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## THE METAMORPHOSIS OF THE ALIENATION CONCEPT

Rarița Mihail (a) \*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Associate Professor, "Dunărea de Jos" University, Galati, Romania, E-mail: [raritya.mihail@ugal.ro](mailto:raritya.mihail@ugal.ro)

### *Abstract*

This article touches the notion of alienation from Rousseau's, Hegel's and young Marx's perspective, Althusser's critique being its offset, which, according to, this concept stems from an abstract, metaphysical view of history and human agents' activities. According to Althusser, alienation is indeed the humanistic expression of a back-to-origins philosophy and of lost human essence retrieval. Hence, the philosophy of contractual alienation (as a foundation of political community as per Rousseau), the interrogation of historical positivity from young Hegel's writings and, last but not least, the alienated work critique elaborated by young Marx in Manuscripts of 1844 can be interpreted as variations around the same essential concepts of human history. In the attempt of overcoming such an undifferentiated approach, the study tries to highlight the original and particular reflection that each of these authors develop on the subject and highlights, at the same time, what they have in common, despite their differences on this theme. When we talk about alienation we always relate to a mutilated loss in the relationship with the self, with others and with the social world. Moreover, we also talk about the possibility of overcoming some of the conditions that are considered degrading for humans. In other words, this study aims to prove that not only it is not possible to reduce the alienation to an abstract and naïve humanistic notion, but that it also represents an essential landmark for understanding the impossibility of some social groups of classes to develop on the merits of long-lasting deprivation of the benefits the relationship with the self, the others and the social world can bring.

**Keywords:** Contractual alienation; estrangement; externalization; objectivity; alienated labour;

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Alienation, understood as an estrangement process, as man's distancing from his specific nature, has probably been one of the most important and debated theories of the XXth century, acquiring acknowledged importance in the consciousness of the postmodern man; the theory put forward by Marx has played a conclusive role in the discussions concerning this subject. Nonetheless, this interpretation also had its share of deviations from this path, and the publication of certain of Marx's novel texts containing reflections on alienation, marked a turning point in the transformation and dissemination of this theory. Throughout centuries, the concept of alienation has been repeatedly used and suffered significant changes. According to theological thinking, the process of alienation denotes man's separation from God, the first biblical case of alienation being that of the couple in paradise which, having eaten



from the forbidden fruit, lost the divine grace proneness and separated themselves from paradise. Theories on social contract use the term in order to denote the loss of man's initial freedom, while the British politic economy uses it to refer back to a transfer of property onto lands and goods.

As a matter of fact, people's mutual interest for alienation came out from the astonishment caused by one of the harshest criticisms of this notion. To be more exact, during the post-war period, alienation was by far the key concept of all the theories of the late capitalistic society. During the 50's and the 60's, the concept of alienation had a short sparkle and an intense presence in the larger frame of critical philosophy, of Marxism and sociology (French and not only).

Nevertheless, the problematics of alienation came to a standstill and a general feeling of distrust started to arise at the onset of the 60's and the 70's. Accordingly, the scepticism directly connected to the theme of alienation was constantly stirred and enthused by Louis Althusser. In *Pour Marx*, Althusser rejected the role of initiating groundwork which seemed to be played by alienation in Marx's paper, *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. According to the French philosopher, alienation cannot have such a role, "unless it is received with a warrant and as a mission from Man's conception which will extract from Man's essence the necessity and the content of economic concepts which we find familiar" (Althusser, 2005, p. 159).

This quotation contains embedded within one of the strongest accusations which have ever been brought against alienation: i.e. its being the foundation of a philosophy based on origin and the expression of a human need to rediscover the lost essence or the missing nature.

Therein, the current paper aims at examining the truthfulness and the relevance or the falsity and the inaccuracy of these judgements, based on the careful study of some texts by Rousseau, Hegel and Marx where alienation plays a decisive conceptual role.

