

Estranged but not Alienated: A Precondition of Critical Educational Theory

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Alienation is a double-edged concept adaptable to both positive and negative or critical accounts of the individual, culture and society. It is also elastic enough to describe very different economical and cultural effects, and thus it is a potential source of confusion and inconsistency. Alienation is characterised by a Janus-faced adaptability to both neutral/positive and negative uses: the former may be considered as endemic, the latter as historical. In some respects alienation is neither avoidable in education nor wholly undesirable.

‘In school and society, the lack of meaningful participation alienates workers, teachers, and students. This alienation lowers their productivity in class and on the job’ (Shor, 1992, p.20). ‘As a result of the postmodern condition, the alienation of the subject associated with modernism has been replaced by the fragmentation of the subject’ (McLaren, 1995, p. 14). ‘[According to Lacan] language is an alien and alienating system of accounting, separated and apart from the reference world it is supposed to describe’ (Rothstein, 1991, p.71). A list of references to the term ‘alienation’ from texts on educational theory and cultural studies suggests that the term enjoys a peculiar currency, even if it is generally employed in a pejorative manner.

The relevance of the concept of alienation to pedagogical research has been acknowledged over the years and indirectly has informed heated debates on educational ideals and their emancipatory potential. Of course, the attack on modern grand narratives has affected this notion to the extent that it is treated as a conceptual tool belonging to Hegelian and Marxian perspectives. Still, even when comments on the term are negative and dismissive, they prove that the term ‘alienation’ is still on the philosophical agenda—and that is of interest to both general and applied philosophy.

However, although the term is frequently used in passing to signify one of the side effects of individualistic or nurturing conceptions of teaching and knowing, with the diminution of interest in Marxism the concept itself has attracted little direct theoretical attention. At first sight, the impression is that its meaning is so fixed and transparent that nobody would have difficulty in understanding it and conveying it to

others. Hence, there seems to be very little concern in redefining the concept of alienation or analysing its employment in educational contexts. One tends to conclude that the meaning of this concept has been so reified due to its transference from philosophy to almost every other discipline in humanities and everyday linguistic use that it has ended up as an empty polemical tool or even just a stopgap.

Perhaps the root of the problem is found in general philosophy itself. Although themes such as alienation, critique of ideology and emancipation were once very fashionable, their philosophical currency now is minimal or non-existent. There are many reasons for that but perhaps there is no need to go through them here—especially since we have already mentioned two of them: the treatment of Marxism as a defunct meta-narrative and the advent of postmodernity. Nevertheless, due to traditional philosophical interest¹ in alienation and the use of established theories in debates about it, this residual concept has become so flexible that it can denote almost any negative experience a subject may have in Occidental societies and their educational settings in particular. The content of the concept ‘alienation’ itself appears elusive as most traditional attempts to pin it down have favoured one *Weltanschauung* over the other, and failed to do justice to its multiplicity. The consequences for those disciplines that incorporate this philosophical term in their vocabulary and their language games (educational theory in our case) are obvious. Can we just go on using it in its everyday sense without bothering to examine it more closely? Is it the early Marxian account or the German Idealist understanding of alienation that is most pertinent to a critique of the (post)modern era and its education? Do we need, perhaps, a reformulation of the notion along contemporary lines of philosophical thought in order to render it compatible with new socio-political developments? Or, following in the steps of Foucault and some poststructuralist critics of the shibboleths of modernity, shall we assume that there is no subject to be alienated, no self-realisation attainable but blocked, no human nature to be redeemed, and hence no need for exploring symptoms of reification in our educational systems? I argue that, before we are in a position to answer these questions with an eye on philosophy of education, we have to turn to the multiplicity of meanings of the term within general philosophy.

For reasons of space, let us here focus on only two aspects of this multiplicity that are crucial as preconditions for revisiting the concept. First, alienation can be presented as positive or negative even within the same theory. In this sense, it appears Janus-faced. Second, it is often treated either as intrinsic to symbolic and social order, and thus as ontologically loaded, or as a pathology of specific social configurations, and so as historical and contingent.

