



The phenomenon of alienation in the historico-philosophical discourse: Evolution of the concept and contemporary interpretations

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Abstract. Alienation constitutes a critical issue in contemporary discourse, intensified by globalisation, digitalisation, technological advancement, social fragmentation, and escalating political instability. The relevance of this inquiry derives from the urgent need to conceptualise the processes through which individuals experience estrangement from their essence, from social institutions, and the broader existential framework of human life. The primary aim of this study was to reconstruct the historical and philosophical evolution of the concept of “alienation”, identify its principal stages of development, and examine its contemporary reinterpretations within the context of global transformations. Methodologically, the research was grounded in historical-philosophical analysis, comparative methodology, hermeneutic interpretation of primary philosophical sources, and interdisciplinary integration of perspectives from philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and political theory. The study results revealed that alienation initially emerged as a metaphysical concern in ancient philosophy, reflecting humanity’s disrupted relationship with the Cosmos. During the medieval period, it was reinterpreted theologically as a rupture between humanity and the divine. The Early Modern era marked a pivotal shift, with alienation acquiring political and legal significance within the framework of social contract theory. In the nineteenth century, German classical philosophy and Marxism endowed the concept with systematic philosophical depth. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, alienation has been further elaborated through social, cultural, existential, and technological dimensions, encompassing phenomena such as digital subjectivity, posthumanist critiques, and algorithmic governance. The practical significance of the research lies in its applicability to contemporary academic and policy discussions within social philosophy, political theory, cultural studies, and education

Keywords: alienation; spirituality; historical development; self-alienation; sociocultural context; society

Introduction

The development of society has always been accompanied by alienation, which emerges during times of social crisis and recedes during periods of dynamic progress, yet never disappears entirely. A thorough understanding of alienation is essential for studying this issue.

Scholars and philosophers have attempted to explain this phenomenon since ancient times. However, it was only in the Modern era that philosophers addressed it as a social phenomenon. Given that the accumulated theoretical material provides an ambiguous and vague

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definition of “alienation”, it becomes clear why contemporary philosophers, sociologists, cultural theorists, and political scientists approach the study of alienation differently, depending on the perspective from which they examine its nature. An analysis of the evolution of the concept of “alienation” reveals the deeper patterns in the development of philosophical thought and brings us closer to understanding the modern forms of social, political, and spiritual alienation that continue to shape the human condition in the 21st century.

The issue of alienation has been extensively developed in philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and political theory, as reflected in a wide range of academic research. In recent decades, there has been a growing number of interdisciplinary approaches to studying the phenomenon of alienation, which allows for new interpretations of both classical and contemporary perspectives. J. Samuel (2023), explored the metaphysical and normative dimensions of alienation, drawing on Hegelian dialectics to illuminate how alienation shapes our relations with norms and the world. Written in the Marxist tradition, the article by M.K. Santiago (2024) brought the discussion back to the classical reading of alienation as a consequence of capitalist relations of production. The author emphasised the importance of restoring the critical potential of Marxism in contemporary political and social contexts. In their article “Labour, capital and the struggle over history: Reconstructing Marxist class theory from the standpoint of alienation,” E. Øversveen & C.A. Kelly (2023) argued that Marxist class analysis – while foundational for understanding social inequalities – has largely overlooked alienation’s experiential and dialectical dimensions. Methodologically, the authors employ a hermeneutic reading of G.W.F. Hegel and K. Marx’s texts, combined with a critical engagement with more recent sociological debates, to demonstrate that alienation provides a vital link between structural economic processes and individual lived experience. J. Pateman (2023) challenged prevailing narratives about Lenin’s engagement with K. Marx’s theory of alienation, demonstrating its central role in Leninist thought and its implications for revolutionary praxis. J. Fanciullo (2025) interrogated the “alienation constraint” on theories of well-being, debating how disconnection from what one finds compelling undermines conceptions of human flourishing. L. Ma (2024) offered a comprehensive philosophical analysis of alienation in the digital age, tracing how digital capitalism transforms labour, products, and social relations, thereby generating new modalities of estrangement. The philosophical dimension was addressed in Z.W. Liu’s (2022) article, which examined H. Marcuse’s utopian project aimed at overcoming the “one-dimensional” man through the transcendence of the system of alienation. The work is relevant in seeking philosophical alternatives to modern technocratic rationalism. Contemporary approaches to the

