



## The Dialectic of Alienation between Philosophy and Reality

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### **Abstract:**

*Alienation has constituted one of the most intricate literary and philosophical phenomena throughout history, reflecting the inherent nature of the eternal conflict between the self and society, between human beings and nature, and between consciousness and dispossession. It is an inseparable component of the history of human consciousness, a determinism imposed by the self in its struggle with its inner ego and its external society, as well as the interplay of opposing and supportive ideas that traverse it. From this tension emerges a state of separation and dissociation, wherein the individual experiences estrangement and a sense of loss despite existing within a collective. Some, however, perceive alienation as a necessary condition for the flourishing of thought and consciousness, as it provokes individuals to recognise their deficiencies and eradicate them in pursuit of an elevated self. It does not conclude with a temporary separation; it grows intellectually and historically to attain absolute unity, thereby achieving the ultimate correspondence between spirit and body.*

**Keywords:** *alienation; the concept of alienation; the term alienation; consciousness and freedom in Western thought; self and consciousness.*

## La dialectique de l'aliénation entre philosophie et réalité

### Résumé :

*L'aliénation a constitué l'un des phénomènes littéraires et philosophiques les plus complexes à travers l'histoire, reflétant la nature inhérente du conflit éternel entre le moi et la société, entre les êtres humains et la nature, et entre la conscience et la dépossession. Elle est une composante indissociable de l'histoire de la conscience humaine, un déterminisme imposé par le moi dans sa lutte avec son ego intérieur et sa société extérieure, ainsi que l'interaction d'idées opposées et complémentaires qui la traversent. De cette tension émerge un état de séparation et de dissociation, dans lequel l'individu éprouve un sentiment d'éloignement et de perte malgré son appartenance à un collectif. Certains, cependant, perçoivent l'aliénation comme une condition nécessaire à l'épanouissement de la pensée et de la conscience, car elle incite les individus à reconnaître leurs lacunes et à les éliminer dans la poursuite d'un moi élevé. Elle ne se limite pas à une séparation temporaire ; elle se développe intellectuellement et historiquement pour atteindre l'unité absolue, réalisant ainsi la correspondance ultime entre l'esprit et le corps.*

**Mots clés :** *aliénation ; concept d'aliénation ; terme d'aliénation ; conscience et liberté dans la pensée occidentale ; soi et conscience.*



## Introduction

In addition to the range of ideologies, cultural institutions, discourse analysis, critique of hegemony, and the examination of diverse cultural media encompassed within the field of cultural criticism, the theme of alienation has received considerable focus and attention. Alienation is considered a cultural and social phenomenon that reveals the extent of the interaction between Western societies and other societies, together with their cultures, customs, moral systems, and values. It refers to living as a stranger within a society where the individual confronts modes of living that inhibit their capacity for adaptation and adjustment, engendering feelings of astonishment and bewilderment.

“It is the feeling of an individual who finds themselves a stranger to their own being, unable to perceive themselves as the centre of their world, alienated both from their own self and from others.”<sup>1</sup>

The causes of alienation in Western society are manifold, cultural, social, and historical, further intensified by the impact of globalisation and the instruments of media and communication. Globalisation is a complex and profoundly influential phenomenon that shapes individuals' mentalities and modes of interaction. While it promotes the exchange of ideas, it simultaneously provokes estrangement as individuals undergo rapid transformations and cultural intermingling.

This ambivalent stance towards globalisation is articulated by one scholar, who states the following:

"Globalisation encompasses a multiplicity of intertwined opportunities and risks. Undoubtedly, the very

entanglement of these opportunities and risks generates diverging feelings, emotions, and positions towards them. Some welcome its clearly discernible epistemic and economic opportunities and thus advocate full immersion in the global moment to benefit from its offerings. Others, however, express apprehension about its numerous dangers, rejecting its implications for independence and its consumerist content, thereby calling for withdrawal to safeguard their civilisational self and cultural identity, which appear to be threatened by globalisation. However, others experience a blend of both positive and negative sentiments and attempt to strike a balance between immersion on the one hand and withdrawal on the other hand. "2

In addition, technology plays a pivotal role in imposing specific modes of communication and social and cultural interaction among individuals.

