importance on an appeal to sentiment or simply a claim that its existence is ubiquitous, both of which can be seen as question begging as to why alienation should be viewed this way in the first place. Instead, the conclusion here is drawn specifically from the conceptual underpinning of the social ontological account of alienation and so proves rather than assumes its foundational character. Consequently, it was critical to demonstrate that alienation theory could be redeemed from those aporias that had otherwise rendered its continued use suspect. The social ontological account of alienation was able to address and resolve all three of the most important aporias as well as engage with many of the peripheral issues that have arisen throughout its history.

The first aporia was centered on the question of whether or not the various occurrences identified as instances of alienation could be understood as emanating from the same fundamental source or whether the most that could be expected was a loose analogy for associating them with one another. Recall that those who advocated for a single unified source for alienation typically focused on a purported material cause, such as was the case with the Marxist emphasis on the foundational role of the capitalist system in shaping every aspect of society. For those that advocated for a merely analogous relationship, on the other hand, alienation was understood as being merely an "umbrella term" that otherwise united

fundamentally disparate phenomena. The social ontological approach to alienation theory showed that there was a third option, which was that there was a formal unity, as opposed to material unity, that was still more substantial than a mere analogy. The basis for this claim comes from the logical form of social reality that stands at the heart of the social ontological account: all of social reality can be represented as having the logical form X counts as Y in context C. If we have found with Searle's social ontology a means for identifying the logical form of social reality in general, then the social ontological account of alienation, which is derived from that understanding, also has a fundamental logical form that reveals a common ground to all instances of alienation. Such a conceptualization is more substantial than the analogical approach because it argues that it is the exact same mechanism at play in every instance of alienation, namely the performative contradiction that arises when the enactment of a deontic power undercuts the status function that made that selfsame deontic power possible, but without having to ground that mechanism in a specific empirical arrangement. The social ontological account of alienation is also less rigid and narrow than what is found with those who argue for a common material cause to alienation because it operates on a level of generality that is applicable to a wide diversity of social arrangements due to the fact that alienation is discovered to be a logical possibility intrinsic to social reality in general. The social ontological account of alienation then takes a considerable step forward in reestablishing a united front for alienation theory that is analytically rigorous but also flexible to varying circumstances.

The second aporia that has stymied the widespread adoption of alienation theory is the objective/subjective divide between those approaches that sees the dispositions of individuals as the necessary and sufficient condition for alienation's occurrence and those that emphasize the primary role of the conditions of society for determining cases of alienation. While traditionally

seen as a term concerned with the objective social structures, the majority of contemporary work in alienation theory leans decidedly in favor of viewing subjectivity as the critical component for understanding alienation. In regards to this aporia, the social ontological account of alienation demonstrated that this divide arises as a result of a fundamental confusion in how the terms “objective” and “subjective” are used. Relying upon Searle’s fourfold schema that identified objectivity and subjectivity as having either an ontological or an epistemological understanding, the divide as it exists in alienation theory is largely dissolved as conceptually untenable. On a more substantial level, the social ontological account demonstrates that a complete understanding of alienation requires both objective and subjective elements. Ontologically speaking, alienation is subjective as its existence, as a derivative of social reality in general, is dependent upon intentionality for its existence. This has the implication that at its most foundational level alienation’s existence is dependent upon the individual who is alienated as it is their participation in the collective intentionality of the status function that creates that conditions for the possibility that be alienated, which would generally align with those approaches that are typically self-understood as subjective. That having been said, it must be acknowledged that it is not easy to discharge the influence that others have on an individual’s perspective, especially as it is the individual’s participation in *collective* intentionality that more specifically creates the context within which alienation can arise. Given that, one also has to understand that as a systematic fallout fact alienation is epistemically objective because the question of whether or not it is true that someone is alienated is not exclusively dependent upon the subjectivity of any one individual in isolation but instead arises as a secondary effect of collective intentionality. Ultimately, the social ontological account of alienation points to how both the objective and

subjective elements must always be kept in view in order to have a holistic understanding of alienation and how it operates.

