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Difference between the Hegel's and Marx's thinking of Alienation

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Abstract

The concept of alienation is one of the major concerns in human existence. We find the first systematic discussion regarding the concept of alienation in the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx. Hegel expounds an idealistic position on the concept of alienation and its overcoming. His concept of alienation mainly focuses on the spiritual and moral dimensions of human beings. On the other hand, Marx thinks that, basic form of alienation is economic, which is rooted in the capitalist mood of production. When human labour becomes and is treated as marketable commodity, man become dehumanized. A separation grows between man-as-man and man-as-labourer. Therefore, from their discussion it is clear that, these two thinkers have given a little different description regarding the concept of alienation. Marx while discussing the concept of alienation rejects Hegel's idealistic description of alienation and develops his own materialistic description. Thus, in the present work I shall try to show the difference between these two thinkers discussion of alienation. Understanding the distinguish nature of them will help us to know much about the concept of alienation discussed in the Post-Hegelian period.

Keywords: Human existence, Idealistic, Spiritual, Moral, Economic, Capitalist mood of production.

In this article I made an attempt to discuss the difference between Hegel (1770-1831) and Marx's (1818-1883) concept of alienation. Understanding of the distinguish nature of these two philosophers will help us to know properly the Marx's thinking about alienation. The concept of alienation is one of the important parts of Marx's philosophy from which Marx looks at the other problems of society. Meszaros writes that, "...the concept of alienation is a vitally important pillar of the Marxian system as a whole, and not merely one brick of it."¹ The foundation of Marx's concept of alienation is the Hegelian concept of alienation mainly it is in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Marx's most of the writings on the concept of alienation have been centered around Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. The most important part which has been discussed in this book is alienation. David McLellan points out that, "The passage where Marx talks most fully about alienation are contained in the Paris Manuscripts, where he first applied the notion to economics."²

According to Marx, when a particular product of labour becomes marketable commodity then we can see a separation between the man (man as labour) and his labour. Because, the labour never gets the actual value what his product gives. Marx argues that, “when human labour becomes, and is treated as, a marketable commodity, man becomes dehumanized. A separation grows between man-as-man and man-as-labour(er).”³ This according to Marx is alienation of labour. Marx thinks when a man is alienated then his creation dominates over him. The man loses control over his creation. Marx says “alienation is that condition in which the creations rule the creators, in which, like the sorcerer’s apprentice, the creators become the victims of their creative powers.”⁴

Marx’s notion of alienation mainly focuses on human labour which is a part of Marx’s economic and social philosophy. Marx discusses his concept of alienation in social and economic relations. Karl Marx uses the concept of alienation to analyzing the social relation of men in various stages. While discussing Marx’s concept of alienation it is necessary to discuss Marx’s relation to Hegel because Marx has been very much influenced by the Hegel’s concept of alienation. Istvan Meszaros writes, “As is well known, Feuerbach, Hegel and English political Economy exercised the most direct influence on the formation of Marx’s theory of alienation.”⁵ The discussion on Marx’s relationship to Hegel will give a better understanding on Marx concept of alienation.

Marx has incorporated this concept of alienation in his philosophy mainly from Hegel and the young Hegelians. Sean Sayers writes, “Alienation is a concept that Marx inherits from Hegel and the young Hegelians.”⁶

Here I am giving a little discussion about the concept of alienation discussed by G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel takes an idealistic position on the concept of alienation and its overcoming. In his philosophy Hegel uses the term *Entausserung* (externalization) in different senses to refer to the different aspects of alienation or *estrangement*. The concept of alienation is found vividly in his both earlier and later philosophical writings. Tom Bottomore, in his book *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, says that, “Although the idea of alienation (under the name of *positivitat* (positivity)) appears in the early writings of Hegel, its explicit elaboration as a philosophical term begins with his phenomenology of mind. And although the discussion of alienation is most direct and concentrated in the section entitled ‘mind alienated from itself; culture’, it is really the central concept and the leading idea of the whole book. In the same way, although there is no concentrated, explicit discussion of alienation in his later works, the whole philosophical system of Hegel, as it is briefly presented in his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, and more extensively in all of his later works and lectures, was constructed with the help of ideas of alienation and de-alienation.”⁷

In Hegel’s philosophy alienation plays a crucial rule in the phenomenological development of consciousness. Hegel distinguishes between ‘alienation as estrangement’ (*entfremdung*) and ‘alienation as externalization (*entausserung*); and the two senses of the term are intimately related to concepts such as objectivity and objectification. He maintains

that experiencing a particular combination of the two senses of alienation allows consciousness to overcome its alienation.