The phenomenon of alienation in Western society is rooted in the fusion of multiple social, cultural, and political factors, producing a complex image that reveals the extent of the individual's tension with the Other in an unfamiliar environment. This term has been employed "to describe a range of different phenomena, including a sense of separation and dissatisfaction with society, the feeling of a moral collapse within society, and the individual's perceived incapacity to confront social, natural, and human institutions in the face of bureaucratic structures."<sup>3</sup>

## **1. Alienation... The Pre-Hegel Stage:**

### **1.1. Alienation in Greek philosophy:**

The ancient Greek philosophers were the first to address the problem of alienation, approaching it as a form of



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complete dispossession of natural legal rights. Plato experienced alienation from the moral codes of his time, challenging the values of his society and its entrenched social systems. He criticised the family and marriage institution, called for absolute equality between men and women, and advocated for an ethical system detached from religion and grounded in rational principles.

According to Plato, “many people live in a state of alienation due to their ignorance of the truth. In the famous Allegory of the Cave, he illustrates how people cling to the shadows on the wall, remaining prisoners of their illusions. The individual who breaks free from the chains of ignorance and moves towards the light is initially shocked but gradually comes to perceive the truth.”<sup>4</sup>

The origins of alienation in Greek philosophy thus lie in reflection on human existence and its relation to the external world. It emerges due to the conflict between the soul and the body and between labour and nature. Humans are subjected to internal and external forces that momentarily separate them from themselves and their surroundings. The Greeks expressed this phenomenon through two principal attitudes: the first sought to employ wisdom to develop a method of overcoming alienation, whereas the second regarded alienation as an intrinsic part of nature.

Socrates held that self-awareness, situated within the relationship between the self and the Other, represents the most effective path out of the circle of alienation. He was the first to expose human beings' alienation from themselves when they lived ignorant of their essence. His famous injunction “Know thyself” constituted a revolution against this epistemic and spiritual estrangement.<sup>5</sup>

“Socrates believed that human ignorance of the self is the root of all moral error and that self-knowledge is the only path by which an individual may liberate themselves from their alienation from both self and truth.”<sup>6</sup>

While Socrates concentrated on the moral dimension, Plato focused on the material aspect, leading from alienation to absolute truth. "Plato contends that the soul's true alienation begins with its connection to the physical body, for this bond causes it to forget its original realm the world of Forms and makes it a prisoner of sensory desires. "<sup>7</sup>

“Alienation, for Plato, bears a metaphysical character: matter represents degradation and darkness, whereas the soul represents spirit; human alienation thus consists in the soul’s submission to matter.”<sup>8</sup>

These premises served as the intellectual foundations that would later shape the development of the concept of alienation. Human nature was understood to be marked by an inner conflict between necessity and freedom and between spiritual and material tendencies. It is therefore affirmed that Greek philosophers succeeded in laying the groundwork that profoundly influenced human thought, generating multiple analytical currents concerned with the essence of this thought and its relation to the world through the notions of alienation, estrangement, dispossession, and the quest for self.

“Greek philosophy articulated alienation as a rift between soul and body, between the sensible and the intelligible realms, placing human beings in a perpetual state of conflict with themselves.”<sup>9</sup>



## 1.2. Alienation in Roman philosophy:

Roman philosophy addressed the concept of alienation unprecedentedly by concentrating on the relationship between the individual and society. It regarded alienation as a social condition arising from interaction with the political reality and the Roman legal order and its relation to the questions of power and personal identity. In contrast, Greek philosophy linked alienation to the anticipation of self-loss within the framework of social and political organisation and to the resulting sense of nonbelonging.

“Roman philosophy turned to address the problem of the human being in relation to society, holding that alienation occurs when the individual withdraws from the public sphere and neglects their role as a citizen within the human community.”<sup>10</sup> In the Roman conception, alienation was not understood as a metaphysical lapse, as it had been for the Greeks, but rather as a moral or social separation from the collective and reason.

Within the framework of social justice and the concept of freedom in communal life, Roman philosophers regarded alienation as a means of examining how individuals interact with political structures and social values and how this interaction generates responses and self-conceptions. Alienation in Roman philosophy was therefore viewed as a problem concerning the individual’s confrontation with authority. It functions as both an instrument of disclosure and a means of inquiry, seeking to deepen the understanding of the relationship between the self and external existence. “Roman philosophy focused on the idea of universal duty: the alienation of the individual signified

their departure from this system, which unites all human beings in a single rational order.”<sup>11</sup>

Despite their well-known passion for work, the Roman people paid significant attention to philosophy, adopting it as an organisational principle of daily life and a means of disciplining the self rather than a purely metaphysical pursuit. This orientation gave rise to the human problem concerning society, for alienation was conceived as the complete rupture between the human being and the natural order and social reality, thereby producing a disjunction between self and nature.