topic show a tendency toward expanded interpretation. P.L. Choquet (2021) introduced the “geo-social critique” concept, viewing alienation not only as an interpersonal or economic category but as a global structural problem connected to spatial inequality and ecological instability. His work reflects new trends in social theory, in which alienation is conceptualised in the context of a globalised world. From a cultural perspective, Z. Jing (2024) analysed the concept of alienation through the lens of survival and cultural interpretation in contemporary societies. The author emphasises that modern culture not only reflects alienation but also produces it as a form of adaptation to the conditions of late capitalism. Thus, the contemporary historiography of the phenomenon of alienation is multifaceted and dynamic. It encompasses both classical and cutting-edge interpretations, demonstrating the deep dependence of this concept on its historical, social, and cultural context. The purpose of this work was to trace how the idea of alienation gradually transformed into a philosophical category, acquiring new layers of meaning depending on the historical, social, and cultural context.

Materials and Methods

The research employed general scientific and philosophical methods to provide a comprehensive historical and conceptual analysis of alienation. The primary method used was historical-philosophical analysis, which made it possible to trace the evolution of the concept of alienation from Antiquity to contemporary interpretations. This method identified and systematised key philosophical traditions, thinkers, and their contributions to the understanding of alienation. In addition, comparative analysis was applied to reveal the differences and similarities in interpreting alienation across various historical periods and philosophical schools. This method allowed the authors to outline the continuity and transformation of the conceptual approaches to alienation. Hermeneutic methods were used to interpret philosophical texts in socio-cultural and historical contexts. By engaging in a close reading of primary philosophical sources (e.g., the works of Plato, Aristotle, A. Augustine, T. Hobbes, J. Locke, J.-J. Rousseau, G. Hegel, L. Feuerbach, K. Marx, J.-P. Sartre, H. Marcuse, and M. Heidegger), the research disclosed the internal logic of the formation and development of the idea of alienation. The systematic approach provided a framework for analysing alienation as a complex phenomenon manifested in different spheres: social, economic, political, cultural, and existential. This approach enabled the integration of insights from various disciplines, including sociology, cultural studies, political theory, and psychoanalysis, into a coherent research narrative.

The study was carried out through a thematic analysis of selected historical-philosophical materials. For each historical period and school of thought, the main

conceptualisations of alienation were identified, compared, and contextualised. The corpus of analysed materials included both primary philosophical texts and recent scholarly publications. Methodologies developed by other researchers were incorporated through the adoption of the critical reinterpretation of classical concepts based on contemporary interdisciplinary approaches (such as geo-social critique and posthumanist theories). This allowed for the extension of classical interpretations of alienation into modern technological and globalised realities.

The study progressed in several stages: selection of primary philosophical works and relevant contemporary studies; Structuring the concept of alienation across different historical periods; Identifying continuities and discontinuities in conceptualisations; Hermeneutic reading of key texts; Formulation of conclusions regarding the evolution of the concept and its relevance in the contemporary context. The research was conducted during 2024-2025, based on the study of available primary philosophical sources, peer-reviewed journal articles, and interdisciplinary analyses accessible through academic databases and open-access platforms. The materials were processed using qualitative analysis methods, without the application of statistical or empirical research techniques, given the philosophical and historical nature of the subject.

Results and Discussion

The phenomenon of alienation emerged long before the concept and category of “alienation” itself were formally established, initially manifesting only as an explanation for the human mind’s response to various contradictions. A distinctive feature of the phenomenon is the attribution of meaning to separation and the transformation of something that belongs to a person’s “self” into something alien. The earliest notions of alienation can be found in the philosophical treatises of Antiquity, where cosmocentric worldviews shape their understanding. The primary source of alienation was considered to be the emergence of the physical world, which led to the appearance of human beings capable of reflecting on their cosmic environment and themselves as cosmic entities. All human problems during Antiquity were viewed in an organic connection with a person’s place in the Cosmos. The inability to understand this or to follow this natural law disrupted harmony and led to imperfection, which contained the idea of alienation and resulted in various forms of social upheaval. Such an interpretation of alienation can be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle (Santiago, 2024). Ancient philosophers noted that alienation could manifest at both the individual-human and societal levels.

