PERSONS AND OBJECTS:

A THEORY OF REIFICATION

by
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To My Mother and Father

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Completion of this dissertation involves me in a serious and irreconcilable contradiction. The debts and obligations I have incurred in its preparation far exceed anything it might conceivably be worth.

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Not least is Freddi. She not only did the proof-reading. At a time when everything was in danger of falling apart, she made me whole. She is my rock.

In keeping with the hoary traditions of academe, all those mentioned are entirely absolved of any responsibility for any errors, inconsistencies, or stupidities in this work. If there are any such, it is clearly the fault of an international conspiracy led by Daniel Ellsberg, Joe Namath, and the National Education Association.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.

--Exodus 20: 4-5

The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things.

--Karl Marx

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

PREFATORY MOTTOES v

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER II: ALIENATION 23

CHAPTER III: ALIENATED SOCIETY 57

CHAPTER IV: REIFICATION 69

CHAPTER V: REIFIED SOCIETY 106

CHAPTER VI: INSTITUTIONALIZATION 125

CHAPTER VII: BUREAUCRACY 157

CHAPTER VIII: THE CONCEPT OF THE CORPORATION 199

CHAPTER IX: A NOTE ON THE NATION-STATE 250

CHAPTER X: ALIENATION, REIFICATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE. 267

CHAPTER XI: BREAKING THE CYCLE 293

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 325

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> A society is rich when material goods, including capital, are cheap, and human beings dear: indeed the word 'riches' has no other meaning.
> --R. H. Tawney, The Acquisitive Society

The modern world seems to have escaped the control of its inhabitants. Society, not nature, is a human creation, but explosive development in the technological mastery of nature is, apparently, accompanied by a parallel decline in the ability of human beings to master their social environment. Enlightenment dreams of improving the human condition through knowledge are transformed into a nightmare, in which the more that is known, the less useful knowledge appears to be. And the refinement and perfection of tools of human activity is met, not with the utilization of those tools for higher human ends, but with the employment of human beings to meet the imperatives of their tools.

Modern individuals are widely seen as increasingly alienated from other individuals, from the community, and from the political system. Order-of-magnitude increases in communications technologies lead to the belief that human communications is becoming a lost art. Unprecedentedly high levels of political participation are viewed only as indices

of alienation and discontent. And the increasingly prosperous urban areas of Western society are depicted as sterile habitats of a "lonely crowd."

All this has, of course, been widely discussed. If nothing else, modern information technology has made it possible for social problems to be identified, dissected, argued about, misunderstood, and forgotten at record rates. But neither the social sciences nor any other human institutions have been able to comprehend these problems in a systematic, comprehensive, or even intrinsically interesting way--let alone remedy them.

I do not pretend, of course, that what follows will provide a perfect understanding of, let alone a complete solution for, these problems. Even if I were so deluded to believe that I did have the answers, I would not be foolish enough to make the claim so early on. But I do believe that a better understanding of some of the central problems of modern society can be provided only by the creation and application of a productive social theory. This work is devoted to the first tentative and awkward steps towards its development.

It will be argued here that a rather eclectically-grounded theory of alienation and reification can provide a powerful tool for understanding important social phenomena. To anticipate and caricature a long, often labored argument: alienation is defined as the divergence between the will, or desires, of an individual and the common good of a social

collectivity. An individual is alienated when, and to the extent that, his will diverges from the General Will. As the last phrase indicates, this definition and the discussion surrounding it draw heavily on Rousseau. It is posited that an identifiable General Will will exist for any collectivity, from the family to the nation-state. That will potentially conflicts with the wills of the individuals who are its members.

Employing terms suggested by Rousseau makes it possible to describe alienation as objective and objectively observable, present to a greater or lesser extent in the relations between most individuals and most social groupings. Alienation, it is further argued, has been, since some historically moot early point in time, a pervasive characteristic of most societies; and it is certainly a dominant attribute of contemporary Western society.

Because their wills conflict with those of the collectivity, and by extension with those of its other members, alienated individuals desire certain things and behave in characteristic ways in order to protect and promote their interests. Above all, they seek to protect themselves from their social environments by acquiring power and the security, stability, predictability, and order power can provide. Private property has historically been identified as the principal shield with which the alienated protect themselves. But property, as a defensive weapon of the alienated, is far less important than the general class of reifications.

A reification, according to the definition adopted here, is an object that has been infused with intrinsic value. By "object," I mean any inanimate entity recognized to exist by a shared culture and a shared language. To reify, similarly, is to an infuse an object with intrinsic value it did not previously have. In the proper, desirable relationship between human beings and objects, objects are only valued instrumentally, as means to human ends; they are thought of and treated solely in terms of their utility for the fulfillment of human needs. Reification reverses that relationship; when objects acquire intrinsic value, they become ends in themselves, about which questions of utility or instrumentality are functionally irrelevant.

The treatment of objects as ends-in-themselves creates serious ethical problems. Human needs go unfulfilled while energy and resources are devoted to the protection and maintenance of objects. More importantly, dehumanization is one of the immediate consequences of reification; human individuals are treated as the expendable tools of objects, when the relationship should properly be the other way round.

Because they are intrinsically valued, reifications have power. They exist as unchallengable and inalterable social facticities, about which no one can do anything. In any perception of the social world, they must be taken as unavoidable givens. Their influence in social affairs is not judged or thought of as the effects of non-reified objects are,

in terms of utility for social purposes. Indeed, it is generally not done at all, since evaluative "oughts" are meaningful only when the possibility of changing some "is" is seriously entertained.

Moreover, the power reifications possess does not spring from what has long been regarded in the West as the only legitimate source of political power, the will of the people. It doesn't even originate in the will of any persons, but inheres in non-human things.

Reification is effected through mystification, a term used to describe the processes by which objects come to be perceived as somehow different from what they really are. Valuation is a form of social knowledge like any other, and objects become reified through the same general processes by which other forms of social knowledge are created, disseminated, and diffused.

Here the linkage between alienation and reification becomes explicit and easy to explain. Objects which advance particular wills, which promote the desires of alienated individuals at the expense of the General Will of the community, can be mystified, so that they are intrinsically valued, and thus perceived by the community as unavoidable aspects of social existence. In other words, they can be reified. As reifications, they possess power, which can be exercised in the interests of alienated individuals, but which incurs no social disfavor, and about which society as a whole feels in-

capable of doing anything.

In order to protect and promote their private interests, then, alienated individuals create reifications, or find ways of identifying themselves with reifications that already exist. The causal linkage between alienation and reification is, however, contingent. Creating, or attaching oneself to, reifications is not an easy or automatic process. The necessary mystification often requires power. And there are other ways in which alienated individuals can protect their interests; property, of course, is one. Many individuals will lack the necessary intelligence, pluck, wealth, or other resources to create reifications, while others many find alternative kinds of protection more attractive.

Still, enough individuals will create enough reifications to insure that the social world will become dominated by them. All manner of objects--institutions, organizations, mores, norms, rules, even words themselves--can be and are reified to a greater or lesser extent. Reification can, and does, occur in objects within objects--rules, for instance, which constitute central elements of organizations, can be reified, as can the organizations themselves--and in objectified relationships between objects--as in the institutionalized interactions between social roles like those of doctor and patient. The most important reifications, though, and those to which the most attention will be devoted here, involve the most important social objects: the state, the corporation,

and other large bureaucracies.

In addition to the aggregate effects of the characteristics of individual reifications--their power, the way in which their mystified character conceals true social relationships, the dehumanization and other moral consequences of treating means as ends--the existence of reifications in society has some broader systemic consequences. Reified society is characterized by a static rigidity, in which important social decisions are made by impersonal and uncontrollable institutions thoroughly immune to human control. Nor is the power of those institutions exercised according to the principles of rationality or intelligence; just as they are reified, and therefore uncontrollable, from the point of view of society, so they contain internal reifications of their own which make efficiency or the intelligent use of resources impossible. In reified society, important things fail to get done.

Not only does alienation cause reification; reification causes alienation as well. Alienation, again, is the divergence between the individual's will and that of society, and the more his will is frustrated by social institutions, the more alienated the individual is likely to become. Reifications, which appear to be legitimate expressions of the will of society, are in fact nothing more than the instruments of particular wills. They therefore frustrate the wills of individuals who are not attached to them, while at the same time giving the appearance that their wills are being twarted, not

by other, alienated individuals, but by legitimate social objects.

Reification is thus fundamentally ironic. An alienated individual may promote his interests in the short run by creating or attaching himself to reifications, but in the long run, other individuals are equally likely to engage in reifying behavior; the individual will be confronted by still more alienated private wills in the guise of legitimate social objects; and his alienation can only increase. Moreover, individuals can become trapped by their own reifications, losing sight of the private ends for which they created them, and becoming themselves victims of the same subjection to objects as those who they sought power over in the first place.

Alienation leads to reification and reification thus leads to alienation, not in a single, once-and-for-all process, but in a vicious and ever-expanding cycle, in which both reification and alienation increase while social institutions, increasingly reified, become progressively more incapable of doing anyone any good.

There are, possibly, some ways to break this vicious cycle. Alienated individuals can be encouraged, directly or indirectly, to channel their alienation into forms other than reification. Reification itself, in general, can be discredited by political education. And political processes, properly mobilized, may again make it possible to restore questions of utility, of service, of ends and means, to public discourse.

Whether or not the cycle will be broken remains, however, extremely problematic. Optimism would not be justified by the facts.

The preceeding pages summarize, in exceedingly brief form, the general argument to be presented here. Several other comments should be made before that argument begins. The theory of reification I will propose in the following pages is just that, a theory--a model, an ideal-type. Like any theory, it seeks to provide a new and interesting way of looking at the world by focussing attention on a few ideas and a few ways of thinking about things, to the necessary, if lamentable, exclusion of everything else. It must be stressed, then, that the theory of reification should not be taken as a complete description of society or any of its parts. Nor is it an all-or-nothing kind of proposition. Elements of the theory may apply more or less accurately and more or less completely to different aspects of the bloomin',buzzin', confusion of social reality. It is never entirely true or entirely false; instead, it will be found to apply more or less productively to different phenomena at different times.

Nor should the theory presented here be considered to apply only to modern Western society. Most of the discussion in the following pages is limited to contemporary civilization in the West, but that is a result of this writer's limitations, not, so far as I can tell, the inherent limitations of the model. The ahistorical and essentially culture-bound nature of

what follows should be considered with that in mind. What most concerns me, and what I know most about, are the problems of modern Western societies. Whether or not the theory of reification has any use for thinking about other societies, or other times, is a question that must be answered by others.

This writer's political convictions, which might best be described as "liberal humanism," are so entwined with the exposition of the theory of reification, as well as its contents, that some elaboration of them is immediately necessary. Only in the context of a liberal-humanist perspective on the world does most of what follows have any great significance, or seem worth bothering about.

Reification occupies an important place in both abstract philosophical anthropology and concrete Marxist revolutionary theory, but it presents a complex problem for neither. In both cases, its existence is readily accounted for by a priori sectarian assumptions, and its ultimate abolition is all but assumed. For liberalism, on the other hand, reification is a particularly cankerous sore on the body politic. Its existence creates what can only be described as a problem of theodicy. All that liberalism embodies is opposed and negated by reification, which seems, however, to spring directly from the nature of liberal society. Liberal politics must therefore be capable of opposing reification at the same time as it defends, or at least accepts, its sources. Only from

the standpcint of liberalism is it important to understand all the aspects of reification, and the means by which reification can be opposed on its own terms.

Underlying the humanist conception of society is the vision of rational human beings exercising autonomous control over their own lives and, through democratic processes, their collective social existence. The idea of mastery lies at the core of the liberal dream. And the kind of humanism advanced here totally accepts the priority of human beings over non-human objects. But as a result of the dominance of objects in social affairs, individuals lack the power to control even the most private and intimate aspects of their lives.

The humanist starts with Protagoras and Kant--man is the only measure; the individual must always be an end--and concludes that persons should rule, not objects; objects should be means, not ends. Reification reverses that position. To reify is to transform objects from means into ends, to attach to them the value which should inhere only in human beings, to give them power in the social world.

Locke described the task of philosophy as that of "removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way of knowledge."[1] The theory of reification seeks to remove some of the rubbish impeding the attempt to realize liberal ideas in

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[1]Quoted in Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p.4.

practice.

Liberalism provides no ultimate solutions for the primal problems of human existence, either on the personal or social levels. It guarantees neither personal happiness nor the abolition of social conflict. But it does promise an opportunity for people to rationally master their own lives and their own roles in the larger human community. This promise has not been fulfilled, it will be argued, because the power and value which should inhere in human beings have been assumed by objects. Reifications keep getting in the way.

Reification is produced by alienation. So long as liberal values reign, alienation can not be abolished. But reification can be, even if alienation continues to exist. Most of what are taken as the evils of alienation, moreover, are really the effects of reification. A world without reifications would look very much different, and very much better, than existing reality, even though alienation would remain. Before the liberal vision is abandoned, then, the underbrush of reification must be cleared, so that liberalism can face its ultimate test which, I clearly believe, will be passed. The alternative--seeking to abolish alienation tout court--comes at too high a price.

Human beings should control their own destinies. That is the core belief of all humanisms, radical as well as liberal. The continued existence of reifications, of non-human objects which dominate and control human activity, is entirely abhorrent

to them all. The Marxist theory of reification holds that it can be overcome only through the revolutionary recreation of society. But acceptance of that argument must, to date, be grounded more in faith than reason.

The liberal theory of reification, to be presented here, takes a more direct course. It seeks to abolish reification directly, not in the hope that the millenium will thereby have arrived, but in the hope that the abolition of reification will at least clear away some underbrush on the road to a freer, more humane, and more self-determined form of human society.

Other tenets of liberal humanism also contribute importantly, if less directly, to the theory of reification. While not immediately involved in defining the need for the theory, they constitute principal elements of its method. As fundamental assumptions, they must also be enumerated.

First of these is what might be described as a pervasive epistemological humility. The absolutely good and the absolutely true have always, and probably will always, remained unknowable. Liberalism was born a twin to the newly individualized Reformation conception of conscience, and still shares with Radical Protestantism the belief that there can be no higher or more final moral tribunal. Sheldon Wolin puts it well:

Men feel more confident when assured that their activity

> is based upon intellectual certainty: they are more apt to engage in sweeping plans when convinced they possess truth in the round. In this sense we can say that the roots of the divergence between the liberal and the radical democratic traditions lie in their contrasting faiths concerning the ability of the human mind to fathom reality and to translate the results into practical action. The first tradition was symbolized in Locke's remark that "our minds are not made as large as truth nor suited to the whole extent of things."[2]

Skepticism about final truths leads directly to the greatest accomplishments and greatest failures of the liberal tradition: the promotion and protection of religious, political, and cultural tolerance, and of freedom of expression, on the one hand; weak-willed reformism which, on the other, has historically served to protect entrenched interests, justifying itself with the argument that a known evil is preferable to an unknown one.[3]

To borrow Isaiah Berlin's metaphor, the liberal temper prefers the fox, who knows many small things, to the hedgehog, who knows one big thing.[4] Epistemologically, this produces what Leszek Kolakowski has called a "pluralist bent, not overworried about coherent knowledge, not ambitious to construct a forest of single trees, but instead ready to accept each particular fact as an absolute even though, on confrontation,

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[2]Sheldon S. Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1960), p.279.

[3]Cf. Charles E. Lindblom, "The Science of Muddling Through," Public Administration Review, XIX (Spring, 1959), pp.79-88.

[4]Isaiah Berlin, The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966, p.1 et ff.

some facts contradict others."[5] Its epistemological preferences, argues Kolakowski, eventually lead liberalism to a position that "discloses that a scientific organization of our image of the world does not represent an organization actually inherent in the world itself, but one that results from just that propensity in the very nature of the human mind."[6] The liberal view might best be summarized as relativistic, not only on questions of ethics and politics, but towards scientific truths as well.

What I have called "epistemological humility" extends to the most primal and fundamental metaphysical questions. Liberal humanism, at least in the form presented here, is irreducibly agnostic. Whether or not God exists, she plays no role in the construction of ethical or political systems--trying to find some justification for Hobbes's claim to have founded his entire system on religion has long been a favorite game of students of political philosophy; try though they might, hardly anyone has been able to make much room for the Almighty in the Leviathan.[7] Secular equivalents of the deity are rejected just as strenuously. According to Lucien Goldmann, the

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[5]Leszek Kolakowski, Toward a Marxist Humanism, trans. by Jane Zielonko Peel (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p.24.

[6]Ibid., p.25.

[7]An excellent summary of the debate can be found in Ronald Hepburn, "Hobbes on the Knowledge of God," in Maurice Cranston and Richard S. Peters, eds., Hobbes and Rousseau: A Collection of Critical Essays, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday And Co., 1972, pp.86-88.

Marxist makes a form of Pascal's wager, gambling not on the existence of God but on the meaningfulness of human history.[8] Liberalism dislikes the odds in both cases.

But precisely because it resists such wagers, liberalism, or at least the kind of humanist liberalism described here, ends up with an attitude very much like Marx's towards human society and human history. For the liberal, man is the only possible measure of each and all things, and human history can be explained only through his activities. In a sense, what Marx takes for a postulate, that society is comprehensible because it is produced by purposive human activity, liberal humanism accepts by default, since it tolerates no transcendent explanations.

Similarly, liberalism, because it accepts no extra-human logos on human potentialities, shares Marx's optimism about man's future--or, more accurate historically, Marx borrowed the optimism of nineteenth-century liberalism--without ever fully sharing Marx's faith that such optimism was justified by science. Instead, liberal humanism holds that, since human beings make their own history, they can make of it whatever they will. But one can only guess what they will. "Inconsistency," writes Hannah Arendt,

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[8]Cf. George Lichtheim, The Concept of Ideology and Other Essays, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1967, pp.227-228.

> has always been the Achilles' heel of liberal thought; [liberalism] combined an unswerving loyalty to Progress with a no less strict refusal to glorify History in Marxian and Hegelian terms, which alone could justify and guarantee it.[9]

Liberal humanism differs from all similar political philosophies in its most basic precept, directly related to its skepticism and agnosticism, and also to the radical egalitarianism that has long been its emotional core. With due allowances for the prejudices of a nineteenth-century aristocrat, it was best expressed by John Stuart Mill, who insisted that, "if a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not because it is the best in itself, but because it is his own mode."[10] The best judge of the individual's interests is the individual.

No one else has a higher or better claim. "Forcing people to be free," or even to do what is good for them, contradicts not only the principles of epistemological doubt, but also the precepts of egalitarianism. The idea of contract, rather than leadership or discipleship or class consciousness, remains at the core of liberal political thought because it implies that each participant remains primarily responsible

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[9]Hannah Arendt, On Violence, Harvest Books (New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), p.25.

[10]John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty," in The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill: Ethical, Political, and Religious, ed. Marshall Cohen (New York: Modern Library, 1961), p.263.

for his own interests and well-being.

Each individual knows what is best for himself; moreover, the individual, as he actually and contemporaneously exists, must be taken as the only possible model of human potential. Liberalism's belief in perfectibility has never involved anything more than a vision of the perfectly-developed bourgeois. Unlike Marx, whose vision of a possible human society permitted him to criticize the existing order in terms of its alienation from what human beings were immanently capable of creating, liberalism has always confined its definitions of good and evil to those experienced by concrete individuals. This failure of the imagination--or product, if you prefer, of epistemological humility--has played a central part in liberalism's continuing discomfort with revolutionary politics.

It has also led directly to the unavoidably central concept of liberal theory: utility. The idea of utility is so cumbersome, so morally dubious, so generally unattractive, that even Mill was forced to disavow it--but he knew it to be inescapable.[11] For if no extra-human standard is available, and if even the yardstick of human potentiality is rejected, then there can be no measure of the good or desirable beyond the self-conscious interests of the individual.

The assignment to each individual of the task of

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[11]Cf. "Utilitarianism," in The Philosophy of Mill, pp.321-398; also, "Bentham," Ibid., pp.46-52.

protecting his own interests and ordering his own utilities is not entirely without foundation, for liberal humanism is founded in the faith that each individual is at least capable of considerable rationality. In a negative sense, the denial of transcendent purposes to human activities makes necessary that human beings supply order to the world. But more positively, liberalism makes no sense unless it is taken for granted that each individual can manage quite well for himself within his private sphere, and with his fellows in the public arena. Hobbes and Newton were, intellectually, born twins. Because it was created and is still occupied by purposive and reasonable beings, the human world is assumed to be masterable, and rationality is the key to mastery.

And each individual must find his own salvation. Liberalism may well be the political philosophy of hedonism and happiness,[12] but happiness is never really conceived as a subject for politics. Politics is always, at best, a necessary evil, at worst, an unjustifiable intrusion on the personal sphere; it is never the direct road to personal fulfillment. Each individual is allowed an entirely inviolate sphere of personal privacy and self-determination; on the other hand, the existence of that sphere renders liberal optimism doubly problematic: not only is the outcome of history uncertain,

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[12]Although Adam Schaff claims that distinction for Marxism. Cf. Marxism and the Human Individual, ed.Robert S. Cohen; trans. Olgierd Wojtasiewicz (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p.8.

but personal fulfillment occurs in an arena outside the bounds of both politics and history. For the isolated Dostoevskian individual facing the existential void of meaninglessness and misery alone, liberal humanism is of no help.

On the one hand, an abiding respect for individual privacy, freedom of expression, and personal autonomy. On the other, a powerful tendency towards reformist politics, a historical pattern of preferring the formal appearance of democratic institutions to real political equality, and a willful indifference to many profound personal problems. If one can sum up a political outlook in two sentences, that should serve as a good sketch of the liberal-humanist attitude.