A JANUS-FACED CONCEPT

As I have already mentioned, the concept of alienation has been used elastically to signify a diversity of psychological and social phenomena

studied within variant and often conflicting frameworks of thought. The most salient feature shared by these frameworks is the treatment of those phenomena as *pathological*. From the time of the biblical texts right down to Rousseau and Marx, alienation, be it the worship of idols or estrangement from true 'natural' life or fulfilling labour, is equated with a 'fall' of humanity and an inauthentic mode of existence. It has negative connotations since it represents a condition one should strive to overcome if one wishes to return to one's authentic and true nature. For Calvin, alienation depicted "'man's fall into original sin" and estrangement from God for all time' (Becker, 1967, pp. 88–89). For the early—'anthropological'—Marx,² division of labour and surplus production have alienating effects on workers and their employers, and for Lukács (1971a) reifying systemic processes transform all types of existence (the self included) into exchangeable commodities.

More recently, Habermas's insights also allude to states of estrangement in contemporary societies. In his earlier research,³ Habermas unveils individual and social crises caused by distorted communication and strategicality, whereas, in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1991) and onwards, similar dysfunctions derive from those system imperatives which colonise the life-world and reify its structures. Thus, according to Habermas (1992), 'the lifeworld must be defended against extreme alienation at the hands of the objectivating, the moralizing, and the aestheticizing interventions of expert cultures'. Finally, the negative content of the concept becomes clearer if we consider Seeman's list of the most blatant alienating effects of society as the subject experiences them: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation, self-estrangement and cultural estrangement (cp. Geyer, 1996, p. ix).

However, the term has not only been employed negatively. As mentioned earlier, one may also encounter its positive sense. Hegel's case is a notable one. He distinguishes two forms of alienation: externalisation and estrangement. We may regard the first as constitutive of identity and hence as non-circumventible, thus having a positive and enabling dimension. In order to know the world and perceive itself as a separate entity, the 'I' grasps independent objects as external. Externalisation, or objectification, undercuts all forms of Hegelian recognition, from mutual love to the master–slave narrative. In educational terms, as we shall see later, in order to learn new material consciousness has to take a distance from it and view it as alien (cp. Löwith, 1985). The second, estrangement, refers to the subject's awareness of this distance insofar as such awareness betrays anxiety and uneasiness due to experiencing the world as strange (cp. Krasner, 1997, p. 284). The latter form is rather negative but no less necessary for individuation as well as for the transformation of the objective spirit into absolute. Being double-edged seems to be alienation's attribute from Hegel onwards.

What might a positive account of alienation mean today, then? In our postmodern era, it may even denote individual autonomy and a feeling of non-belonging. Following Hegel but without recourse to

absolutist-metaphysical undertones, one might say that some form of estrangement is a precondition of the subject's self-formation and its *vis formandi*, its learning capacity. For autonomy is 'independence from' and *Bildung* is 'knowing of' and 'exposure to' otherness. Moreover, what it is at stake here is not only ontologico-epistemological issues of identity and cognition but also an ethical demand: the right to remain silent. It is one's right to decide oneself upon one's inclusion or self-exclusion from forms of collectiveness. It represents the ethical/normative allocation of space to individual existential choice. Hence, alienation 'is no longer an estrangement from cruel industrial-capitalist demands but an "inalienable" right: a source of creative energy—or an expression of personal eccentricity'. To encounter it within a classroom community may mean that such a community allows room for unassimilated otherness to flourish. As the demand for schools based on unoppressive collectiveness increases,⁴ alienation *qua* the right to remain silent may turn out to be helpful. Instead of the duty to participate, 'the stress is now increasingly on the right not to participate, and to remain happily alienated' (Geyer, 1996, p. xv). In my opinion, an affirmative sense of alienation is crucial to negative freedom. For one should be entitled not only to participate in, but also to exclude oneself from, a given configuration, social or other, if one so desires.