During the Middle Ages, the idea of alienation was defined by a geocentric worldview and was considered through the opposition between God, who created a world functioning according to divine laws, and the

human being, who lives in accordance with these same laws. Through the concept of alienation, attempts were made to explain the rupture in the relationship between humanity and God, as well as the fundamental contradictions of human existence: inner tension, the polarity of human nature, and the presence of evil in the world. This can be clearly observed in the works of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Abelard. In Augustine’s *Confessions* and *The City of God*, alienation is expressed through the experience of the inner struggle between bodily desires and the soul’s longing for divine truth, as well as through the theological interpretation of humanity’s fall and separation from God. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas discusses how sin disturbs the natural order established by God, resulting in the disintegration of human nature and spiritual estrangement. In his *Ordinatio*, Duns Scotus highlights the human will’s dual orientation – toward personal benefit and universal good – which creates the internal polarity and potential alienation from divine intention. Peter Abelard, particularly in *Sic et Non* and *Ethica (Scito te ipsum)*, explores the moral conflicts within the human conscience and the difficulties of attaining theological truth, thereby emphasising alienation’s internal dissonance and existential uncertainty (Osborne, 2014).

The problem of alienation remained relevant during the Renaissance as well. It was associated with a dual understanding of human nature – both “natural” and “divine” – which generated contradictions in a person’s self-awareness and in the understanding of their own activity. This was reflected in the views of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Giannozzo Manetti, Leon Battista Alberti, and other thinkers of the period (Choquet, 2021). During this time, the phenomenon of alienation was understood as a response to the contradictions arising from the dual perception of the human being-as-a-God-Creator on the one hand, and as an ordinary earthly person on the other. Alienation manifested in the realisation that although extraordinary qualities were attributed to humans, they were, from the very beginning, limited by their natural and physiological characteristics, and they were aware of it. Thus, alienation continued to be perceived in its previous sense of “separation”, although a comprehensive conceptualisation of the phenomenon had not yet been formed.

The concept of “alienation” was formed in the 17th century and is associated with the theory of the social contract. Its emergence was conditioned by the socio-cultural situation that demanded a new understanding of the relationship between “the individual and society,” recognising the individual as the highest value of social life. In this context, it is important to refer to the works of T. Hobbes, J. Locke, J.-J. Rousseau, and T. Paine, who connected alienation with the process of transferring an individual’s natural rights to the state and subsequently becoming dependent on it. A distinctive feature

of these thinkers' views is that alienation, in their concepts, appears as a voluntary act by the individual, necessary to obtain guaranteed security. T. Hobbes, in his examination of the essence of power relations, notes: "I authorise and give up my right of governing myself to this man, or this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorise all his actions in like manner... This is the generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speak more reverently), of that Mortal God, to which we owe, under the Immortal God, our peace and defence" (Hobbes, 1651). Despite sharing a general approach to the problem, the philosophers of the Early Modern period differed in their understanding of alienation. J. Locke, unlike T. Hobbes, argued that even in an alienated form, the individual must retain certain natural rights – life, liberty, and property – which cannot be alienated (Locke, 1823). A distinctive aspect of J.-J. Rousseau's position is that, in addition to alienation based on the need for self-protection, J.-J. Rousseau also reflected on the problem of despotic state power, which is based not on the right given to it but on brute force. This, in his view, leads to the violation of human freedoms, which should be preserved even after the conclusion of the social contract (Rousseau, 1998). Thus, philosophical concepts of "alienation" in the 17th-18th centuries recognised the source of alienation in the specific structure of reality, whose imperfect relationships introduced disharmony both in interpersonal relations and in the individual's self-perception.

The transition from the concept of "alienation" to its development as a philosophical category took place in the 19th century. This was linked to the process of progressively enriching the concept with logic and dialectical content. A significant contribution to this process was made by representatives of German classical philosophy, who viewed alienation as a historical process resulting from human activity within the sphere of their existence – society. During this period, alienation began to be understood simultaneously as both an objective and subjective action. The issue of alienation was addressed by G.W.F. Hegel, L. Feuerbach, and K. Marx.