The third aporia, which is the question of whether alienation is to be understood only as a descriptive term or as also having an intrinsic normative content, finds resolution in the social ontological account as well. Recall that a major part of alienation's appeal as traditionally conceived was that it was seen as not only being able to describe a situation distinct from what was singled out by other terms but also it was able to simultaneously show that such circumstances ought to be criticized. The central objection to this perceived interrelationship was the classic argument that one cannot derive an ought from an is. Searle has shown, however, that to understand the workings of social reality in the form of status functions and deontic powers is to understand a descriptive scenario as inherently normative due to the fact that it does not just show that there are certain deontic expectations that a person has but it also shows, given a person's role in establishing the existence of that deontology via their participation in collective intentionality, that the person ought to fulfill such normative expectations. As Searle succinctly explained it, to understand that a person has made a promise, that is, has assumed an obligation to act or refrain from acting in a certain way, one not only understands the fact that such an action has occurred but one also understands the expectations that normatively bind that person to acting accordingly. Since alienation arises out of the relationship between status functions and deontic powers, that normative dimension carries over into alienation. Alienation not only describes a situation in which the enactment of a deontic power occludes the collective recognition of the status function that made the deontic power possible but it also reveals such circumstances as normatively problematic, or as it was more precisely articulated, alienation is a metanormative concern as it involves conditions that undermine the possibility of acting in a

deontological fashion in the first place. The central normative issue with alienation is that it indicates a situation where the conditions that are necessary for a person to act in accordance with a self-assumed obligation is undermined precisely in the very act that is trying to realize that normative obligation. Alienation is thus normatively problematic and intrinsically worthy of critique because of how it produces conditions that undermine the very possibility of acting normatively.

One important addendum to this final point given the excess to which alienation was applied to all manner of circumstances deemed worthy of critique. Though definitively shown to be an intrinsically normative idea, alienation is just one amongst multiple critical terms to use. It is not the be-all end-all term as it was sometimes used during its heyday. This is important because, first, it means that while alienation can be understood as intrinsically normative, that does not mean it is the primary concern in every possible situation in which it is potentially relevant. One can be perfectly consistent in recognizing that it may be better to be alienated from a normatively “bad” society than fully integrated in it. The point is that *ceteris paribus* alienation is problematic. Second, this is also important because it points to the fact that the terminology of alienation is just one tool amongst many that should be a part of sociological analysis. It adds an entire dimension to sociological analysis that otherwise is ignored or simply not perceived, again even while important to recognize that it alone does not provide a full picture of things for the purposes of social critique when used on its own. The fact that the social ontological account can show both that alienation is important and put it in its proper context vis-a-vis other conceptual tools of sociological analysis is an essential accomplishment for reviving alienation after it succumbed to its various theoretical excesses.

Beyond the three aporia there was also the question of whether the account can engage meaningfully with alienation theory's past. While most treatments of alienation theory end up touching upon the term's extensive history, they only do it in a perfunctory manner with the unstated conclusion being that the past is best left in the past. In the case of this dissertation, the main intention behind surveying the long and varied history of alienation has been to determine the common analytic points that can serve as guiding threads for working through the assorted challenges that face alienation's future viability. Said another way, being able to see why certain approaches understood themselves as dealing with alienation helps to unpack what is at stake with alienation. Each stage in alienation's development – from its pre-philosophical history to its early philosophical appropriation through to its various iterations in successive waves of Critical Theory – brought with it new characterizations and insights that offered promising progress for alienation theory even while introducing numerous elements that have proven to be problematic for the term's continued relevance. Equally important, several of the approaches reviewed remain ways that the term alienation is employed, and so out of due respect for those uses it was vital to meet those approaches on the level at which they presented themselves. Ultimately the hope was to not only show that the social ontological account of alienation fits within alienation theory's history but also that it is able to productively engage that history in a way that could contribute to a deeper appreciation of their insights as well as help to draw out what was best in those accounts for alienation's continued usage. The hope now is that in having revisited the various stages of alienation theory's development, even if one might exhaustedly say, "yet again," it has been possible to lay sufficient groundwork so as to envision a new possibility for alienation's future.

Having surveyed the major stages of this project and highlighted what are forwarded as the most important accomplishments, the final words will be left to address where things can be envisioned as going from here. Towards that end, there are two primary topics that are the most salient: the role the social ontological account of alienation can have as it is applied to concrete circumstances and alienation's relevance to a critique of modern society. Since the majority of contemporary work in alienation theory is in the field of empirical sociology and approaches alienation from a perspective generally in alignment with what was laid out by Melvin Seeman, being able to show how the social ontological account of alienation can contribute to those investigations is imperative if this approach is to help contribute to the more widespread revitalization of alienation theory. In the section that addressed Seeman's contributions to the development of alienation theory, it was pointed out how empirical approaches, in wanting to get right to the details of concrete cases, can often tilt in the direction of assuming more than proving that what is being dealt with is an instance of alienation. On that, recall that the central critique was how to distinguish between when cases of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, etc. are instances of alienation and when they are those *simpliciter*. There is a significant difference between a case where one is unable to bring about a certain effect, a case where one is unable to bring about a certain effect that one *would like* to have occur, and a case where one is unable to bring about a certain effect but recognize that one *ought* to be able to bring about that effect. It is only the last instance that aligns with the characterization of alienation given the deontic expectations involved, and the conceptual schema provided by the social ontological account of alienation is able to explicate social circumstances exactly in those terms. Furthermore, as the concern with alienation is identifying a performative contradiction between status functions and deontic powers, a fundamentally philosophical conceptualization such as is