The notion of alienation is key concept in Hegel's phenomenological development of consciousness because: (1) alienation is a fundamental aspect of every shape of consciousness prior to Absolute Knowing. Sean Sayers writes, "The concept of alienation is central to Hegel's account of the development of spirit (Geist), and thus of the process of human self-development."⁸ and (2) it is the experience of alienation that drives consciousness to alter its understanding of itself and its object until it overcomes its alienation in Absolute knowing. Hegel argues that, "The contrast can only be removed by effort and struggle, for the individual spirit has to create or recreate for itself and by its own activity a universal objective spiritual realm, which it implies and in which alone it can be free and feel itself at home. The struggle spirit goes through is thus the greatest in the whole range of its experience for the opposition to be overcome is the profoundest that exists."⁹ Hegel's point is that while consciousness's journey to full self-understanding is a struggle, it is a struggle that defines consciousness. While alienation is an undesirable aspect of consciousness's existence, the experience of alienation is a necessary one if consciousness is to fully understand itself.

In Hegel's philosophy, consciousness is estranged when it cannot recognise that it is a unity of both subjectivity and objectivity. The second sense of alienation i.e. '*Entausserung*' or Externalization describes the process by which consciousness externalizes itself in objective form. Through this self-objectification, consciousness develops a better understanding of itself. Through externalization, consciousness not only objectifies itself rather it learns more about itself. It learns that it is not only a pure subject rather it comes to know its communion or totality with the object. This externalisation allows consciousness to overcome the distinction between itself and its object. Hegel points out that, "... it is the externalization of self-consciousness that posits the thinghood [of the object] and that this externalization has not merely a negative but a positive meaning, a meaning which is not only for us or in itself, but for self-consciousness itself. The negative of the object, or its self-supersession, has a positive meaning for self-consciousness, i.e. self-consciousness knows the nothingness of the object, on the one hand, because it externalizes its own self – for in this externalization it posits itself as object, or the object as itself, in virtue of the indivisible unity of being-for-self. On the other hand, this positing at the same time contains the other moment, viz. that self-consciousness has equally superseded this externalization and objectivity too, and taken it back into itself so that it is in communion with itself in its otherness as such. This is the movement of consciousness, and in that movement consciousness is the totality of its moments."¹⁰ Hegel further points out that, "This totality of its determinations establishes the object as an implicitly spiritual being, and it does truly become a spiritual being for consciousness when each of its individual determinations is grasped as a determination of the Self"¹¹

Like Hegel, Marx also uses the term alienation in both the senses of *Entfremdung* and *Entausserung* Sean Sayers writes, "Marx sometimes uses '*Entausserung*' to describe the

way we relinquish ourselves in our products, and 'Entfremdung' for the way in which these products become hostile forces working against us; but he also uses the terms interchangeably."¹² Though while discussing the concept of alienation Marx has very much been influenced by the Hegel's philosophy, he makes a clear distinction with Hegel's philosophy at his later ages. Sean Sayers writes, "many philosophers within the continental tradition, particularly those influenced by Althusser, have maintained that Marx made a sharp break with his youthful Hegelianism after his early period and that his later work is 'scientific' and free of this influence."¹³ In this regard Amal Krishna Guha points out one major criticism raised by Marx against Hegel vision of alienation. Amal Krishna Guha remarks that, "Marx's central criticism of Hegel is that Hegel confounds objectification and alienation. Hegel does not see that the objectified labour becomes alienated labour at a specific historical stage of human development and is destined to pass away, with the disappearance of that stage. Associated with this confusion, is Hegel's one sidedness : Hegel sees labour only as the essence of the human being through the external act of making nature the instrument of his will, but does not see that under given social conditions, 'the human essence objectifies itself in an inhuman way'."¹⁴ But he accepts the dialectical thinking of Hegel in this regard and rejects the idea of Hegel that 'nature as another mode of existence of the mystical absolute idea. As we find it "He showed the fallacy of Hegel's attempts to treat nature as another mode of existence of the mystical Absolute Idea. At the same time, he stressed the positive aspects of the Hegelian dialectic"¹⁵