The first systematic philosophical investigation of alienation is found in the works of G. G.W.F. Hegel (2018). He presents alienation as a complex and multifaceted category through which various levels of objectification and externalisation are revealed. Hegel understands alienation as a historical process, dialectically conditioned both by reality itself and by the activity of the subject. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, and *Philosophy of Right*, a holistic historical account is developed through the totality of alienation and the development of human culture, which is presented as unfolding in the form of alienation. Nature, history, education, morality, civil society, and the state are all forms of the self-alienation of the Absolute Spirit for the purpose of self-knowledge. Through the process of studying the past and delving into its inner

essence, its theoretical comprehension becomes the means of overcoming alienation. The Spirit "alienates itself, and then returns to itself from this alienation, thereby revealing its reality and essence, and becoming the possession of consciousness". Reality, although created by the human being, appears to them as "something immediately alienated" (Hegel, 2018). Thus, the idea of alienation takes on a universal character as a factor of movement. Contradiction (or alienation) becomes a necessary stage of development, without which the full content of the Absolute Idea could hardly be revealed.

Ludwig L. Feuerbach (1986) opened a new path for understanding alienation. First, he used the concept of alienation to explain the existence of the Christian religion. Second, he gave this category an anthropological meaning by replacing the Absolute Spirit as the subject and object of alienation with the living "natural" human being – one who feels, suffers, observes, and creates God in their own image and likeness. According to L. Feuerbach, in the idea of God, the human being has embodied their species essence, which can be observed as another entity distinct from themselves. "Theology divides and alienates the human being, only to then re-personify this alienated essence in them once again". The process of alienation expressed here has significant consequences, as the person who created God begins to perceive themselves as His creation. L. Feuerbach also proposed a way to overcome alienation by replacing the religion of love for God with a religion of love for humanity, through which the individual will regain their personal qualities.

A unique revolution in the understanding of the phenomenon of alienation, its essence, and the possibilities for overcoming it was carried out by Karl Marx. Unlike Hegel, who understood alienation as the development of consciousness, K. Marx turned to social reality and the material production sphere of society, where he sought the causes of alienation. Furthermore, alienation is understood as a multi-level phenomenon, with each form corresponding to a certain stage of development. K. Marx considered economic alienation, which arises with the emergence of wage labor as a result of its division, the emergence of private property, and the development of commodity-money relations, to be the determinant of all forms. Based on K. Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, a hierarchy of the main forms of alienation can be identified: 1) economic – alienation from the product and process of labor; 2) social – alienation from the species essence, alienation of one person from another; 3) political – alienation of the state from the people, bureaucracy; 4) spiritual – religious alienation, bourgeois political economy, and fetishism of money as a form of alienated consciousness. Following L. Feuerbach, K. Marx continues to attribute a strongly negative meaning to alienation, transferring it from its religious basis to the economic sphere. As a way to overcome alienation, he proposes changing the material conditions of social life, including the abandonment of private

property (Marx, 2007). This abandonment is not an act, but a process, determined by two factors: the growth of the level of development of productive forces, which at an appropriate level will make possible the dissolution of the causes of alienation – division of labor and the improvement of the individual, who, at a high level of development, will be capable of mastering and re-objectifying the entire wealth of human essence contained in social relations (Marx, 1970; Marx & Engels, 2022).

In the 20th century, the study of the phenomenon of alienation continued across various fields, leading to the emergence of numerous conceptual approaches to its understanding. In the concepts developed by scholars of the Frankfurt School of philosophy (T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, H. Marcuse, A. Schweitzer), a distinctly social approach to defining the essence of alienation can be traced. Drawing on the category of “alienation” developed by K. Marx, they emphasise the characteristics of social processes under the conditions of industrial society. H. Marcuse notes that one-dimensional thinking is systematically imposed by policymakers and their representatives in the sphere of mass information. The universe of their discourse is introduced through hypotheses that operate autonomously and continuously, being methodically repeated and thus transforming into hypnotically effective formulas and attitudes (Marcuse, 1991). A. Schweitzer draws attention to the inhumane nature of the conditions in which people live, which lead to alienation. Normal human-to-human relations encounter numerous obstacles. A person loses the sense of kinship with their fellow human beings and thus descends into a path of inhumanity. A. Schweitzer asserts that a destructive interaction has developed not only between the economy and spiritual life, but also between society and the individual. Whereas once society uplifted people, now it oppresses us. According to him, the accelerated pace of social life began to exert a negative influence on the individual. The overemployment of the modern person in all strata of society leads to the demise of spirituality (Schweitzer, 2005). Among the factors contributing to the loss of spirituality are: the increasing specialisation in all areas of human activity (production, science, governance), the intensification of society’s technicisation, the rapid growth of impersonal scientific knowledge, and the expanding influence of this impersonality on the individual, and so on.