The uneasy compromises and logical fudgings which stand at the core of liberal doctrine can be made to work only if the institutions liberalism engenders can survive and function effectively under their own steam. But the principal bulwarks of liberal society--the institutionalized markets, the voluntary associations, the schools and colleges, even the state--seem to be either falling apart or converted into the institutional embodiments of all that liberalism abhors. People can not control their own lives or determine their own destinies because the institutions that should permit them to do so are doing the opposite.

If this failure can accurately be attributed to the

problem of reification, and if the possibility that reification can be abolished without abandonment--indeed, perhaps through the restoration--of liberal principles can be convincingly established, then the liberal dream can be salvaged. There are no attractive alternatives.

The exploration of those possibilities traverses a long and frequently indirect path; like a good scatback it must, in order to reach the final destination, never take two consecutive steps in the same apparent direction, use blocks wherever it can find them, and remain in constant danger of stepping out of bounds. The first step involves the idea of alienation, which has always been logically and historically prior to that of reification. Consideration of reification itself follows, concluding with an attempt to explain, or at least identify, the causal linkage between alienation and reification. The following chapter is devoted to the phenomenon of institutionalization which, it is argued, embodies the important instances of reification in modern society.

With the help of the ideas discussed in Chapters II through VI, a number of examples of reification are discussed in the following three, divided into the general categories of bureaucracy, the economy, and the state. After this brief excursion into concrete reality, the path returns to the plane of theory, for a consideration first of the dynamic, developmental interrelationships between alienation, reification, and social change, and then of the prospects for dereification and

dealienation. The possibility remains, of course, that the entire enterprise will be ajudged to have gone out of bounds somewhere along the line, but--just in case it isn't--it will be run to its completion.

CHAPTER II

ALIENATION

> "We're all in this together!" yelled Ponzo. I saw that was so--everywhere I went, everybody was in it together.
> --Kerouac, On the Road

"Alienation," like "revolution," or "ideology," has become a political catchword of such universal popularity that it has almost lost meaning. Social critics of both the right and left use it as a general term for all the ills of modern society; existentially and psychiatrically-oriented theorists of the middle use it to describe themselves, and thus by extension the whole of humanity; social scientists, never overly scrupulous about terminology, use it to mean everything from unhappiness to exploitation.

The pages immediately following contain an attempt to restore some meaning to the idea of "alienation." My aim has been twofold: to define the term in a way which promises the greatest utility for political theory--or more precisely, for those avenues of political theory I wish to explore--without, on the other hand, doing too much violence to either the etymological origins of the word, or the ways in which it has been employed by important political thinkers in the past.

The goal throughout has been to find a definition suf-

ficiently narrow to delimit a specific phenomenon, but sufficiently broad to encompass, without too much distortion, the most important earlier discussions of alienation as a political phenomenon. Like the late Whole Earth Catalogue, I am primarily concerned with access to tools. The process of redefinition has been undertaken in the hope of providing the most useful possible tool for the development of political theory.

Some of the misunderstanding surrounding the idea of alienation can be cleared up by looking at grammar. "Alienation" derives from the Latin "alius," for "other," and is defined by the dictionaries as being synonomous with "estrangement." It is thus "estrangement" from some "other." The crucial word is "from;" the alienation of some subject must always be relative to some object. One is alienated from something or, alternatively, something is alienated from one. To say merely that one is "alienated" is to make a grammatically incomplete statement. This simple distinction has great importance for making sense of the meaning of "alienation." By simply applying the rule that "alienation" is always alienation of someone from something else, many of the less fruitful usages of the term can be discarded altogether.[1]

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[1]Cf. Kenneth Keniston, The Uncommitted: Alienated Youth in American Society (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), p.453; Richard Schact, Alienation, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p.257; and Istvan Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p.36.

A second, semantic, rule can provide additional assistance. For purposes of prose style, as Balzac well knew, a multitude of terms, differing from one another by only the slightest shades of connotation, enhances the richness of meaning. The needs of political theory are different. To have the greatest possible utility, a term should least resemble, and consequently be most difficult to confuse with, other terms. When an adequate word exists to describe something or some class of things, employing another word which means the same thing is likely to produce confusion rather than enlightenment. If it is to have any utility for political theory, "alienation" must mean something other than "discontent," "unhappiness," "exploitation," or "adolescence."

Applying these rules to the problem of "alienation," a good place to start is provided by Melvin Seeman, whose classic essay sought to make sense out of the sociological and psychological literature on alienation by distingushing five separate usages of the term. These usages, argued Seeman, underlie all the various definitions of "alienation." For Seeman, "alienation" can mean either "powerlessness," "meaninglessness," "normlessness," "isolation," or "self-estrangement."[2]

But Seeman's typology can not stand up to the "aliena-

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[2]Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," American Sociological Review, XXIV (December, 1959), pp.783-791.

tion-from" criterion; his five categories soon collapse into two: alienation as a kind of social relationship, and alienation from self. "Powerlessness," "meaninglessness," "normlessness," and "isolation" all refer to relationships between an individual and some social collectivity, whether the particular focus of estrangement is the collectivity's power relationships, structure of meaning, system of norms, or social ties to the individual. It makes no difference whether those attributes of the collectivity are experienced as entirely foreign to the individual, or whether, instead, the individual has so internalized social values or patterns that he experiences his estrangement from them as a kind of estrangement from self. Either case involves the estrangement of something social from something individual; and Seeman's first four categories differ from one antoher far less than they all do from the fifth, which involves a purely personal relationship with oneself.

Self-alienation, defined as the experiencing or perception of oneself or one's activities as foreign or estranged, is a phenomenon of major importance and widespread, perhaps universal, occurrence. But whether it is a proper concern of political, as opposed to psychological or even social-psychological, theory is another question.

Three different usages of "self-alienation" are commonly employed. The first involves the failure, generally attributed

to social and economic conditions, of individuals to achieve the innate, natural, or "historical" potentialities of human development, growth, and happiness. The "self" from which one is alienated is the ideal possible human self.

This is the sense in which the term is used by most "Marxist humanists." Gajo Petrović, for instance, describes alienation as the distance between human potentialities, which are set by human nature, and social realities, which are historically determined.[3] Within the Marxist tradition, this position has been subjected to Louis Althusser's devastating critique. Such a conception of alienation, says Althusser, implies the existence of a fixed, "idealistic" human nature entirely divorced from human history. But the first postulate of Marxist historical materialism, elaborated in the Theses on Feuerbach, is that man makes himself. What human nature can become once alienation is abolished must thus remain an entirely open possibility. Either Marx was involved in a serious self-contradiction, says Althusser, or else the "Marxist humanist" position on self-alienation must be abandoned; it is closer to Feuerbach than Marx, and thus subject to Marx's critique of Feuerbach.[4]

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[3]Gajo Petrović, Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Yugoslav Philosopher Considers Karl Marx's Writings, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p.84ff.

[4]Louis Althusser, For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1970), pp.227-231; Georg Lukács made essentially the same argument forty years earlier,

One can generalize Althusser's position to formulate a non-Marxist critique of the idea of self-alienation as failure to attain potentialities inherent in human nature. In order for such a concept to make any sense, there must exist an objective standard of human development against which all existing individuals and societies can be measured. Those failing to live up to that standard can then be defined as "alienated."

Even if one had such a conception, calling the failure to attain it "alienation" involves a considerable stretching of the meaning of the term. "Alienation," again, means "otherness" or "foreigness." If there is something innate or inherent in human personality or society which social conditions prevent people from expressing or becoming, that does not mean that people no longer possess those characteristics, or even feel estranged from their awareness of them. By definition, they remain intrinsic to human personality. People are not alienated from them so much as prevented from enjoying or expressing characteristics that are still very much their own, and if they are alienated, it is not from themselves, but from the social mechanisms that prevent their self-realization.

If, on the other hand, people have somehow "forgotten" or "lost" those characteristics or the drive towards them, that can hardly be alienation either. Here, one must take issue

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before there was a "Marxist humanism" to be opposed to. Cf. History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, trans. Rodney Livingstone, orig. ed., 1923 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), pp.186-189.

with the contention of Berger and Pullberg that alienation is a kind of forgetting;[5] one can not experience estrangement from something the existence of which one has forgotten.

Most plausibly, one could argue that self-alienation is neither the frustration of expression nor the forgetting of innate tendencies; but rather the consciousness of experiencing something that was once characteristically human as now being foreign. One might speak, for instance, of contemporary humans as being alienated from the propensity of their forebears for red meat. But using the term "alienation" in that way trivializes it. By that definition, the very existence of human history causes "alienation," and unless one wishes to make arbitrary distinctions, contemporary individuals are even more self-alienated in their lack of susceptibility to the Black Plague or smallpox than in their inability to commune happily with the forces of nature.

A second conception of self-alienation refers to certain types of neurotic illness characterized by an unhealthy lack of integration among the various parts of human personality. This psychological conception has only the most tenuous links to liberal political theory.[6] The liberal conception

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[5]Cf. Peter L. Berger and Stanley Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," History and Theory, IV (1965), p.200.

[6]Cf. Schact, Alienation, pp.123ff.

of society and social theory is grounded in the conviction that an autonomous, self-determined sphere of individual self-consciousness and individual psychology remains radically separate from all political and social forces, that an irreducible minimum of human personality remains outside the bounds of politics.[7] Liberal political theory can do no more than describe the contents and, in contemporary jargon, "outputs" of this minimum, and liberal political ethics demand that political action leave it untouched.

Liberalism has, of course, often been attacked for this "psychologist fallacy,[8] as has that archetypical liberal, Freud, who attributed the origins of anxiety to socio-historical forces, but then sought to remedy them on an individualistic basis.[9] But, retaining here the liberal assumptions, self-alienation, as generally described in the psychological literature, constitutes for political theory an object of curiosity, but hardly a subject of much relevance or political significance. Mental "illness," or even the forms of mental "health," fall into the private sphere upon which liberal theory and liberal politics forbid themselves to intrude.

The third common usage of "self-alienation" resembles

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[7]See above, p.19.

[8]Cf. K. R. Minogue, The Liberal Mind (London: Methuen and Co., 1963, p.19 et ff.

[9]Cf. Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1962), pp.9-11.

the psychological conception in its emphasis on the fragmentation of individual personality, but it sees that fragmentation as socially caused, and prescribes political remedies. Marx's criticism of bourgeois civil society in his early writings, drawing heavily on Hegel, makes much of the fragmentation of the self produced by the differentiation between the civil, political, and economic spheres of bourgeois life.[10] His followers have drawn heavily on this aspect of Marx's work. Modern society, they argue, compels the individual to be all things to all men, leaving nothing for himself.[11]

Whatever the validity of this line of social criticism, "self-alienation," used in this sense, clearly refers to a relationship between the individual and society. Either social forces and expectations compel the individual to conceal his "true" self under a variety of social masks, or the individual has so internalized those forces that he is no longer conscious of the mask-wearing process, but experiences an inner conflict between that portion of the self which is "natural," and those elements of society which he has incorporated into his personality. These two conditions differ, no doubt, in the kinds of problems they create for individual happiness

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[10]Karl Marx, "On the Jewish Question," Early Writings, ed. and trans. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p.14

[11]Cf. Lucien Goldmann, Recherches dialectiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p.84; Mészaros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, p.73.

and well-being, but at the root they come down to the same thing: a tension between what society demands of the individual and what he spontaneously desires to give. We are back to the individual-society nexus.

In sum, so far as "self-alienation" is a topic with which political theory can deal--and to a considerable degree it may not be, implying either a wider, theological framework or a narrower, clinically psychological one--it can be accounted for entirely in terms of the social relationship between the individual and others, generally society as a whole.

Seeman's five categories have been reduced to one. Alienation can now be described as a certain kind of social relationship.[12] Just what that relationship is, however, remains to be specified.

Alienation is the absence of belonging to an autonomous, self-sufficient, nurturitive, face-to-face community.

Such a community need not actually exist, or ever have existed, to talk about alienation from it; alienation can be described as the absence of that relationship between the individual and such a community even if the community is merely posited, existing only in ideal, hypothetical form. More precisely, one can speak of the extent of an individual's aliena-

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[12]Cf. Joachim Israel, Alienation: From Marx to Modern Sociology, a Macrosociological Analysis (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p.11.

tion by the extent to which his relationship with society differs from that in an ideal community.

To speak of alienation is generally to speak at the same time of community. The two polar opposites revolve around each other like twin stars; at times, the light of one obscures that of the other, but neither can ever escape the other's gravitational field. The great critics of alienation since the mid-eighteenth century have generally been proponents of community: Rousseau, Hegel, all the Marxists, Durkheim, Tönnies--Nietzsche is the seminal exception. Just as peace is, at the simplest level, the absence of war, so alienation is the absence of community.

The idea of community contains a certain kind of relationship among individuals and, most importantly for the purposes here, between the individual and the community. Central to that relationship is the sense of belongingness, of being an equal part, and central to belongingness, as will be discussed, is a consensus of wills, a mutuality of interests. In this sense, the adoption of "absence of community" as a definition for "alienation" becomes little more than a matter of logic. Alienation, as discussed, must refer to social relationships characterized by estrangement from others. "Community" describes non-estranged social relationships. Alienation is thus the absence of community.

Students of the concept of alienation are quick to point out that it appears to be a distinctly modern problem.

The historical process of transition from Gemeinschaft to Gesellschaft provides, indeed, a convenient way of thinking of the development of alienation. Tönnies, who invented the distinction, must be considered one of the major theorist of alienation.[13] It might even be possible to trace the historical roots of modern alienation to the breakup of medieval society, which created the new class of Hobbes's "masterless men."[14] Just as alienation is conceptually the absence of community, so historically it characterizes the epoch after the destruction of the medieval world order--or for those who take a less sanguine view of the Middle Ages, the longer epoch since the destruction of primitive society.

Still, it would be a mistake to consider alienation, as defined here, to be exclusively modern. For vividness and clarity of detail, no description of alienated modern society can match Thucydides' account of the Corcyrean rebellion, or of Athens during the plague.[15]

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[13]I refer, of course, to his masterwork, Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft), trans. and ed. Charles P. Loomis, Harper Trochbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

[14]Cf. Michael Walzer, The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp.9-10; 13-20.

[15]Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, trans. Crawley (New York: Modern Library, 1951), pp.188-191; 112-13. Cf. also, Eric Josephson and Mary Josephson, eds., Man Alone: Alienation in Modern Society (New York: Dell, 1962), pp.18-20.

To say that alienation is the absence of belonging to a hypothetical community is, however, to say very little, particularly when there are no such communities around to serve as models of what we all don't belong to. In order to elaborate on the nature of such a community, and by so doing the nature of alienation, it is necessary to devote attention to the foremost theorist of political community, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

No idea in the history of political theory has caused quite as much trouble or confusion as Rousseau's General Will. Rousseau liked to describe himself as a "man of paradoxes,"[16] and that man's greatest paradox was the General Will.

The problem Rousseau sought to resolve merited no less complex or sophisticated a solution. "I propose," he wrote at the very beginning of The Social Contract,

> taking men as they are and laws as they can be, to inquire whether the political order admits of an organizing principle that is both legitimate and conducive to stability. I shall endeavor, throughout the inquiry, to wed that which right permits to that which interest prescribes, so as to reconcile justice and utility at every point.[17]

Alienated individuals were to be melded into a legitimate and

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[16] The Political Writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 2 vols., trans. and ed. C. E. Vaughan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), I, p.222. Hereinafter cited as "Vaughan."

[17] The Social Contract, in The Social Contract and [the] Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind, ed. Lester G. Crocker (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967), p.5. As the divergence between the last two citations indicates, I have attempted wherever possible to make citations to the most readily-available English-language editions of Rousseau. When no translation exists, I have cited the authoritative Vaughan only. In all cases, the translations in this text are my own, or at least my emendations of others.

stable political community without any sacrifice of their personal interests or any violation of the precepts of justice.

Rousseau himself despaired of the task; even if such a community could be created, it would be inevitably subject to the inescapable laws of political decline and degeneration --even Rome, after all, had fallen.[18] But to attempt anything less, to ignore the attributes and implications of the General Will, would be to countenance either anarchy, or oppression, or most likely, the continued maintenance of societies in which each individual was alienated from everyone else.

The problem, the need for the creation of a General Will, arose because historical accident had thrust mankind from the state of nature into a society that was not a community. Before the real or mythical historical point at which one man, "who after enclosing a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, this is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him,"[19] human unhappiness, destructiveness, and alienation were not only nonexistent but literally unthinkable. Natural man, having no need of society or its appurtenances, lived without it, and unconscious not only of others

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[18]Cf. Judith N. Shklar, "Rousseau's Images of Authority," in Cranston and Peters, eds., Hobbes and Rousseau, p.341.

[19]Rousseau, Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality Among Mankind (hereinafter cited as "Second Discourse," in Crocker, ed., p.211.

but of himself as well, had literally nothing to be alienated from. With no more need of human beings than wolves had of other wolves, or monkeys of other monkeys[20]--having, for that matter, no more self-consciousness than a wolf or a monkey--he could hardly be said to be alienated. Indeed, he was like the wolf or monkey, entirely at home in and with nature, with which his relationship was without plan, foresight, contemplation, or consciousness.[21]

The destruction of the state of nature through the institution of private property brought with it, simultaneously, the need to reckon with other persons as the primordial fact of social existence, and the awareness of what can only be called alienation from them--although Rousseau never used the word in that sense.[22] The essence of society was exploitation, and all human relationships--with the rare and fleeting exceptions of some instances of conjugal or familial love--were founded in unilateral or mutual exploitation. Rousseau supplanted Hobbes's war of all against all with metaphors more appropriate to the drawing-rooms and salons of eighteenth-century Paris, in which jealousy, backbiting, gossip, slander, and obsequiousness were the predominant weapons of interpersonal

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[20]Cf. Second Discourse, p.198.

[21]Ibid., pp.189-190.

[22]Cf. Schact, Alienation, pp.18-21.

warfare. But the indictment is no less severe--although Rousseau was, of course, pointing his finger at a different culprit, not human nature, but the nature of human society.[23]

Society was destructive of all that was naturally good in man, and of human happiness as well, because it founded the individual's judgement of himself in the attitudes of others, but did nothing to guarantee that those attitudes would be supportive or even friendly. "The savage," wrote Rousseau, "lives within himself, whereas social man, constantly outside himself, knows only how to live in the opinion of others; and it is, if I may say so, merely from their judgement of him that he derives the consciousness of his own existence."[24] The relationship of the individual to society became central to his happiness and well-being, but it provided little of either.

Living in society required the individual to become entirely dependent on others, but because self-interest still ruled almost all individuals, this dependence was bound to be self-destructive. All the goods which society could provide--esteem, honor, respect, position, riches--were purely relative; one had always to measure oneself against one's

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[23]Cf. Rousseau, "Social Contract, First Draft," in Vaughan, I, p.453; also John McManners, "The Social Contract and Rousseau's Revolt Against Society," in Cranston and Peters, eds., Hobbes and Rousseau, p.297.

[24]Second Discourse, p.245.

peers, and was thus always in a competition with them far more deadly than that of the marketplace.[25]

Alienation, in the sense of an estrangement from the society on which individuals were so dependent, but which was less than a community, in the sense of a pervasive and unhappy perception of otherness in all on whom the individual had to rely for satisfaction, was thus the central motif of Rousseau's portrait of society. This portrait, drawn most fully in the Second Discourse, described the raw material with which one who sought to establish the General Will would have to work; more importantly, it demonstrated why the creation of a radically new kind of political community was so desperately necessary.

To the world of sham, Rousseau opposed the ideal of classical antiquity, and especially the community of classical Rome, but he was sufficiently astute to realize--indeed here, perhaps, lay his greatest genius--that the relationship between the individual and society was more than a matter of historical circumstance. There was no going back. The state of nature was lost forever; man's fall from grace had created an entirely novel and unprecedented situation, which had to be resolved in a radically new way. Since men had once

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[25]Cf. Marshall Berman, The Politics of Authenticity: Radical Individualism and the Emergence of Modern Society (New York: Atheneum, 1972), pp.131-144; and Roger D. Masters, "The Structure of Rousseau's Political Thought," in Cranston and Peters, eds., Hobbes and Rousseau, pp.406-407.

been exposed to society, "The sweet voice of nature is no longer an infallible guide for us, nor the independence which we have received from her a desirable state."[26]

To restore happiness and morality, to abolish alienation and oppression by an act of conscious and rational will: that was the political task with which Rousseau was confronted. The tool he employed was the General Will.

It is possible, posited Rousseau, to create and identify for any homogenous group of persons a common interest, or set of common interests, around which a community could be constructed. Because, by definition, the common interest coincides with the personal interests of all those who share it, the total submission of the individual to the community can be legitimately and even gratefully accepted, so long as that submission does not exceed the bounds of serving the common interest.[27] And since moral freedom consists of willing submission to laws one has willed for oneself, the conscious identification of the individual with the General Will also provides a means of promoting and assuring public morality.[28]

Because the contract in which the General Will is established is entirely social and perfectly reciprocal, and

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[26]"Social Contract, First Draft," in Vaughan, I, p.488.

[27]Social Contract, p.21. [28]Ibid., p.23.

because it is founded in the absolute juridical equality of all members of society--more accurately, because it cannot exist without such equality--the problem of alienation should disappear.[29] One acts unselfishly and supportively towards others in promoting one's own interests, and encounters in turn perfect reciprocity. Alienation is rooted in inequality and selfishness. The social contract abolishes inequality by making all individuals morally and politically equal before the community; it abolishes selfishness by transforming the good of the individual into that of the community at large.

