

The Body, Alienation, and Gift in Marx and Wojtyła

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1. Wojtyła and Marx

With the exception of some important Italian scholarship,¹ the significance of Marxism to the development of Karol Wojtyła's thought has been insufficiently stressed. This essay will address one aspect of Wojtyła's engagement with Marxism, namely, his analysis of alienation. He addresses alienation in one of his late philosophical essays,² and, as pope, he raises it in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, in §15. There he affirms that man's relation to the products of his labor is one of alienation and also increasingly one of fear. *Centesimus Annus* later develops the idea in more detail (as we will see), arguing that alienation is "the loss of the authentic meaning of life."³

In order to understand these references, we must first engage the original idea in Marx. In this essay, I will first summarize Marx's presentation and then examine more closely how alienation functions within the dialectic of subject and object and within the bodily structure of man. In this understanding, the self-gift of one to another can only be alienating. Then I will turn

¹ Key works are by Rocco BUTTIGLIONE (especially his *Karol Wojtyła: The Thought of the Man Who Became John Paul II*, trans. Paolo Guietti and Francesca Murphy, Grand Rapids, Mich., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1987, 400pp.); see also Gregory G. BAUM, *The Priority of Labor*, New York, Paulist Press, 1982, 152 pp.; ID., *The Impact of Marxism on the Thought of John Paul II*, "Thought" 62 (1987) 26-38; Pierluigi POLLINI, *Il problema della filosofia della prassi in Marx e Wojtyła*, in AA. VV. (ed. R. Buttiglione), *La filosofia di Karol Wojtyła*, Atti del Seminario di studi dell'Università di Bari (Bologna: CSEO, 1983), pp. 61-73; and Dean Edward A. MEJOS, *Against Alienation: Karol Wojtyła's Theory of Participation*, "Kritiké" 1 (2007) 71-85.

² KAROL WOJTYŁA, *Participation or Alienation?* 197-207, in ID., *Person and Community*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM, Catholic Thought from Lublin, vol. 4, New York, Peter Lang 1993, 370 pp.

³ Pope JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical on the Hundredth Anniversary of *Rerum Novarum Centesimus Annus*, 1 May 1991, at The Holy See, w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html (17.9.2017). Cf. Pope BENEDICT XVI, in his encyclical on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth *Caritas in Veritate*, 29 June 2009, §53, at The Holy See, w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf-ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html (17.9.2017): "Man is alienated when he is alone when he is detached from reality, when he stops thinking and believing in a foundation." Alienation is treated similarly by Pope FRANCIS, as in, e.g., *Evangelii Gaudium*, §§1, 89, and 196.

to Wojtyła's exposition, which reorients alienation within the context of loneliness and sin.

Lastly I will show that the body for him is not a need-machine but rather the means of personal expression in self-gift, which overcomes alienation.

2. Marx on Alienation

The category of alienation in Marx has received considerable attention, beginning in the 1930s.⁴ In 1932, the previously unpublished "Paris Notebooks" and *the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* revolutionized Marxian scholarship. Alienation (*Entäußerung*) in the early works is four-fold: man is alienated from his product, his labor, his essence and own self, and other.⁵ The term "alienation" appears in these early works, not in *The Communist Manifesto* nor in *Capital*. Yet one can find the concept, if not the exact term, in the later works as well.

Marx's *Comments on James Mill* in the "Paris Notebooks" argues that, when capitalism reduces the reality of man to property ownership, it inevitably makes social relations alienating. In capitalism, I am defined by my property. When I give up my private property to someone else, it ceases to be mine and becomes someone else's property. Thus it is alienated from me. I would only allow this because of need: someone else has property of his own that I want. In this way, social relations are reduced to relations of simultaneous alienation.⁶ I do not properly understand

⁴ The classic treatment is István MÉSZÁROS, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, London, The Merlin Press 1970, 352 pp. For recent surveys of the literature on alienation, see Marcello MUSTO, *Revisiting Marx's Concept of Alienation*, "Socialism and Democracy" 24 (2010) 79-101 (with an overview of "alienation" in non-Marxist writings as well); and Sean SAYERS, *Marx and Alienation: Essays on Hegelian Themes*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan 2011, 210 pp.

⁵ See Lanny Ace THOMPSON, *The Development of Marx's Concept of Alienation: An Introduction*, "Mid-American Review of Sociology" 4 (1979) 23-38.