The psychological perspective, which reflects the views of philosophers of the psychoanalytic school (Freud, 1976; Fromm, 2013), considers alienation as an attribute of the human psyche, based on an intrapersonal conflict. Thus, the focus is not on the social conditions of human life, but on individual characteristics. The source of alienation is seen in the contradiction between the “individual” or “collective” unconscious and the social demands internalised in human consciousness. This allows for the possibility of overcoming alienation by analysing the legitimacy of social norms

and reconciling the individual with their own nature. The views of Z. Freud (1976) and E. Fromm (2013) are largely consonant. However, while Z. Freud refers to neurosis as a factor of alienation, which results either in a neurotic loss of the self (“depersonalisation”) or a loss of the sense of reality of the surrounding world (“derealisation”) (Freud, 1976), E. Fromm emphasises that a significant number of neurotic conflicts leading to alienation are determined not by instinctive, but by socio-cultural predispositions. This makes it possible to speak of the social nature of the unconscious in the psyche (Fromm, 2013). This, in turn, allows us to conclude that E. Fromm’s views are close to the central thesis of Marxist philosophy: the causal dependence of all phenomena of spiritual life, including alienation, on social relations.

The personal approach, represented in the concepts of existentialist philosophers (J.-P. Sartre, A. Camus, K. Jaspers, G. Marcel), considers alienation through the lens of the opposition between the authentic individuality of a person and the society that stands against them. Individual freedom is manifested not in setting a goal, but in making a choice. The initial choice occurs outside of the individual’s consciousness and arises in an unknown way from the very first moment of a person’s existence. During the course of life, if a person sets a goal that contradicts this initial choice, then, according to J.-P. Sartre, they are doomed to failure: “We are freedom that chooses, but we do not choose to be free; we are condemned to be free” (Sartre, 2004). In this way, freedom, in its original sense, is destroyed. An initial choice that runs counter to a person’s uncertain desires and prevents them from developing their individuality signifies total alienation of the individual. This is reflected in such individual states as loneliness, the feeling of existential abandonment, the hostility of the world, the loss of connection with it, abandonment by God, failure in the trials of freedom, the meaninglessness of one’s existence, and alienation in interpersonal relationships. Closely related to the existential concept of “alienation” is the interpretation proposed by M. Heidegger. By distinguishing between “authentic” and “inauthentic” modes of human life, M. Heidegger argues that alienation is an inherent attribute of human existence, linking it to the person’s fate of being entangled with things. He notes that when things take precedence, life assumes an inauthentic character, thus leading to alienation (Heidegger, 1962).

However, in the 21st century, the dichotomy between the social and ontological dimensions of alienation loses its clarity and definition. In the digital age, these levels intertwine and mutually reinforce each other, forming new, hybrid forms of alienation in which the subject is simultaneously subordinated to structural mechanisms of control and experiences a profound loss of meaning and authenticity. Digital technologies – particularly social media, algorithmic models of behavior, artificial intelligence systems, and automated decision-making – transform the very conditions of human existence. The

modern individual constantly produces data representing them as digital avatars, shadows, or profiles – fragmented, edited, and controlled by external algorithmic structures. They increasingly lose ownership of their image, which becomes a commodity or an instrument of influence. This leads not only to “alienation from oneself” but also to deep emotional and existential exhaustion – a consequence of constant comparison, imposed visibility, and the impossibility of genuine interaction. In the post-truth world, communication loses its dialogical and ethical nature: the word is no longer addressed to the other but functions as a tool of influence, manipulation, or representation. It is not just a crisis of truth, but the collapse of the very horizon of meaning. All of this results in a delegation of subjectivity – some functions of the “self” are transferred to technology: decisions about routes, preferences, and interpretation of news are carried out by algorithms. The subject is no longer the sole source of will; it dissolves into a network of interactions that increasingly occur without its active participation. In this context, the notion of autonomy acquires a new meaning or even becomes problematic. Posthumanist philosophy – in the works of R. Esposito, Katherine Hayles, Yuk Hui, Donna Haraway – does not interpret these phenomena solely as “defects” of the modern project that must be eliminated. Rather, it proposes abandoning the idea of a coherent, self-sufficient subject around which the humanist canon was built. Instead, the concept of techno-mediated subjectivity is put forward – fragmented, relational, emerging through interaction with non-biological agents, infrastructures, and networks. In this context, the human is no longer the center of the universe, but merely one element in a complex system of interrelations. Therefore, overcoming alienation is no longer seen as a return to an authentic “self”, to an original wholeness, or to a true nature. Instead, it is conceived as a radical rethinking of what it means to be human (Esposito, 2011; Dodonova *et al.*, 2024).