Then again, this should not affect our diagnosis of pathologies and our struggle to overcome them. Neither should it attenuate the critical force of the legacy of older theories that relied on the negative sense of the term. But to be able to accomplish both tasks, to affirm one's uniqueness and to criticise social pathologies and their effects on the individual, we have to retain the double-edged character of that concept in its reformulation.

THE HISTORICITY OF ALIENATION

The second issue about alienation is its historicity—which is not irrelevant to its axiology. Hegel considers alienation endemic and a prerequisite of the shaping of identity, whereas Marxism treats it as historical and random.⁵ For Marx, the concept of estrangement itself presupposes that there is a need for fulfilling and redemptive work and interaction that modern conditions of work and interaction deny (Sayers, 1998, p. 40). The early Frankfurt School, inspired by Freud, saw it as built into hominisation as such and an inescapable effect of enculturation processes in general (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979). Arguably, one of the major debates within Critical Theory (that between Marcuse and Adorno) comes down to questions of whether one should interpret repression and reification as contingent or ubiquitous (Papastephanou, 2000). For the defenders of the endemic character or alienating symbolic and social order, repressive reality acquires a profound and universal dimension.

This is illustrated most cogently by Lukács's admission that in his *History and Class Consciousness* he had fallen in the same trap (via

Hegel) as 'bourgeois philosophy' and identified alienation with objectification as such. In his own words (Lukács, 1971b, p. xxiv):

In the philosophical, cultural criticism of the bourgeoisie... it was natural to sublimate a critique of society into a purely philosophical problem, i.e. to convert an essentially social alienation into an eternal 'condition humaine', to use a term not coined until somewhat later... When I identified alienation with objectification I meant this as a societal category—socialism would after all abolish alienation—but its irreducible presence in class society and above all its basis in philosophy brought it into the vicinity of the 'condition humaine'.

The same holds not only for Adorno and Horkheimer but also for postmodernist thinkers like R. Barthes and J. F. Lyotard, who couple terror with the 'economy of the phrase'. Only, in the latter case, we may say that the idea of an irreducibly economic—hence diminishing and tyrannical—character of symbolic order raises alienation not so much to a *condition humaine* but rather a *condition linguistique*. As a result, rational critique of estrangement misfires (Papastephanou, 2000) due to its own complicitous relation to logic (or language), since the latter's overcoming of estrangement cannot but amount to self-cancellation. Lukács had realised the impossibility of articulating critique plausibly within the framework of the identification of alienation with externalisation as such. A vision of a better, non-alienating, society would make sense only in a strongly metaphysical and 'apocalyptic' way. He wrote, 'as, according to Hegel, the object, the thing, exists only as an alienation from self-consciousness, to take it back into the subject would mean the end of objective reality and thus of any reality at all' (Lukács, 1971b, p. xxiv). For defenders of the idea of the historical character of alienation, like Lukács, there is a surplus of subjective energy that resists the instrumentalisation of consciousness caused by the reifying impact of the system (cp. Habermas, 1991). We shall return to his insights later on to see how he transcends that identification of externalisation with alienation that gives the latter an endemic character.

It is not difficult to assume, given the above accounts, that alienation can be meaningful in its negative mode (as a conceptual tool employed to describe and renounce pathological subjective and cultural conditions) only if it is seen as non-endemic. What might be endemic is a positive outlook on estrangement, since identity needs alterity if it is to be formed at all.⁶ However, to argue this point we need to appeal cautiously to a weak justification in order to avoid the pitfalls of foundationalism and transcendentalism. This perhaps assumes a traditional conception of language as connected with the intentionality of a speaker, but also holds good if we endorse the poststructuralist emphasis on the anonymous differential character of signification. Along these lines, the positive phenomenon of alienation to which I attribute an endemic aspect can be seen as transhistorical rather than ahistorical. It is transhistorical to the extent that subjects are language-

speakers, find themselves in a Gadamerian 'always already' of social life, and have a sense of 'self' (even if only imaginary, if we follow Lacan) in a dialectical relation to others. As the term 'ahistorical' resonates essentialism and apriorism, it does not fit in with my account—not only for substantive but also for rhetorical reasons.