According to Roman philosophy, the human being is not an isolated entity but a part of an organised whole governed by law and reason. This belonging is political, behavioural, and intellectual, conferring the individual's right to participate actively.

In the Roman view, alienation signifies a departure from the communal order. It arises when a person pursues glory, wealth, or position while remaining physically within the group, without a sense of belonging or shared concern. Such a state occurs when moral bonds have been severed.

To address the problem of alienation against which the Romans had risen, they sought to reinforce the principle of *virtue*, understood as the attempt to reconcile nature and reason. Power, luxury, and self-interest were perceived as distractions that had estranged human beings from themselves and their communities. They believe that reform can be achieved only through self-discipline, emotional regulation, and harmonious coexistence with nature.

In another period, the evolution of alienation, specifically the Middle Ages, focused on individuals' relationships with religion, society, and nature. The concept came to be



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employed within intellectual and theological discourse, reflecting the spiritual and social transgressions of the time in Christian thought. Alienation was conceived as the necessary separation of the human being from their Creator due to sin, serving as a means of spiritual purification and a way to reforge the path towards the divine.

“Christian thought views true human alienation as estrangement from God through original sin an interruption of the source of existence and spiritual life.”<sup>12</sup> In contrast, in Islamic thought, alienation signifies restoring connection with God through obedience to His commands and abstaining from His prohibitions. Humans, by nature, are inclined towards error and deviation, but forgiveness lies in the effort to return to God. Thus, alienation becomes a means of spiritual liberation through divine mercy, which grants individuals the opportunity to return.

Dr. Mohammed Ammara observes, "Estrangement in medieval Islam was neither spiritual nor moral; it did not give rise to a priesthood, whereas in medieval Christianity, it produced an institution that formed a religious entity separate from society." <sup>13</sup> Unlike ecclesiastical estrangement, which established a division between church and civic life, alienation in Islam never evolved into a priestly system but remained a personal, experiential state of the heart. "Whereas the church's estrangement from society provoked a revolt against it, Islamic estrangement constituted a call for renewal and reform from within the faith itself."<sup>14</sup>

This clearly contrasts revolutionary alienation in the West, which gave birth to secularism and religious reform, with reformative alienation in Islam, which did not reject religion but sought to renew and improve it.

On the intellectual plane, alienation during this period embodied profound inner conflicts. It mirrored the realities of the feudal society that restricted human freedom, engendering a deep internal sense of separation of the self within the sociospiritual sphere. This era was characterised by the dominance of the Church and monarchical control over knowledge and reason, which produced a sense of rupture from the cultural heritage of the past. Technological transformations likewise brought about sweeping changes to political and social structures, intensifying feelings of detachment and widening the gulf between individuals and their lived reality as an immediate response to rapid shifts.

The contours of intellectual alienation became starkly evident when individuals were deprived of the capacity for free expression. This separation between thought and practice obstructed the development of consciousness and hindered the individual's understanding of self and society more profoundly. In his *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun discussed the concept of collective consciousness and its influence on social and political structures. He observed that when power is divorced from justice, a climate of withdrawal, hesitation, and silent resignation prevails: "Know that tyranny seizes people by the hand and assumes their affairs on their behalf, weakening them utterly until those addressed no longer possess a voice. They merely fall silent when addressed and obey when commanded."<sup>15</sup> For this reason, the true intellectual must remain independent of authority so that their voice may be articulated clearly and audibly.

These reflections solidified the philosophical notion of doubt as a means of seeking absolute truth, articulating the human being's estrangement from both self and society. This alienation was intensified by the time's dominant religious



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and social doctrines. Individuals in this era often experienced a lack of coherence with the edicts and teachings of the Church, resulting in an enduring internal state of conflict.