In Rousseau's terms, it is thus possible to restate the notion of alienation in terms of the concept of General Will. So long as the will of the individual coincides with the General Will, he is perfectly unaliented from society as a whole; whether or not psychological self-alienation remains is problematic but irrelevant here. When the particular will of an individual conflicts with the General Will, he is alienated from society. More precisely, one is alienated to the extent that the particular will diverges from the General Will. When the divergence is total, alienation is total; the less the divergence, the less the alienation.

For every aggregation of similarly-situated individuals, a General Will can be said to exist, if not in practice,

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[29]Cf. Ibid., p.26.

then at least as a theoretical possibility. There is always some common interest; else there would be no common intercourse. In Rousseau's words, "what is common among different interests creates the social bond, so that if there are no points at which the interests of everyone agree, no society can possibly exist."[30] Whatever provides the motivation and desire for interaction with others provides, at the same time, the basis for a possible identification and construction of a General Will.

Any group can meaningfully be said to have a General Will. The smaller and more emotionally important the group, the less likely particular wills are to diverge from the General Will; members of a family or a group of friends all have their private interests, but often sacrifice them to the good of the whole. Still, defining alienation in terms of the General Will permits the identification of alienation in, say, family groups, in precisely the manner employed for larger forms of social organization.

Nonetheless, Rousseau's choice of society as a whole as the level at which alienation must be combatted was not without its reasons. The more individuals are alienated from society, the more likely they are to be alienated from one another as well. Small groups, like the family, may provide

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[30] Ibid., p.27.

some unalienated relationships, but in the absence of widespread agreement with the General Will, the wills of those groups will probably diverge from one another. The term "alienated society" will thus be employed here to refer to situations in which a preponderant part of its members are alienated from society as a whole, and by extension from one another.

To repeat once more: an individual is alienated from society when, and to the extent that, his will conflicts with the General Will. And he is alienated from other individuals to the extent his will diverges from theirs.

The tendency of groups within society to have General Wills of their own which diverged from the General Will of society led Rousseau, like Machiavelli and the classical writers Rousseau so admired, to lay down an absolute prohibition on any intermediate societies or affective organizations in his ideal state. What we would call voluntary associations were to be strictly prohibited, as would all economic, religious, and social corporations, guilds, and societies, except so far as they were direct creatures of the state.[31]

To an extent, Rousseau's objections to such organizations were the same as his predecessors'; he feared they would divert loyalty, energy, and commitment from their only legitimate object, the nation-state. But he rephrased the prohibition in his own terms, which are indispensable to any

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[31]Cf. Ibid., pp.31-32.

modern conception of alienation and reification. The problem, he wrote, was that the wills of such societies always had two different aspects:

> for the members of the association, it is a general will; for the whole society, it is a particular will, which appears to be in the right on first glance, and vicious on the second. So the devout priest, or the brave soldier, or the zealous patrician, can also be the bad citizen. Such a commitment can be very advantageous for the particular society, and very pernicious for the larger.[32]

One can be entirely unalienated within a particular sub-organization and yet thoroughly alienated from society as a whole, and vice versa; such organizations themselves, as possessing wills, can be alienated to a greater or lesser extent from the larger societies of which they are a part.

This formulation can be extended in any direction, often to great lengths. One might begin by saying that all of the nation-states of the world, interacting in a purely Hobbesian fashion, are alienated from the larger human community, as are all the citizens of those nation-states who are not entirely alienated from them. In the other direction, any given society can be seen as a set of sub-organizations, each of which has its own sub-organizations; and littler sub-organizations have littler sub-organizations, and so on, ad infinitum.

Among those organizations whose wills might diverge from the General Will is the government itself. Rousseau

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[32]Rousseau, "Political Economy," in Vaughan, I, pp. 242-243.

was never so naive as to confuse the institutional apparatus of the state with society as a whole, and he well understood that, in the terms adopted here, the government, as an organization or set of organizations, was entirely capable of being alienated from society. Rousseau put the matter quite schematically:

> The Government, as an integral part of the body politic, shares in the General Will which constitutes that body; as a body itself, it has its own will. These two wills are sometimes in agreement with each other, and sometimes in conflict.[33]

Just as each citizen has a particular will which may or may not conflict with the General Will, so every organization, specifically including that of the government, has its own will. Whether or not that particular will will coincide with the General Will is, said Rousseau, entirely prolematic.

Merely to define alienation as the divergence between particular and General Wills is not enough. In order to make the definition more complete and more comprehensible, further discussion of the idea of the General Will is necessary. Here, Rousseau is often of little help, having been not only paradoxical but frequently obscure. It will be necessary, therefore, to extrapolate from Rousseau's own discussions, and make a few reasoned guesses, in order to explain the General

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[33]Rousseau, "Letters from the Mountain," in Vaughan, II, p.201.

Will adequately for purposes of constructing a theory of alienation. This may involve some inaccuracy in the correct interpretation of Rousseau, but the focus must be less on what Rousseau actually meant than on how what he said and implied can be used.

One thing is clear. For Rousseau, the General Will is the common good.[34] It is thus that the people can err but the General Will cannot; it is not really a will at all, in the sense of purposive intent. It always exists, but it is not so much created as discovered. For every society there is a common good, a general interest, a General Will, which can be discovered by the people assembled together without resort to any complex argument or inquiry; "it reveals itself so plainly that nobody with a little good sense can fail to see it."[35]

But the General Will is neither a Benthamite utility-maximization function nor the dictate of some impersonal reason which ignores the feelings, preferences, and tastes of the members of the community. Social psychologists Cartwright and Zander distinguish between the goals of members of a group

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[34]Cf. Social Contract, pp.30-31

[35]Ibid., p.109.

for the group and those for themselves,[36] and their distinction can easily be applied to Rousseau's model of society. The General Will is the will or goal of each member of society for society, as distinguished from his personal goals or interests.

In the simplest, perhaps over-simple, terms, alienation is closely tied to selfishness. One's own needs, desires, and wishes are considered more important, and are more vigorously promoted, than those of the collectivity. In alienated society, everyone looks out for himself, and the public be damned.

Of course, in alienated society it may be so difficult, and so personally destructive, to serve the general good, that heroic unselfishness would be necessary in order for individuals not to be alienated. Thus the ordinary perception that high levels of alienation indicate that something is wrong with society does not conflict with this discussion's focus on individual desires and wills. Social conditions can make individual agreement with the General Will either very easy or very difficult, and the ease with which their own desires can be brought into line with the General Will is undoubtedly the most important determinant of the alienation

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[36]Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander, "Motivational Processes in Groups: Introduction," in Cartwright and Zander, eds., Group Dynamics, Research and Theory (3rd ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1968), p.403 et ff.

of individuals. Utopian thinkers have, for that reason, sought to structure society so that the individual can serve the general good merely by serving his own interests--Adam Smith falls into that category as readily as Karl Marx. But reality is rarely so pleasant, and the conflict between individual desire and the general good more often appears to be unavoidable.

It is necessary to avoid hypostatizing society, however, in order to carry the analysis one step further. Society is nothing more than an aggregation of individuals organized in certain ways and sharing certain things in common. What one wills for society, then, is what one wills for others, and for the collectivity of oneself and others. More importantly, what society, as opposed to a random collection of individuals, is is the set of wills for society of its members, and the patterns of behavior they conduct as a result of those wills.[37]

It must be stressed, though, that for Rousseau there always exists, in each individual, a particular will distinct and separate from the individual's acceptance, or even active promotion, of the General Will. The General Will does not include everything; many aspects of individual activity are matters of total indifference for society. The mere exist-

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[37]Cf. Rousseau, Émile, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1955), p.424.

ence of a particular will is no evidence of alienation; only when the individual experiences conflict between his will and that of society, even if he shares in the latter, does alienation arise.

On the other hand, such conflict can arise witnout producing alienation so long as the individual willingly accepts the precedence of the General Will over his own; most individuals would rather not pay their income taxes, but those who do so from the feeling that it represents a legitimate imposition, or from feelings of reciprocity towards their fellow citizens, as opposed to those who do so solely from fear of being caught, can hardly be said to be alienated thereby. Most mature individuals willingly accept a relatively high level of social coercion and regulation, and it would be much too simple to describe an individual as alienated merely because he stops at traffic lights even when he is in a hurry.

Conceptual difficulty arises because the classic liberal dichotomy between individual and society cannot withstand serious scrutiny. As Rousseau and Marx both so eagerly maintained, all real and complete individuals are individuals <u>in</u> society. "It is above all necessary," wrote Marx, "to avoid postulating 'society' once again as an abstraction confronting the individual. The individual <u>is</u> the <u>social being</u>."[38]

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[38]<u>Early Writings</u>, p.158.

In political analysis, one must always steer between the Scylla of an unreal atomization of human societies and the Charybdis of conceiving individuals as entirely submerged in the social whole.

Some elements of society are necessarily internalized in all normal human beings; conversely, human, i.e. social, life only exists when individuals share things in common and will things for others and for the collectivity. On the other hand, even the most totalistic society ever to exist--although more thorough alternatives have been conceived in imaginative literature--has never entirely obliterated personal will, whim, and opinion. The tension of the individual-society polarity is always there; the mistake is to assume that its mere existence implies conflict and thus alienation. To speak of an individual so self-sufficient and complete that he can be self-consciously oblivious to society is, as Nietzsche so clearly saw, to speak of an extra-human being.

Alienation is a characteristic of the individual-society nexus, but a non-alienated individual can still be openly in conflict with social institutions. Here Rousseau's insistence that government, or other social organizations, can embody particular wills becomes extremely important. While society per se can never be alienated from itself, its institutions can and often do promote and establish particular wills. They do so when they are reified. One can speak of those institutions, as well as those of their members who

share the will of the organization, as being alienated from society, but it would be pointless to label conflicts between those institutions and the rest of society's members as instances of alienation. Being in conflict with an illegitimate institution is very different from being coerced by one that is adequately representing the will of society, and the two instances should not be confused.

Marx's description of the proletariat in his earlier writings provides the best example for illuminating this point. According to Marx, the institutions of an advanced capitalist society embody and enforce the particular wills of a handful of capitalists. The proletariat, on the other hand, once it has achieved true proletarian consciousness, has no will, as a class, other than that of the common interest of all humanity. It is the "universal class." Its historical mission is to abolish alienation by overthrowing all those institutions which perpetuate the particular interests of the few, rather than the common good. Most importantly, for purposes of the present discussion, the proletariat ceases to be alienated not at the moment when the revolution succeeds, but earlier, at the time when class consciousness, the identification of the will of the individual proletarian with that of the proletariat, and thus humanity, as a whole, emerges.[39]

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[39]Cf. Marx, Early Writings, pp.58-59; also Cf. Nathan Rotenstreich, Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp.62-63.

The definition of alienation as conflict between particular and General Wills thus applies perfectly well to this case. From the point where it develops into a universal class with a particular will identical to the General Will, the Marxist proletariat ceases to be alienated, as the term is used here, although its historical mission remains that of abolishing alienation. This implies that alienation and revolutionary attitudes are incompatible within the same personality; more precisely, the development of revolutionary attitudes possibly represents a step in the supersession of alienation at the personal level.

Conversely, the encouragement and nurture of alienated attitudes appears to be an extremely rational strategy for alienated institutions which hold power. In order to continue their existence as promoters of particular wills, they must encourage the development of particular wills contrary to the General Will. Ideally, of course, they will indoctrinate members of society into a belief in the particular will of the alienated organization, but short of that, they will prefer the development of other particular wills, even contrary to their own, to the possibility that some class of individuals might come to value the General Will in preference to personal particular wills.

The co-optation and "buying off" of revolutionaries, which attempts to promote and make manifest the latent con-

flicts between personal desires and revolutionary goals, provides the clearest example of this process. At the level of consciousness, a similar technique is the attempt to label acts of guerilla insurrection as selfish "banditry," in order to promote the belief that revolutionary activity is essentially selfish, and thus different only in degree from the privatistic, selfishly-oriented behavior that holders of power are attempting to encourage in the general population.

Restating the idea of alienation in terms of the General Will has several distinct advantages for political theory. As noted above, in order for the idea of alienation to be useful, it must be considered as a relationship between the individual and a collectivity of other individuals in which he is included; alienation seen as a relationship to the General Will operates at precisely that level. Alienation is generally considered, as was also mentioned, to be the result of the absence or destruction of an all-encompassing, nurturitive community; and Rousseau's ideal community, in which the General Will reigns, is precisely such a community.

On the other hand, the concept of General Will is not inextricably limited to the level of society as a whole. One could speak just as reasonably, as Rousseau himself did, of the General Will of a formal organization, or voluntary association, or business enterprise, or religious order.

One can then talk of the alienation from these organizations of their members, or of the organizations themselves from society as a whole, or of the alienation from society of organization members who are not alienated from their organizations. As will be seen, this has considerable utility for political theory.

Thinking of alienation in terms of the General Will also establishes the concept in specifically political terms, thus escaping the danger, so often encountered by theorists of alienation, of "psychologizing" political phenomena. Alienation as alienation from the General Will has nothing necessarily to do with personal incapacity, maladjustment, or irrationality. It is an objective, objectively observable phenomenon which can be experienced just as readily by healthy, rational, Benthamite utility-maximizers as by the psychically-warped and misshapened creatures of some of the more subjectively-oriented literature on alienation.

Most importantly, thinking of alienation in terms of the General Will restores the idea of public interest, public goods, and public concerns to the center of political theory. At root, politics and political theory concern that which is public; yet the increasing privatization of political affairs and political theory since the disintegration of the Middle Ages has produced a political world which, both in theory and practice, is in some sense profoundly anti-

political.[40] Both the conservative admirers of classical excellence and the Marxist seekers of the abolition of politics through politics have long attacked the liberal bourgeois world-order for this privatization. Until now, however, those who continue to accept the central body of liberal doctrine have been unable to respond sensibly.

Yet the creation, maintenance, and sustenance of a sphere of public interest and public good should, at least theoretically, be far from incompatible with the maintenance of the predominant values of liberalism. The idea of social contract, as central to liberal theory as mathematics was to Protagorean philosophy, implies that civil society exists, and is justified in continuing to exist, only so long as common interests unite all its members. The primary concern of liberal theory has, historically, been the tension between private and public goods.

That liberalism, in both theory and practice, has long paid entirely insufficient attention to the public side of this polarity is an entirely correct criticism; that its internal logic or dynamics have compelled it to do so is not. Perhaps by focussing on alienation, defined precisely in terms of conflict between the private good and the public good, it will be possible to restore the proper balance to liberal

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[40]Cf. Wolin, Politics and Vision, pp.290, 414.

theory and, ultimately, to liberal practice.[41]

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[41]Cf. Brian Barry, "The Public Interest," in William E. Connolly, ed., The Bias of Pluralism, Atherton Controversies (New York: Atherton, 1969, pp.159-177; as it relates to Rousseau especially, pp.168-172.

CHAPTER III

ALIENATED SOCIETY

> (The reality I speak of here is the same one Hobbes described, but a little smaller.)
> --Woody Allen, "My Philosophy"

Some measure of alienation is inescapable, at least in the short run in the West. Moreover, the costs of escape, if escape is possible at all, are not inconsiderable. After serious consideration of the nature, causes, and forms of alienation, escape may, indeed, seem far less desirable than amelioration. It is the central argument of this thesis that most of the damaging consequences of alienation arise not from alienation per se, but from reification; that it is possible to abolish reifications without directly confronting the root problem of alienation; but that it is not possible to abolish alienation without at least simultaneously attacking reification; that, in other words, it is not alienation but reification which should currently be the primary concern of social theory and social action.

In order to make this case, the behavior of alienated individuals and the nature of alienated society must first be briefly discussed. Then, a definition and description of reification must be attempted, after which it will be possible

to construct the linkage between alienation and reification, and begin the descriptive task of looking at modern society in terms of the theory of reification.

But alienation, as defined in Chapter II, is no simple or monolithic phenomenon. Within the compass of the definition it is likely, and certainly expected, that different individuals will be more or less alienated from different collectivities at different times for different reasons. Rather than there being two classes of individuals, the alienated and the unalienated, the assumption is that all individuals are alienated from some social groupings to greater or lesser extents at various times in their lives. Alienation is thus a condition like anxiety or self-confidence which, present in all individuals at all times, affects their behavior in certain ways, always in the context of, and constrained by, all the other components of human personality.

The critique of alienation, combined with the ever-present promotion of the alternative of community, developed as a critique of bourgeois society,[1] and it is to the most famous of those critics to whom it is necessary to look first in order to summarize the important aspects of the behavior

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[1]Cf. Robert A. Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition (New York: Basic Books, 1966), pp.264ff.; Bertell Ollman, Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p.131.

of alienated individuals. The most important sources, by and large, are not in the contemporary literature on alienation, extensive as it is, which has focussed to a considerable extent on the subjective experience of alienation, or the behavior of particular classes of alienated individuals in particular sets of socio-economic-political circumstances, but rather in the great critics of civil society, and their more modern followers.

A final caveat is made necessary by this choice of emphasis. Thinkers like Hobbes, Simmel, Tönnies, and Marx, firmly rooted in the intellectual and methodological climates of their time, and concerned, as they were, with conceiving sociological phenomena in terms of large-scale historical change, tended to write and think in terms which, since Weber, might best be described as ideal-typical. Their descriptions of bourgeois society tend to be broadly drawn, and inadequately qualified. But if their models, or archetypes, are conceived not as descriptions of actual concrete phenomena, but rather as tendencies or attributes which innere to a greater or lesser degree in all modern individuals, they remain the best theoretical characterizations of alienated behavior.

For the description of alienated individuals and alienated society, Hobbes comes first. Ferdinand Tönnies is, as has been noted, generally thought to have provided the most

systematic and thorough description of the difference between alienated and non-alienated societies, but Tönnies himself devoted the bulk of his academic career to the study of Hobbes, "the master of us all."

According to Hobbes, alienated man is, first and foremost, a desiring individual. "A perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceaseth only in death,"[2] is implied in the very notion of alienation adopted here, since it is the particular will, or desire, of the individual, conflicting with that of those around him, which provides the whole impetus for alienated behavior. For an individual whose will is entirely consonant with the dictates of society, power, be it personal, political, or social, has little importance, since all the mechanisms and forces of society reinforce his attempt to satisfy his desires. But once wills are in conflict, power becomes crucial.

The desiring nature of alienated individuals combines with the uncertainty of social life to make prudence another central attribute of alienated behavior. Only through prudence, in fact, can individuals ever be induced to leave the state of nature; and prudence underlies what Hobbes called the first law of nature, the requirement that men should seek peace.[3]

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[2]Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, or The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiasticall and Civil, ed. Michael Oakeshott, Collier Classics in the History of Thought (New York: Collier Books, 1962), ch.11, p.80

[3]Ibid., ch. 14, pp.103-104.

Alienated individuals, blessed with the virtue of prudence,[4] seek power in order to guarantee their personal security and the stability and regularity of their social environments. Desire produces the quest for power, and prudence in the pursuit of desires produces the search for security.

The obverse of prudence is fear. It is "the passion to be reckoned upon,"[5] in considering the behavior of alienated individuals. When one's fundamental interests stand in direct conflict with those of the other individuals by whom one is surrounded, fear is not only the most natural, but the most rational response. Fear induces rational men to seek protection wherever they can find it. For Hobbes, of course, that protection can only be provided by the absolute sovereignty of the leviathan.

C. B. Macpherson has attempted to abstract and systematize the fundamental postulates of the "theory of possessive individualism," of which Hobbes is claimed to be the founder and most important exponent. The overriding thrust of Macpherson's arguments may well do serious injustice to Hobbes and the other thinkers he considers, but at least the first three of what Macpherson describes as "the assumptions which comprise possessive individualism," may be taken as

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[4] Ibid., ch. 8, pp.61-62.

[5] Ibid., ch.14, p.111; cf. also ch.27, p.221.

accurate not only for a description of Hobbes and later liberal theorists, but as fundamental characteristics of alienated behavior. What Macpherson claims Hobbes and the later liberals took as philosophical assumptions may be seen, that is, as the conscious or unconscious motivational assumptions of alienated individuals. According to Macpherson, they are that:

> (i) What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.
> (ii) Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.
> (iii) The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.[6]

Rephrased in terms of this argument, Macpherson, drawing on the theorists of liberal bourgeois society, contends that alienated individuals seek to maximize their freedom by minimizing their dependence on others; that they do so by attempting to limit their relationships with others to transient, voluntaristic contracts which they enter from alienated motives; and that they think of themselves as being autonomous in the spheres of their own persons, which they guard jealously from outside interference. The isolated yeoman, alone with his family--from whom he is presumably not alienated--entirely self-sufficient both economically and emotionally, represents

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[6]C. B. Macpherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.263.

the fulfillment of alienated man's fondest hopes.

By the time one gets to Tönnies, then, there is little left to be added. Indeed, his definition of gesellschaft, the theoretical focus of his entire work, has a remarkably familiar ring. "In gesellschaft," he wrote,

> every person strives for that which is to his own advantage and he affirms the actions of others only in so far as and as long as they can further his interests. Before and outside of convention and also before and outside of each special contract, the relation of all to all may therefore be conceived as potential hostility or latent war.[7]

The only important deviation from Hobbes, and it is an important one, is the reminder that even after the sovereign has been created, the war of all against all is not abolished or even very much abated, but only channelled into newer and less violent forms. The marketplace becomes the battleground.

Tönnies also suggested a useful metaphor to conceptualize what might be called the architectonics of alienated society. In a society dominated by gesellschaft relationships, he wrote,

> everybody is all by himself and isolated, and there exists a condition of tension against all others. Their spheres of activity and power are sharply separated, so that everybody refuses to everyone else contact with and admittance to his sphere...[8]

Society is a mass of independent spheres, the occupants of

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[7] Tönnies, Community and Society, p.77

[8] Ibid., p.65.

which are concerned, above all else, with maintaining their structural integrity. Any contact between one sphere and another is perceived by both as a threat, and hostility is the emotion produced by the fear that one sphere might impinge on another.