Therefore I suggest that we examine alienation as a bifurcated concept, one aspect of which is methodologically useful for studying the negative but contingent effects of civilisation while the other is most effective when applied to the positive (and constitutive of subjectivity and learning) phenomena of relating to alterity. Lukács arrived at this distinction, but Marx before him had realised the necessity for such a move for what I believe to be the right reasons, namely the salvage of the potential for critique and improvement of human life. After examining their position, I shall show what in their approach is considered unacceptable and even dangerous today and how their distinction between the historical and the endemic can now be couched in a different language. Let us cite Lukács's account (1971b, p. xxiv) at some length:

Objectification is indeed a phenomenon that cannot be eliminated from human life in society. If we bear in mind that every externalization of an object in practice (and hence, too, in work) is an objectification, that every human expression including speech objectifies human thoughts and feelings, then it is clear that we are dealing with a universal mode of commerce between men. And in so far as this is the case, objectification is a neutral phenomenon; the true is as much an objectification as the false, liberation as much as enslavement. Only when the objectified forms in society acquire functions that bring the essence of man into conflict with his existence, only when man's nature is subjugated, deformed and crippled can we speak of an objective societal condition of alienation and, as an inexorable consequence, of all the subjective marks of an internal alienation. This duality was not acknowledged in *History and Class Consciousness*.

Compare it with O'Neill's interpretation of Marx's concept of externalisation:

There is nothing mysterious, says Marx, in the fact that man, as a psycho-physical entity, expresses himself through thought-constructs and cultural objects. The process of externalisation (*Entäußerung*) is the natural expression of the kind of being man is. Marx does not lament the external world, for it is the precondition of all human effort, the means to human expression. It is when the products of man's mental and physical energy deny or despoil the integrity of man's nature that the phenomenon of estrangement (*Entfremdung*) is encountered. (O'Neill, 1972, p. 118)

Both thinkers distinguish between an externalisation that is not by definition negative but rather neutral (as well as arguably endemic-transhistorical) and could even be seen as having a strongly positive side

and a dimension of estrangement that is of course negative but historic-contingent and transcendable. They ground this distinction in their belief in the necessity of human expressiveness and in the possibility of the emancipation of a human nature that is in the chains of capitalism.

In hindsight, we may criticise both thinkers for the essentialism implicit in their understanding of human nature and the expressivism in their notion of conceptualisation and signification that relies on the now obsolete binarism of the 'inner versus the outer' and the 'subject versus the object'. We may also reject their nostalgic politics of return to a true and authentic existence and their confidence in a determinist course of history—both ideas not implied in the above passages but presupposed by them and assignable to these theorists and to Marx in particular. But we need not discard the distinction along with those foundationalist assumptions and consequently the critique of society and the vision of a potentially better world.

After all, those critics who did wholly reject Marxism (the demand for a better life notwithstanding) on the grounds of criticisms similar to ours—Popper being one of those critics—were no less essentialists when they assumed psychologistic explanations of why people tend to envisage a better world. Popper (1985) attributes critical vision to the strain of civilisation and, since this notion has strong Freudian affinities,⁷ it carries along with it the essentialist belief that alienating phenomena can be attributed to people's discomfort with the Law of the Father. They are therefore coupled with the process of individuality as such and assignable to a *condition humaine*. We should dispense with essentialism of both kinds, the Marxist one referring to a good human nature in chains and the bourgeois one, voiced not only in traditional philosophy but also in the postmodern, which elevates alienation to a transhistorical psychological level. Societies and individuals can to a large extent overcome alienating life forms precisely because essentialism is misconceived and there are no foundations for the claim that negative alienation is other than historical-contingent. This overcoming is not relativist but does not require foundations either, because it is nothing but the possibility that people may decide at some point to orient their groundless desire for happiness and freedom to forms other than those dictated by capitalism. As Tony Bennett writes:

socialism can extricate itself from the mire of an epistemological and ethical relativism only by means of a political desire which functions as cause and justification of itself (although it is, of course, produced by and within the complex play of social forces and relationships) and which supplies the criteria—always contested—for the determination of the ends to which political and theoretical practice are directed. (1991, p. 66)

As to the externalisation that concerns language, when transferred to another paradigm of thought and understood in poststructuralist rather than idealist-linguistic terms and even if it then takes another name, divested of the old connotations, it will not cease to be endemic and

neutral. It will be endemic so long as it signifies the other-orientedness of language-using and sociable empirical subjects. And it will be seen as axiologically neutral from the moment that philosophers distantiate themselves from the metaphysics and the essentialism to which they are committed when they treat representation and symbolic order as violent *per se*.

In this way we are entitled to distinguish between an endemic and neutral but potentially positive estrangement on the one hand, and a negative but contingent-historical one on the other. A positive and endemic alienation corresponds to the differential prerequisite of individuation, the encounter with otherness as unassimilated and unassimilating through language. Alienation, in the sense I give it, is simultaneously distance and proximity, engagement and withdrawal. It is a space waxing and waning, a de-transcendentalised locus of *intersubjectivity*.

A negative and contingent alienation on the other hand can be defined as an *intro*subjective and *introcultural* condition of excessive lack and frustration (along the lines of Marcuse's notion of surplus repression) regarding some contingent material and symbolic aspects of existence, of which subjects may be conscious or unconscious. This formal definition has always to be applied to biographical or historical facts, for its content is only furnished by spatio-temporally located and mutable states of affairs. (I would not call phenomena of *Unbehagen* related to love or death as such 'alienating' in this negative but contingent mode.) Thus, as the contents of this sense historically vary in kind, density, complexity and degree and as, by being historical, they are by definition surpassable, they can acquire any meaning that would be compatible with the premises of the definition. They can comprise effects related to a spectrum of occurrences, for example from the modern constellation of employer–state–employee to those of 'bad faith' as described by Sartre and down to postmodern fragmented and virtual reality. Thus the confused flexibility that at the moment characterises all theorising about alienation can now be brought to order and be more useful for both general philosophy and philosophy of education.

To put it schematically, alienation's ambiguity consists in the fact that:

- alienation is neutral/positive when endemic;
- alienation is negative when historical.

More specifically, we should retain the ambiguity of this term, for we need the conceptual horizons both aspects open. We require the positive aspect because the 'I' and the Other need to have a Hegelian distance from each other. (We need not assume necessarily the concomitant idea of their 'conflict' as the Hegelian master–slave narrative of identity formation has it or the forgetfulness of the linguistic construction of both, the self and the Other.) Here is an ontological, epistemological and ethical necessity. For we must also describe the phenomena of reification

without losing sight of the fact that people are not and ought not to be immersed in their life-world. A degree of independence and estrangement is necessary from the human rights perspective (liberalism), the demand for autonomous and reflective subjectivities, as well as from the postmodern sensitivity to our 'radical other'.