### **1.3. Alienation in the Renaissance:**

During the Renaissance, the first striking element concerning alienation was the Cartesian conception of the phenomenon. Although René Descartes did not develop a comprehensive, centralised theory of alienation as later philosophers would, the concept appears in his work as an implicit feature, particularly through the dualism of mind and body. The self, for Descartes, is the thinking substance, distinct and separate from the body, a spiritual realm elevated above the material world of the flesh. "This duality denies the existence of any connection between the mental world and the physical world, indicating that the soul is a simple thinking substance, while the body is an extension, divisible in nature. There is nothing in the concept of the soul that pertains to the body and nothing in the concept of the body that pertains to the soul."<sup>16</sup>

According to Descartes, the body is a source of confusion that obstructs access to the pure knowledge provided by reason. He distances himself from the sensory world and privileges the thinking self. This, in itself, constitutes a form of alienation. Descartes is widely associated with the idea that matter is spatial, defined by its linear dimensions and by occupying a specific location in space. This attribute does not apply to the mind, which has no physical shape but is characterised solely by consciousness. The body, by contrast,

is matter that occupies space and possesses measurable dimensions.

#### **1.4. Alienation in Hegel's philosophy:**

Building upon the Cartesian edifice that anchors existence in the thinking self, "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am").<sup>17</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel constructed a profound interpretation of alienation that has become foundational in modern philosophical discourse. Grounded in reason, his framework leads toward a phenomenology of the object.

For Hegel, alienation is a philosophical concept denoting the state of estrangement of the individual from both self and society, producing a sense of psychological and social isolation. It represents a decisive stage characterised by the aspiration towards freedom and the realisation of the self. He regards alienation as a phenomenon that unfolds progressively through historical periods, reflecting the evolving level of individual consciousness within society. It is the product of historical accumulations centred on developing self-awareness and collective consciousness through successive phases in which individuals transcend the limits imposed by their societies.

In Hegel's view, alienation is not a negative psychological condition but rather a necessary stage for crystallising consciousness and intellectual growth. These experiences discipline the self, granting it deeper awareness and greater resilience in its relationships with the individual and the collective. It is, ultimately, the struggle between the self and others through which consciousness attains maturity.

For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, self-consciousness constitutes an essential stage in internal development. It is



not merely a simple awareness of the self and its immediate struggles but rather the experience of the self as it experiences sustained conflict and tension upon encountering the external world. Alienation emerges when the individual feels dispossessed of truth, existing simultaneously as a free and a constrained being.

“To be alienated means being deprived of something that belongs to oneself. It entails notions of deprivation and loss. Undoubtedly, it arises as a causal consequence of historical circumstances unfavourable to absolute existence. However, it must be emphasised that alienation is a form of dispossession. However, not every act of dispossession necessarily constitutes alienation. In many cases, something can be taken away without leading to alienation in a strict sense. For dispossession to become alienation, it generally requires that the individual be rendered estranged from certain capacities and prevented from embodying their vital existence. In such circumstances, dispossession becomes an act of alienation a loss of power and of the right to agency.”<sup>18</sup>

### **1.5. Alienation and the Absolute Mind in Hegel:**

Regarding the concept of alienation concerning absolute mind, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel conceives of it as history, essence, and being itself. He explicitly positions himself in opposition to liberalism and to the claims advanced by sociologists, who advocate for public opinion, shared destiny, and human nature as foundations prior to reason. Hegel considers such notions merely transitional stages through which consciousness must pass to reach the ultimate stage of the development of reason. For him, the state constitutes the highest and final form of this fulfilment:

“It is the divine idea as it exists on earth; in it, we find the aim and the subject of history in its most precise form. The state communicates the will of God to individuals. The worth possessed by the human being, and all their spiritual reality, is derived solely through the state, for their spiritual truth is confined to their specific human essence reason, which exists objectively within it and has for them an immediate objective reality. In this way, the human being attains full consciousness; only do they participate in ethical life, as well as in a just social, political, and moral order. In this state, the unity of subjective and universal will is realised. It is within the state that laws and rational institutions are found; the state exists through reason and is the realised ethical life.”<sup>19</sup>

According to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the state represents absolute truth and sacred will; it is the embodied form of absolute self-consciousness. Alienation manifests as a condition of consciousness when it realises itself as a separate entity, divided from its essence. This alienation also arises when one confronts truths that exceed its immediate capacity for comprehension. At this point, consciousness becomes detached from the self, impeding its development. Such a stage is necessary because conditions laden with alienation can ultimately serve as powerful catalysts for an eruption of consciousness, leading to its reunification with the self.