On the level of interpersonal contact, according to Georg Simmel, the interactions between these separate spheres come to be characterized by reserve, politeness, the maintenance of interpersonal distance, and secrecy. Individuals protect themselves by concealing as much as possible from one another.[9] Simmel well knew, as did his predecessors, that alienated individuals, motivated primarily by fear, seek above all to protect themselves from the depredations of others. Polite society is nothing more than an intricate web of protective mechanisms.

If etiquette and norms of interpersonal politeness are the primary forms of protection on the interpersonal level, all have been agreed, from Hobbes on, that private property is the dominant form through which individuals seek to defend against threats to their autonomy on the social level. The sphere of individual autonomy is symbolized by the fences or walls which surround the individual home; the maxim that a man's home is his castle accurately expresses the idea of a

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[9]Cf. The Sociology of George Simmel, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1950), p.416; pp.330ff.

personally-controlled fortress in which the alienated individual can wall out the outside world and clearly mark out the grounds in which his will is entirely sovereign.[10]

The conventional description of a liberal society resembling the Brownian interaction among atomized individuals ignores the crucial point: as many individuals as are capable participate in the endless series of collisions not entirely alone, but carrying at all times a series of worldy possessions, which provide the buffers in collisions with others. Like turtles, alienated individuals enter the treacherous social world carrying shells of private property on their backs. And each time one reencounters what may be the twentieth century's most dominant, or at least most often-repeated scene, that of refugees trudging along a road, carrying or pulling in carts all their worldly possessions, one is seeing in literal form what sociology can describe only in the abstract: alienated individuals facing the world, not precisely alone, but alone with their property.[11]

In sum, alienated individuals, desiring goods which society has no interest in providing them, fearful always of the hostility towards them of society and of other alienated individuals, desire above all else to protect themselves by

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[10]Cf. Mészáros, Marx' Theory of Alienation, p.258.

[11]Cf. R. H. Tawney, The Acquisitive Society, Harvest Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1948), pp.72-73.

creating individual spheres of autonomy over which they have complete control. Most conventionally, these spheres take the form of private property. In order that they might not become dependent on any other individuals, alienated men become, as Rousseau insisted they do, dependent on things.[12]

But something is missing from this picture of alienated society. Property has until recently been the refuge of a privileged few. In recent years, in those few parts of the world where the widescale distribution of some minimal level of property has been attained, this distribution has been achieved only through the creation of institutions, economic or political, which in themselves constitute new and more powerful threats to individual autonomy and self-determination. Control is central to the idea of property as a protective device; but the more property individuals come to formally possess, the less control they seem to have over it.

Perhaps more importantly, the model of individual spheres never quite conformed to a society in which large-scale collective action at work, in social activities, and often at play is far more the norm than the exception. In the workplace, the church, the school, the state--the great engines of bourgeois advancement--the possession of property

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[12]Cf. Émile, p.49; discussed by Wolin, in Politics and Vision, p.373.

is not only a defensive mechanism limited to a few, but also one of limited utility even for those who have it. One's Cadillac, or Volkswagen, remains parked outside the door when one enters the factory, the office building, the school, the church, or the internal revenue office. Property alone is often not enough to defend the alienated individual from society, even in the most purely atomistic and capitalistic of societies.

The theory of alienation as it has developed since the nineteenth century has a major hole in it. It has been postulated, quite correctly, that alienated individuals will act defensively to protect themselves against society by developing spheres of activity over which they have total control and within which they are entirely autonomous, but only one of those spheres has been identified, and no general theory of sphere-creation or autonomy-maximization has been provided.

It is no accident, then, that those who discuss alienation consider it to be not only so important but so fundamentally destructive of human happiness; faced with alienation, the individual's mechanisms for self-protection are clearly inadequate. It is also no accident that, as a result, thinkers have been tempted to consider and even promote very extreme solutions to the problem of alienation, willing to abandon highly-cherished values like privacy and freedom of expression in order to see that individuals, incapable of protecting

themselves against alienation, could be protected from it by an overmastering collectivity. But the hole remains. What fills it is the theory of reification.

CHAPTER IV

REIFICATION

> But if the very Rocks and Rivers (as Metaphysic teaches) are, in strict language, made by those Outward Senses of ours, how much more, by the Inward Sense, are all Phenomena of the spiritual kind: Dignities, Authorities, Holies, Unholies!
>
> --Carlyle, The French Revolution

The most striking fact about the history of the idea of reification is that no one has said very much about it. Karl Marx, who is universally regarded as the most important theorist of reification, and whose writings have provided the groundwork for literally all the commentary on the subject since his lifetime, employed the term, so far as I have been able to determine, only once.[1] Indeed, no one has ever provided for reification the kind of extensive discussion that Plato provided for justice, or Locke or Mill for freedom, or Kant for reason. Works, including short monographs, in which reification has been the primary focus can be counted

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[1]Cf. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy, trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p.67; so scrupulous a scholar as Henri Lefebvre, who desires to return the idea to popular use, claims that Marx never used the term at all. See his The Sociology of Marx, trans. Nobert Gutterman (New York: Pantheon, 1968), p.48.

on the finger of one hand.[2] And all those works have fallen within the Marxist tradition, which, for all its importance, has remained largely isolated, until very recently, from most of the rest of Western philosophical and political inquiry.

One can not even take recourse in the dictionary for help in understanding reification. The definition found there, which is essentially the one assumed in the Marxist tradition, is rooted in the most fundamental kind of philosophical error.

Webster's, with the Oxford English Dictionary in almost complete agreement, defines "reify" as "to regard (as an abstraction, a mental construction) as a thing; convert mentally into something concrete or objective." Etymologically, "reify" and "reification" come from the Latin res, or thing, and the non-word "thingification" is often given as a synonym for "reification." To reify, according to the conventional usage, is to make something that is not a thing, or less than a thing, into a thing.

There would be nothing wrong with this usage were it not for the existence of a parallel set of words with which

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[2]In rough order of importance, I number in this listing: Georg Lukács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in History and Class Consciousness, pp.83-222; Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness;" Lucien Goldmann, "La réification," in Recherches dialectiques, pp.64-106; Israel, Alienation, pp.255ff.; and Joseph Gabel, La fausse conscience: essai sur la réification (3rd ed., rev.; Paris: Editions De Minuit, 1969).

reification is often compared: "objectify" and "objectification." According to Webster's, again, to objectify is "to cause to become or to assume the character of an object." In order to make sense of the idea of reification, then, it must be distinguished from objectification.

It is possible, at least for the purposes at hand, to identify what might be called the Marxist-phenomenological tradition. Whether or not, as has often been argued, the two different elements in that tradition are converging is of no importance here; for the narrow purposes at hand, their epistemological orientations, both grounded in a reaction to the "purely contemplative" idealism of Hegel, are sufficiently similar.[3]

Most basic to this tradition is the belief that man, as a species, creates his social world through purposive endeavor. While pre-existing natural phenomena form much of the raw material of human existence, processes of production, in the broadest sense, are essential to the conduct of social activity. The social world which people inhabit--its languages, customs, mores, institutions, and even its perceptions of reality--is largely one of their own making, made at least partially by conscious plan.[4]

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[3]Cf. Raymond Aron, Marxism and the Existentialists, Clarion Books (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), p.31.

[4]Cf. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, The German Ideology, trans. and ed. R. Pascal (New York: International

The process of objectification plays a central role in this view. Berger and Luckmann define objectifications as "products of human activity that are available both to their producers and to other men as elements of a common world.[5] In other words, objectification is the primordial human process in which subjective human activity creates material, symbolic, and abstract objects which are perceived equally by all members of a common culture. Without objectification, by definition, there can be no language, no uniformity of social conduct, no social activity of any sort beyond the most rigidly primitive levels.[6]

The very existence of society necessarily implies the existence and utility of objectifications; they constitute the shared social world about which and through which individuals can communicate and develop relationships with one another. In this sense, man is preeminently homo faber. Without the assumption of conscious, purposive, goal-oriented

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Publishers, 1947), p.14; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1967), p.52; on plans, cf. Marx, Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, Volume I, The Process of Capitalist Production (hereafter cited as "Capital, I"), Untermann, trans. (New York: Modern Library, 1906), p.198; Jean-Paul Sartre, Search for a Method, trans. Hazel E. Barnes, Vintage Books, (New York: Random House, 1963), pp.150-151; and Ollman, Alienation, p.113.

[5]Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, p.34.

[6]Ibid., p.35.

human behavior which creates social reality through the process of objectification, it is impossible to arrive at a humanistic conception of society or of social science. "Objectivation and objectification," say Berger and Pullberg, "are anthropologically necessary. A priori, human existence can not be conceived without them."[7]

A relatively orthodox Marxist, Georg Lukács, makes much the same argument. Bearing in mind, he says,

> 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 among 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.[8]

But Lukacs continues, quite properly, to insist that reification is not a neutral phenomenon, that it is, in fact, one of the most important forms in which the destructive forces of capitalism are embodied.

Marx himself said essentially the same thing in a number of places. In the Paris Manuscripts, he wrote that:

> It is just in his work upon the objective world that man really proves himself as a species-being. This production is his active species-life. By means of it nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labor is, therefore, the objectification of man's species life.[9]

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[7]Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," p.201

[8]Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.xxiv.

[9]Early Writings, p.128.

And the very first Thesis on Feuerbach defends objectification in opposition to Feuerbach's "contemplative" materialism. Feuerbach, Marx wrote, "does not understand human activity itself as objective activity."[10]

The production of objects from non-objects thus appears to be an attribute of human existence so fundamental and necessary that it would be senseless to attach any kind of evaluative judgement to it. Yet "reification" invariably carries a negative connotation. It must thus be fundamentally different from objectification. But, to return to the dictionary definitions for a moment, it can be different only if an "object" is different from a "thing."

"Objects" differ from "things;" that is the fundamental assumption on which all discussions of reification, as well as the more mundane usages in dictionaries and ordinary parlance, have been founded. Historically, the distinction between objects and things has been important to philosophy, and those who have spoken about reification can hardly be blamed for perpetuating it. But the distinction between objects and things is fundamentally insupportable and indefensible, and must be discarded if the concept of reification is

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[10]Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach," in The German Ideology, p.197; Cf. also Karl Marx, The Grundrisse, ed. and trans. David McLellan, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), p.151; Sartre, Search for a Method, p.13; and Rotenstreich, Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy, p.66

ever to have any utility.

In philosophical discourse, the term "object" generally implies a complementary "subject;" each term is an incomplete thought without the other. This practice accords entirely with etymology, since "object" derives from the Latin jacere, "to throw," combined with the prefix ob, for "before" or "towards. An object is thus something that is thrown before or towards--and "before" and "towards" are prepositions the object of which can only be the individual perceiver or actor. For there to be an object, there must be a human subject which perceives it.

The next step, in the history of the idea of reification, has been to distinguish "things" from "objects" precisely by the absence of the subjective element. The crucial role was played, of course, by Kant, who, insisting on the existence of "things-in-themselves" that were at least partially inaccessible to human experience, differentiated them from objects of human perception. "Things" are those entities the essences of which remain outside human knowledge.

Hegel, unhappy with this Kantian dualism, insisted that the existence of things-in-themselves was not an ontological necessity, but a product of historical development. The Absolute Spirit, claimed Hegel, created all objects through the activities of Mind. Things-in-themselves only appeared to be unavailable to human perception and knowledge because

men had become somehow alienated from them, had lost or forgotten their connection to human activity. The abolition of alienation through the realization of the Absolute Spirit would recover this connection, and thus end the distinction between things and objects. In the meantime, however, objects had been transformed into things, and were thus reifications.

It was easy for Marx to then stand Hegel on his head and claim that objective reality was created not by the workings of disembodied mind, but by concrete productive labor, by praxis. And while Marx himself did not use the term "reification" in that way, his followers, once Hegel had been restored to legitimacy, saw clearly enough that for Marx all objects in alienated capitalist society must be reifications, just as they had been for Hegel. The existence of humanly-created things-in-themselves was seen as the product of a specific historical epoch in which human productive activity was distorted into the production of things. This perversion of the proper relationship between subject and object would, of course, be overcome when the proletariat, the true "subject-object of history," abolished alienation in all its forms.[11]

Human activity, of labor or of Mind, creates the objective world, which, because it has been created by human activity, remains entirely available and accessible to human

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[11]Cf. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.126 et ff.

intelligence. Somehow, through the workings of alienation, objects lose their accessibility and connectedness to human activity and become reifications, things-in-themselves, objects of human activity entirely outside of human control. That constitutes, I would think, a fair summary of the idea of reification to date. And the idea certainly contains many useful elements, which any theory of reification should contain: reifications are mystified, outside of human control, mysterious entities which serve no clear function either in their creation or their existence, and whose connection to human activity has been forgotten. But the Hegelian-Marxist notion remains fundamentally flawed.

The flaw is this. All objects, and all things, exist for human beings, and human activity on every level except that of speculative philosophy, particularly including that of everyday life, only as they are perceived and acted upon by human beings. Without a human subject, there are not only no objects, but no things. It is theoretically possible for an isolated individual to imagine a thing-in-itself that is somehow impenetrably mysterious, but he could never communicate the idea of such a thing to another human being without the medium of language, which is composed entirely of objectifications, or perhaps of expressive gestures, which must also be objectified. Only through objectification is subjective experience available to other human beings; thus, on the social

level, only objectifications can exist.

This statement follows directly from definitions that those who have written of reification would accept themselves. For if all social reality is created by human activity, then any entity existing at the social level must be an objectification. As soon as an objectification becomes a thing-in-itself, it ceases to exist at the social level. When there is no subject, there can be not only no object, but no thing either, since all of social reality is nothing more than an aggregation of the subjective experiences of human individuals. Even the concept of "thing-in-itself" must be objectified, put into common language, in order that philosophers might discuss it.

As soon as the distinction between object and thing evaporates, as it must for all those, Marxists, phenomenologists, and others alike, who hold that knowledge is a social phenomenon which must be understood sociologically, then the whole theory of reification would seem to go up in smoke. But the idea of reification is too valuable to lose. Moreover, even those discussions which have conceived of reification in terms of the now-discarded distinction between objects and things retain most of their utility if another definition is provided. What is needed, therefore, is a new definition of reification, one which will retain all the advantages of the older one without having to rely on an unmaintainable

distinction.

In order to formulate this new definition, it is necessary to return for a moment to the idea of objectification. Objectification is the production of objects by purposive human activity in order to meet human needs. These needs can be pretty broadly defined, to include not only simple biological necessities, but also the need for tools and for society and all its constituent elements. As instruments of need satisfaction, though, objects should be functional, purposive instrumental, utilitarian. Objects are created only to satisfy human needs, whether directly or indirectly, and their existence can only be justified to the extent that they serve that purpose.[12]

Objects, then, are, or should be, instruments of need-satisfaction. But the process of reification distorts the relationship between people and the objects they produce--in the broadest sense of production, for language, social relationships, and the entire fabric of human life are all products of human activity. At root, reification reverses the relationship between means and ends in these products. Objects, which are initially created only as means to human ends, become ends in themselves. Not only do they thereby lose their instrumental

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[12]For Marx, the highest need of man is that of free, creative self-expression, the need for objectification itself, which can be fulfilled only after man is free from all other needs. Cf. Early Writings, p.128; Petrovic, Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century, p.127.

purpose, and with it whatever utility they may have possessed, but in becoming ends they begin the process whereby other means are subordinated to them. In proper dialectical fashion, the desirable relationship between humans and objects--between means and ends--is entirely reversed, and people become subordinated to their own tools.[13]

It is time for a formal definition. To reify is to "infuse with value" an object that has been created by human endeavor, and then to perceive it and act towards it in a way fundamentally different from an object which has no intrinsic value. A reification, similarly, is a humanly-created object which has acquired a value other than the instrumental one for which it was created, or ostensibly created. Reifications are thus also objectifications, but objectifications of a very special kind.

By "perceive it and act towards it in a way fundamentally different from an object which has no intrinsic value," I mean just that--to treat it as an object of intrinsic value. Marx's conception of reification is most commonly identified with his discussion of the "fetishism of commodities" in Capital,[14] and the operative word is "fetishism;"

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[13]Cf. Marx, Early Writings, p.177; Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, pp.183, 186.

[14]Capital, pp.81ff.

similarly, Veblen attacked the "animism" of classical political economy,[15] the reified character of which will be discussed later on.[16] "Worship" is perhaps too strong a word to describe the attitude towards reification, and "animism" contains, as will be shown, some misleading connotations, but the general sense of opprobrium it connotes is perfectly satisfactory.

The verb "infuse" in the definition implies, of course, an active process, in which something--intrinsic value--is added into something else. But its usage in this context often refers to a more subtle process. When an object acquires intrinsic value it did not previously have, that certainly represents an added characteristic; and the usage of "infuse" creates no complexities when that addition is the result of conscious intent to add something, as often happens in the process of reification.

However, the way in which social perceptions work often makes it possible for an object to acquire intrinsic value by removing something from it: its instrumental value. Because in many societies objects tend to have a certain value merely because they exist--because they are there--the acquisition of intrinsic value is accomplished by the removal of

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[15]Thorstein Veblen, "Why Is Economics not an Evolutionary Science?" in The Place of Science in Modern Civilization and Other Essays (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), p.64.

[16]See Chapter VIII.

instrumental value, in stunning demonstration of the principle that less is more.

In those cases, which are also quite frequent, the task of infusion with value consists of removing a characteristic of an object, and that is the sense in which the usage of "infuse" becomes rather complex, although not, I think, hopelessly so. Berger and Luckmann, ignoring the fact that reification doesn't just happen, but is made to happen, speak of the process of reification as one of "forgetting."[17] So long as one remembers that someone puts the forgetting process into motion, they are correct, but that setting into motion remains, albeit indirectly, an infusion.

A few words should be said in defense of my definition. Even if the distinction between "thing" and "object" must be abandoned, it is clear that, if the term "reification" is to retain any connection to its earlier usage, the relationship between individuals and reified objects must be somehow different from the relationship between individuals and mere objectifications. The class of "things" has been excluded from discourse because of the impossibility of separating it from the class of "objects," but the aim is somehow to put the class of "reifications" in its place, only defining

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[17]Berger and Luckmann, Social Construction of Reality, p.89.

"reifications" so as to avoid the objections to "things." The smaller the difference between the new concept of "reifications" and the older one of "things," it would seem, the greater the possibility of employing older works on "reification" without substantial modification.

"Things" were thought to differ from "objects" because they were entirely autonomous of human activity, because they, or at least their essences, were somehow inaccessible to human cognition and human control. As a result, whereas objects were always perceived in terms of their potential utility for human self-expression or human need-fulfillment, reified "things" had independent existences which not only remained impervious to human control, but came ultimately to control human activities themselves. As "beings-in-themselves," "things" were also "beings-for-themselves," existing entirely outside of human control or human will.

What was formerly considered effect must now be taken as cause. Reifications are perceived as being outside of human control, of having existences of their own which subordinate other entities to them, not because they are somehow "things," but precisely because they are perceived as being outside of human control. If this seems circular, it is only because the reasoning that always underlay the conception of "reification" as "thingness" was circular. If any non-human entity is treated differently from other objects, in a way

which permits it to lead a kind of autonomous existence in which it is not subjected to the need to justify itself in terms of utility for human values, in which it is not perceived as having potential utility of that kind at all, then it is a reification whether it is a "thing" or not. What makes an object into a "being-for-itself" is not some fundamental ontological attribute, but the fact that it is perceived by society as being sufficient unto itself. What makes it sufficient unto itself is a social ascription of value to it.

In a sense, then, my definition is also largely circular. Reifications are all objects which are not valued in terms of their utility for human happiness or satisfaction.

Consider a concrete example, one drawn from the tradition in which the idea of reification developed. God may be conceived of as an ultimately unknowable entity, standing entirely outside the limits of human cognition or human knowledge. She may be a kind of divine thing-in-itself. Alternatively, God may be entirely knowable, perfectly comprehensible for all men; yet she may still be worshipped. In either case, the image of God will be an important factor in social life; social activity and individual effort will be subordinated to serving what is thought to be her will; and her existence will dominate, to a considerable extent, the social life of society. From the humanist, post-Feuerbachian perspective in which all the contemporary discourse on reification has

taken place, both Gods are equally reifications; yet the old theory of reification, grounded in the distinction between "thing" and "object," adequately explains the reified nature of only the first God.

More to the point, what is important to a social and political theory of reification is not the intrinsic ontological character of any entity, but the way in which perceptions and beliefs about that entity influence social behavior. For those purposes, the distinction between "thing" and "object" is obviously inferior to one grounded in a purely social fact such as valuation.

George Lichtheim has perceptively noted that, "positivist sociology in the later nineteenth century fell heir to the unsolved problems of traditional metaphysics."[18] To date, the concept of reification has been employed to resolve metaphysical and socio-political problems at the same time, by making an ontological category--that of "thingness"--central to a sociological analysis. The wedding between sociology and metaphysics has long been uneasy; the two are fundamentally incompatible.[19] The time has come for a divorce. And

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[18]George Lichtheim, "Alienation," in David L. Sills, ed., International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan and The Free Press, 1968), I, p.268.

[19]This is seen most distinctly not in Marx, who abandoned metaphysical concerns by the time of his mature writings, but in Lukacs, whose otherwise excellent, seminal essay on "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," is seriously weakened by his self-conscious attempt to merge sociological and ontological categories as part of the task of

one whose orientation is sociological and political rather than metaphysical will attempt, in what follows, to assume custody of the theoretical offspring.