What we should reconsider, however, when discussing the negative aspect of alienation, is the interpretation of alienating phenomena as endemic in one way or another, for such a posture implicitly legitimises reifying processes emanating from systemic imperatives. Ultimately, less ontologically loaded notions of subjectivity, antagonism, critique and civilisation and less 'reconciled' diagnoses of our times will prove to be of pivotal importance for postmodernist philosophy and philosophy of education. There are some conceptions of alienation that are more useful than others for a new educational ideal. We may draw the dividing line between those that see the corresponding phenomena as endemic to subjectivity or culture as such and those which leave space for an overcoming of alienating forces. It is the latter that can lead to a renegotiation of pedagogical issues revolving around theories of instruction, curriculum and the teacher–pupil relation. Moreover, a new perspective will shed light on the signs of alienation in academia itself. Overall, such a new perspective will show that the problem of estrangement goes beyond the dilemma, on which many current educational projects appear to focus, between schooling's contribution to political participation on the one hand and to isolationism and apathy on the other.⁸

Let me recapitulate here the main argument of the paper before moving to a closer analysis of it. Alienation is a double-edged concept adaptable to both positive and negative or critical accounts of the individual, culture and society. It is also elastic enough to describe quite divergent economical and cultural effects, thereby causing confusion and inconsistency. I have argued that alienation is characterised by this Janus-faced adaptability to both (a) neutral/positive and (b) negative uses, where the former may be considered endemic while the latter may be treated as historical.

(a) Considering its neutral/positive use, alienation may be further explored as follows. The flux of experience and the open-endedness of articulated speech create a subject-in-process, to borrow a Kristevan term (Papastephanou, 1998), and justify our feeling strangers to our own selves. Being a stranger to oneself can be construed as an omnipresent and inescapable reality of hominisation and identity formation. As such, it is axiologically neutral. Its positive sense is acquired by the explanation it gives to the construction of the self differentially both regarding the external Other and the displaced, successive and fragile unities of the self (the Other within). It is also acquired by the protection it offers to individuality in its unique singularity. The self needs the space around it that the awareness of its radical alterity creates. Also, the self should always be open to its own relativisation, the possibility of its own estrangement, and break with its previously consolidated but illusory unity.

As to why this has to be universal (in a non-aprioristic sense) and endemic *qua* transhistorical, although it is a really big issue, it suffices here to refer to kinship universals. I take the terms from Habermas (1970) and I view them as formal, what I would call 'relational schemata', for they reveal the intersubjective and differential character of individuation (the connection with significant Others as caretakers, teachers, peers, friends, relatives). They do so without necessarily informing us about fixed parental or gender roles (such as mother, father, daughter, son) which I see as historically contingent and in no way universal. Kinship universals attest to the invariant significance of alterity for subjectivity and the constitutive role of alienation as externalisation for the differential element that is presupposed in the subject's proper use of personal pronouns. To say 'I', one needs to be first, not in antagonism with the 'You', but in reciprocal recognition of the irreducibility of the 'I' to the other and vice versa.

(b) Then again, feeling isolated and oppressed by a societal configuration blocking one's potential for redemption and self-realisation can be construed as a clearly negative historical phenomenon that is in no way insurmountable by definition. Philosophy should not only question the ineluctability of such phenomena: it must also direct its sharpest critique at it. As we have seen, Marx's account of alienation was very effective to this end. However, it is true that many accounts of negative alienation have sought the justification of their critical intervention in grand narratives that are now outdated. The critical-negative employment of estrangement can be dissociated from all past justification and couched in a non-foundationalist and non-eschatological framework. New conceptualisations and negotiations of freedom, happiness, justice and communal life have already been presented with the challenge to set themselves as ideals against a reifying, globalised, postmodern reality.

Now I shall turn back to the issue of the use of the concept but this time let me focus on the employment of it in this paper. Given the confusion already there in alienation's ambivalent role, my use of the terms 'alienation' and 'estrangement' interchangeably throughout this text probably adds more to this confusion than repairs it. Due to the ambiguity of the term already discussed, alienation is often identified with estrangement but I suggest that we reserve the former term for negative phenomena of distance, exclusion, docility and hostility within society. In this way the term 'estrangement' will be limited to a more optimistic reception of the awareness of our difference from others and the constant displacement of our identity. Evidently, any preference for the association of one term with negative and the other with positive meanings is arbitrary and conventional. As to my own preference, it is justified by the fact that the word 'alienation' carries historically and theoretically a negative ideological baggage that would be more difficult to dispense with than the word 'estrangement'. And I prefer 'estrangement' to 'externalisation' and 'objectification' because the two latter terms echo the rigid separation of the self from the other (as interiority toward exteriority or as subject towards its object(s)).