⁶ Karl MARX, *Comments on James Mill*, "Éléments d'économie politique" [1844], trans. Clemens Dutt, pp. 211-238, here pp. 217- 218 [XXVIII], in Karl MARX and Friedrich ENGELS, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, London, Lawrence and Wishart 1975, 670 pp. Future references to the Marx-Engels *Collected Works* will be abbreviated MECW, with references to the original pagination provided in brackets.

myself as a social being; I become estranged from my own essence, reduced to “an abstract being, a machine tool, ... a spiritual and physical monster.”⁷

In this process, money is necessary as the medium of exchange, but here mediation generates alienation, not its resolution. Rather than an interaction between persons, economics becomes an interaction between things. Carol Gould explains that, in this exchange relation, “each recognizes the other ... only in terms of their objectifications, that is, the products or commodities that they exchange. Thus the relations between persons appear as relations between things.”⁸

All social interaction thereby centers around accumulating more of the mediator (money), which becomes a “real God,” i.e., an end in itself. Marx points out the irony of this. Whereas money is supposed to symbolize the value of the objects, the situation is reversed: the value of the object is reduced to its monetary value.⁹ He does not hesitate to spell out the theological ramifications of this situation. As money is in economics, he argues, so Christ functions in Christianity. Christ mediates between God and man and among men. “But Christ is *alienated* God and alienated *man*. God has value only insofar as he represents Christ, and man has value only insofar as he represents Christ. It is the same with money.”¹⁰

In the *Economic and Political Manuscripts*, Marx proposes that man internalizes private property as alienation.¹¹ Man “has himself become this tense essence of private property.”¹² A year later, in *The German Ideology* co-authored with Friedrich Engels, Marx translates the alienation of the worker vis-à-vis his productive labor into the division of labor: to quote Dupré,

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 220 [XXIX].

⁸ Carol C. GOULD, *Marx's Social Ontology: Individuality and Community Theory of Social Reality*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press 1978, 209 pp., here p. 54.

⁹ MARX, *Comments on James Mill*, cit., p. 212 [XXV].

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ DUPRÉ, *Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*, cit., p. 129.

¹² Karl MARX, *Private Property and Labor*, pp. 290-293: ID., *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* [1845], trans. Martin Milligan and Dirk J. Stuijk, *MECW*, vol. 3, pp. 229-348.

“alienated labor is crystallized in private property, and private property is nothing but the disposal of another man’s labor.”¹³ Thus alienation ties together the economic realities of private property and the division of labor as their anthropological correlate.

In *Capital*, alienation becomes commodity-fetishism, the reduction of inter-personal relations to relations between things and the corresponding conviction that relations-between-things are the only relations that exist. Echoing the theological metaphor in *Comments on James Mill*, Marx states that the idea of the commodity “abound[s] in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.”¹⁴ The famous analysis contends that goods within capitalism lose their simple value as objects of use for me and take on a kind of mystical importance once they become commodities. As with the fetishism of religion, so with economic exchange: commodities are important not for what they actually are, materially, but for what value has been attached to them, spiritually. With both commodities and with religion, “the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own ...”¹⁵ We see here an idea that will be more significant when we turn to the embodied person: namely, the relation between the material expression of spiritual realities. For Marx, this relation is simply one of mystification: spiritual values are figments arbitrarily attached to material reality, which has its value in use.¹⁶

Here the role of the commodity becomes essentially interchangeable with that of money as seen in the earlier formulations: both mediate between subject and object, but rather than the overcoming of alienation through dialectic, capitalism sediments alienation within the conflict it cannot help but foment.

¹³ DUPRÉ, *Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*, cit., p. 150; see this entire section, pp. 149-151.

¹⁴ Karl MARX, *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes, New York, Penguin [1867] 1976, 1141 pp., here p. 163.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁶ On the intrinsically theological nature of ideology for Marx, see Jacques DERRIDA, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans Peggy Kamuf, New York, Routledge 1994, 258 pp.