## **2. Religion and the Pinnacle of Alienation in Hegel:**

In the journey toward the Absolute, religion, with its beliefs and sacred rituals, becomes a secure refuge for attaining truth. Conversely, the absence or weakening of this religious spirituality leads to a hollow practice: the mere



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performance of rituals without an understanding of the deeper meaning of faith traps the individual within the prison of appearances, substituting form for spiritual essence, and outwards conformity for the inner joy of faith and the truth of the divine.

Hegel defines religion as “self-consciousness of the absolute spirit as conceived by finite spirit,”<sup>20</sup> which signifies that religious feeling expresses the spirit's awareness of itself. Hegel establishes two foundations for religion: experiential and reflective. The experiential self is rooted in emotion and a self that grows towards objectivity, ultimately transferring to religious representation, which he considers the highest degree of reason. "The dialectic between the finite and the infinite, the second finitude being thought, and the third finitude the finitude of the world. "<sup>21</sup>

Through this feeling, the spirit apprehends itself as universal truth. However, such awareness remains bound to the finite human condition: it is suspended between universal consciousness and the finite, determinate forms through which spirit is revealed in its absolute nature.

Hegel holds that the human spirit passes through three stages:

1. Spirit *in itself*;
2. Spirit *for itself*;
3. Spirit *in and for itself*.

For Hegel, religion constitutes the apex of alienation because human beings perceive in God a reflection of their own essence. In Hegel's thought, God is the absolute spirit, manifested through history and humanity. However, consciousness is the separating element between God and human beings, striving for self-realisation. Through

religious contemplation, individuals regain awareness of their true selves, ultimately creating a philosophical reconciliation between the human and the divine.

The framework of religious alienation in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's thought does not deviate from the doctrinal dimension, through which development and clarification of meaning occur, enabling the self to liberate itself from its constraints. Religion becomes a mirror reflecting human purity, drawing the individual closer to absolute truth.

Within the convergence of religion and alienation, Hegel understands alienation in the sphere of ethics not as a fixed set of values and principles but as the outcome of a dynamic interplay between the individual and the social dimensions, transcended through full awareness of rights and duties. It is a struggle of the self with itself, an effort to reconcile the personal with the collective, producing a tension that propels the individual from a state of harmony to one of autonomous self-awareness. This awareness entails a proper understanding of responsibility as encompassing both right and duty, generating a persistent inner unease within the individual. For Hegel, this discomfort is not destructive but rather a stimulus for growth and development. It is a form of training and self-discipline through which the self learns to choose its level of consciousness during its engagement with society. In this developmental trajectory, the human being encounters a decisive moment between self-awareness and social reality.

Although the term *alienation* in Hegelian philosophy may appear technical, its essence is metaphysical. "It is a necessary step in the realisation of the Absolute through its true self-knowledge. Thus, the Hegelian concept of



alienation is a moment that can be called the moment of the loss of the object (*perte de l'objet*) or the moment of nonbeing."<sup>22</sup> Alienation arises when society rejects or ignores the individual. The essence of humanity lies in transcending this condition to attain the highest form of consciousness, grounded in responsibility and absolute freedom.

Hegel regards religion as a means of embodying the rights apprehended and enacted by reason. It is the path to the divine. For this path to be fully realised, religion must permeate the spirit of society profoundly, reaching into the institutions of the state and becoming the mode of thought and way of life of individuals inscribed upon both soul and heart.

"Hegel conceives religious feeling as the sense of the contradiction between the finite life of the individual and the infinite life of the cosmos and of the human desire to dissolve this contradiction. The individual feels pain and anxiety, expressed in a sensation of fragmentation and the need for a complete, living union with the whole a longing that is experienced at every moment within the self."<sup>23</sup>

Alienation manifests when the individual senses a dissonance between themselves and their identity or when laws that restrain their free development are imposed upon them. However, despite its rigour, alienation constitutes a crucial stage in the path to liberation, offering the self an opportunity to become aware of its existence and comprehend the external world.

Within the Hegelian framework, freedom emerges as the essence of the transition from alienation to self-consciousness.

## 2.1. Alienation and Freedom in Hegel:

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's conception of freedom continues to expand, as it is intricately bound to the notion of alienation. This concept functions as an analytical instrument across various fields of knowledge (description, explanation, opposition, comparison) concerning history, the state, and power. Alienation, in Hegel's thought, is linked to the state; in Karl, Marx, to labour; and in Sigmund Freud, to the self. It acts as the organising and determining principle of the relationships among phenomena, as it generates tension through the experience of separation and division, standing in opposition to the very essence of freedom.