Reification is essentially a problem of consciousness; to talk about reification is to talk about perception and the action based on that perception. But, in the strongest possible terms, it must be stressed that in no way does the fact that reification is "only" a problem of consciousness diminish its importance. In one sense, all human social problems are matters of consciousness, since human beings can only act towards and relate to the world as they perceive it. Less globally, it is certainly true that all social theory is concerned primarily with explaining, reinforcing, or altering the social consciousness of the theorist's audience. The Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach should not be misread to deemphasize the importance of problems of consciousness; on the contrary, it is itself nothing more than an attempt to alter consciousness.[20]

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developing a complete Marxist metaphysics. See especially Part II.

[20]It goes, of course: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world differently, the point is, to change it;" in The German Ideology; p.199. See also Karl Korsch, Marxism and Philosophy, trans. Fred Halliday (London: NLB, 1970), pp.66ff.

It should also be clear by now that reification is primarily a problem of value.[21] The critique of reification is primarily moral, hinging on the reversal of ends and means, which is, of course, a complete and perfect negation of the Kantian imperative, and thus of the whole structure of humanist ethics that goes with it. This structure, founded in the twin postulates of Protagoras's man as measure and Kant's man as end can reasonably, I should think, be said to underlie Marx's system as much as Kant's--even if the two philosophers had nothing else in common.[22]

That Marx condemns reification for precisely this reason--that it converts the ends into means--is made perfectly clear throughout his writings, although it is best expressed in the Paris Manuscripts. There, he puts the problem with all the precision of a mathematical formula: "The devaluation of the human world increases in direct relation with the increase in value of the world of things."[23] There are two classes of entities in the social world, human beings and objects. The former should be ends, the latter means.[24]

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[21]Cf. Gabel, La fausse conscience, p.59ff.

[22]Cf. Eugene Kamenka, The Ethical Foundations of Marxism (2d. ed., London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p.24.

[23]Early Writings, p.121.

[24]Cf. Aron, Marxism and the Existentialists, p.5.

What I have described as a kind of Kantian critique of reification can be stated in a different way, one with which those wary of anything that finds traces of Kantianism in Marx may be more comfortable. People should govern objects, not the other way around; that would seem a direct corollary of the Kantian imperative. There are those, however, to whom the name Kant signifies a kind of intellectual analogue to venereal disease, and the latter formulation has the advantage of being directly supported by Marx's explicit statements. In the last volume of Capital, he wrote that, in the realm of necessary production, "freedom in this field cannot consist of anything else but of the fact that socialized man, the associated producers, regulate their interchange with nature rationally, bring it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power..."[25]

According to Eugene Kamenka, Marx's revolutionary vision was that of

> the creative, self-determined man, master of his environment, of the universe, and of himself, cooperating spontaneously and harmoniously with all other men as "aspects" of the human spirit liberated within him. "Dignity," the young Marx writes in a secondary school essay, "can be afforded only by that position in which we do not appear as servile instruments;" "the criticism of religion," he writes...nine years later, "ends in the teaching that man

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[25]Marx, Capital, A Critique of Political Economy, Volume III, The Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole, (hereinafter cited as "Capital, III), Untermann, trans. (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Co., 1909), p.954.

is the highest being for man..."[26]

It is time to confront Marx directly. For although Marx's conception of reification was founded in an epistemological distinction which can no longer be accepted, the construction of any fruitful theory of reification requires the retention of as much of Marx as possible. It is conceivable that one could systematically recapitulate the entire Marxist critique, modifying it as one went along in order to conform to the present redefinition of reification. That procedure would, however, be limited by the fact that Marx's theory of reification is a small but integral part of a worldview fundamentally characterized by its totality, so that an accurate description of Marx on anything requires clear cognizance of Marx on everything.[27]

The primary concern here is not Marx; the aim is neither an accurate summary of his thought nor an attempt to modify it to meet contemporary conditions and issues. Rather, Marx provides the critical raw material for developing what can only be called a liberal theory of reification; and it is

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[26]Eugene Kamenka, "Marxian Humanism and the Crisis in Socialist Ethics," in Erich Fromm, ed., Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1966), pp.118-119.

[27]Cf. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.27; Ollman, Alienation, pp.16,70, 131, et passim.

not his aims nor his total vision so much as some of his ideas, ripped brutally perhaps out of context, which have the greatest utility for that endeavor. So the discussion to follow will focus narrowly on Marx's discussion of reification as it relates to three separate problems, each of them crucial for a theory of reification: they might be summarized, in one-word descriptions, as value, mystification, and power.

To begin with the problem of value, it has already been argued that reification consists of the process in which objects of instrumental value acquire intrinsic value, and it has also been argued that this shift in valuation is a moral phenomenon of considerable importance, since if one assumes that human beings should be valued intrinsically and objects instrumentally, the infusion of objects with intrinsic value is directly immoral. Marx never put the argument in anything like those terms, but his most important discussion of reification, in the first chapter of Capital, is almost entirely about value and valuation, and his central argument conforms perfectly to the new definition offered here.

"A commodity," wrote Marx,

> appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological nicetics. So far as it is a value in use, there is nothing mysterious about it, whether we consider it from the point of view that by its properties it is capable of satisfying human wants, or from the point of view that those properties are the product of human labor. It is as clear as noon-day, that man, by his industry,

> changes the forms of the materials furnished by nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him.[28]

Prior to the development of capitalist exchange society, human productive activity was motivated entirely by a concern for use-values, or utilities. Objects were produced in order to serve a direct and readily-comprehensible need of the producer or someone essentially like him, and the entire economic organization of society was oriented directly to the satisfaction of basic human needs.[29]

It was only with the development of production for the market, production of commodities, that things became more complex. What transformed the commodity from a "very trivial thing" into a "very queer thing" was precisely the invention and acquisition of a different form of value, of exchange-value.

Exchange-value has nothing to do with human needs or desires. Rather, said Marx, the exchange-value of any given commodity merely represents entirely fortuitous relationships among the labor-times necessary to produce certain goods. As such, exchange-value could be shown to embody the entire set of social relationships of production.[30]

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[28] Capital, I, p.81.

[29] Ibid., p.84; Cf. also Israel, Alienation, p.312.

[30] Capital, I, p.85.

But that was really not the point. Prior to Marx's critique of political economy those relationships had remained entirely hidden, so that exchange-values appeared to be an arbitrary but unquestioned attribute of all objects. More importantly, from the point of view of the individual producer the entirely mysterious relationship of exchange-value became the predominant motivational element in production; things were no longer produced to meet the needs of the producer or of anyone he knew, but rather because they had exchange-values in markets over which the producer had no control. The development of exchange-value did not totally obliterate the use-values of commodities; the final consumer had always to value the commodity for its utility, else the whole structure would collapse--as it did, from time to time. Nonetheless, the most important fact was that most people perceived objects not in terms of their utilities, but in terms of what they would bring in the marketplace.[31]

Still, Marx did not attribute the reified character of commodities to their possession of exchange-value alone. Still trapped in the Hegelian dialectic, he considered the acquisition of exchange-value not as the crux of the whole process, but only as the crucial step in the transformation of commodities into "things." Commodities abounded in metaphsical subtleties not merely because they acquired exchange-

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[31] Ibid., p.86.

value, but because that acquisition converted them into "things." All the effects of this reification on the social system were thus attributed to the "thinglike" character of commodities.

But Marx went too far. The acquisition by material objects of intrinsic values divorced from their potential use is adequate by itself for a criticism of reification. When humanly-produced objects acquire intrinsic value, reification is already at work. The entire paradigm of men as ends and objects as means has already been disturbed.

The reification of commodities is best thought of in terms of exchange-value alone, without the adding-on of "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" like "thingness." This can best be demonstrated in the aspect of commodity production for which Marx reserved his bitterest attack. The development of commodity exchange, wrote Marx, pervaded everything, to the point where persons themselves were transformed into things, or more precisely, to the point where labor itself became a commodity. "Labor does not only create goods," said Marx, as early as the Paris Manuscripts, "it also produces itself and the worker as a commodity, and indeed in the same proportion as it produces goods."[32]

As a result of the development of capitalist markets and the institution of exchange-value, "...finally material

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[32]Early Writings, p.121.

life appears as the end, and what produces this material life, labor (which is now the only possible but, as we see, negative form of self-activity), as the means."[33] The laborer becomes progressively dehumanized, and progressively enslaved by his own tools, to the point where, "every kind of capitalist production...has this in common, that it is not the workman that employs the instruments of labor, but the instruments of labor that employ the workman."[34]

The conversion of human beings into means, into objects, into commodities, has become a major theme of the contemporary theory of reification. The noted scholar Lucien Goldmann, for instance, defines reification as follows:

> in liberal capitalist society, human relationships have lost much of their qualitative and human character, and have been transformed into merely quantitative relationships. In addition, their essence as social and interpersonal relationships has disappeared from human consciousness, to reappear in reified form as the characteristics of things.[35]

Similarly, István Mészáros, in his excellent book on Marx's Theory of Alienation, argues that the development of capitalist labor-contracts is predicated on the conversion of persons into things.[36]

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[33] German Ideology, p.66.

[34] Capital, I, p.462; Cf. also Capital, III, p.310.

[35] Lucien Goldmann, Marxisme et sciences humaines (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p.33; Cf. Recherches dialectiques, p.78.

[36] Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, p.34. Cf. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p. 131.

But it is crucial to retain the distinction between objectification and reification, and the idea of the reification of human relationships, as employed by Goldmann or Mészáros, blurs that distinction while distracting attention from the important issues. As has already been seen, it is entirely necessary that individuals and individual behavior be objectified, in order for individuals to exist for others at all. Any agreement or understanding about labor, or any other form of human interchange, must be objectified if it is to have any real existence when more than one party is involved. I cannot enter into any kind of agreement or understanding, no matter how non-exploitative, with anyone else without objectifying myself, my commitments, and my actions.

Moreover, it is not the "thinglike" characteristics of objectified social relationships to which the Marxists are really objecting. "Things" are mysterious, uncontrollable, capricious; but the "reification" of human relationships is attacked because it permits individual behavior to be controlled, predicted, and manipulated. Reification is not dehumanization. It can cause dehumanization, and often does, but the characteristics ascribed to "things," as well as the principle of economy of definitions, make it impossible that reification and dehumanization should be the same.

Still, the Marxist critique is well-taken, and the link between reification and dehumanization must be explored.

That nexus is neither mysterious nor hard to find, once the fallacy that reification involves thingification has been abandoned. For we are led right back to the question of value. What is wrong in the treatment of human beings as commodities is precisely that the objects for which they are exchanged, money and goods, have been reified. When profit, or productive efficiency, becomes an end in itself--acquires intrinsic value--then (and only then, historically) does labor become a commodity. The result is the dehumanization of laborers, the treatment of them as mere tools, as means.

By the logic of the definitions employed here, human beings can never be reified, since they, and only they, are intrinsically valuable.[37] But they must, can, and always are objectified. It is the reification of other objects--specifically money and the relationships of production in the Marxist critique--which causes dehumanization. The transformation of labor into a commodity is only an effect, a consequence, of

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[37]It should be stressed that while individuals, per se, cannot be reified, the roles which they occupy, and the patterned relationships in which they participate, can be. A king cannot be reified as a person; as a human being, however he is valued qua human being is just the opposite of reification. But kingship can be reified, as can the rituals attending it. Physicians are not reified qua human beings, but the role of physician, as well as the pattern of physician-patient relationships that goes along with it, is a reification in most societies. Once one starts from the humanistic assumptions of the categorical imperative, what is intrinsic to human beings becomes the only thing which can not be reified. But social objectifications, like roles or norms or behavior patterns, are just as subject to reification as any other.

the reification of other objects in the economic system. And the dehumanizing consequences of treating labor like a commodity are only the second-order results of reification.

The transformation of labor into a commodity illustrates what might be called the two-step process of reification. First, objects other than humans acquire intrinsic value. They are, in short, reified, Then, human beings, who should be valued intrinsically, are subordinated to, or subordinate themselves to, those reified objects. Whatever it is called, it is bad enough, but it is necessary to keep the logical and terminological distinctions in mind if the theory of reification is ever to be elevated from a mere irritant in the pores of the Marxist system.[38]

It might, at this point, be useful to repeat the definitions advanced in this chapter. Objectification is the process in which the products of human activity enter social life as entities which can be recognized by members of society. Objectifications, or objects, similarly, are those entities which are "cognitively available" to members of society. Reifications are objectifications which are valued intrinsically, rather than instrumentally or not at all. Reification is the process in which objects--or objectifications, if one prefers to use a longer word when it is exactly synonomous with

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[38]Gabel succeeds in keeping the two steps separated. Cf. La fausse conscience, pp.107, 121.

a shorter one--acquire, become infused with, that intrinsic value. Dehumanization, on the other hand, is the process in which the intrinsic value which should inhere in human beings is stripped from them. It is thus the polar opposite of reification, and entirely distinct conceptually, although the former is generally produced by the latter, and the two generally flourish in the same hedgerow.

A similar sort of analysis must be provided for the second aspect of Marx's conception of reification, that of mystification. Marx insisted again and again that reifications only appeared to be things; that, indeed, was the problem with them. They were, in fact, nothing more than the embodiments of concrete social relationships which were hidden and mystified by the assumption of thinglike form. To return to the chapter on the fetishism of commodities, Marx says there that:

> A commodity is therefore a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor; because the relation of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor....the value relation between the products of labor which stamps them as commodities have absolutely no connection with their physical properties and with the material relationship arising therefrom. There it is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fan-

tastic form of a relation between things.[39]

Marx emphasized again and again that social life was governed not by things, but by concealed social relationships masquerading as things.[40] He always saw the skull of social relationships beneath the skin of reified society, and never tolerated the fiction that reifications were anything more than products of underlying social relations.

Changing the definition of reification from "thingification" to "infusion with value" permits the retention of the Marxist description of mystification. Only through mystification, in the sense of making things appear as other than they really are, can objects be reified, in the latter sense. Ascribing intrinsic value to something which did not previously have it necessarily involves changing the perception of the object. Something that was not perceived as having intrinsic value comes to be so perceived; that is clearly mystification. And this mystification, under the new definition as well as the old, invariably grows out of social relationships, often in a conscious or semi-conscious effort to conceal them, as will be considered in more detail later on.

Marx's discussion of the relationship between reification

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[39] Capital, I, p.83.

[40] Cf. The Grundrisse, pp.73, 97; Goldmann, Recherches dialectiquesm pp.78, 309.

and its third attribute, power, merits extensive consideration. The reified world of capitalist society, said Marx, is pre-eminently one in which objects, not men, rule. This is expressed in the quotation cited above, which argues that men should rule nature rationally "instead of being ruled by it as by some blind power." It is also expressed, indirectly, in the fact that Marx only rarely accuses the property-owning classes of being somehow evil or vicious in themselves, for they too are caught in the blind logic of reified society. It is not the ruling class so much as the tendency of men to be ruled by objects which must be abolished if society is ever to become truly human.[41]

The rule of objects in alienated society was a central theme for Marx as early as the Paris Manuscripts, where he wrote:

> Alienation is apparent not only in the fact that my means of life belong to someone else, that my desires are the unattainable possession of someone else, but that everything is something different from itself, that my activity is something else, and finally (and this is also the case for the capitalist) that an inhuman power rules over everything.[42]

Once the means become ends, they acquire power; they rule.

The theme was reiterated in The German Ideology, where

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[41]Cf. Alfred G. Meyer, Marxism: The Unity of Theory and Practice (2d ed., Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press, 1963, pp.202-203; Meszaros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, p.159

[42]Early Writings, pp.177-178.

Marx's description of bourgeois society culminates with the statement that, "in imagination, individuals seem freer under the dominance of the bourgeoisie than before, because their conditions of life seem accidental; in reality, of course, they are less free, because they are more subject to the violence of things."[43] It need hardly be emphasized that these violent things were not the forces of nature, to which pre-bourgeois men were at least equally subjected, but the forces of society, embodied in reifications. The mystification that accompanied reification created the illusion that individuals in bourgeois society were subject to the power of ordinary things rather than reifications; the possession of power by reifications made that subjection serious and dangerous.

In the first volume of Capital, Marx states the problem in terms that do proper homage to his intellectual legacy, and especially his debt to Feuerbach. He explicitly draws the parallel between the latter's critique and his own: "As in religion, man is governed by the products of his own brain, so in capitalistic production, he is governed by the products of his own hand."[44]

Towards the end of the third volume, however, Marx used an entirely different kind of terminology, in a passage

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[43] The German Ideology, p.77.

[44] Capital, I, p.681; cf. Rotenstreich, Basic Problems of Marx's Philosophy, p.21.

that has often been quoted, but which deserves repetition. "In Capital-Profit," he wrote,

> or better Capital-Interest, Land-Rent, Labor-Wages of Labor, in this economic trinity expressing professedly the connection of value and of wealth in general with their sources, we have the complete mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the transformation of social conditions into things, the indiscriminate amalgamation of the material conditions of production with their historical and social form. It is an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world, in which Mister Capital and Misstress Land carry on their goblin tricks as social characters and at the same time as mere things.[45]

Pernicious as the conversion of abstracted social relationships into things might be in itself, it was not the real problem. For capitalist society was dominated by the "goblin tricks" of those things; they ruled society both cruelly and capriciously.

The relationship between reification and power has also been a major theme of later writers on reification. Gajo Petrović, for instance, defines reification as, "the act (or result of the act) of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties and actions of things independent of man and governing his life."[46] Petrović's language is especially interesting since both "independent" and "governing" are, of course, political words and, all metaphysical considerations to one side, Petrović sees clearly that reifi-

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[45] Capital, III, p.966; Cf. Ibid., pp.947ff.

[46] Petrović, Marx in the Mid-Twentieth Century, p.135

cation is preeminently political.

Lukács puts the situation in especially clear terms. "Man in capitalist society," he says,

> confronts a reality "made" by himself (as a class) which appears to him to be a natural phenomenon alien to himself; he is wholly at the mercy of its "laws," his activity is confined to the exploitation of the inexorable fulfillment of certain individual laws for his own (egoistic) interests. But even while "acting" he remains, in the nature of the case, the object and not the subject of events.[47]

The last phrase summarizes the relationship between reification and power. Individuals become the objects of events; they no longer exercise control of the social world, but are themselves controlled by their own creations. Power in social activities passes from the hands of human beings to inhere in objects, in reifications.

For those who think of reification as thingification, power seems to flow naturally from the idea of a thing. The very distinction between object and thing implies, indeed, that while the former remains entirely subject to human control and human will, the latter has escaped from both, and leads an existence of its own. Moreover, this existence is neither neutral nor unimportant; the social world comes to be filled up by things which influence and even control human life, but which cannot be controlled by human will.

Once the definition of reification is altered, however,

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[47]Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.135.

the relationship between reification and power becomes a little more complex. When an object becomes infused with intrinsinc value--when it is reified--it becomes an unchallengeable and inalterable social facticity.[48] It structures and conditions all social activity in which it is involved, since its being intrinsically valued makes some possible alternative actions more likely and totally rules out others.

Reification, says the French psychiatrist Joseph Gabel, involves the projection of an "artificial stability" into the social world.[49] The ability of human society to make its own history is often described as the condition of "world-openess;" all possibilities are open. Once the social world comes to be occupied by reifications, however, many alternatives are eliminated, and the world begins to be closed off.[50] So long as God is worshipped in herself, atheists and heretics will be in an extremely unfavorable power situation, while the class of priests which is able to identify itself as the agents of that reification will readily take advantage of the power it possesses.

By closing off the avenues of human activity, reification channels that activity into other directions. When a

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[48]Cf. Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," p.206

[49]Gabel, La fausse conscience, p.85

[50]Sartre, Search for a Method, pp.94-95.

reified church dominates the spiritual life of society, individuals will seek fulfillment in other arenas, like politics or the arts. More microscopically, the reification of bureaucratic rules makes it impossible for those seeking services from the bureaucracy to receive them without considerable effort on their part, and may force them to remain unsatisfied.

"Reification," say Berger and Pullberg,

> minimizes the range of reflection and choice, autonomizes conduct in the socially prescribed channels and fixes the taken-for-granted perception of the world. Reification in this way comes close to being a functional imperative.[51]

In other words, reification causes things to happen in certain ways, and prohibits other kinds of activities. That, in the most fundamental sense, is social power.

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[51]Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," p.208.

CHAPTER V

REIFIED SOCIETY

> ...law aspires and ought to be something rational, and therefore demands that there be a distinction between person and thing.
> --Tönnies, Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft

Alienated individuals, whose wills, by definition, conflict with those of society at large, who seek to maximize their personal autonomy, independence, and power, do so by creating reifications, by infusing objects with intrinsic value.[1] Whether they do so consciously or unconsciously is of little matter, at least for the moment, although it is suspected that most reification is unconscious.

We are back, in a sense, to Rousseau's contention that alienated individuals should seek to make themselves dependent on things and not men.[2] In order for that dependence to work, however, the objects on which the individual is depending must themselves be sufficiently well-protected to guarantee permanence and solidity. They must, in other words, be reified, so that fleeting considerations of utility

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[1] Cf. Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," p.207

[2] Cf. Rousseau, Émile, p.49.

do not threaten their existence.

The petty bureaucrat, who adheres rigidly to a rule, insisting on its strict observance whether that observance meets the utilitarian goals for which the rule was created or not, provides a classic example. He reifies the rule. As a result, the rule becomes primarily an instrument for protecting his alienated particular will (preservation of his job security) rather than for promoting the General Will of the organization, the aim for which it was at least ostensibly created.