3. Alienation within the Subject-Object Relation

In his understanding of alienation, Marx both relies upon and critiques Hegel. According to his “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General” at the end of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, the great philosopher’s “outstanding achievement” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* was the realization that man creates himself through a dialectical engagement with the object, an engagement that includes alienation as a necessary moment. Labor for Hegel is this process of man’s coming to be through confronting what is not him. Yet, Marx complains, Hegel “sees only the positive, not the negative side of labor.” He does not see how labor itself can be innately alienating within certain economic systems. Rather, because of his idealism, “the only labor which Hegel knows and recognizes is *abstractly mental* labor.”¹⁷

Hegel’s priority of consciousness over objectivity means that dialectic occurs within thought, between the ears of the philosopher, so to speak. There is no escape from alienation for Hegel but only a way of living within it by pretending to have mastered it through thought—the “illusion” of all “speculation.” As a result, Hegel promotes a kind of quietism that refuses to see the real alienation that persists objectively. For Hegel, “the whole *history of the alienation process* [*Entäußerungsgeschichte*] and the whole *process of the retraction* of the alienation is therefore nothing but the *history of the production* of abstract (i.e., absolute) thought – of logical, speculative thought.”¹⁸ *The German Ideology* insists that ideas are produced like any other product and thus depend upon the systems of material production. German philosophy (i.e.,

¹⁷ Karl MARX, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General*, pp. 326-346: ID., *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, here p. 333 [XXIII], emphasis in the original.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 333 [XIII and XVII; the original manuscript numbering is not in order].

Hegel) “descends from heaven to earth” but with Marx and Engels “it is a matter of ascending from earth to heaven,” from matter to concepts.¹⁹

Marx’s counter-proposal regarding “objectivity” is to posit “real, corporeal *man*, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature,” who is objective because he is “natural.”²⁰ Man does not dialectically *achieve* objectivity—an objectivity that (as we will see) Marx equates with sensuality and materiality—but is always and already so.²¹ Marx thus reorients the question from the internal alienation of thought to the external alienation inherent in socio-economic relations. Marx locates the dialectical engine not in *Geist* but in capital, in this-worldly economic processes.

As we have seen, the commodity functions in the later Marx as the dialectical point of connection between subject and object. The first page of *Capital* tells us, “A commodity is, first of all, an *external object*, a thing which through its qualities satisfies *human* needs of whatever kind.”²² (The next section will explore the significance of human needs in Marx’s understanding of alienation.) One of the dangers of reorienting dialectic in this way is that objectivity still functions only vis-à-vis subjectivity, in order to meet subjective needs.²³ Marx wishes to reinforce man’s inherent objectivity. Yet, by tying it to material needs, he makes objectivity not innate at all but rather dependent upon need; objectivity can be alienated from man, as indeed the capitalist system of exchange does. The priority of use-value gives a utilitarian coloring to objectivity.

¹⁹ Karl MARX - Friedrich ENGELS, *The German Ideology* [1846], trans. W. Lough, in vol. 5 of MECW, New York, International Publishers/Lawrence and Wishart 1976, 684 pp., here p. 36.

²⁰ MARX, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General*, cit., p. 336 [XXVII].

²¹ As DUPRÉ summarizes Marx’s position, “Man’s true alienation is the opposite of what Hegel thought: it does not consist in man’s relation to nature but in his estrangement from nature, in his *inhuman* relation to nature” (*Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*, cit., p. 125).

²² MARX, *Capital*, cit., p. 125, emphasis mine.

²³ See BUTTIGLIONE, *Karol Wojtyła*, cit., p. 85.

A further problem is that the conflictual dialectic that Marx appropriates from Hegel cannot foresee subject-object relations outside of confrontation, at least in the present economy. Dialectic suffuses ontology with violence.²⁴ As Dupré puts it, in Hegel, “Self-consciousness affirms itself in desire, and all desire tends to annihilate its object.”²⁵ When the object is itself a subject (as in the Master-Slave dialectic), it resists being absorbed into another subject. This resistance creates self-consciousness—but only within the dialectical friction. “Hegel therefore concludes that self-consciousness is born out of the confrontation of one consciousness with another consciousness.”²⁶

Just as Hegel did in his proposal of the alienation of consciousness, Marx bakes alienation into the subject-object relation, which now is economic and material. “[T]he power which I attribute to my object over yours requires your recognition in order to become a real power. Our mutual recognition of the respective powers of our objects, however, is a struggle, and in a struggle the victor is the one who has more energy, force, insight, or adroitness.”²⁷ There is no objectivity without alienation. There is no economic exchange without conflict. Thus, as Buttiglione argues, Marx’s economic take-over of ontology tends to reduce the human subject “to a mere appendage of the thing,”²⁸ namely, the alienating commodity.

Wojtyła, conversely, replaces the Marxian primacy of the object with a return to the subject, but not in the Hegelian style. Rather, he combines the priority of the subject with a co-equal priority of *being* (in which both subject and object participate), which is completely

²⁴ John MILBANK’S insights on the ontology of violence in, e.g., *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd ed., London, Wiley-Blackwell [1990] 2006, 480 pp., are worth probing on this point. Disappointingly, his commitment to Marx’s critique of capitalism leads him to apply his hermeneutic of peace to an array of post-modern theorists but not to Marx himself.