The concept of authenticity, historically associated with existentialist philosophy (especially Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre), presupposes the capacity of the individual to present themselves truthfully and act by their inner self. In the digital age, however, authenticity becomes problematic: individuals curate multiple identities for different platforms, constantly modify their digital personas, and increasingly tailor self-presentation for algorithmic visibility rather than personal expression. This results in self-alienation, where the gap between lived experience and its mediated representation grows. Moreover, the right to privacy, rooted in classical liberal and human rights discourse (e.g., John Locke, J. S. Mill), is severely challenged by the dynamics of datafication and surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 1989). In the digital ecosystem, individuals no longer fully control the information that represents them. Personal data are extracted, aggregated, and monetised without transparent consent, reducing subjects

to data profiles optimised for commercial or political ends. This commodification of identity further alienates individuals from control over their embodied existence. The philosophical consequences of these processes are profound. First, the fragmentation of the self into data points undermines the possibility of a unified, authentic identity, leading to ontological alienation. Second, the erosion of privacy removes the conditions necessary for maintaining a reflective space where authentic selfhood could develop. Author B.-C. Han (2015) aptly described the contemporary subject as a “transparent self”, exposed to the gaze of others without refuge, thus intensifying feelings of insecurity, self-estrangement, and performative existence. The right to authenticity and privacy must therefore be rethought: not merely as protections against intrusion, but as affirmations of embodied integrity, agency, and existential coherence in environments that constantly threaten to fragment and appropriate human subjectivity.

The development of digital technologies has led to unprecedented opportunities and the emergence of new, intensified forms of structural alienation. These forms are rooted in the uneven distribution of access to technological resources and the transformative impact of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) on labor relations. Digital inequality refers not merely to disparities in access to devices or the Internet but also to disparities in digital literacy, algorithmic inclusion, and technological agency. Access to technology determines access to education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. Those excluded from digital networks experience structural alienation – a systemic separation from the main avenues of self-realisation and social agency. From a Marxist perspective, this phenomenon can be interpreted as a new form of proletarianisation: the digital underclass is excluded from the means of symbolic and informational production, much like industrial workers were historically alienated from material means of production. In this sense, technological alienation in the digital age is not just about exclusion but about losing control over one’s capacity to participate meaningfully in public and economic life (Øversveen & Kelly, 2023). Automation and AI introduce further layers to the alienation of labor. In traditional Marxist theory, alienation occurs when the worker becomes estranged from the product of their labor, the labor process, their species-being, and other human beings. With AI, labor is automated, fragmented, deskilled, and surveilled. Philosophers such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, and S. Zuboff (1989) have shown that platform capitalism treats human labor as an input to data extraction systems, reducing workers to nodes in algorithmic networks optimised for efficiency. Workers in the gig economy, for instance, are managed not by human supervisors but by algorithmic systems that dictate schedules, evaluate performance, and assign tasks. This erases personal autonomy and deepens

alienation from the labor process: the worker no longer even perceives the employer as a relational other, but faces an opaque, often unintelligible system of control. Moreover, B.-C. Han (2015) observes that the contemporary subject internalises performance pressure and self-optimisation imperatives, leading to self-exploitation – a voluntary but alienating process where freedom is instrumentalised. In this context, structural alienation emerges not only as material deprivation but also as ontological dislocation: the individual is alienated from labor, community, and self-realisation, fragmented within an increasingly automated and datafied environment. B. Stiegler (2019) warned of a “loss of individuation” due to technological externalisation of memory, cognition, and decision-making. Without meaningful participation in production, cultural creation, and political action, the contemporary subject risks becoming a passive appendage to technological systems.

The classical conception of the subject of rights, rooted in the traditions of Enlightenment humanism – particularly in the works of René Descartes (“*cogito ergo sum*”) and Immanuel Kant (concept of autonomy) – presupposed an individual who is rational, self-sufficient, and self-legislating. In this framework, rights were conceptualised as attributes of an autonomous self-capable of exercising free will and rational choice. However, posthumanist philosophy radically reconfigures this image. J. Samuel (2023) argued that the human subject cannot be conceived outside of its technological, biological, and ecological entanglements. The posthumanist subject is no longer sovereign and coherent; it is relational, hybrid, and technologically mediated. It emerges through continuous interactions with non-human agents – machines, algorithms, environments – thus undermining the foundational assumptions of traditional rights theory.