The first philosophic systematic occurrence of alienation is not noticeable until the beginning of the XIXth century in the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, the German philosopher turns alienation into the central category of the modern world and uses terms such as *Entäusserung* (exteriorization) and *Entfremdung* (alienation) in order to represent the phenomenon in which the Spirit becomes other than itself through objectification.

In order to present the Hegelian conception concerning the involvement of alienation in man's universal becoming, one should not overlook *the theory of the social contract* all the more since young Hegel used to be a passionate reader of Rousseau and *The Social Contract*, idealising the principle of organic wholeness which dialectically connects the individual to his political body.

## **2. A POSITIVE APPROACH TO ALIENATION IN *THE SOCIAL CONTRACT***

One of the first philosophical and political meanings of the concept of *alienation* can be identified in *The Social Contract*. Rousseau calls forth the juridical denotation of the term, *alienus* (Lat.) – which belongs to the other, the stranger – giving it a new application field. From a strictly juridical perspective, alienation represents the act of giving up, abandoning or giving one good away.

And yet, this restrictive approach gives alienation a value stringently negative and its form proves itself to be rather poor. The notion only describes the act of forsaking a certain good to a foreign party, either a sovereign or an institution, but it does not mention anything about any qualitative or substantial alterations of the individual offering it away. The individual who alienates his things like that has not joined any political communities yet.

In order for the alienation act to acquire a new function, it needs to be considered as an establishing method of the political body and of citizenship. Nonetheless, one needs to notice the fact that the term *alienation* applied to the political field does not appear as such, but the notion is transposed from the juridical to the political branch at the expense of a certain alteration of its original denotation. In other words, the status of notion with a disavowal connotation suffers a fundamental transformation: from now on, the loss will be compensated for by a certain positive feature.

Let us see under what circumstances can alienation be considered a modality that establishes the political body. To Rousseau, in the absence of a convention that establishes and sets the power of all apart from the power of one, the only efficient law is the law of the most influential. Social violence and the supremacy of one individual create injustice. The social contract is the one that allows for the embodiment of general will, and in order to describe the relationship that connects the natural individual

to the general will, under the authority of a contract, Rousseau attributes the alienation concept a positive denotation: “Each of us puts his person and all his power, under the supreme direction of the general will and *in corpore* we receive each member, as an indivisible part of the whole” (Rousseau, 1957, p. 101). As individuals, each and every one of us, give all their rights away to the community, all at once becoming its members!

Accordingly, *a priori*, the act of giving a good away acquires but a negative denotation, since this only implies giving away to the benefit of the other, that which I possess. In order for the alienation act to become establishment of the political body, it needs to be considered through a positive lens. Nonetheless, for this transfer to become possible, its accomplishment ground needs to change. From an economy of goods regulated by private property, one needs to report oneself to a policy of the citizen’s rights and duties: citizens as “participants to the sovereign authority” and individuals as “subjects under the laws of the state” (Rousseau, 1957, p. 102).

The citizen and the individual are two ways of being which, involving one another, enable social individuals to form a political and sovereign party: associated together “they collectively take on the name people” (Rousseau, 1957, p. 102).

This no longer means giving a good away without a contract but rather giving up one’s rights to a general will. The denotation that Rousseau assigns to freedom is that of understanding *individual freedom* as being encompassed by *universal freedom*. The act of alienating one’s rights gets, in this context, a positive function. I no longer give my freedom away to a certain person but I submit myself to the general will, and it is precisely this compliance that enables my individual freedom. My individual freedom is, from now on, organically bounded by everyone’s and, for this reason, it is complete.