²⁵ DUPRÉ, *Philosophical Foundations of Marxism*, cit., p. 30.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ MARX, *Comments on James Mill*, cit., p. 226 [XXXII].

²⁸ BUTTIGLIONE, *Karol Wojtyła*, cit., p. 85.

forgotten in Marxist dialectics. The subject/person is always already a being, regardless of economic forces.²⁹ By grounding subjectivity in metaphysics, he can treat of the person “objectively,” without slipping into a dialectical conflict between subject and object. Despite Marx’s commitment to the objectivity of man, his dismissal of metaphysics in favor of historical materialism means that he has lost the tools he needs to describe man’s objective nature as more than an aggregate of subjective material needs.

4. Alienation as Need

The “Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General” spells out Marx’s materialist account of objectivity by connected it to being “sensuous.”³⁰ He clarifies what “sensuous” means by noting that “to be *sensuous*, that is, to be really existing, means to be an object of sense, to be a *sensuous* object, to have sensuous objects outside oneself ...”³¹ In this text, he elides, perhaps unthinkingly, from objectivity to sensuality: the “non-objective” is equivalent to “an unreal, *non-sensuous* thing – a product of mere thought (i.e., of mere imagination) – an abstraction.”³² The equivalence of thought and imagination is itself telling; it echoes the intrinsically ideological/fetishistic nature of the spiritual for Marx. “A non-objective being is a *non-being*.”³³ While the imaginary/spiritual is the non-real, the sensuous or material is the objective and real. While scholars have debated the extent of Marx’s materialism, this early text presents the foundational equation of sensuality = materiality = objectivity = existence.

The sensuous for Marx is important because it is able to fulfill material human needs: “*Hunger* is a natural *need*; it therefore needs a *nature* outside itself, an *object* outside itself, in

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

³⁰ MARX, *Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy in General*, cit., p. 336 [XXVI], emphasis in the original.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 337 [XXVII], emphasis in the original.

³² *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

³³ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

order to satisfy itself, to be stilled.”³⁴ Here Marx introduces the theme of need by connecting sensuality with the ability to suffer.³⁵ Within a year, in *The German Ideology*, Marx would clarify that man’s needs as a material being are what initiate the history of economic systems (the only real human history). There he begins his history of man’s productive relations by asserting that all economic activity is rooted in the body’s need to perpetuate life: “But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, housing, clothing and various other things.” In a marginal note in the manuscript, he writes: “human bodies. Needs, labor.” The main text continues, “The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself.”³⁶

Marx would not concede that bodily needs are alienating in themselves; the division of labor and private property within the capitalist economic system alienate. And yet the body with its needs subjects man to slavery by tying him to the productive process. Because of my body, I become a slave of my needs and must submit to “labor to earn a living” to meet them.³⁷ In the “Paris Notebooks,” he argued that need, crystallized in the product made by someone else, enslaves the consumer in a relationship of dependency to the producer.³⁸ “Presupposing private property, my individuality is alienated to such a degree that this activity [of work] is instead *hateful* to me, a *torment*, and rather the *semblance* of an activity. Hence, too, it is only a *forced* activity and one imposed on me only through an *external* fortuitous need, not through an *inner, essential* one.”³⁹

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 336 [XXVI], emphasis in the original.

³⁵ “To be sensuous is to *suffer*. Man as an objective, sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being – and because he feels that he suffers, a *passionate* being.” *Ibid.*, p. 337 [XXVII], emphasis in the original.

³⁶ MARX - ENGELS, *The German Ideology*, cit., pp. 41-42.

³⁷ MARX, *Comments on James Mill*, cit, p. 220 [XXIX].

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 225 [XXXII].

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228 [XXXIII], italics in the original.

Even more: sexual reproduction is the origin of the division of labor, which “was originally nothing but the division of labor in the sexual act.”⁴⁰ In *The German Ideology*, Marx pinpoints the division of labor as the cause of private property. Both the division of labor and property are found primordially in the family: the division of labor “simultaneously implies the *distribution*, and indeed the *unequal* distribution, both quantitative and qualitative, of labor and its products, hence property, the nucleus, the first form of which lies in the family, where wife and children are the slaves of the husband. This latent slavery in the family, though still very crude, is the first form of property ... [i.e.,] the power of disposing of the labor-power of others ... Division of labor and private property are, after all, identical expressions ...”⁴¹ Thus, bodily need and reproduction have a sinister cast; they will blossom into the evils of capital.