When objects acquire intrinsic value, those individuals who are identified with, or identify themselves with, them benefit. Conversely, individuals seeking to further their private interests often infuse with value those objects with which they are identified. If images of the flag become reified, for instance, those who wear them on their lapels will be able to enjoy the benefits of attaching themselves to an intrinsically-valued object. When society is alienated, in the sense that individuals pursue only their selfish interests, and an object is reified, in the sense that its intrinsic valuation is widely accepted, then those alienated individuals who are able to successfully attach themselves to reifications occupy a highly-favored position.

Put most schematically, the relationship between alienation and reification might be described as follows. Ali-

enation is the condition in which the private will of the individual diverges from the General Will of a social grouping. Reifications are objects valued intrinsically by society. If the alienated individual can identify himself with a reification which advances or favors his particular will, he acquires a powerful weapon in his conflict with society. Alienated individuals, acting rationally to protect their self-interests, will therefore seek to create, maintain, or strengthen those reifications which, valued in terms of the general values of the society, nonetheless promote private wills.

If a reversion to philosophical terminology may be excused, the linkage between alienation and reification can be understood in terms of the difference between essence and appearance. In their public guises, as perceived by society, reifications are intrinsically valuable; they appear to be good in themselves. But that is only because appearance is confused with essence, because reifications are mystified. In fact, reifications promote and support particular wills, which society does not value so positively. Consciously or unconsciously, the alienated individual who attaches himself to a reification takes advantage of this confusion. He employs the mystified appearance to conceal the fact that the essence promotes his will, and not that of society.

Attachment to a reification is thus a highly rational strategy for alienated individuals, seeking to protect their

interests, to pursue. Whether or not an individual will pursue that strategy depends on the adaptive intelligence and skill with which he confronts his environment, the availability of resources at his command--reification is often expensive--the availability of alternative protective devices, like great personal wealth or charisma, and the availability of likely reifiable objects.

In other words, the linkage between alienation and reification is highly contingent. But it is very strong nonetheless. Empirically, the social world is jammed fulled with examples of alienated individuals creating or sustaining reifications; logically, alienated individuals, as will be discussed in Chapter XI, have few other choices; morally and politically, the assumption that most individuals are pretty effective and pretty rational in protecting their most important interests is extremely useful. Not all alienated individuals create or promote reification--many are unable to--but enough do to fill the social world with reifications, and they do it because they are alienated.

How alienated individuals cause objects to acquire appearances of intrinsic value different from their essences --how mystification is accomplished--is a complex and difficult subject, involving all the elements of individual and mass persuasion, attitudinal change, public relations, and propaganda. In short, valuation is a form of social knowledge

like any other, created, disseminated, and elaborated in much the same ways.[3] The activities of someone seeking to create a reification through mystification resemble, in all essential respects, those of someone marketing a new variety of toothpaste, or campaigning for public office--often, indeed, they are identical. And success is also measured in the same way: by the general public acceptance of the reification's intrinsic value, or the desirability of the toothpaste or candidate.

In a highly secularized society, in which norms of equality and individual worth are paramount, individuals can rarely permit their pursuit of power to seem entirely personal. Attachment to a reified object, however, not only permits the individual to mystify his personal stake in the promotion of a particular will, but also allows, at the same time, a pose of disinterested selflessness and self-effacement. An oil company executive who can mystify his corporation's goal into one of "helping the nation meet its energy needs" or some such balderdash not only hides the extent to which the corporation's success is in his own interest, but also comes to appear as a valuable public servant; and the harder he works to maximize the value of his stock options, the more he appears as a selfless and disinterested servant of the common

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[3]Cf. Julius Kovesi, Moral Notions, Studies in Philosophical Psychology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), pp.47ff., for a discussion of how linguistic knowledge is disseminated.

weal.

And reifications also possess power. The real impact of the reification of the exemplary oil company comes, of course, not from the benefits to its executives' self-esteem and standing in the eyes of the community, but from the power they command in the corporation itself. An entirely unreified billion-dollar corporation, were such a beast at all possible either in logic or fact, would no doubt have considerable resources for influencing its environment; considerable power, that is.

But the power of a reified corporation is of an altogether different order, and far greater. So long as its activities are guided, or at least partially controlled, by the needs and interests of society as a whole, the corporation is seriously constrained in its actions towards its customers, employees, and the general public; in the nature of the items it produces and the prices it charges for them; in its decisions about plant location, investment allocation, and profit distribution. Once it is valued in itself, however, once it can legitimize all its activities in terms of reified objects like "the nation's energy needs" or "the growth of the national economy," it acquires a degree of autonomy and immunity from external control that permits it to do whatever it wants.

If power is the ability to impose one's will on others, the reified corporation, merely by being reified, and without

the addition of any other resources, possesses far more power than its unreified counterpart. Almost by definition, it can do as it chooses, since its activities will be accepted as right and legitimate merely because the corporation is intrinsically valued. Its actions need not even have the appearance of being socially useful, so long as the institution itself is reified.

It must be stressed, however, that the attachment to reifications because they possess power is, again, probably more often unconscious than conscious, and that most individuals who create or sustain reifications do so less from a kind of mad power lust than from the fear of being stripped and battered around by an alienated society whose will is not their own. The heavily-mortgaged working-class homeowner who supports reified zoning codes under the mystification of "local autonomy" or "maintaining property values" is as dependent on reifications as the oil executive, but his motivation is probably less conscious, and the power to which he attaches himself serves less to promote his selfish interest than to mollify his fears of losing what little he has.

In general, it might be argued that the propensity to reify exists as strongly, if not more strongly, among the disadvantaged classes of society than among those in power; the poor and powerless are certainly more likely to be alienated. But precisely because they are lacking in money, power,

and influence, the poor are less able to create reifications than the powerful. Still, one of the most widely-discussed reifications--although never discussed in these terms--is the creation of informal output norms, or "soldiering," among blue-collar workers. "A fair day's work" is an easily-accepted value, even when it comes to serve less as a standard of what is actually "fair" than as a means of protecting workers against their supervisors and employers.

The process of reification is, however, fundamentally ironic. The interests and wills of individuals change, specific goals grow or diminish in importance, attitudes and values are altered. And all people die. But while their wills are interred with their bones, the reifications they have created often live after them. An object, once infused with value, tends to retain that value; and objects, while hardly indestructible, are not mortal as people are. The political leader who reifies the state or one of its branches in order to serve his personal ends would often prefer the state dereified once he has lost power, but dereification is harder than reification. Workers laid off because management no longer feels a "fair day's wages" are economically justified by a "fair day's work" become trapped in reifications of their own creation, and are forced to accept either a substantial alteration in their personal values or a serious gap between their wills

and reality. And, as the case of the workers demonstrates, individuals are even more likely to be trapped and hamstrung by reifications of their own creation when they themselves, as often happens, have come to accept the intrinsic value of those reified objects.[4]

On the social level, reification thus tends to increase at a Malthusian, or at least Parkinsonian, rate. Individuals come and go, but their reifications remain behind, while new individuals are forced to create still more reifications in order not only to promote their particular wills but to counteract the effect of the reifications left behind by others. Rules generate counter-rules; political symbols generate counter-symbols; and protective or interest organizations generate counter-organizations. If the federal government is already reified, serving the interests of someone else--or even of no one at all--the alienated individual can only seek to reify the state government, or the county, or the "community."

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[4]The entire discussion in this paragraph closely parallels Sartre's description of the "practico-inerte" in his Critique de la raison dialectique, especially his notion of "counter-finality." Interestingly, if inevitably, Sartre also speaks of reification per se, but his discussion of it is far less interesting, and far less relevant to the theory of reification, than his general description of the "practico-inerte."

The Critique is a complex and maddening, if brilliant, work, and its basic concepts function on a level at once more microscopic--the simple phenomenological--and more macroscopic --the world-historical--than the discussion here. So rather than attempting to find and explain all the parallels, I will simply refer the reader to Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique de la raison dialectique (précédé de Question de méthode), Tome I, Theorie des ensembles pratiques (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp.165ff.

The dynamics of this process inhere in the very nature of reification. For so long as objects are perceived solely in terms of their instrumental values, their continued existence remains contingent on their continued usefulness. When a tool no longer serves the function for which it was created, it is discarded, unless it has acquired an intrinsic sentimental or artifactual value somewhere along the line. Intrinsically-valued objects, on the other hand, will tend to remain in existence until a major change in social values strips them of their reified quality. This is no less true for quasi-abstract objects, like organizations, than it is for concrete objects like sacred icons. Organizations, or icons, that have been reified will rarely vanish of their own accord; if they are not to continue to fill the social universe, they must be either demystified or destroyed.

The result of the tendency of reifications to remain in existence is a social world in which individuals, or social collectivities, have progressively less and less control over everything. Speaking in terms of the conventional Marxist notion of reification, Goldmann refers to the "anarchy" of capitalist society, denoting primarily the absence of conscious social control or planning.[5] The term is not strong enough; "anarchy" connotes merely the absence of authority, but reifi-

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[5]Goldmann, Recherches dialectiques, p.70.

cation tends to make authority increasingly impossible, as the social world becomes more and more filled with autonomous, intrinsically-valued, uncontrolled objects leading lives of their own.

Similarly, Louis Althusser, Goldmann's ideological enemy, speaks of Marx's conception of capitalism as one of a "process without a subject,"[6] and once the veil of Hegelian terminology is pierced, he is obviously talking about a social world that is controlled, not by humans acting either individually or collectively, but by objects over which individuals have lost control. The dominant metaphor for a general discussion of reification must be, not the Wicked Witch of the West, but Dr. Frankenstein's monster.

Confronted with a social world whose objects and institutions increasingly resist any form of social control, and many of which embody or promote particular wills in conflict with his own, the alienated individual responds by creating still more reifications. But these too come to escape his control, or can, at best, do little to promote his particular will. As a result, the individual becomes still more alienated: the gulf between his particular will and the General Will --which more and more becomes impossible of fulfillment, if

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[6]Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy, trans. Ben Brewster, Modern Readers (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), p.121.

not of expression--widens, as the particular wills of others increasingly threaten the individual. The vicious cycle of alienation-reification-alienation expands in Yeats's ever-widening gyre, and if mere anarchy is not loosed upon the world, it is only because objects have assumed the human tasks of governance.

Before examining this cycle in greater detail, or examining at any length specific instances of reification, it might be a good idea to list some examples or categories of reification, in order to further illustrate its nature and forms. This list is not exhaustive, and serves nothing more than an illustrative role.

The French psychiatrist Joseph Gabel, who has written extensively on reification, speaks often of the "reification of reason," or "morbid rationality," a dissociative condition characteristic of schizophrenics, in which the individual perceives his own behavior as governed by an abstract and immutable logic over which he can, and does, have no control.[7] In addition to clinical case-histories, Gabel offers Camus's Merseault, the Stranger, as an example of someone who has

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[7] Gabel, La fausse conscience, p.239 et passim; Gabel, "La Réification (Essai de psychopathologie de la pensée dialectique)," Esprit, XXIX (October, 1951), pp.459-482.

reified reason.[8]

On the social level, educational institutions are often accused of the reification of reason; by converting reason from a technique of human activity into an abstract, intrinsically-valued end, schools, it is argued, suppress the spontaneity, emotionality, and instincts of their students, thus warping their development by cutting them off from their own feelings and desires. The feelingless robot is said to be the desired, if rarely achieved, product of these institutions.

At its most extreme and terrifying level, the reification of reason approaches what Hannah Arendt has called "totalitarian logic," in which concrete human ends and desires are subjugated to the inexorable logical consequences of an idea. "The most persuasive argument in this respect," writes Arendt,

> an argument of which Hitler like Stalin was very fond is: You can't say A without saying B and C and so on, down to the end of the murderous alphabet. Here, the coercive force of logicality seems to have its source; it springs from our fear of contradicting ourselves.[9]

Arendt's discussion presents the paradigm of reification in

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[8]Gabel, "La Réification," passim.

[9]Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (2d ed.; Cleveland: World Publishing, 1958), pp.472-473; Cf.pp. 470ff. Gabel himself describes Nazi ideology as a prime example of reified thought; Cf. La fausse conscience, pp.97-109.

its starkest form. Logic, the science of ends and means, is itself converted from means to end, and human beings are crushed beneath it.

Still, the reification of reason, or logic, is really a subclass of what might be more generally described as the reification of technique. In its sources, forms, and effects, the reification of reason is not fundamentally different from the reification of "historical materialism," or of the techniques of "scientific management," psychoanalysis, or military warfare. By definition, techniques are means to ends; in practice, they tend to be reified, valued for their own sake, and followed more or less slavishly to the utter destruction of the ends they were designed to promote.

Closely related to the reification of technique is the reification of technicians. The line is narrow and hard to draw between a reasoned respect for technical competence and an unreasoning faith in professionals merely because they are professionals. But there is no question that the mystification and reification of professional roles is a widespread fact of considerable social importance, particularly in medicine, the military, and education. As a result of that reification, for instance, most professions in most states in this country, ranging from vetenarians to cosmetologists, are esentially self-governing and free of external control, in fact if not in form.

The reification of technicians or professionals is often confused with another problem, that of the reification of disciplines or specializations--what might be called the hardening of the categories. The division of labor and the demand for growing specialization of personal skills characterize much of modern society. But the insecurity and atomization involved in narrow specialization often leads to the mystification of specializations and the building of perceptual walls between them. The Englightenment ideal of a single, unified science has been replaced by the belief that everything from plumbing to taxation to motel management requires advanced training and arcane knowledge available only to the chosen few.

Knowledge is thus divided into a string of watertight compartments, and few individuals dare think themselves capable of moving from one to another. This hardening of the categories is, of course, most pronounced in the academic world, where it often produces the most limited and one-sided kind of scholarship, with advanced specialists talking essentially the same things past each other in differing jargons. But it is not limited to that world alone, as anyone who has ever watched a house built by union labor can readily attest.

Still another type of reification, one already mentioned, is that of symbols. As soon as the notion of men dying for their flag passes from the realm of mere metaphor,

reification is clearly at work. A much less serious example is found in the folk wisdom of Washington bureaucrats, who know that Congressmen are likely to be much more sympathetic to proposals that contain statistics. A similar idea is, of course, a central part of the folk wisdom of graduate students, especially in the social sciences. But lest anyone think that reification is purely a modern phenomenon, it might be a good idea to ponder the behavior of the Knights of the Roundtable in their pursuit of the Holy Grail.

Social behavior of all forms is, to a considerable extent, rule-governed behavior; rules are one of the principal forms of objectification, so much so that whole schools of philosophy, linguistics, and anthropology are founded in the belief that not only rule-making but the forms of rules are themselves inherent in human nature. But rules too can be reified.

No type of reification provides, perhaps, so clear an example of the relationship between alienation and reification as does the reification of rules. Political leaders faced with large alienated groups in the population invariably call for a respect for law in general, and the attempt is made to focus that respect not on the contents or ends of law, but on the institution of "the law" itself. The rigid adherence, ignoring all dictates of common sense or even common equity, to one anomalous law or another is a common demand of aliena-

ted groups and individuals. And Justice Holmes's dictum about shouting "fire!" in a crowded theater should serve as a reminder that even the best abstract legal or constitutional rules can be reified if adhered to regardless of circumstance or intent.

The importance to society of rules and rule-governed behavior, and the ease and frequency with which rules are reified, make rule-making one of society's most important functions, and rule-making positions its most desired roles. The higher one goes in the status hierarchy, whether within organizations or in society as a whole, the greater one's ability to make rules and, even more importantly, the greater one's ability to ignore rules made by others.

Rules are made to be broken--by those having enough wealth, status, or power to break them, or make and enforce counter-rules. Discipline is for privates, not generals, and official limousines rarely get speeding tickets. In an important way, then, the world of lower and even middle-class individuals is much more reified than that of the upper classes; ordinary citizens lack the power or resources to overcome reified rules. More alienated, one suspects, to begin with, lower and middle-class individuals are thus also more harassed by reifications which, as has been seen, are still more alienating. The alienated get more alienated and the powerful get more powerful.

Given this parade of horribles, one might be tempted to believe that Marx was correct, that in contemporary society all objects are reifications. But that would be much too simple, and simplistic, a conclusion. It is probably true that, to coin an ugly word, all objects are reifiable. It must be remembered, however, that objectifications are useful and entirely necessary, and that when not reified, techniques, professional roles, structural principles, intellectual and vocational categories, and rules are all necessary and useful social objects.

Any consideration of reification which does not keep the question of usefulness or utility foremost in mind will find not too few, but too many reifications; indeed, will find reifications in everything. On the other hand, of course, a kind of vulgar structural-functional approach to social reality, which finds the utility of objects proved by their mere existence, is not much help either. Whether or not any given object is a reification must be considered entirely problematic until the way in which that object is perceived and valued is well understood.

The study of reification is fundamentally and constantly the study of the functions, manifest and latent, performed by social objects, and the ways in which those functions are perceived by members of society. The idea of reification demands of all objects the most fundamental of political questions:

cui bono? But it permits, even expects, the answer to often be: no one. It provides a perspective, a vantage point, from which to observe social phenomena and evaluate them in terms of their relationships to human desires and needs. Moreover, as already discussed, it demonstrates at least some of the social consequences of alienation. The theory of reification presented here has been self-consciously designed with the goals of evaluative and descriptive social inquiry in mind; how well it meets those goals can be determined only by observing how the theory works when applied to concrete cases.

CHAPTER VI

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

> ...it should be kept clearly in mind that the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief...
> --Weber, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft

The large, formal, purposive organization is the distinctive social form of modern civilization. As a tool, an instrument for the attainment of social ends, the large organization is generally, and quite correctly, thought to have created the prosperity, diversity, and complexity of modern life. To think or speak of politics, economics, or sociology in modern society is, by and large, to think or speak of formal organizations.

The great theorists of organization have all, of course, insisted that many important needs can best, or only, be served by organizations, and much of their case is incontrovertible.[1] The widespread diffusion of information, goods, and culture can be accomplished only by complex organizational instruments.

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[1] Cf. most famously, of course, Max Weber, Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft), ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, III vols., (New York: Bedminster Press, 1968), I, p.337; III, pp.973ff.

But, like all other nonhuman social objects, organizations can be reified, and their importance to society and social life is so great that the temptation for alienated individuals to reify organizations will always be very powerful. Most organizations purport to be performing some social function, filling some social need. In that sense, they are self-styled instruments of the General Will. But many organizations serve only particular wills; because they have been infused with value--reified--they are able nonetheless to continue in existence and exert considerable power over social affairs.

The problem of organizational reification is particularly acute because, in order to function effectively as non-reified tools, organizations must develop a number of characteristics which make them susceptible to reification. Employee and managerial loyalty; favorable public recognition of "brand names" or trademarks; the commitment of considerable resources to rationalizing and making more scientific the internal workings of the organization--all generally lead, in the short run, to an increase in the organization's efficiency as a social tool, but all tend strongly to the transformation of the organization into something valued intrinsically, for itself.[2]

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[2]Cf. S. N. Eisenstadt, Essays on Comparative Institutions (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965), pp.182-193.

Philip Selznick has described the process by which organizations acquire intrinsically-valued status as one of "institutionalization;" more precisely, he defines as institutionalization the process by which organizations become "infused with value."[3] The familiar ring of that term for those who have read the preceeding pages is not accidental. For the purpose at hand, Selznick's definition will be adopted completely, with the addition of the theory of reification, so that institutionalization is reification, or at least one of the forms of reification. Formal organizations, social objects created to meet social needs, become infused with intrinsic value, which is to say institutionalized, or reified.

This form of reification is as pervasive as it is important. As the largest, most powerful, and in many ways most consequential of social objects, formal organizations play a special role in modern society; when reified, they are an extremely important class of reifications.

Most of the balance of this work will be devoted to formal organizations, primarily because of their importance --although limitations on the author's time and interests, and the narrower limitations on readers' patience, have also contributed to that decision. The relationship between reifi-

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[3]Philip Selznick, Leadership in Administration: A Sociological Interpretation (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p.17.

cation and formal organization will be considered first in the abstract, then a little more concretely. It is important to emphasize, however, that the decision to focus on formal organizations is at least somewhat arbitrary. Other forms of reification--of language, or interpersonal relationships, of social roles, and so forth--also occur, are also important, and are also, hopefully, accounted for by the general theory discussed in the preceeding pages. It has simply been necessary to draw some boundaries.

To begin with a terminological matter: since I have equated institutionalization with reification, the term "institution" will henceforth be reserved for organizations which have been reified, while "organizations," by exclusion, will be used to refer to non-reified entities. "Institutionalization," similarly, will be reserved for the special processes of reification of organizations, for the creation of institutions in the sense adopted here.

Selznick begins his discussion of institutionalization by making his own distinction between organizations and institutions. "The term 'organization,'" he writes,

> thus suggests a certain bareness, a lean, no-nonsense system of consciously co-ordinated activities. It refers to an expendable tool, a rational instrument engineered to do a job. An "institution," on the other hand, is more nearly a natural product of social needs and pressures--a responsive, adaptive organism.[4]

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[4] Ibid., p.5, emphasis his.

Institutionalization, Selznick insists, is a historical process of growth, of adaptation to the environment. In order to survive in a hostile world, the organization must develop and evolve into something other than it was to start with. "When an enterprise begins to be more profoundly aware of dependence on outside forces," says Selznick,

> its very conception of itself may change....As a business, a college, or a government agency develops a distinctive clientele, the enterprise gains the stability that comes with a secure source of support, an easy channel of communication. At the same time, it loses flexibility. The process of institutionalization has set in.[5]

According to Karl Deutsch:

> In simple language, to have power means not to have to give in, and to force the environment or the other person to do so. Power in this narrow sense is the priority of output over intake, the ability to talk instead of listen. In this sense, it is the ability to afford not to learn.[6]

The adaptability of which Selznick and other proponents of the view that organizations are, or should be, "open systems"[7] speak is thus a product of weakness, of the insufficiency of power.[8]

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[5] Ibid., p.7.