This is precisely what Hegel articulates in his discussion of "*liberté de l'esprit*" (freedom of the spirit):

"We must conceive of spirit as free. The freedom of the spirit signifies its proximity to itself, its comprehension of itself, the formation of its nature through its union and fusion with the Other, the discovery of itself therein, its reunion with itself, the possession of itself, and the enjoyment of itself."<sup>24</sup>

According to scientific and theoretical research, the concept of alienation in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy leads to a phenomenological reality that constitutes the fundamental cornerstone for establishing a dialectical conception of the phenomenon. Alienation is conceived as an opportunity enabling the individual to understand themselves within the whole fabric; it is a powerful motor of development, equipping the individual with the necessary means to achieve integration and absolute consciousness. For Hegel, alienation is the pathway to historical development: it grants the self the chance to perceive itself more profoundly, drawing closer to truth



through the challenges and confrontations it faces within the domain of estrangement.

The feeling of separation from oneself propels the individual to search for existence. A cumulative historical process stimulates the ascent to the highest levels of self-awareness.

However, Hegel's conception of alienation has faced severe criticism. Critics argue that by positioning alienation as the principal component in the development of historical consciousness, Hegel reduced it to a transitional process aimed solely at absolute unity, thereby overlooking the diverse human experiences of deprivation, abandonment, loss, and fragmentation. While Hegel viewed alienation as a temporary, incidental condition that can be overcome, critics contend that this perspective neglects the lived experiences of existential and psychological alienation.

According to these critics, Hegel's philosophy of alienation is limited and superficial, erasing personal and social circumstances and stripping the phenomenon of its concrete reality. In societies marked by alienation, disorder, and instability, interpersonal relations are dominated by these factors, as the decline of shared norms undermines social bonds. In such contexts, individuals often prefer isolation to meaningful social engagement.

This alienation has profound psychological consequences:

“The individual becomes vulnerable to psychological disorders, their relationships with others deteriorate, manifesting in diminished empathy, and alienation affects work and productivity in all its forms. When the individual is a worker, their productivity declines; when a student,

their motivation to study diminishes. These aspects interact with one another, each amplifying the other."<sup>25</sup>

According to critics, to investigate alienation properly, one must have a complex and interwoven understanding of cultural and economic factors within a modern and contemporary framework. One domain in which the manifestations of alienation are most apparent is the artistic field. Alienation reflects the artist's state and relationship with the spectator, generating emotions outside conventional experience.

The struggles and tensions experienced by characters caught between their inner selves and the external world with which they interact are, in essence, expressions of alienation, underscoring the profound interconnection between consciousness and lived experience. Alienation deeply penetrates the inner worlds of writers and artists of all kinds. As has been aptly observed:

*"Every pioneer, regardless of temperament, carries within themselves the seeds of alienation in their inner structure; likewise, every literary or artistic work necessarily reveals traces of alienation from the earliest times to the present day. It must also be stressed that alienation tends to expand and ramify the further we move forward in time its roots deepen, particularly in the modern and contemporary world."*<sup>26</sup>

Alienation constitutes a form of estrangement between individuals and society, leading to acute social disintegration and an expanding sense of separation. At the same time, it signifies a detachment from the realm of principles and constraints meant to govern communal life, thereby fostering resistance and rebellion against authority.



## **2.2. Alienation and the Coherence of the Literary Text in Hegel:**

In the literature, alienation emerges as a reflective mirror of the inner conflicts and fractures experienced by individuals within their societies. It manifests in narrative and poetic works as an artistic device that exposes the human emotional condition through semiotic structures that transcend simple discourse, articulating identity, marginality, and dispossession. It often takes the form of interior monologues, conveying the crises and existential struggles of the modern human being.

The literature is the primary active medium through which images of alienation are transmitted, infused with the technical influences of modernity and the transformations of intellectual thought. In Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's view, alienation is not a transitory state but a necessary condition enabling the self to ascend from the ordinary to a higher level of existence. The importance of this concept lies in its role in shaping free consciousness within its philosophical framework. It is a struggle between spirit and nature, through which transformation occurs, a transformation that, in turn, produces harmony, culminating in absolute consciousness.