The later works do not repudiate this analysis of alienation driven by need but merely reinterpret it according to more sophisticated economic categories. Thus, the *Grundrisse* of 1857 notes that, while the capitalist obtains surplus-value in the exchange of labor and wages, the worker obtains only the satisfaction of his needs as his labor is alienated from himself: “What he obtains from the exchange is therefore not exchange value, not wealth, but a means of subsistence, objects for the preservation of his life, the satisfaction of his needs in general, physical, social etc. ... What he gives up is his power to dispose of the latter.”⁴² Likewise, the first page of *Capital* connects the *raison d’être* of the commodity to the satisfaction of human needs.⁴³

⁴⁰ MARX - ENGELS, *The German Ideology*, cit., p. 44.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46, emphasis in the original.

⁴² Karl MARX, *Grundrisse: Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, New York, Vintage Books [1858] 1973, 898 pp., here p. 284.

⁴³ MARX, *Capital*, cit., p. 125.

To summarize: for Marx, the body is a site of physical need that drives the human subject into alienating economic relations. The dependency created by the exchange process is disempowering and must be countered through communism by the independence of the subject vis-à-vis the other through the abolition of private property, which liberates him from the economic system that forces dependency.

5. Alienation as Loneliness and Sin

How might alienation be construed differently? A first step is a structure of human history that transcends mere economism, and biblical anthropology provides this. Marx's rejection of his Jewish roots means he rejects the categories of pre- and post-lapsarian man—of man as created versus man as fallen.⁴⁴ For Marx, man has always been fallen, that is, always dominated by selfishness. Rather than distinguishing between pre- and post-lapsarian man—an original goodness distorted by a past sin—Marx argues that alienation is original but will be overcome in the future. Thus, while John Paul II can propose, with Jesus, that “in the beginning, it was not so,” Marx can only promise, “In the future, it will not be so.” John Paul II can point to the original experiences of pre-lapsarian man continuing to “echo” in our heart, but Marx is forced to propose a whole world *de novo*.

John Paul II's ability to theorize from the perspective of the Fall enables him to utilize Marx while obtaining a critical distance. In the theology of the body, he repeats Paul Ricoeur's assessment of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as “masters of suspicion,” who view the world and man through the lens of some form of disordered desire. John Paul II maps the three forms of concupiscence from I Jn 2:16—“the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life”—

⁴⁴ “Do not let us go back to a fictitious primordial condition as the political economist does, when he tries to explain. Such a primordial condition explains nothing; it merely pushes the question away into a grey nebulous distance. ... Thus the theologian explains the origin of evil by the fall of man; that is, he assumes as a fact, in historical form, what has to be explained.” In MARX, *Estranged Labor*, cit., p. 271 [XXII].

onto Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche respectively.⁴⁵ Thus, he grants that Marx's hermeneutics of the comprehensive nature of greed enables him to see realities that others have missed. What Marx does not have, however, is the perspective of "the beginning" that would allow him to see greed as a distortion of human nature and not as intrinsic to it.

The status of Marx as a master of suspicion means that Karol Wojtyła could appropriate Marxist theory as a phenomenology of the fallen world while discarding its eschatology. Hence, in some of his last writings before becoming pope, he analyzed key Marxist ideas such as alienation and praxis. Toward the former, he stretches out a significant olive branch:

Despite its weaknesses, ... the concept of alienation seems needed in the philosophy of the human being. It is warranted by the condition of human existence, by the contingency and limitation of every particular realization of a concrete *I*, or person. The concept of alienation, when properly applied, can aid in the analysis of human reality—not primarily on the plane of external influences from the extra-human world, but mainly in the realm of specifically human and interhuman relationships—and therefore, in the analysis of the *I-other* relationship.⁴⁶

Thus, like Marx, Wojtyła can see the importance of alienation to social relationships, but, unlike Marx, he does not locate alienation's origin in economic exchange. It is not that private property drives us, on account of bodily need, into alienating exchange; rather, sin disrupts our relationships first. As Wojtyła continues, "According to Marx's philosophy, human beings are

⁴⁵ See Pope JOHN PAUL II's theology of the body, at §46:1-3 (pp. 309-311), translated into English in the definitive edition by Michael Waldstein as *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, Boston, Massachusetts, Pauline Books and Media 2006, 735 pp. Future references will be abbreviated TOB and give the audience talk, a colon, and the paragraph number, with the page number in parentheses.