These theoretical considerations allow one to understand the two distinct connotations which Rousseau attributes to the concept of alienation. On the one hand, it is about moving man away from his natural state of “celestial and majestic simplicity impressed on him by his creator”, under the pressure of civilization. On the other hand, the concept designates an imperative which lies at the foundation of a harmonious human society, the clause of the social contract: “the total alienation of each associate of himself, and all his rights, to the whole community” (Rousseau, 1957, p. 100). The social contract creates “a moral and collective body” (Rousseau, 1957, p. 101), a man with a personal life and will in a state whose sovereign, in Rousseau’s own terms, is not a person but the general will of the state, actively expressed.

Therein, one can easily infer the *positive value of alienation* as it is responsible for engaging everyone within the same political body. Nonetheless, the concept equally connotes the constitutive moment of the political sovereign. As a matter of fact, the individual who alienates his rights allowing for the foundation of everyone’s power as a general control simultaneously becomes a citizen, i.e. a gifted individual with rights and capable of exercising them freely.

Accordingly, there is a compensation for submission - *citizenship* which can express itself within the civil society. In order to understand the positive value of alienation, the notion of *compensation* is fundamental: initially involved in the selling act, compensation eventually gets a connotation which exceeds the frame of the property.

This notion is also to be found later on: compensation, within the connotation given by Hegel, is the very becoming of the subject who acknowledges his liberty in the actual form of the right or of the work. As such, the subject gains shape and a historically determined content. Alienation seems to suppress the sovereignty of the subject to reality, it becomes a necessary stage in the development of consciousness, while the individual is destined to identify himself in his object which, being ready to oppose it, seems rather strange. Starting from these theories, it can be seen that one of young Marx’s first criticisms of Hegel concerns the exclusion of the famous “return to self” of the subject’s spirit through a positioning against the object of its production.

Despite these disputes, one thing is clear: *alienation needs to be compensated by something*. But can this really work for commerce? To Rousseau, the alienation of the individual in the body of the general will allows for the particular expression of everyone’s freedom. By alienation, the individual gains a subjective form, it becomes a subject of the state and a member of the invisible body of sovereignty.

Man’s alienation as a citizen in the relationship with the state has become the departure point of the way in which Hegel approaches the concept of alienation. The theory of the social contract states that

in the organised society the individual needs to give up a series of rights to the benefit of the state, which represents the collective interest of the community. Hegel has particularly developed this idea strongly expressed by the philosophers of natural rights.

Quoting from Rousseau, and especially from *The Social Contract*, the German philosopher takes the idea of organic totality which dialectically bonds the individual to his political body. However, Hegel understood that the “perfect totality” of the Greeks cannot be reactivated in a modernity which connects the fragmentariness of the political body and the separation of knowledge.

A clear mind does not give up criticising the republican idealism of Rousseauistic inspiration which embraces the ideal of the Greek “perfect totality”, acknowledging that it takes us to a turning point as it denies the interactions between classes and the internal conflicts of the civil society. “This unmediated juncture between the Universe and the Individual is an abstraction; it sees in man nothing but the citizen, and not the bourgeois, the isolated man as such” (Hyppolite, 1955, p. 71).

Consequently, unlike Rousseau, who imagines an ideal, just and pacifist society, Hegel maintains the idea that there is a conflict inherent to any form of social relationship: to Hegel, “the civil society is not the place where the individual’s freedom unfolds in its purity deprived of contradictions but rather the place where conflicts between individual freedoms and social groups pile up, where conflicts, interests and needs collide, each having a different force and a power” (Azzarà, 2011, p. 83). As such, the consciousness of the slave and of the master, being different members of the same political body, are engaged in a fight for recognition till death. Accordingly, Hegel sustains the existence of a conflict within social and historic totality, including thus the possibility of its negation with a view to historically changing totality, and therefore progress. For the German philosopher, a social order is fit for reconciliation if and only if it allows for freedom, which means that, that order needs to respect and promote both subjective and objective freedom.

### 3. HEGEL’S CONCEPTS OF ALIENATION

Starting from the theory of contractualism which outlines man’s alienation as a citizen in the relationship with the state, Hegel considers alienation a fundamental moment of the development of consciousness. Be it about law, labour, family or language, alienation, objectification and externalization work together with the purpose of growing an objective consciousness.