[6] Karl W. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government: Models of Political Communication and Control (2d ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1966), p.111.

[7] Cf. Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1966), pp.19ff.; James D. Thompson, Organizations in Action: Social Bases of Administrative Theory (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), pp.6-10.

[8] Cf. Thompson, Organizations in Action, pp.30-31.

Here is the crucial point: this weakness springs from the general alienation of society. In a perfectly non-alienated society, in which the General Will was willed by all, organizations would not require power, and there would be no hostile environment to adapt to. The tasks for which the organization was designed would be accepted by everyone, and the organization's social environment would reinforce, not challenge, its original aims. Only when a dissensus on goals exists in society do organizations need power to perform their tasks, and adaptibility to survive in their environments.

In his inimitable style, Talcott Parsons has written that, "the most essential feature of the value system of an organization is the evaluative legitimation of its place or "role" in the superordinate system."[9] In other words, in order to exist and function effectively in society, organizations must convince their members, and non-members, that what they are doing, and how they are doing it, constitute legitimate efforts to meet socially-accepted goals in socially-accepted ways. In Rousseau's terms, the will of the organization must not conflict with the General Will of society in order for the organization to legitimately come into being. Or at least the will of the organization must be made to appear not to conflict with the General Will. Corporate and other

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[9]Talcott Parsons, Structure and Process in Modern Societies (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1960), p.20.

organizational charters provide beautiful examples of the ways organizations attempt to legitimize their creation, even though they may be alienated from the start.[10] "A formal organization," says Parsons at another, more lucid point, "...is a mechanism by which goals somehow important to the society, or to various subsystems of it, are implemented and to some degree defined."[11]

Parsons's analysis is incomplete, because it ignores the problem of alienation. In alienated society, in order to meet goals not in conflict with the General Will, legitimate organizations require power. Socially desirable goals can only be attained by overriding or end-running the wills of alienated individuals and institutions. But power is a paradoxical commodity. Were society not alienated, it would be readily available, but hardly necessary; the pursuit of generally-accepted goals would meet with the happy acquiescence

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[10] On legitimacy, cf. Peter L. Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion, Anchor Books, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1969), pp.29ff.

[11] Talcott Parsons, Structure and Process in Modern Societies, p.63. Excluded from this analysis, of course, are all illegal or antilegal organizations, which specifically oppose at least some important social values, and must therefore function in secret or in hiding. Even here, though, illegal organizations or their members often seek to legitimize themselves by appeal to widely-accepted values, in what might be called the "Godfather" syndrome. But the vast majority of organizations exist, or attempt to appear to exist, well within the framework of what society considers to be legitimate or acceptable conduct. Even groups of bandits prefer to present themselves to the world as Robin Hoods.

of everyone. In alienated society, where organizations need power in order to meet legitimate social needs, it is much harder to come by. Organizations are likely to have difficulty acquiring enough, and if they fail to do so, they must either adapt or die.[12]

But institutions, directly as a result of their reified nature, do have power. The adaptation which permits underpowered organizations to survive is precisely that of becoming reified--becoming institutionalized.

An example might help illustrate some of the complexities involved. Amtrak, the national passenger railroad corporation, was established for the entirely laudable and almost uncontroversial purpose of restoring passenger rail service in the United States. Its creation was made necessary by the alienated cupidity of the major railroads, and the internally reified incompetence of the Interstate Commerce Commission, which has long been dominated by interests hostile to passenger railroad activities. But Amtrak has never had enough power to accomplish its goals, as a direct result of the reified legitimacy of the railroads and private enterprise in general, which not only made direct nationalization politically unthinkable, but also forced Amtrak to show more consideration and respect for the railroads' interests than they deserved. Expectably

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[12]Cf. Norton E. Long, The Polity, ed. Charles Press (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1962), p.50 et ff.

enough, Amtrak has lost large amounts of money while failing even to meet its modest preliminary goals.[13]

Short of a massive infusion of power, either through a direct statutory change or a considerable increase in funding, both of which are unlikely since they would require the acquiescence of a number of particular wills and their representatives in Congress, Amtrak will die--unless it becomes institutionalized. That second, more plausible alternative would involve the adaptation of Amtrak to its alienated environment through the development of a powerful supportive constituency, either among a selective clientele group (most likely members of the Eastern elite who regularly travel intercity in the Boston-Washington corridor) or the railroads. Those constituencies would permit Amtrak to become institutionalized by conferring on it a political legitimacy which would guarantee its continued success in the Congressional appropriations process.

In either event, the price of Amtrak's survival would be the conversion of its goals from those of helping to develop an efficient and comprehensive national transportation system to serving the interests of a narrow group at the expense of the general good. Most likely, Amtrak will provide great benefits to its Northeast Corridor riders at considerable expense

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[13]Cf. Alexander R. Hammer, "What Price Amtrak?" The New York Times, February 18, 1973, III 1:1; "Railroads: A Trimmer Amtrak Is Given a Chance," Business Week, March 17, 1973, pp.24-25; and "Railroads: Light in Amtrak's Tunnel," Time, March 26, 1973, p.82.

to taxpayers in other parts of the country, who will continue to suffer from the absence of decent rail transportation. And once again, a government organization established to serve the public weal will, because of the shortage of power for good works and the continued reified legitimacy of private interests, become nothing more than a device through which the poor and middle-class subsidize the rich.

Institutionalization is a paradoxical phenomenon. Organizations in alienated society have difficulty surviving without it, but the price of survival is a Faustian bargain, the costs of which, for society, may exceed the gains. "When the organization confronts a changing environment," writes Samuel Huntington, whose provocative Political Order In Changing Societies shares Selznick's appreciation of institutionalization, but far surpasses it in its regard for stability, "it must, if it is to survive, weaken its commitment to its original functions."[14] The first baggage thrown overboard by an organization in the process of institutionalization is the only thing that, socially, can justify its existence.[15] In order to survive in an alienated world, organizations must become alienated. They must put their own maintenance ahead

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[14]Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp.15-16.

[15]Cf. William H. Starbuck, "Organizational Growth and Development," in James G. March, ed., Handbook of Organizations (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co.,) pp. 474-476.

of the interests of society. Institutionalization is the process by which legitimate organizations lacking the power which stems from social consensus guarantee their survival. Its first step is the negation of the very sources of organizational legitimacy. Such a conclusion will disturb only those who believe that non-human social objects have some special claim to existence--only those, that is, who have already taken for granted, as a positive good, the reified character of institutions.

The relationship between alienation and institutionalization has another dimension. According to Selznick, the motor that drives the institutionalization process is the private needs and desires of individuals who, in the terms employed here, are alienated. The members of formal organizations "are not content to be treated as manipulable or expendable. As human beings and not mere tools they have their own needs for self-protection and self-fulfillment..."[16] Yet if the members of an organization share its goals, their subordination to them will not be manipulation, and their "expendability" will not be a problem. Similarly, their needs for self-protection and self-fulfillment would be adequately met by a non-reified organization if they were not alienated

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[16]Selznick, Leadership in Administration, p.8.

to begin with.

If the wills of society, the organization, and the individual all coincide, the needs of the individual are best met by an organization that is as efficient and effective as possible, that remains an expendable tool. Only when the will of the individual diverges from that of society does he need to transform the organization into an end in itself, which will shield and protect him from society at large.

Selznick expands on the relationship between personal need and the drive for institutionalization in another passage, which also contains the famous phrase on infusion with value:

> To institutionalize is to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand. The prizing of social machinery beyond its technical role is largely a reflection of the unique way in which it fullfils personal or group needs. Whenever individuals become attached to an organization or a way of doing things as persons rather than as technicians, the result is a prizing of the device for its own sake. From the standpoint of the committed person, the organization is changed from an expendable tool into a valued source of personal satisfaction.[17]

Selznick's rhetorical distinction between "persons" and "technicians" should not be allowed to mislead. The "persons" of whom he speaks are alienated individuals, at odds with the will of society, and thus with the narrow technical task by which the existence of the organization is socially legitimated.

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[17] Ibid., p.17.

Attachment to the organization itself, as opposed to its original definition of tasks, can only come from a failure to accept those tasks as one's own, and that in turn can only come from a conflict with the General Will of society. The device becomes prized for its own sake because its original goals are not prized. As Parsons correctly argued, organizations can come into being only when the tasks they set for themselves are broadly acceptable to the general value-system of society. For the alienated individual, that is not good enough. His needs and those of society are different, and in order for his organizational membership to be a vehicle for personal satisfaction, the organization must be diverted from its original purposes and transformed into an intrinsically-valued institution. It must be reified.

The first characteristic of institutionalization, according to Selznick, is the development of a certain level of internal rigidity,[18] which seems to stand in direct opposition to the institution's development as an adaptive organism, but which in fact comes to determine the direction in which the institution adapts. Those internal procedures, values, and practices which protect individual needs come to take precedence over the original goals of the organization--this is

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[18] Ibid., pp.8-9.

the source both of the new rigidity and of the need for adaptation.

This rigidity is precisely of the kind described by Gabel as an "artificial stability," characteristic of reifications produced by alienated consciousness.[19] Alienated individuals often attempt to impose order on their social environments by reifying objects which hold the potential of protecting their interests. The organization as a whole, prior to its institutionalization, cannot serve as such an object, since its goals diverge from those of its alienated members. But its procedures, practices, and internal status system can, once they have become reified.

Institutions adapt to their alienated environments in order to survive, but neither the source of that survival instinct nor any notion of just what it is that survives has yet been suggested. The missing link lies precisely in the internal rigidity of institutions. Their essential cores--their souls, so to speak--consist of internal hierarchies and practices which, originally established as means to organizational ends, become ends in themselves as the organization becomes institutionalized. The organization feels a need to adapt because the desires of its leading members for perpetuation of internal practices conflicts with its original goals.

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[19] See above, p.104.

What survives adaptation, if it succeeds, is the procedural internal core.[20]

The rigidity of institutions is not only internal. Selznick again is right on the mark:

> The test of infusion with value is expendability. If an organization is merely an instrument, it will be readily altered or cast aside when a more efficient tool becomes available. When value-infusion takes place, however, there is a resistance to change.[21]

In a non-alienated social system, in which all resources were committed to the most rational and effective service of social ends, there would be no qualms about altering or discarding organizational instruments as soon as they became outmoded--or successful. The reification produced by alienation tends to cause organizations to hang on long after they have lost any important social utility. They continue to occupy and even dominate the social universe, to exert power and influence over public affairs, long after their justification for existence has passed. No matter how damaging their activities are for society, their existence remains unchallenged, because they have become infused with value. Edward Banfield puts it well:

> The end of organizational maintenance--of keeping the organization going for the sake of keeping it going--

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[20] Cf. Starbuck, "Organizational Growth and Development," p.476.

[21] Selznick, Leadership in Administration, p.21.

> is usually more important than any substantive end. The salmon perishes in order to give birth to its young. Organizations, however, are not like salmon; they prefer sterility to death.[22]

Nor are institutions readily altered once they have become institutionalized. Given the infusion with value, it might seem an attractive strategy to permit the external, reified appearance to remain, while remaking the internal core of the institution in order to serve social needs. This kind of co-optation is, indeed, frequently attempted, particularly when a small band of reformers seeks to advance a common good that is not yet generally recognized as such by the public at large, and so attempts to legitimize its activities by protecting them behind a reified institutional shield.

But this strategy is unlikely to succeed. At the core of every institution, after all, are its fixed and reified internal practices and procedures, which have been created precisely to serve the needs of alienated institutional members as opposed to the general good, and which constitute

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[22]Edward C. Banfield, "Ends and Means in Planning," in Sidney Mailick and Edward H. Van Ness, eds., Concepts and Issues in Public Administration (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p.77; Cf. Weber, Economy and Society, I, p.202. An hilarious, if deadly serious, example is provided by Edward L. Katzenbach, "The Horse Cavalry in the Twentieth Century: A Study on Policy Response," in Carl J. Friedrich and Seymour E. Harris, eds., Public Policy, A Yearbook of the Graduate School of Public Administration, Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.: Graduate School of Public Administration, 1958), pp.120-149.

essentially what the institution is. In most cases, institutions simply cannot be salvaged. If it is possible to attack reification at all, it would be better to abolish the reified institution altogether, rather than retaining the reified shell and attempting to alter the internal core.

The quest for stability and unexpendability extends to the inter-organizational level as well as the organizational and intra-organizational. Sociologists of organization have long argued that institutions (or at least organizations with self-oriented goals) seek to insure stability and the reduction of uncertainty by creating "negotiated environments," in which relationships with other individuals and organizations are fixed and regularized.[23] Relationships between institutions thus become institutionalized themselves, with the stability and regularity of the relationship coming to take precedence over original organizational goals. "Artificial stability" is thus extended from within the institution to society as a whole.

The pernicious consequences of this stabilization are theoretically and empirically obvious. As purposive tools with definite social goals, organizations can legitimately function well only to the extent that they create change

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[23]Cf. Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, A Behavioral Theory of the Firm (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p.120; James Thompson, Organizations in Action, pp.20-24.

in the social order. Organizations are created in the first place, says Kenneth Boulding, in order to reduce the distance between the ideal and the real.[24] Institutionalization, both within the institution and in its relations with other social objects, not only prevents change, but reinforces stability precisely in those areas of social life where there exists a recognized need for change. The recurrently ironic theme of modern reformist and even radical politics, first sounded perhaps by Michels,[25] that organized activity for change often results only in the reinforcement of the status quo, is produced by institutionalization.

The production of stability through institutionalization when there should be change, or even conflict, is best exemplified in American society when organizations originally designed to protect legitimate social interests through adversary processes become institutionalized and develop institutionalized relationships with their putative adversaries. Robert Dubin is not the only one to have recognized this process in labor-management relations, where the interests of both workers and management become subordinated to the insti-

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[24]Kenneth E. Boulding, The Organizational Revolution: A Study in the Ethics of Economic Organization (2d ed.; Chicago: Quadrangle, 1966), p.73.

[25]Cf. Robert Michels, Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Free Press, 1962), esp. pp.333ff.

tutional needs of the labor-relations process and its participants.[26]

David Sudnow has observed much the same process in Public Defender offices, where the difficulty of functioning in an extremely hostile environment provides powerful incentive for the adaptive institutionalization, not only of the offices themselves but, more importantly, of their relationships with prosecutorial agencies and the courts. The adversary ideal of criminal justice is totally subverted, and the interests of indigent defendants are often sacrificed to those of the Public Defenders and their institutionalized relationships with other agencies.[27]

"The transformation of expendable technical organizations into institutions," says Selznick, "is marked by a concern for self-maintenance.[28] In the exceedingly useful terms provided by Lawrence Mohr, the change from organization to institution is characterized by the substition of reflexive

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[26]Cf. Robert Dubin, "Power and Union-Management Relations," in William A. Faunce, ed., Readings in Industrial Sociology (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1967), pp.465-481.

[27]David Sudnow, "Normal Crimes: Sociological Features of the Penal Code in a Public Defender Office," Social Problems, XII (Winter, 1965), esp. pp.264-265. But cf. also Jerome H. Skolnick's fascinating, "Social Control in the Adversary System," The Journal of Conflict Resolution, XI (March, 1967), pp.52ff.

[28]Selznick, Leadership in Administration, p.20, emphasis his.

for transitive goals.[29] The institution becomes increasingly concerned with itself, less and less with the surrounding society.[30] Like all reifications, it becomes sufficient unto itself, with the consequences of all reification: power flows, not to those who can best wield it for society, but to alienated individuals promoting their narrow self-interests; social resources are channeled into the fulfillment of the egoistic needs of a few, rather than towards the fulfillment of widely-shared values; and the real workings of the social world are mystified and hidden behind a veil of legitimating myth.

Selznick, indeed, lists as the first of the "aspects of adaptive change," "the development of administrative ideologies." Sometimes, he says, "they are created and manipulated self-consciously, but most administrative ideologies emerge in spontaneous and unplanned ways, as natural aids to organizational security."[31] The task of creating and maintaining those ideologies belongs to administrative leaders, or "statesmen," as Selznick would call them. "To create an

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[29]Lawrence B. Mohr, "The Concept of Organizational Goal," American Political Science Review, LXVII (June, 1973), pp.475-476.

[30]Cf. Charles Perrow, Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay, Scott, Foresman Introduction to Modern Society Series, (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, and Co., 1972), pp.188-189.

[31]Selznick, Leadership in Administration, p.14.

institution," he says in peroration,

> we rely on techniques for infusing day-to-day behavior with long-run meaning and purpose. One of the most important of these techniques is the elaboration of socially integrating myths. These are efforts to state, in the language of uplift and idealism, what is distinctive about the aims and methods of the enterprise.[32]

Those given to employing less precise and less exalted names have long known that public-relations is one of the primary functions of top organizational executives.

Institutionalization is effected by legitimation. Legitimacy which inheres directly in an object is synonomous, of course, with reification, but it is useful, perhaps, to think of institutional reification in the narrower terms of legitimation, since doing so makes so much of institutional behavior readily explicable. More precisely, the form of intrinsic value which institutions acquire is that of moral and political legitimacy.

All the important aspects of institutions as reifications revolve around the institution's legitimacy. Unexpendability, the protection of core practices and procedures, the abandonment of original goals in favor of self-maintenance--all are made possible by the institution's status as a legitimate (i.e., reified) social object.

Every institution has a fundamental public-relations

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[32] Ibid., p.151.

problem. Organizations must legitimate themselves in terms of publicly-accepted goals, and every organization is founded with a specific social function in mind. In order to continue functioning once they are no longer organizations but institutions, institutions must maintain their legitimacy after the original source--a legitimate social purpose--is gone. Infusion with value must be made to happen.[33] Institutions must reify themselves by legitimating themselves.

Above all else, legitimation solves the problem of the institution's relationship with its environment. It provides power, by establishing the institution and all its activities as a legitimate social entity; or, stated differently, it provides the institution with all the justification it will ever need, thus permitting the abandonment of socially useful goals without jeapordizing the institution's survival.[34]

Sometimes, institutions legitimize themselves through what Charles Perrow has called the "extrinsic characteristics" of their products, in which institutions reify not themselves but their products.[35] The example of functionally harmful

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[33]Cf. Eisenstadt, Essays on Comparative Institutions, pp.40-44.

[34]Cf. Charles Perrow, "Organizational Prestige: Some Functions and Dysfunctions," American Journal of Sociology, LXVI (January, 1961), p.335.

[35]Ibid., p.336ff.

automotive styling provided by Perrow is, of course, a classic case. So, too, is the public emphasis placed by government officials on the loyalty, dedication, neatness, and courtesy of their essentially non-functional subordinates.

Most often, however, institutions legitimize themselves directly. Simple reflection will reveal that this is a far surer and more rational strategy, since it guarantees that whatever goals the organization is or is not meeting, it remains legitimate. And that legitimacy is necessary because, in Mohr's terms, institutions come to be totally committed to reflexive, self-serving goals.[36]

The purest example of a reified institution is undoubtedly the modern nation-state, particularly those states which could in some sense be said to have been founded by the free action of their citizenry. Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel in more ways than one. Or, as Max Weber wrote:

> Experience shows that in no instance does domination voluntarily limit itself to the appeal of material or affectual or ideal motives as a basis for its continuance. In addition, every such system attempts to establish and to cultivate the belief in its legitimacy.[37]

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[36]Charles Perrow rightly insists that many large institutions feel no need to change their goals, having the power to do whatever they want: Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay, p.201. They must, however, displace their stated, founding, legitimizing goals in order to become institutions at all.

[37]Weber, Economy and Society, I, p.213.

Institutions claim, not that they serve a need, but that they deserve, or have a right, to exist, simply because they are themselves.[38]

In a curious kind of way, the process of institutionalization provides a powerful incentive to fail. If an organization with a finite purpose meets the needs for which it was uniquely created, there is little to prevent its abolition. Its members and employees, sharing a commitment to the goals of society, would be just as happy to see it go. But an institution can never afford to succeed entirely; to do so would be suicidal.

The example from the economic sphere springs immediately to mind: planned obsolescence is the mechanism by which manufacturers of consumer products guarantee a continued need for their existence; if the products lasted forever, they would soon succeed themselves right out of business. In matters of somewhat more moment, it is a simple truism that no sooner is one war over--or, if the institution is really wise, even before it is over--than the military has already identified the major threat in the next. In contrast, the government organization most widely agreed to have been entirely successful in the last decade, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, has paid the price in the form of

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[38]Cf. Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," p.207.

extensive dismantling.

Alternatively, institutions can make success impossible by becoming so reified that they have no goals at all. What they do no longer matters, only what they are. One thinks immediately of urban police departments in ghetto areas which, when their members are threatened by community violence, become so concerned with protecting themselves that they serve no other useful function,[39] or political organizations which, over time, come to be nothing more than social centers for their memberships.

The amount of energy, money, and other scarce resources devoted to the care and feeding of institutions whose true operative goals are essentially antisocial or, at best, purely self-serving is staggering. Still more pernicious is the general distortion of social values created by the continued legitimacy of organizations which serve only themselves.

The legitimation process which reifies institutions is largely performed by, and redounds largely to the benefit of, those on top. Selznick insists that institutionalization benefits members at all levels of the organization, since those on the bottom need the security and stability it provides

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[39] Cf. Andy Logan, "Around City Hall: A Hail of Bullets," The New Yorker, March 24, 1973, p.82 et ff.

as much as those at the top.[40] But only those holding power within an institution are in a position to take advantage of the power it assumes as a result of the legitimating-reifying process.[41] General Motors's power in the national arena provides only the most marginal of benefits for its assembly-line workers, and then only because they are alienated from their counterparts at Ford and Chrysler, not to mention the purchasers of automobiles or automobile workers in Germany and Japan. But it must surely be of some satisfaction to the Chairman of the Board that, when he talks, people listen.