⁴⁶ WOJTYŁA, *Participation or Alienation?* cit., p. 205.

alienated by their products: their economic and political systems, their property, and their work. Marx also included religion in this category.” Such a materialistic assessment of the problem leads to a materialistic solution: “transform the world of products,” including religion, “and then the age of alienation will come to an end and a ‘reign of freedom’ will ensue, bringing with it complete self-actualization for one and all.”⁴⁷

But this materialistic approach “actually transfers the problem beyond ourselves to what could be called the structures of our social existence, while ignoring what is essential. What is essential is how we relate to one another, even somehow despite the structures.”⁴⁸ The Marxist solution is too superficial, because it remains on the plane of the extra-human rather the interior—what John Paul II will call the “heart.”

Thus, what is required is not revolution but interior conversion, in particular the conversion to the love that Wojtyła calls the “participation of every human being in the humanity of another human being.”⁴⁹ Structures must be transformed, certainly, but on its own this will not eliminate alienation, which has its roots not in structures but in hearts driven by sinful desire. The materialist approach may even make things worse, because it obfuscates the real problem (the “heart”).

Transposing the problem of alienation to the sphere of human products and structures may even contribute to its development, as certain contemporary

⁴⁷ IBID. Cf. Karl MARX, *Private Property and Communism: ID., Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, pp. 293-306, here p. 297 [V]: “Religious estrangement as such occurs only in the realm of *consciousness*, of man’s inner life, but economic estrangement is that of *real life*; its transcendence therefore embraces both aspects.”

⁴⁸ WOJTYŁA, *Participation or Alienation?* cit., pp. 205-206. He gives the example of concentration camps, in which—despite all the structural pressure to the contrary—some people maintained their freedom and related to others in love, not alienation.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Marxists have already observed.⁵⁰ The structures of the social existence of human beings in the conditions of modern civilization, and even this civilization itself and its so-called progress, absolutely must be evaluated in the light of this basic criterion: Do they create the conditions—for this is their only real function—for the development of participation? Do they enable and help us to experience other human beings as other *I*'s? Or do they do just the opposite? Do they obstruct participation and ravage and destroy this basic fabric of human existence and activity, which must always be realized in common with others?⁵¹

He goes so far as to say that “the central problem of life for humanity in our times, perhaps in all times, is this: *participation or alienation?*”⁵² Do we participate in the lives of others as human beings, or do we view them as alien to our own reality?⁵³ As we will see, for Wojtyła the way in which we participate in others is self-gift.

Centesimus Annus, especially §41, provides more detail concerning alienation and its resolution. Marxism proposes “a mistaken and inadequate idea of alienation,” which suffers from materialism and economism. Alienation is found wherever “the authentic meaning of life” is lost. Rather than the term “participation,” the encyclical highlights relationships of “solidary and

⁵⁰ At this point in the text, there is a footnote referencing a contemporary Polish Marxist, Adam SCHAFF, and his work *Marxism and the Human Individual* (in English: trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz, ed. Robert S. Cohen, New York, McGraw 1970, 268 pp.).

⁵¹ WOJTYŁA, *Participation or Alienation?* cit., p. 206.

⁵² *Ibid.* This analysis is based on his treatment in *Person and Act*, Part 4, translated in Italian (more reliably than the English translation): Karol WOJTYŁA, *Persona e Atto*, trans. Giuseppe Girgenti and Patrycja Mikulska, pp. 1165-1213, especially the brief treatment of alienation on pp. 1211-1212: ID., *Metafisica della Persona: Tutte le Opere Filosofiche e Saggi Integrativi*, ed. Giovanni Reale and Tadeusz Syczeń, Milan, Bompiani 2014, 1665 pp. See also MEJOS, *Against Alienation*, cit., especially pp. 79-83.

⁵³ On this point, cf. Florian Henckel VON DONNERSMARCK's remarkable 2006 film *The Lives of Others*, which presents the overcoming of the alienating reality of life under totalitarian Communism.

communion with others for which God created him.”⁵⁴ These relationships are marked by what *Gaudium et Spes* 23 names the free gift of self that enables man to find himself. John Paul II underlines the essentially personal nature of such a gift: “Man cannot give himself to a purely human plan for reality, to an abstract idea or to a false utopia. As a person, he can give himself to another person or to other persons, and ultimately to God, who is the author of his being and who alone can fully accept his gift.” Thus, for John Paul II, alienation is really the refusal of self-gift, while its overcoming is the revolution of love.⁵⁵