Hence we can modify the scheme we offered above and give it the following form:

- *alienation* is historical and negative;
- *estrangement* is endemic and neutral/positive.

Once again, the assumption of the ambiguity of the term ‘alienation’ leads us back to Hegel’s theory (especially since it informs directly or indirectly Marx’s and Lukács’s positions). My terminological distinction in its conceptual intervention inverts Hegel’s schema. To him, alienation (*Entäusserung*) denotes the exteriorisation of the spirit through which it produces its self-contents. Because human nature is a historical and civil achievement, alienation is a necessary moment in the history of our lived being. Estrangement (*Entfremdung*), however, signifies distantiating from the source of life and being.⁹ Evidently, the former is rather positive and the latter negative, whereas in my use of the terms the opposite holds. With this reversal in mind, I will proceed by applying the distinction as I have drawn it in order to show how it helps me explore both sides of the notion of alienation with regard to education. In keeping with my distinction, I consider estrangement in education a necessary factor in knowledge acquisition and critical self-consciousness. Similarly, I view alienation as the cause of many disturbing effects on the plane of culture as well as the plane of organised instruction. In what follows, I will take two examples, Hegel’s and Adorno’s educational theories, that assist me in the examination of both concepts.

For Hegel, knowledge as assimilation of something ‘foreign’, outside ourselves, presupposes our being estranged from whatever is already our own. To learn something novel and yet unknown, to escape the stagnation of self-affirmation, we must approach the alien, which in turn relies on separation and distance from the familiar. The centrifugal powers of an Ego seeking recognition from its Other guarantee apprehension of the *alter* in its *alterity*. Knowledge acquisition has as its precondition a distance from knowable reality as well as an estrangement, a departure, from our own self.¹⁰ We must not forget that Hegel was the first to attack so powerfully the dualism of the knowing subject versus the knowable object and to overcome the problematic tension that mentalism established between these two poles. The mediation between the two sides was achieved in Hegel via the abandonment of the idea of rigidity, closure and the ontological asymmetry of both. The possibility of the subject’s openness to and construction by the object (objective world or co-subjects) is estrangement *par excellence*. Just as in the postmodernist theories of Kristeva, Lacan, Derrida and others the questioning of the identity of the ‘I’ is not only desirable but also necessary, similarly for Hegel being a stranger to oneself is not only acceptable but even a prerequisite of knowledge. In a more practical vocabulary, this means that education should encourage the young’s anti-conformist reconciliation with, or even pride in, what constitutes their particularity. It should also promote the student’s bold encounter

with all the aspects of reality that have so far been left out from the discourse that every complacent cultural form proclaims hegemonic, in other words, with what is radically 'other' in a society. Moreover, it means that education must heighten children's ability for constructive self-critique and self-reflection. Hence estrangement in classroom settings amounts to respecting and preserving one's space—feeling a stranger to the other—and it entails one's difference and heterogeneity while promoting one's openness to otherness resulting from one's acknowledgement of the *lacuna* created by one's own strangeness to oneself.