found in the social ontological account of alienation is primed for this kind of analysis given that the scrutiny of contradictions is arguably the most basic of philosophical tools. Ultimately, the relationship between the social ontological account of alienation and empirical investigation can be envisioned in the following way. While the social ontological account provides the initial framework for developing a hypothesis as to circumstances that can potentially be seen as fitting the description of alienation, empirical research can, first, be used to determine the degree to which the individuals involved see their circumstances as explicable according to that framework, which can also be confirmatory that the framework is a justifiable one, and second, it can be used to measure the degree of strength that the individuals involved experience when it comes to the performative contradiction that is at the heart of alienation. The hope is that the social ontological account can contribute to greater consistency across studies in terms of their framework, which would also contribute to the clarity of picture that comes from cross-study comparisons.

Beyond dealing with particular cases, the social ontological account also helps explain why alienation is so significant in modern society. Many theorists have pointed out that alienation is the quintessential modern phenomenon given both its pervasiveness and also its intensity, to which various explanations have been offered. The social ontological account of alienation points to two simple reasons: increased complexity and elevated expectations of self-realization. On the one hand, understanding alienation as a performative contradiction readily reveals why the increased complexity of modern society would lead to increased alienation: the more deontic powers there are, the more likely it is their expectations will overlap and thereby place people in situations that sit at the crossroads of contradictory expectations. The most ready way that this can be seen is in the increased acceleration with which contemporary modern

society operates.¹ A person is expected to fulfill numerous expectations—financial, romantic, health, mental, personal, etc.—and on a daily basis. One could say the modern person is expected to be everything to everyone and at all times, and unsurprisingly that leads to situations of profound alienation when one is unable to fulfill these expectations given the contradictory currents. Building directly on this issue of increased complexity is the fact that modern society is also characterized by heightened expectations of self-realization. The more individuals are expected to be actively engaged in constructing their social environment, that is, the more they are expected to be full participants in the collective recognition of status functions, the greater the potentiality for performative contradictions to arise. Since alienation is a situation where the enactment of a deontic power is such that it occludes the participation of the individual in the collective recognition of the status function that enables the deontic power, that means the more circumstances there are where a person is expected to be the self-realizing participant in the construction of their social circumstances the greater potentiality there is that that person finds themselves enacting a deontic power in such a way that it would undermine that expectation of self-realization. More specifically, the status function of being an individual in modern society carries with it the deontic expectation that one be self-realizing in all that one does, which, when combined with the increased complexity of the modern world, produces a greater propensity that one fails to realize that deontic power in such a way that it undermines the status function.

Still, in the end we need not conclude with the feeling that there is little hope for humanity to be freed from alienating circumstances in the overwhelming onslaught of modern society. Instead, the social ontological account points to the fundamental emancipatory potential that exists at the heart of social reality. Because social reality is constructed by participation in

¹ See Hartmut, *Alienation and Acceleration* (2010).

the collective recognition of status functions, social reality is intrinsically oriented towards the ideals of cooperation and self-realization: cooperation because of how social reality arises out of groups of people coming together to realize its existence in their actions and attitudes and self-realization because of how those same people become a certain kind of person through their appropriation of those actions and attitudes that create social reality. While this does not mean human society is on a clear linear path to greater cooperation and self-realization, it does mean that the arc of the social world, as it were, is bent towards these values as they are intrinsic to the existence of the social world itself. While rather basic social institutions can be constructed through relatively limited cooperative behavior between people, the more complex society becomes the more marginal increases in social power requires additional commitments from the participants involved, which ultimately requires that the individuals involved be *willing* to cooperate. In short, the more people are willing to cooperate, the more deontic powers—these fantastic increases in humanity’s ability to do things simply because they want to do them—are able to operate. First and foremost in obstructing this development, however, is alienation. As a foundational logical possibility given the interaction between status functions and deontic powers, the existence of alienation impinges upon these twin ideals of cooperation and self-realization: cooperation because of how alienation undermines an individual’s ability to participate freely and fully with others and self-realization because of how it directly occludes a person establishing themselves in their social context. Having a proper understanding of alienation, and realizing its essential role in any sociological analysis, is then crucial for anyone working to enrich and empower humanity.

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