6. Labor, the Body, and Self-Gift

This divergence from Marx with regard to alienation and self-gift implies also distinct ways of viewing human labor and the body. Marx argues that labor itself becomes alienation within capitalism: “If then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation.”⁵⁶ But Marx’s anthropology demands the confluence of labor and man. As Rocco Buttiglione stresses, “This idea of the self-creation of man through praxis constitutes the authentic core of Marx’s thought and permits him to be presented as one who has both inherited and actualized the Promethean dream dormant within the whole of modern thought.”⁵⁷ Such Promethean achievement can only be intrinsically

⁵⁴ Earlier, at §13, *Centesimus* cites *Rerum Novarum* and John Paul II’s own *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* regarding the necessary variety of social organizations in which participation (to use the earlier language) is exercised, in particular “intermediary groups,” such as the family.

⁵⁵ He continues, “A society is alienated if its forms of social organization, production and consumption make it more difficult to offer this gift of self and to establish this solidarity between people” (ibid). Cf. his reflections (drawing on Pope PAUL VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae*) on the importance of a culture and in particular art that fosters chastity, in TOB, 61:1-63:7 (pp. 364-378).

⁵⁶ MARX, “Estranged Labor,” cit., p. 274 [XXIII]. Cf. the later *Grundrisse*, cit., pp. 461-463.

⁵⁷ BUTTIGLIONE, *Karol Wojtyła*, cit., p. 293.

alienating; as Del Noce argues, “[I]f man *is* labor, the reduction of labor to an instrument coincides with man’s estrangement from himself.”⁵⁸

Further, we have seen that Marx bridges the gulf between subject and object through the means of money or the commodity, but also that this mediation only alienates human persons. Dialectical progress seems to stall within capitalism (although the current stage of conflict is temporary). This means that, outside of the communist eschaton, there can be no real self-gift. I surrender my product only because I am driven by the needs of my body, and I jealously regard your appropriation of my product as a kind of hostile take-over of my very self.

Against this dystopic vision, Wojtyła proposes genuinely non-alienating personal relations even within the current socio-economic conditions—namely, participation. He agrees that man is formed through his action, including his labor, but he believes that labor can always be a positive reality. Its value is not simply in meeting my needs but also and primarily in making me a certain kind of person. Further, like Marx, he makes the reality of the subject-object relationship fundamental to social interaction and to the question of alienation. But, because we are not governed by materialistic determinism but rather by deeper realities, personal interiority (the “heart”) gives the solution to alienation within these relations.

Del Noce observes that, for Marx, personal interiority is the psychic form of private property. It is the claiming of personal space not accessible to the other, not made public in the commodity. Because of this, it is innately suspicious. This fact underlies the natural trajectory of Marxism toward totalitarianism, toward the attempt to eliminate any possibility of an interior

⁵⁸ Augusto DEL NOCE, *Lezioni sul Marxismo*, vol. 1 of *I Caratteri Generali del Pensiero Politico Contemporaneo*, Milano, Giuffrè 1972, 268 pp., here p. 43, my translation.

space inaccessible to the state.⁵⁹ The word “mine” is alienating and selfish; it implies that “I have produced for myself and not for you, just as you have produced for yourself and not for me.”⁶⁰ Yet it is the reality of personal interiority that is the bulwark against alienation. Interiority cannot be lost no matter how oppressive the external regime—a truth Wojtyła learned through difficult personal experience.

This interiority allows for the participation that overcomes alienation. While Marx proposes self-assertion over the other in dialectical conflict, Wojtyła argues that, by means of our common participation in humanity, which transcends mere matter and certainly economic exchange, we already have a commonality that can deepen into communion.⁶¹ In the Marxist vision, self-gift is at best an illusion. In Wojtyła’s, self-gift is that to which all human development points. Labor can be “*work with others* and *work for others*: it is a matter of doing something for someone else” (CA 31). And this remains possible when sin (not capitalism) is defeated, because the basis of self-gift is the created, interior nature of the human person rather than external systems.

The body plays a distinctive role in this dynamic. We have seen that the body functions as a need-machine within the Marxist formulation. Beyond that, it provides the possibility for personal expression only insofar as it can be seen as the equivalent of a commodity; it is the product of labor that makes objective my subjectivity. Work should be, as Marx puts it in Hegelian language, the free making-objective of my subjectivity, and it will be so in communism.⁶² Yet this self-expression is problematized for the laborer under capitalism. Further,

⁵⁹ See DEL NOCE, *Lezioni sul marxismo*, cit., p. 48.