Likewise, they enable the dialectical bonding of the particular with the universal, from a historical perspective. The main break away from Rousseau’s or Hobbes’s contractualism is due to the fact that Hegel no longer considers the political process starting from resolute anthropological premises.

The proposition of the German philosopher is to conceive the development of the objective spirit by starting from himself, while keeping up with the movements of consciousness in history, genuine essential mediations which enable the Spirit to come back to itself: “The Spirit has broken away with the world of existence and representation as we know it [...] it is never at rest but rather trapped in an ever progressing movement. [...] The beginning of the new spirit is the product of a great revolution of varied forms of culture, the price of a far too twisting road and of equally as many trials and toils. It is the whole which came back to itself from that which has been previously spread before him” (Hegel, 2000, pp. 14-15). It is certainly needed to draw a line between *alienation* within the frame of the pure activity of the Concept, as a moment of the pure activity of the Spirit which comes back to itself, and *alienation* as a moment in the development of individual consciousness which is thus related to the universal.

#### 3.1. Alienation as Self Estrangement

The term *self-estrangement* goes back to Hegel’s first writings, especially the ones from Berna which are necessary in the understanding of his later works, as noted by Jean Hyppolite. However, unlike his writings from youth where Hegel constructs a harsh criticism against modern consciousness, he now tries to reconcile in a philosophical manner the destinies of the singular and the particular. “The need for philosophy” was born from this necessity, so that the ideal way man learns to feel as comfortable in the world as he in his home is philosophical, through the progressive development of his consciousness. The singular individual feels alien to the traditions and customs of his age, and this alienation further leads to the temporary impossibility to feel free.

The singular constitutes itself as something “fortuitous” (Hegel, 1999, p. 30) as compared to the rigid necessity of the world which condemns him to a state of estrangement (similar to *Entfremdung*) and

suffering. In other words, alienation is due to the fact that the singular individual does not feel comfortable in the world.

In the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, this state of consciousness will become “the unhappy consciousness” of the manifestation of an “inner disruption of the spirit” (Hyppolite, 1955, p. 61) in the times of historical transition foregoing revolutions. When such a consciousness is spread among the masses, the people itself, with its own laws and institutions, is lost. Unhappy consciousness generates the loss of the world’s objectiveness, the ruination of the people and its institutions, just like the loss of the world’s objectiveness produces unhappy consciousness. The influence is reciprocal: despite the delay between them, the singular and the universe train each other in their fall.

The fundamental difference between the estrangement denoted to in the theory of the social contract in Rousseau’s vision and the estrangement considered as a necessary moment in the development of the Spirit, in Hegel’s own denotation of the term, consists in the absence of fundamental anthropologic premises.

In *Emile* (1998), Rousseau draws attention to the fact that, in order to accede to the status of citizen, an individual first needs to learn the job of being a man: only the *natural man* is capable of alienating his own freedom to the *total* and accordingly become a citizen of the community. In this way, Rousseau draws a distinction between the natural man, free in nature, and the citizen, whose particular freedom is not absolute freedom unless a foregoing alienation of his natural liberty takes place within a social pact.

To Hegel, alienation is taken for reality: the world of reality, he says, is the world of the spirit’s alienation. Although one can identify the idea of a radical negation of nature, one can no longer find fundamental anthropological premises, the natural man, but a pure universal becoming of the singular self-consciousness.

The fact of being self-confident needs to be considered a necessary state of consciousness: alienation generates reality. To put it differently, according to Hegel, in order to affirm oneself, one needs to lose oneself first.