Thus, alienation is a prerequisite for achieving genuine interaction and cohesion within society. This becomes evident when the individual experiences separation from self and others, as the value of their principles and labour is stripped of its actual substance. This deepens the gap between the self and the social fabric, producing a sense of estrangement that impedes authentic engagement with reality. Overcoming this requires a comprehensive

awareness that enables the restoration and reconstruction of these severed bonds. As Hegel writes, "Spirit must estrange itself from itself to recognise itself; through this alienation, reconciliation takes place."<sup>27</sup>

For Hegel, social interaction resides in the capacity of the individual to align the self with society. Alienation serves as a dynamic force, compelling individuals to perceive themselves as inseparable parts of the whole. In his view, it is the principal driving mechanism of growth and development across successive stages, a journey through nothingness and anxiety toward absolute consciousness.

### **3. Karl Marx's Critique of Hegel's Theory of Alienation:**

Following the trajectory of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophy, Karl Marx formulated his theory of alienation with firmly materialist and historical dimensions. He revealed the condition of the working human being under the weight of the capitalist system. Whereas Hegel confined the concept of alienation to the sphere of absolute consciousness, Marx redefined it as a material effect rooted in the economic base of capitalist society.

Marx observed that "Hegel stands on his head when he claims that thought is the primary cause of social phenomena, rather than material reality."<sup>28</sup> Within this framework, Marx presented alienation as a fundamental condition of wage labour, identifying four key dimensions:

1. **Alienation from the product of labour:** the worker has no claim to what they produce; it is taken from them and sold.<sup>29</sup>
2. **Alienation from the production process:** labour becomes merely a means of subsistence, not self-realisation.<sup>30</sup>



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3. **Alienation from human nature:** the worker's selfhood is crushed within the capitalist system.<sup>31</sup>
4. **Alienation from society:** relations between individuals are governed by material exchange rather than human connection.<sup>32</sup>

Interpersonal relationships cease to be grounded in human cooperation and become governed by market logic and utility. Money replaces human connections as the primary mediator. In this commercial exchange system, humanity disappears: economic value becomes the measure of worth, and transactions are no longer relationships between people but between sums of money.

To overcome this condition, Marx argued for the establishment of a communist society through the transformation of relations of production, where tools of production are held in common, labour is free, and individuals work without coercion.

Marx termed this reversal "the reification of social relations", a process in which the relations between people and things are inverted: "the worker becomes a thing, while the thing is treated as a living being endowed with value and power."<sup>33</sup> In this inversion, the human being is transformed into a commodity, and the commodity is imbued with a quasihuman spirit.

For Karl Marx, alienation is not, as it was for Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, merely a stage in the history of human consciousness or a necessity imposed by the self in its struggle with its inner being. Instead, it is the direct consequence of private property and wage labour conditions that, in Marx's view, can only be transcended through social transformation.

Marx inverted Hegel's philosophy by asserting that social existence determines consciousness, not vice versa. This inversion left a lasting imprint on modern thought, especially amid the rise of consumerism and the mechanisation of labour through technology.

## **Conclusion**

In this sense, alienation is a complex human experience with profound philosophical, social, and psychological dimensions. It encapsulates the individual's feelings of separation, isolation, and dispossession within a society with which they enter into a relationship of existential anxiety, especially when their freedom is constrained by socioeconomic and cultural structures that shape the relationship between individuals and their environment. This estrangement deepens when individuals fail to establish meaningful connections with others according to prevailing social principles, creating a rift between personal aspirations and social expectations.

From an economic perspective, Marxist theorists argue that alienation is rooted in the capitalist system. This system causes workers to lose their connection to themselves, to the product of their labour, and to others when those products are exchanged as commodities. In this process, the worker is reduced to an instrument akin to any other production tool.

This feeling of alienation intensifies until it elevates consciousness to its highest levels. It is not a fixed or inevitable condition but a phenomenon that can be transcended by strengthening social bonds and reframing



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principles and values within a just and humane social fabric. Once inner balance is achieved, the self can stabilise.

All the perspectives and interpretations surrounding the concept of alienation affirm that it is not merely a social or psychological phenomenon but a fundamental philosophical question that persistently asserts its presence within critical thought. It revolves around the very essence of the human being: *Is alienation an act produced by the human self, or is it a necessity imposed by external forces?*

Alienation thus appears as the tragic image of human consciousness estranged from itself, standing outside the sphere of meaning. However, simultaneously, it represents a necessary stage, a moment through which the self is returned to its origin, allowing the balance between the dualities of self and other, consciousness and existence, to be restored. Where alienation occurs, the possibility of emancipation and liberation also arises, setting the quest for a more authentic and profound human self in motion.