Whereas estrangement may be very significant for explaining human orientation to knowledge, alienation reveals some of the barriers obstructing emancipation and freedom through education. Adorno's analysis of alienating cultural effects is exemplary here. What he names 'the culture industry' corresponds to what reifies knowledge and transforms it into a commodity of purely exchange value. On the one hand, knowledge requires effort and genuine interest in the knowable object but these prerequisites are not encouraged by the educational system. On the other hand, knowledge is power and, by being so, it offers to those who can officially prove to have it an enormous potential for improving their social status, earning power and access to the ruling élite. The masses desire knowledge because of its benefits but are unable to fulfil that desire due to the initial exclusion the educational system exercises on them. In this way, *Bildung* becomes fetishised—a commodity to which the masses project their most wanted yet unaccomplished dreams, and are led thereby to a love-hate relation to knowledge. Now, the culture industry utilises this relation in the most profitable fashion. It offers *Ersatz* knowledge, an illusion of true education, immersing the masses in a self-deceptive indulgence. Tokens of *Bildung* such as an encyclopedia in the living-room, the degree certificate on the wall and the commercialised classical CD, establish a *Halbbildung* making up for the exclusion of the masses from any authentic and redemptive relation to knowledge. Alienation in education takes the form not so much of incomplete learning but of hatred towards learning leading to substitutes for true knowledge (Adorno, 1972). This phenomenon is a product of the culture industry and as its product it can be fought and superseded only if its status as a mere social-historical construction is unveiled and acknowledged.

I have attributed a different meaning to the terms 'estrangement' and 'alienation' in an effort to grasp the protean character of what is at issue here without neglecting the axiological parameter (negative/positive) and the temporal dimension (endemic/historical). Education is an exemplary case of the application of the distinction just drawn, because, being by definition associated with individuation and socialisation, it involves the subject and the Other in all the forms of their encounter, asocial/universal and social/historical. To summarise, some pathological phenomena concerning learning are assignable to a negatively and historically understood concept of *alienation*, whereas the

distantiation that is presupposed in order to open ourselves up to knowledge is assignable to a positively and endemically viewed *estrangement*.

This distinction aims also to initiate a new dialogue about alienation among different philosophical viewpoints. The temporal and axiological parameters I have introduced aspire to offer an original and heuristic frame of research. Such a frame suffers neither from a dependence on transcendentalism or eschatology (as in the case of past philosophies) nor from a blinkered hostility to all discourse about emancipation and self-realisation (as in the case of Popperian liberalism, neo-pragmatism and some postmodernist trends). Finally, as an exercise in applied philosophy, it enlarges the scope and relevance of the notions of alienation and estrangement to education.

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NOTES

1. It is not only philosophy that has employed this concept. Literature and poetry have also taken it up (or echo it) to signify inauthentic modes of existence, feelings of rupture and separation from the world and the other, emptiness and feelings of fall and loss of an undifferentiated unity with God or nature. For reasons of space and focus I cannot discuss this sense of the term here.
2. For a concise account of Marx's understanding of alienation, see Barbara S. Krasner (1997), p. 285.
3. J. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1987) [1968]. On his later work, see Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Vol. 1*, trans. T. McCarthy (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991) [1981].
4. See Barbara Thayer-Bacon (1998) *Philosophy Applied to Education* (New Jersey, Merrill).
5. As John O'Neill (1972, p. 118) remarks, 'now the term alienation is frequently used to cover both the phenomenon of externalization and estrangement. This can only lead to a misunderstanding of Marx's use of the concept of alienation. It is clear that the externalization of human behaviour into ideologies, social institutions, material products is a necessary precondition of the phenomenon of estrangement, i.e. man treated, say, as a means to, rather than the end of such cultural products. But the reverse is not true. It is not necessary that the phenomenon of externalization be accompanied by estrangement'.
6. Here I do not wish to accommodate the Hegelian conflictual basis of subject formation but only to acknowledge the significance of the dialectic of the 'I' and the Other. On this point, I am indebted to Professor Herbert Schnädelbach.
7. See Karl Popper (1985), p. 87.
8. On the issue of schooling and alienation as isolationism and apathy, see Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, 'Tracing the growth of alienation: enculturation, socialization, and schooling in a democracy', in Geyer (1996), p. 95.
9. See Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit* (New York, State University of New York Press, 1979) and John O'Neill (ed.) *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition* (New York, State University of New York Press, 1996).
10. See for instance, Karl Löwith (1985), pp. 100–102.

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