Although the two *Entfremdung* and *Entäußerung* have different denotations, alienation – with the connotation of being a stranger to oneself, can be associated to the notion of estrangement as externalization. Accordingly, “being a stranger to oneself” or “becoming another or external to oneself” can mutually involve one another, the first state being the consequence of an individual’s externalization. And yet, the theme of externalization which prepares the Feuerbachian problematics of the alienating objectification has a more straightforward positive connotation than alienation seen as *Entfremdung*. The worker, for example, gives a form to matter when he manipulates it. By modelling his work, he models himself. Accordingly, is this a condition for him to feel estranged from himself? Is he necessarily a stranger to his own product?

## **2.2. Alienation as Externalization or Objectification**

Commenting on Hegel’s writings that date back to his time at Jena, Franck Fischbach (2008) remarked that alienation understood as *Entfremdung* connotes the tragic character of hollow subjectivity which confronts itself to a dead objectivity, a romantic theme which culminates with his time spent in Berna. However, alienation understood as *Entäußerung* connotes the positive character, as founder of objectification seen as concrete social activity.

Nonetheless, this positive connotation grows within a negative process. While *work* is described by Hegel (1999) as a “subjective activity of the singular individual” (p. 101), it should be observed that this is not purely a positive act, in the sense that the individual expresses what he is by the means of an expression that would be nothing but the extension or manifestation of himself within a determined social world. Man externalizes himself by working, thus effecting a first denial of himself, becoming other than himself. Since it allows the worker to transmit a form this externalization hides away a positive character.

Accordingly, seen as an externalization process, work makes the individual become universal. By working, man becomes the subject of a universal moderation of his needs: “considered a being of singular needs, the individual becomes universal” (Hegel, 1999, p. 104).

Thorough this articulation of the universal individual and of the community, one should remark the double influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith. While to Rousseau the universal becoming of the individual is limited to a contractual moderation of rights and duties, to Hegel there is the description of a moderation of universal needs since the worker commonly works to satisfy everybody’s



needs, in keeping with the same principle as Adam Smith's "invisible hand". Despite the worker's poor condition, Hegel often endures the double character of work: the worker produces an object, but he equally produces himself through work, giving himself a form. The first loss of the worker is in the externalisation process, when he becomes another. The worker no longer recognises himself in the process of his production, suffering a second loss, that of his object.

If work means the disavowal of the worker as a "pure self", the second disavowal takes place when the worker – the feeling of alienation to his object being long due – finally succeeds in recognising himself in his object. For that, he needs to deny the differentiated character of the object in relationship with his subjective activity: the disavowal of negation and the occurrence of the subject's objective and positive existence. Once again, by losing himself, the Hegelian subject acquires a real existence.

In view of that, through the lectures delivered at Jena, Hegel approaches the problem of work as a way to the individual's objectification. And yet work is not the exclusive way of externalization: money, property, the contract, all take part together in the universal development of singular consciousness. That is why they appear as facilitations which enable everyone to acquire a universal destiny. For example, the change allows for a return to the basic need, reality understood as a multitude of particular needs: "change means returning to bonding, to possession [...]. Each abandons their profession, they suppress their being there so that it soon is acknowledged that the other obtains the *consent of the former*" (Hegel, 2002, p. 54). Hence, one can comprehend the influence of the first meaning of the term alienation, from Latin and pertaining to the juridical, i.e. giving one's personal goods away to a third party. However, the act of "taking one's goods" has a positive meaning, enabling the donation of an object to the community, by founding and engaging a universal moderation of needs.

As a consequence, Hegel develops the notion of property by mediation which means that the mediation of the change enables to ascribe a value to the property thus including the individual in a universal and social destiny.

Analogous to work, the exchange allows for this externalization process. As such, in and through externalization, the individual acquires a content, a substance and a universal form, otherwise said, a real existence. The negativity inherent to the externalization process in the exchange influences the process of externalization within work.

And yet, how does one explain the fact that negativity, bound to the externalization process within the exchange, allows the acquiring an objective existence? Hegel mentions that during the exchange "I have created something, which means that I have *externalized* myself; *the negative* is *positive*; this externalization is an act of *acquisition*" (Hegel, 2002, p. 57). The nature of this externalization is exactly the forcing of my work as value in the eyes of the other.