## Endnotes:

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<sup>1</sup> Abou Bakr Moussa. *The Crisis of Identity in Adolescence and the Need for Jurisprudential Guidance*. 1st ed. Cairo: Al-Nahda Al-Masriya Library, (2002), 52.

<sup>2</sup> Abdullah bin Abdul Mohsen Al-Turki. *Globalisation from an Islamic Perspective*. Riyadh: Obeikan Library, 2000, 25.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammed Thanoon Zain Al-Sanea. "Alienation and Exile." *Afaq al-Thaqafa wa al-Turath* (UAE), no. 33, year 9 (April 2001): 60.

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- <sup>4</sup> Amal Bouharb. "The Dialectic of Alienation in Greek Philosophy." *Ida'at* 1 2024.
- <sup>5</sup> Emam Abdel Fattah Emam. *Alienation: The Concept and Its Development in Philosophy*. Cairo: Madbouly Library, 1999, 27.
- <sup>6</sup> Abdel Rahman Badawi. *Existential Time*. Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya, 1983, 112.
- <sup>7</sup> Abdel Rahman Badawi. *Existential Time*. Beirut: Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiya, 1983, 104.
- <sup>8</sup> Zakaria Ibrahim. *The Problem of Alienation*. Cairo: Dar Misr for Printing, (1967), 74.
- <sup>9</sup> Fouad Zakaria. *Philosophy Between Science and Religion*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Muasir, 1985, 82.
- <sup>10</sup> Zakaria Ibrahim. *The Problem of Alienation*. Cairo: Dar Misr for Printing, (1967), 87.
- <sup>11</sup> Mohammed Ammara. *Islam Between Estrangement and Alienation*. Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, (1995), 55.
- <sup>12</sup> Roger Garaudy. *Islam in Our Time*. Translated by Abdel Sabour Shahin. Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, (1980), 74.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibrahim Mostafa Ibrahim. *Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Hume*. Alexandria: Dar al-Wafaa, 85.
- <sup>14</sup> René Descartes. *Discours de la méthode*. Leyde: M. Jan Mair, 1641, 52.
- <sup>15</sup> Zakaria Ibrahim. *The Problem of Alienation*. Cairo: Dar Misr for Printing, (1967), 45.
- <sup>16</sup> Ousmane Saver. *Le Problème de l'Aliénation: Critique des Expériences Préfacées de Dépossession de Mart Stéphane Haber*. Paris: L'Harmattan, (2002), 16.
- <sup>17</sup> Abdel Fattah Al-Didi and Issam Hilal. *Education in Hegel*. 111.
- <sup>18</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *La Phénoménologie de l'esprit*. Translated from German by Jean Hyppolite. Paris: Rabier Montagne, (1939), 203.
- <sup>19</sup> Hassan Hanafi. *Lectures on Hegelian Philosophy of Religion*, 1986, 402–495.



<sup>20</sup> Frank Fischbach. "Transformation du concept d'aliénation: Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx." *Revue Germanique Internationale* 8 (2008): 85.

<sup>21</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Leçons sur l'histoire de la philosophie: Introduction, système et histoire de la philosophie*. Translated from German by J. Giblin. Paris: Gallimard, 1954, 202.

<sup>22</sup> Mohammed Thanoon Zain Al-Sanea. "Alienation and Exile." *Afaq al-Thaqafa wa al-Turath* (UAE), no. 33, year 9 (April 2001): 64.

<sup>23</sup> Ibrahim Mahmoud. *Towards Kafkaesque Alienation*, 85 (adapted).

<sup>24</sup> Zakaria Ibrahim. *Hegel: The Father of Absolute Idealism*. Cairo: Ru'ya Publishing and Distribution, (2023), 10.

<sup>25</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 1970, 172.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Louis Althusser. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: Monthly Review Press, (1971), 77.

<sup>29</sup> Bertell Ollman. *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1976), 58.

<sup>30</sup> Andrew Wolff. *Karl Marx*. London: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>31</sup> Karl Marx. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Vol. 1. 1867.

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