In the posthumanist view, alienation no longer appears solely as estrangement from one’s labor (as in Karl Marx) or one’s species-being, but rather as estrangement from one’s own embodied subjectivity, fragmented across digital infrastructures. N.K. Hayles (1999) discusses this process regarding the posthuman, where cognition and agency are distributed across humans and intelligent machines. As individuals increasingly rely on external memory systems, decision-making algorithms, and data-driven environments, their capacity for autonomous action becomes technologically mediated, thus alienating them from the classical model of self-determination that rights discourse presupposes. Moreover, R. Braidotti (2017) emphasises that the posthuman condition leads to a nomadic subjectivity, characterised by fluid, transitory identities. The alienation here is not simply negative but also productive: it opens possibilities for rethinking rights beyond fixed notions of sovereignty and individuality, towards a model based on relational ethics, care, and interdependence. B. Stiegler (2019) introduces the

concept of technological prosthesis, suggesting that human existence has always been technically supplemented. Yet, in the digital age, these supplements have become so pervasive that they alter perception, desire, and volition, creating a condition he terms “hyper-alienation”. In such a context, the subject of rights is no longer an autonomous entity but a being whose agency is continuously negotiated with technological systems. This reconfiguration has profound implications for legal and political philosophy. The rights attributed to a coherent human subject (such as privacy, dignity, freedom of will) must now be reinterpreted in light of hybrid subjectivity. If agency is distributed, it becomes necessary to rethink notions like responsibility, culpability, and consent, particularly when actions are co-produced by humans and non-human agents (e.g., AI decision-making systems). In posthumanist frameworks, alienation thus shifts from being solely a socioeconomic condition to an ontological and technological phenomenon: a loss of coherence, ownership, and authentic self-representation in a world saturated with algorithmic governance and digital mediation. Accordingly, the rights philosophy must evolve to account for subjects who are no longer unitary but networked, fragmented, and situated within technological assemblages.

In the 21st century, alienation transcends its classical economic meaning, becoming a cultural and existential phenomenon that shapes not only personal identity but also the dynamics of global conflicts. The spread of technocentric ideologies, prioritising technological progress, efficiency, and automation, intensifies the rift between societies oriented toward rapid technological innovation and those rooted in traditional, community-based, and spiritual worldviews. Technocentrism, often presented as the unavoidable path of modernity, embodies an ideology that frames technological development as an autonomous, self-justifying good. In the tradition of Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (Marcuse, 1991), this ideology can be understood as reducing human needs, desires, and values to those that serve technological and economic systems. Alienation, in this view, manifests not merely as separation from labor but as estrangement from non-technological ways of living, from community, from nature, and from historical forms of self-understanding. The technocentric narrative often delegitimises traditional cultures, branding them as obsolete, inefficient, or superstitious. It imposes a universalising rationality that dismisses localised forms of knowledge, belief, and social organisation, thus creating deep cultural tensions. In Frantz Fanon’s and Achille Mbembe’s postcolonial theories, this imposition of a dominant rationality can be seen as a form of cultural alienation, where local identities are fractured under the pressure of global (techno-economic) models (Fancullo, 2025). These dynamics of alienation contribute directly to international conflicts in several ways: 1. Cultural Resistance: Traditional societies often resist the

wholesale adoption of technocentric values, defending communal ties, spiritual practices, and ecological ways of life. The alienation produced by technological imperialism provokes efforts to reclaim identity, autonomy, and tradition, sometimes through political movements, sometimes through cultural revitalisation. 2. Economic Inequality and Technological Disparity: As U. Beck (1992) notes in his theory of the risk society, technological development is uneven, producing winners and losers on a global scale. Marginalised societies often experience both material alienation (lack of access to digital infrastructures) and existential alienation (loss of meaningful cultural frameworks), fueling resentment and conflict. 3. Hybridisation and Identity Crisis: In contexts where traditional and technocentric values collide, individuals experience identity fragmentation. H.K. Bhabha's (1994) concept of the "third space" describes how hybrid identities are formed in the interplay of local traditions and global modernity. Still, such hybridity can also deepen alienation, as individuals struggle to reconcile conflicting cultural logics. 4. Radicalisation and Reaction: In extreme cases, the alienation induced by technocentric hegemony can feed into radical ideological movements, which present themselves as defenders of authentic, traditional values against the perceived dehumanisation and homogenisation of global modernity.