⁶⁰ MARX, *Comments on James Mill*, cit., p. 225 [XXXI].

⁶¹ Cf. the later presentation of “original unity” in TOB, 8:4-9:3 (pp. 160-164).

⁶² MARX, *Comments on James Mill*, cit., p. 227 [XXXIII].

it is unclear according to Marx's anthropology what precisely self-expression could be. What exactly does one express if the reality of the person is purely material?

For Wojtyła, in contrast, the body always reveals the person.⁶³ In his earlier work, *Person and Act*, he says something similar about human action: "the person is revealed through action."⁶⁴ In other words, the body makes possible the visible expression of the person that occurs in action, including labor. In the theology of the body, he will say that the body acts as a kind of "primordial sacrament," as the visible sign of the invisible reality of the person.⁶⁵ The body always speaks the reality that we are made for self-gift.⁶⁶ For Wojtyła, the body functions as a means of personal expression beyond the economic dynamic. For Marx, one cannot really escape economics; as we have seen, even his analysis of the family is tied to productive processes. For Wojtyła, who has an aesthetic sense of the body that Marx lacks, the body is always and everywhere revelatory, enabling a personal expression that transcends economics and social structures.

This possibility of participation with others through bodily expression means that self-gift is a genuine reality. While Marx is resigned to dialectical conflict under capitalism, Wojtyła proposes a dynamic of gift. While Marx views even personal interiority as suspicious because it savors of private property, for Wojtyła I say "mine" not to trigger dialectical aggression but to possess myself well enough to be able to give myself.⁶⁷

⁶³ TOB, 9:4 (p. 164) and 55:2 (pp. 345-346), *inter alia*.

⁶⁴ WOJTYŁA, *Persona e Atto*, cit., p. 851.

⁶⁵ TOB, 19:3-6 (pp. 202-204) and 96:1-7 (pp. 503-507).

⁶⁶ The meaning is the "spousal meaning of the body," developed in TOB, 13:2-16:2 (pp. 178-191).

⁶⁷ On "mine" in Wojtyła, see the play *Radiation of Fatherhood*'s otherwise mysterious reflections on the word, in ID., *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski, Oakland, California, University of California Press 1987, 405 pp.

7. Conclusion

Another future pope, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, noted the Gnostic fear that lurks at the source of the alternative to Wojtyła's vision of self-gift. Gnosticism rejects love for control. "Love appears too insecure a foundation for life and world. ... It makes me permanently dependent. ... Thus, instead of being a beautiful promise, love becomes an unbearable feeling of dependence, of subjection."⁶⁸ The knowledge that leads to power appears to be "the only reliable redemption of humankind."⁶⁹

But the reality is that we *are* dependent. Ratzinger notes that love counters the threat of the dialectical loss of self through competition, because love is truly creative of oneself and of the other, "because love essentially takes the form of saying, 'I want you to be.' It is creativity, the only creative power, which can bring forth the other as other without envy or loss of self."⁷⁰ Ratzinger goes on to note that Gnostic fear leads to doubting being, an attitude that "manifests itself as the belief in progress, the principle of hope, the principle of class struggle, in other words, creativity as opposed to creation, the production of the world as opposed to the existence of creation."⁷¹ This is the innate Prometheanism in Marxism.

Of course, Marxism has not cornered the market on Prometheus. Both Ratzinger and Wojtyła as popes criticized the inherent materialism and individualism underlying both Marxism and consumerism. One might argue that both systems are guilty of commodity fetishism, in that they elevate the product of labor over the laborer as a full person. The person has both bodily and

⁶⁸ Joseph RATZINGER, "In the Beginning ..." *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, OP, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company 1995, 112 pp, here p. 96. For these points, he relies upon Rocco BUTTIGLIONE and Angelo SCOLA, *Von Abraham zu Prometheus: Zur Problematik der Schöpfung innerhalb des modernen Denkens*, "Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift" 1 (1976) 30-41.

⁶⁹ RATZINGER, *In the Beginning ...*, cit., p. 97.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

spiritual needs, and he cannot live by bread alone. Both systems reduce the person to his or her material functioning, while neglecting the spiritual hunger that impels the individual toward genuine community, with God and with other human persons. Further, both systems fall into a kind of dualism that severs the intrinsic connection between the body and the heart. John Paul II's paradigm shift—that the body does not enslave but rather expresses the person—provides the way forward for living out the gift of self within the drama of the world in a non-alienating way.

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