The destiny of Hegelian positivity is universal in the way it establishes the foundations of man's positive essence. But, if that unity needs to be established, this thing is due to the fact that the scission has already taken place, i.e. the fragmentariness and the opposition of particular consciousness. In the contract, for example, externalization is bound by externalizing the other and as such, every singular individual reaches further away from the imposed will.

Accordingly, estrangement (*Entäusserung*) of my own being, in contract or in work, leads me to a new form of positive existence: "the negative becomes positive". But this positivity is not the expression of a natural development: returning to the being as a positive being needs to be done by spirit, following universal abstractions and mediations. Accordingly, one can thus understand what Hegel meant when he ascribed philosophy a reconciling duty, that of reconciling the singular individual and the universal being of the world.

Jean Hyppolite (1955) admits that the flaws of the Hegelian system pertain more to its "incapacity of bettering its time" (p. 100) and hence, political capitalist economy by nature is founded in a conventional means of production relationships. Nonetheless, he agrees to Hegel on the inevitable nature of alienation as soon as man acquires a real and conscious existence, therefore social. Hegel (2002) does not refute the fact that the considerable difference between those who are extremely rich and those who are extremely poor is a wrongly committed against the effective universality of social organization, but this dissimilarity seems to gradually disappear by the means of a fundamental facilitation of money which enables for the transformation of the real need in "pure form" (p. 101).

Although Karl Marx (1987) appreciates the "greatness of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and its final outcome – the dialectics of negativity as a creating and engaging principle" (p. 131), it draws attention

onto the contradictory nature of Hegelian philosophy. According to Marx, Hegel's greatest mistake is that he got stuck on a level of abstraction which does not allow him to understand tangible reality or that he thus didn't perceive, the contingent and alienating nature of the capitalist mode of production as a historical stage that can be overcome.

To Marx, unlike Hegel, alienation does not coincide with the objectification process as such, but rather with a precise economic reality and a specific phenomenon: paid work and the transformation of work products in objects which are conflicting with their producers. The philosophical and political diversity between these two interpretations is enormous. Unlike Hegel, who stands for alienation as an ontological manifestation of work, Marx conceives of this phenomenon as being characteristic to a certain limited period of production, specific to capitalism, anticipating thus the possibility of overcoming it by the fact that society moves further away from private property (Marx, 1987, p. 73).

### **3. THE MANUSCRIPTS OF 1844 AND THEIR MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THE REVITALISATION OF ALIENATION**

*The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* describe alienation as the phenomenon through which work opposes the worker "as something alien, as a power *independent* of its producer" (Marx, 1987, p. 62). To Marx (1987), "the *alienation* of the worker in his product means that not only does his work become an object, an *external* existence but that it also exists outside it, independent from it, like something which is foreign to him and becomes an independent power opposing him" (p. 63).

Apart from this general definition, Marx states four different types of alienation which show the way in which, in the bourgeois society, the worker is alien to: a) the product of his work which becomes "an object foreign to him and which has power over him"; 2). the work process which is perceived as being "aimed against him, independent from him and that not belonging to him"; 3). the human kind as "the generic essence of man" is turned into "an essence foreign to him"; and 4). all the other people, i.e. concerning the relationship with "work and the object of work (Marx, 1987, pp. 66-69) accomplished by his fellow workers.

The first and most obvious alienation is therefore the one of the object opposing the worker like an "alien being". Work is fixed in an object, in a thing, but this objectification contains within an unacceptable disavowal: of the object as product of the personal productive activity of the worker. Accordingly, this is an "unlucky" objectification, an objectification faulted by a first denial, the denial of the relationship between the worker and his object. Political economy and its corollary, private property, seem to only make possible such a disavowal. Differently put, the produced object soon gets in the hands of the one buying work force. The object, as a consumer good, does not belong to the one buying it but rather to capitalism as a buyer of work force. Accordingly, private property logically appears to be the cause of this disavowal. The relationship between worker and the object of its production is found under the form of unity divided under the impulse of private property.