One important difference between Marx's and Hegel's thinking of alienation is that, in Hegel's philosophy we have seen that, when human consciousness objectify itself, it is a form of alienation. But according to Marx's, human being come to realize its individuality through the objectification of them therefore, for Marx, it is not alienation of man. Marx points out that, "...it is only when the objective world becomes everywhere for man in society the world of man's essential powers-human reality, and for that reason the reality of his own essential powers-that all objects become for him the objectification of himself, become objects which confirm and realise his individuality, become his objects: that is, man himself becomes the object."¹⁶ This is why David McLellan writes that, "Marx's central criticism of Hegel was that alienation would not cease with the supposed abolition of the external world. The external world, according to Marx, was part of man's nature and what was vital was to establish the right relationship between man and his environment."¹⁷

Therefore it is notable here that, Marx has accepted some points of Hegel and he has rejected some other points. We find a lot of similarity in their social philosophy. Sean Sayers argues that, "Marx ideas in this area are directly inherited from Hegel, and there is a considerable congruence between their social theories. Marx agrees with Hegel in regarding the self as a social and historical creation. He regards self-alienation as a social and historical phenomenon which is destined to be overcome with historical development and progress. Thus in Marx, as in Hegel, the social and spiritual aspects of alienation and its overcoming are united. However, as mentioned already, Marx rejects the Hegelian view that alienation has already been overcome in present society. He also criticizes Hegel's account

of history as the self-development of spirit for its idealism and instead propounds a materialist theory. Present capitalist society is characterized by alienation. This has an economic and social basis. Alienation will be overcome only when this is changed. Alienation thus serves as a critical concept pointing towards the material transformation of the existing order.”¹⁸

In G.W.F. Hegel's philosophy we find that the term alienation translates two German words 'Entfremdung' and 'Entausserung'. Marx in his writings on *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, tries to show that these two German terms are closely connected with the concepts of 'labour' and 'personality'. Marx discusses that the submission of one's to the direction of another can be characterized by any of those terms. On the other side to contract one's labour with another is same with surrender it to another. In both the sides labour and his personality is alienated. Syed Sajidul Islam points out that, "Marx however seeks to outline the real history of man. Hegel has used the term Entausserung in connection with property transfer and labour contract in his Philosophy of Right, and had at times used Entfremdung interchangeably with this term in the phenomenology. Marx finds here a place to begin the reduction of Hegel's philosophy to the concrete, for its transformation into political economy as suggested by Hegel's own usage, Marx notices that the two German terms have a close connection with the concepts of "labour" and "personality". It suggested to him that the submission of one's labour to the direction of another could itself be characterized in either of the terms. To contract one's labour or personality to another is to surrender it to another, and thereby to make it alien to oneself. This is how the story in the Manuscripts comes to be told.”¹⁹

At the last we will have to accept it that, though there are some differences between Karl Marx's thinking of alienation and G.W.F. Hegel's thinking of alienation, still we will have to accept it that, it is because of Hegel that Marx becomes able to put forward his philosophy to a higher level. Because, Marx has very much been influenced either positively or negatively by the Hegel's and some Young Hegelian's especially Feuerbach's philosophical discussion. Though there are some differences between these two philosophers, still we will have to accept it that there are lots of similarities among these two great philosophers. Therefore, we can say Hegel's philosophy is the basis because of which other young Hegelian's become able to develop their philosophy in to a higher stage.

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