From a philosophical perspective, these conflicts demonstrate that alienation is not merely an internal psychological state but a structural and global phenomenon. As J. Baudrillard (1994) suggests, in the era of simulations and hyperreality, traditional cultures are not only economically marginalised but symbolically annihilated, turned into commodified "heritage" for global consumption. Overcoming such alienation would require a critical rethinking of technology not as an autonomous force but as a culturally embedded practice, subject to ethical, political, and existential reflection.

Conclusions

The concept of "alienation" has undergone a rather long genesis. It has evolved from a mechanical interpretation – as a conscious or forced act of transferring certain natural (inborn, a priori) human rights to the social organism – to the recognition of alienation as an essential and necessary aspect of human life, an attribute of existence. Scholars, while studying various aspects of this complex phenomenon, have assigned

different meanings to it. Using the same term to denote entirely different phenomena and processes, researchers, understandably, could not reach a commonly accepted definition of alienation for a long time. While some viewed alienation as an individual, internal split in human consciousness, others understood it as the objectification of human activity – the separation of the products of one's material and spiritual labor from the individual. The emergence of various directions and approaches in defining the concept of "alienation" is conditioned by the different spheres of society in which it occurs. In the 19th and 20th centuries, alienation came to be analysed not only in terms of economic structures (as in K. Marx's critique of capitalism) but also through the lens of culture, psychology, and existential ontology, reflecting an increasingly multifaceted and interdisciplinary character. The posthumanist rethinking of subjectivity in the 21st century further challenges traditional notions of the autonomous individual. It redefines the subject of rights as technologically mediated and relational, thus requiring a re-examination of fundamental legal and philosophical categories. Moreover, the emergence of digital embodiment raises critical concerns regarding authenticity and privacy, as individuals become alienated from their embodied selves through the commodification and algorithmic governance of personal data. Ideologies of technocentric alienation contribute to global conflicts, intensifying tensions between traditional cultures and the homogenising forces of digital globalisation. At the same time, new forms of structural alienation – such as digital inequality and AI-driven labor exploitation – underscore the necessity of addressing technological injustices alongside classical social critiques. Further research should focus on developing normative frameworks for posthuman rights, exploring the ethical dimensions of digital embodiment, and theorising alternative models of technological development that respect cultural plurality.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Феномен відчуження в історико-філософському дискурсі: еволюція концепту та сучасні інтерпретації

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Анотація. Феномен відчуження є актуальною проблемою сучасності, що набуває нових форм у контексті глобалізаційних, цифрових та соціальних змін. Його дослідження потребує глибокого філософського аналізу, спрямованого на осмислення втрати людиною зв'язку з собою, суспільством і світом, а також на формування нових підходів до розуміння сучасного людського буття. Метою роботи було простежити історико-філософську еволюцію поняття «відчуження», окреслити основні етапи його розвитку та проаналізувати сучасні інтерпретації у контексті глобальних цивілізаційних змін. У дослідженні використано історико-філософський аналіз, компаративний і герменевтичний методи, а також міждисциплінарний підхід, що дозволив інтегрувати філософські, соціологічні, культурологічні й політологічні підходи до вивчення феномену відчуження. У процесі роботи встановлено, що поняття відчуження еволюціонувало від античних уявлень про втрату космічної гармонії через людське існування до середньовічної інтерпретації як розриву з Богом. У Новий час відчуження набуло політико-правового значення (Т. Гоббс, Дж. Локк, Ж.-Ж. Руссо), а в XIX столітті отримало глибоке філософське осмислення в працях Г. Гегеля, Л. Фейєрбаха, К. Маркса. У XX-XXI століттях відчуження розглядається в соціально-культурних, психологічних і технологічних площинах, включно з явищами цифрової ідентичності, постгуманізму та алгоритмічного контролю. Практичне значення дослідження полягає в можливості його застосування у сферах соціальної філософії, культурології, політичних наук, освітньої діяльності, а також для розробки концепцій протидії сучасним формам соціального, політичного і цифрового відчуження.

Ключові слова: духовність; історичний розвиток; самовідчуження; соціокультурна ситуація; суспільство