Alienation does not involve only the distance which separates the producer from its object but it is present in the heart of objectification, in the production act. When Marx uses the term *Entäußerung*, as a *loss of self*, it's not about any externalization but about an externalization process which involves the nullification of the worker. Productive activity becomes self-automated, it functions outside the being of the worker and opposes a foreign force. One's own work transforms the worker into a consumer good. This does not happen only because the relationship subject/ object is reversed in the market economy but because work itself opposes the worker as a purely external force which does not belong to someone's own being. "Which is why, the worker only feels himself outside his work and his work feels outside himself. [...] His labour is therefore not voluntary but coerced; it's forced labor" (Marx, 1987, p. 65).

Work confines and inhibits workers' humanity which, treated as a work force is reduced to the most basic of functions: drinking, eating and reproducing. Consequently, Marx chooses from the two forms of alienation previously listed, a third connotation of alienation: alienating the generic being of man, of his own humanity or, speaking in Feuerbachian terms, of man who reports himself to his kind, of man as a universal, free being. "The vital conscious life is that which distinguishes man from of animal life activity. It is only through that he becomes a generic being" (Marx, 1987, p. 68).

In contrast to religious alienation, one speaks of an objective alienation rather than of an alienation of consciousness, a subjective alienation. Religious alienation can be solved through an effort

of consciousness, through a simple sublimation of illusion, by acknowledging the fact that God is but the objectified being of man, man deprived of his essence. Alienated work does not represent only a twist in the world's objective consciousness but it also refers to a real alienation, that of man in the relationship with himself and of man in his objective existence.

As such, alienation is objective to the extent that it configures a certain real and objectified relationship with the rest of the people (Marx, 1987, p. 70).

Productive activity does not belong to the worker and this is only due to the fact that it belongs to another man. While for a worker his activity is a labour, for another it needs to be *gratification* and the joy of life. Neither gods nor nature but man himself can be this alien force which dominates man.

At the end of the *Manuscripts*, Marx introduces an ultimate manifestation of alienation, i.e. through money. What is specific about alienation through money is the fact that it is not so much the manifestation of man splitting himself from himself but rather the means of an ability transfer, as money is "the alienated *ability of mankind*" (Marx, 1987, p. 121).

Within politic economy, man is deprived of himself, of his life, of his free activity, of his expression. In this context, money appears to be the human ability to substitute, which allows for a compensation of man's negation as human and natural force.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Seen as a human experience and a philosophical thought, alienation is a primarily multiple-meaning word, extremely flexible, able to denote the most common of the situations but also the most positive, formative or negative, painful and destructive ones for an individual or for an entire group. as well. The aim of the current article has been to take alienation out from a long line of theoretical approaches accusing it of being a metaphysical, a historical and humanist category and one-sidedly mediating its religious dimension, thus reducing it to a philosophy of total transparency, i.e. deleting alterity. We consider that our analysis enables us to sustain not only that alienation is not essentially an abstract concept that hides away a humanist and essentialist thought, but also that, on the contrary – if we take into account Rousseau, Hegel and Marx and their works – alienation is a notion that obviously moves further away from this way of seeing things.

It should be reminded that Rousseau, Hegel and Marx don't create a homogenous group, a uniform philosophical gathering. The vision each had on alienation differs from the other's in many ways. By looking into texts written by Rousseau, Hegel and Marx and by outlining the invariable elements but also the undisputed metamorphoses of the concept of alienation, the current paper has brought to light both the varied and sometimes heterogeneous significances ascribed to this notion by philosophical consciousness and the unique theoretical and surprising nature of alienation.

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