In general, I would like to contend, reification on the institutional level--reification of the institution as a whole--as opposed to reification within it, remains almost exclusively the province of top officials. Not only do they have the most to gain; because they command organizational resources they have the tools with which the institutionalizing process can be accomplished.

In this sense, Selznick identifies the role of organizational leadership as one of communications and "the creation of administrative ideologies."[42] Discussing a slightly different phenomenon, Max Weber wrote that the basis of insti-

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[40]Cf. Selznick, Leadership in Administration, pp.8-9.

[41]Cf. Perrow, Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay, pp.201-202.

[42]Selznick, Leadership in Administration, p.14.

tutionalization was "the needs of privileged strata to legitimize their social and economic conditions, that is, to transform them from mere resultants of power relationships into acquired rights, and hence to sanctify them."[43] But Weber did not go far enough. Institutionalization not only legitimizes the power of elites; by creating new spheres of legitimacy, it also provides elites with new sources of power.[44]

Reification, it should be remembered, creates power by creating autonomous, uncontrollable spheres of social activity. For elites, power follows legitimacy just as legitimacy follows power. "The power of the rich," says Perrow, "lies not in their ability to buy goods and services, but in their capacity to control the ends toward which the vast resources of large organizations are directed."[45] This power is only effective when organizations have been legitimized, and the rich are thus able to subvert organizational goals to their own ends.

In this sense, although hardly in this sense alone, the theory of reification agrees comfortably with those who see modern society as being at the mercy of elites. Lower-class and lower-status persons are not, however, without

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[43]Weber, Economy and Society, III, p.1146.

[44]Cf. James Thompson, Organizations in Action, p.33.

[45]Charles Perrow, Complex Organizations: A Critical Essay, p.14; Cf. also pp.200-201.

resources or targets of reification. They must simply set their sights lower. The reification they produce is less visible.[46]

This should not be taken to mean, however, that reification, whoever produces it, necessarily results from a conscious or rational decision to advance individual interests by creating mystifications. It is entirely possible that the President of General Motors really believed that what was good for himself personally was good for the nation as a whole. Powerful individuals possess no greater immunity to myths, even those of their own creation, than anyone else, and the image of the ruthlessly cynical enterpreneur callously manipulating the public mind, while attractive, may well be less than entirely accurate.[47] At the very least, most institutions perform the tasks of selecting and indoctrinating their personnel well enough so that, in any institution more than a generation old, those who spout the legitimating myths have been exposed to them for so long, and are so deeply entwined in the affairs of the institution, that the failure to believe would create serious cognitive dissonance.

Defenders of institutionalization, among whom Hunt-

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[46] See the next chapter.

[47] Cf. John Kenneth Galbraith, The New Industrial State, Signet Books (New York: New American Library, 1967), pp.167-168.

ington is probably the most ardent, insist that it is indispensable. Without it, Huntington says, chaos replaces order, and progress gives way to degeneration. So directly does Huntington confront the issue that he must be cited at length:

> Political institutions have moral as well as structural dimensions. A society with weak political institutions lacks the ability to curb the excesses of personal and parochial desires. Politics is a Hobbesian world of unrelenting competition among social forces--between man and man, family and family, clan and clan, region and region, class and class--a competition unmediated by more comprehensive political organizations. The "amoral familism" of Banfield's backward society has its counterparts in amoral clanism, amoral groupism, amoral classism. Morality requires trust; trust involves predictability; and predictability requires regularized and institutionalized patterns of behavior. Without strong political institutions, society lacks the means to define and to realize its common interests. The capacity to create public institutions is the capacity to create public interests.[48]

The reference to Hobbes, in addition to the entire tone of the passage, make it clear that Huntington is taking alienated society as a given. Certainly, that assumption is empirically correct; moreover, it underlies this entire work.

And Hobbes, to be sure, made explicit the need to institutionalize the sovereign by surrounding him with a body of legitimating doctrine.[49] He, like Huntington, sought to

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[48]Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, p.24.

[49]Cf. Thomas Hobbes, De Cive, or The Citizen, ed. Sterling P. Lamprecht (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949), Preface, pp.7-11.

counter alienation by creating reifications. Alienated individuals, the argument goes, are selfish, insecure, desirous of stability. Their wants can be channelled and controlled only by the creation of institutions.

But that argument is doubly flawed. First, institutionalization may provide an outlet for needs created by the existence of alienation, but it hardly abolishes them. If anything, it not only perpetuates alienation, but exacerbates it as well. To recapitulate an earlier argument, the creation of reifications only adds new demands, needs, and powers--those of reified institutions--to the general war of all against all. Instead of bringing individual wills more in harmony with the General Will, institutionalization creates more individual wills. And these new wills lack even the justification of belonging to adult, rational, free human beings. Institutionalization merely legitimizes the particular wills of non-human objects.

An alienated individual who benefits from the order, predictability, and security institutionalization provides must still live in a social world full of organizations, and once they in turn become institutionalized, he finds himself worse off than before. Owning stock in General Motors might incline one to look favorably on its institutionalization, but that will eventually be accompanied by the parallel institutionalization of Chrysler and (eventually) Ford, not to

mention the corporations which supply the stockholder with his food, clothing, and shelter--and man does not live by transportation alone. The increased dividends from General Motors will hardly cover the increased prices produced by the institutionalization of Standard Oil, Continental Baking, and DuPont.

That is why Hobbes insisted that there be only one institution in society. As soon as there is more than one, society becomes divided by the presence of competing and unchallengeable particular wills, and unified social action becomes impossible.

But Hobbes ignored what Rousseau knew: the sovereign, once institutionalized, was perfectly likely to develop a particular will of its own. Only on Hobbes's assumption that the General Will wills order first and above all can his defense of institutionalization be justified.

But, to return to Huntington's exegesis of Hobbes, there may be a simpler way out. All the functions Huntington assigns to institutions can, at least theoretically, be fulfilled by organizations. The assumption, frequent and popular in the conservative tradition, that organizations must be mystified and mythified in order to function gives very little credit to the potential of ordinary individuals for the the rational and intelligent conduct of their lives. No one believes that efficient public fire-fighting depends

on the institutionalization of fire departments--although they, too, at least in their volunteer incarnations, have had their mythologists. It may be possible that more complex and difficult social tasks can also be performed without reification, although extended discussion of that possibility must be postponed for a while.

What might have struck the reader as a distinctly anarchist caste in the immediately preceeding pages should thus be considered in light of the distinction between institutions and organizations. The abolition of reifications would hardly leave society without any mechanisms for governing itself. After all, the proponents of institutionalization insist that organizations are precisely "merely" technical tools for getting the job done. No matter how alienated society is, that should be enough. The alternative, reified institutions, is simply too costly.

CHAPTER VII

BUREAUCRACY

> Every work of man is a compromise between the material and the tool.
> —Leszek Kolakowski, Toward A Marxist Humanism

Institutionalization, although a serious problem, is not the only reification-caused disease to which organizations are susceptible. Even more pervasive, and far more irritating to the general public, are the assemblage of pathologies normally associated with the idea of "bureaucracy."

Bureaucracy affects both organizations and institutions. In both cases, it is an important cause of alienation among non-members, since bureaucratic reifications represent the embodied particular wills of organizational or institutional members. Non-members, compelled by the exigencies of modern life to deal constantly with bureaucracies, find those encounters frustrating, unsatisfying, and alienating.

Perhaps more importantly, from an evaluative point of view, bureaucracy prevents unreified organizations from achieving the social goals to which they are committed. In a world of scarcity, it can safely be assumed that the General Will of society desires that organizations committed to socially-desired goals be as effective and as efficient as possi-

ble; this assumption is implicit in the very idea of an organizational tool.[1] Bureaucracy makes that efficiency impossible.

De-institutionalization by itself is thus not an adequate approach for attempting to remove reification from the organizational life of society. Even if only organizations remained, bureaucracy would still be a problem.

On the other hand, just as institutionalization is largely created by, and primarily serves the interests of, those on the top of administrative structures, bureaucratization is the domain of middle-level managers and those even lower in the hierarchy. Many instances of bureaucracy within institutions are thus, morally, less undersirable than one might think, if not entirely desirable. High-level managers who institutionalize organizations in order to serve private goals are often frustrated in the accomplishment of those goals by bureaucracy-creating subordinates. That bureaucracy generally advances private rather than public goals, but at least the private goals are those of middle and lower-status individuals, not the elite. When General Motors fails to maximize profits because its employees create bureaucracy in order to protect their interests, it is hard to condemn bureaucracy tout entier.

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[1] Cf. Parsons, Structure and Process in Modern Societies, p.41.

Whatever the evaluative considerations, which will be discussed more thoroughly at a later point, the central thesis of this chapter is that bureaucracy is a direct product of reifications created by alienated individuals within large organizations in order to protect their interests. Most of the phenomena commonly associated with bureaucracy are reifications, created for the same reasons all reification is created, and having the characteristics of all reifications.

In order to make that argument, this chapter will consist largely of a survey of the scholarly literature on bureaucratic behavior and its harmful social consequences. In particular, three general categories of bureaucratic malfunctioning will be considered. First is the over-rigid adherence to rules, operational goals, evaluation standards, and other internal mechanisms which are ostensibly established in order to improve bureaucratic performance, but which often lead to waste and inefficiency. This sort of goal-displacement is similar, in all important respects, to another set of problems, those arising from competition and misunderstanding among organizational sub-units, or between technical experts and lay members of the organization. Second are the problems arising from "informal organization" within the larger, formal organization. Third is the problem of pathologies or disturbances in the flows of information within organizations and institutions; while many of these disturbances arise from

problems falling into the first two categories, there are some that have causes all their own, and all are sufficiently important to rate a separate analytical category.

The conviction that bureaucratic malfunctioning constitutes a subject worthy of serious consideration stems, of course, from the belief that there exists some proper way in which large organizations should function. In other words, it is necessary to conceive of formal organizations as preeminently purposive tools. That such a conception is entirely in keeping with the whole thrust of this work need hardly be made explicit, although much of the contemporary scholarly work on organizations begins by specifically rejecting the concept of organizational purposiveness.[2] As I hope to demonstrate here, the idea of purpose is crucial not only for any attempt to evaluate organizations normatively, but also for any attempt to explain why they behave as they do.

It is unfortunately necessary to add another terminological note. Since bureaucracy occurs in both organizations and institutions, and since most of the academic literature on bureaucracy does not make the distinction between "organization" and "institution" adopted here, I will use the term "organization" in this chapter when discussing aspects of

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[2]Cf. Herbert A. Simon, "On the Concept of Organizational Goal," Administrative Science Quarterly, IX (June, 1964), pp.1-22; Cyert and March, Behavioral Theory of the Firm, pp.26,27.

bureaucracy. Most of the instances in which the term is employed, however, are equally applicable to "institutions;" rather than getting bogged down in needlessly cumbersome locutions, I hope readers will keep that in mind. When statements do apply differentially to organizations and institutions, the differences will be made explicit.

Before embarking on a review of the leading ideas about bureaucratic malfunctioning, the problem of bureaucratic reification can be approached on a more general level. Since Max Weber, the first great student of bureaucracy, those concerned with the social effectiveness of bureaucratic organizations have often put the problem as a conflict between the differing imperatives of formal and substantive rationality. Organization represents, ostensibly, the attempt to apply the tools of rationality to the performance of social functions. But the rationality applied consists, it is often argued, of only the narrow, formal, technical principles of logic or engineering. Substantive rationality, the application of the best available resources of human intelligence to the problem itself, gets lost or even destroyed by overrigid adherence to canons of formal rationality.[3]

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[3]Cf. Weber, Economy and Society, I, pp.85-86; also Karl Mannheim, Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: Studies in Modern Social Structure, Harvest Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1940), pp.51-60.

Insofar as theorists of reification have dealt with bureaucracy at all, they have done so in precisely this way. Lukács and his disciples have argued that the bureaucratic embodiment of formal rationality represents a typical example of reified bourgeois thought, in which narrow, undialectical, technically specialized methods are applied to the problems of a complex, historically dynamic, and dialectical social world.[4] And indeed, those theorists of organization most concerned with denying the utility of narrow formal rationality have--though blissfully unaware, no doubt, of much of the school of thought Lukács represents--focussed on the resistance of human beings to treatment as cogs in a smoothly-oiled mechanism, and the incompatibility of narrowly technical concerns with human organization.[5]

Formal rationality as a reification falls precisely into the theoretical scheme of this work; described in Chapter V as the "reification of technique," it meets all the criteria of reification. Created by alienated individuals, those skilled in the techniques and methods of formal rationality --cost accountants, time-and-motion engineers, professors of business administration--it confers a reified legitimacy

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[4]Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, pp.88ff; Cf. Norman Birnbaum, "The Crisis in Marxist Sociology," Social Research, XXXV (Summer, 1968), p.369; and Andrew Arato, "Lukács' Theory of Reification, Telos, XI (Spring, 1972), p.30.

[5]Cf. James G. March and Herbert A. Simon, Organizations (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1958), pp.32,33.

on techniques, which are justified as means to agreed-on ends, but which, coming to be valued in themselves, hinder the pursuit of those ends.

By itself, however, the concept of formal rationality is inadequate to explain all the specific examples of bureaucratic misbehavior. It provides an excellent starting point for the consideration of bureaucratic reification, but only as a place to begin.

The individual most often associated with the idea of formal rationality run amuck is Frederick Taylor, the founder of "scientific management," and a contemporary of both Weber and Lenin, both of whom were acutely aware of his work. Taylor's insistence on elaborate time-and-motion studies, extremely narrow subdivision of labor, and complex methods of incentive payments have all been pointed to as examples of a rigid, mechanistic logic which forgot it was being applied to conscious human beings--and the widespread application of which would have created a vast and powerful class of technocrats.[6]

But Taylor, better than many of his critics, understood exactly where the issue lay. Speaking of the conditions existing prior to the application of his techniques in the

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[6]Cf. Nicos P. Mouzelis, Organisation and Bureaucracy: An Analysis of Modern Theories (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968), pp.84-87.

first shop in which he experimented with scientific management, Taylor wrote that, "as was usual then, and in fact as is still usual in most of the shops in this country, the shop was really run by the workmen, and not by the bosses."[7] While Taylor's complaints were certainly overdrawn, and the workmen ran the shop only to the very limited extent of setting production techniques and output restrictions, the application of scientific management techniques certainly constituted an effort to shift fundamentally the balance of power in the workplace. As an unsurprising result, it was frequently resisted by the workers, far more often than Taylor, the naive idealist, seemed to expect. The application of formal rationality, in the form of "scientific management," to industrial management was resisted by workers, not because they were irrational or bent on destruction, but because it stripped them of what little power they had left in their work environments.

The problem of power distribution and power relationships within bureaucracies was long ignored by students of organizational sociology, only to be rediscovered in the last few years. Writers like Michel Crozier and Melville Dalton began to locate the source of bureaucratic malfunctioning

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[7]Frederick Winslow Taylor, The Principles of Scientific Management (orig. ed., 1911; New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1967), pp.48-49.

in the power conflicts within bureaucracies.[8] Crozier best summarized the position when he wrote that,

> contrary to the hopes of the industrialists and progressivists of the twenties, the very progress of rationality in the field of organization has shown how deceptive such beliefs in the one best way were. Power relationships and discretion in human interaction can not be suppressed with rationalization...[9]

Alienated individuals seek to maximize their power, in order to protect themselves from their environments. For the unskilled blue-collar worker or the professional white-collar executive, the workplace is often an environment in which alienation predominates. In particular, the techniques of formal rationality, by removing all control over the pace and task-division of work, constitute a major threat to whatever power the worker may possess.[10] And alienated individuals seeking power relative to their environments create it by creating reifications. That is the fundamental paradigm for all the following discussions of bureaucratic reification.

Before getting to those discussions, though, one last

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[8]Cf. Michel Crozier, The Bureaucratic Phenomenon, Phoenix Books (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964); and Melville Dalton, Men Who Manage: Fusions of Feeling and Theory in Administration (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1959).

[9]Crozier, Bureaucratic Phenomenon, p.157, emph. his.

[10]Cf. Robert Blauner, Alienation and Freedom: The Factory Worker and his Industry, Phoenix Books (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964), p.17; Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp.236-237.

point must be emphasized, because of its importance to the general theory of alienation, and also for the assistance it may provide in unraveling what has long been one of the knottiest problems of organization theory.

Alienation, as has been discussed, is primarily a question of wills. When all the members of an organization will the same tasks and ends for the organization, it can reasonably be expected that alienation within the organization will be low. But the wills for the organization of a consensus of members are precisely what has been most recently described by Lawrence Mohr as the organization's goal.[11]

Mohr's concept of goal consensus thus becomes central to any organizational analysis. The greater the goal consensus--the higher the degree to which the principal aims of the organization or institution are willed by its members--the less alienated will be the organization's members relative to the organization, and the less likely they will be to create the reifications produced by alienation that form the principal source of bureaucratic malfunctioning. The lower the goal consensus, conversely, the more likely the organization will be riddled with internal reifications produced by its

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[11]Mohr, "The Concept of Organizational Goal," pp.473-474.

alienated members.[12]

In alienated society, the likelihood that at least some of its members will be alienated from the organization will be high. If organizational goals do not conflict with the General Will--if the organization as a whole is not alienated--it will undoubtedly have trouble recruiting an entire staff of persons who are similarly unalienated socially, and equally committed to a socially-desired goal. On the other hand, in institutions whose goals serve the particular wills of small institutional elites, it is unlikely that lower-level employees will share those particular wills.

The internal rigidity of which Selznick and other students of institutionalization speak represents, in this way, a kind of compromise, in which institutional leaders, in order to promote their private interests, buy off lower-status members by permitting them to retain some degree of internal reification. In exchange, those lower-status members help promote the institution's goals.[13]

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[12]This discussion has much in common--with the difference in specific terminology used here--with Anthony Downs, Inside Bureaucracy, A RAND Corporation Research Study (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), pp.223ff.

[13]The argument in this paragraph restates, of course, the famous "contributions-inducements balance" model of conventional organization theory, in a rather more jaundiced form. Cf. Chester A. Barnard, The Functions of the Executive (Thirtieth Anniversary Ed.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp.139ff.; and Herbert A. Simon, Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations (2d.ed.; New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp.110ff.

There are, no doubt, non-alienated organizations whose members generally share a high commitment to the organization's transitive goals. Such organizations appear most frequently in times of crisis like war or natural disaster, and are relatively common in more normal times. More interesting, though, are alienated institutions whose members are similarly unalienated from the institution, sharing its socially alienated goal. Examples include everything from a gang of thieves to the Nazi Party; their high morale, bursts of remarkable efficiency, and effective hierarchy are ruefully envied by leaders of alienated institutions.

Everyone is familiar with the model of the highly-motivated combat team as the exemplar of organizational unity, cohesiveness, and effectiveness, although in recent years that example has been replaced by the more attractive (to academic scholars of organization) image of the team of research scientists in a high-technology electronics plant.[14] That kind of organization is distinguished by the shared, single-minded commitment of its members to an overriding goal. Red tape, bureaucratic delay, excessive hierarchy, insufficient coordination, distorted information flows--all seem to disappear when organizational members share a common

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[14]Cf. Tom Burns and G. M. Stalker, The Management of Innovation (London: Tavistock Publications, 1961); the extent to which the electronics plants Burns and Stalker describe resemble an idealization of most academic departments will not be commented upon.

motivation. The opposite case, perhaps the corporation Dalton studied, for example, exists when whatever direction or goals the institution might have become entirely submerged in the selfish interests of individuals, and the conflicts between those interests.[15]

The following discussion begs what is, as a result, obviously the most important question of organizational analysis and design, that of how a high level of goal consensus can be created and maintained. Insofar as it will be treated at all, that discussion must be reserved for a later and more general consideration of the causes and cures of alienation in society. But, as a last word before turning to the survey of bureaucratic pathology, it must be stressed that all of the diseases share a common cause, that of alienation.

In his ground-breaking essay on "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," Robert Merton wrote that, "one may note a tendency for certain bureaucratic norms, originally introduced for technical reasons, to become rigidified and sacred...",[16] and his statement sounds the theme for the entire discussion of over-rigid bureaucratic adherence to rules, sub-goals, and sub-organizational imperatives--what, in

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[15]Cf. Dalton, Men Who Manage, passim.

[16]Robert K. Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," in Merton, et. al., eds., Reader in Bureaucracy (New York: The Free Press, 1952), p.368.

general, has been described as the phenomenon of goal-displacement.[17] It need hardly be mentioned that Merton uses the terms "rigidified and sacred" in a way essentially equivalent to the usage here of "reified," nor need the source of those reifications be once again insisted upon.

The specific form of goal-displacement known as rules-fetishism discussed by Merton in his article has best been analyzed by Alvin Gouldner, in his famous study of a gypsum plant. In a situation of goal consensus, Gouldner says, the creation of rules will be jointly agreed to by workers and management, and the rules will be willingly accepted and obeyed by both.[18] In conditions of goal dissensus, however, rules can be made to serve no less than six separate functions, none of which do very much good for the effective functioning of the organization, but all of which provide power and protection for alienated individuals within it.[19]

"Explicational," "Screening," "Remote Control," and "Punishment-Legitimating" rules-adherence legitimizes the power of supervisors by transferring the responsibility for making demands on subordinates from themselves to impersonal rules--which, as reified, can not be questioned or opposed

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[17] Ibid., pp.365-366.

[18] Alvin Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy (New York: The Free Press, 1954), pp.221, 217.

[19] Ibid., pp.157ff.

in the way that personal authority can be.[20]

The employment of rules to buttress or even substitute for personal authority or power solves the dilemma of a supervisor uncomfortable with a direct exercise of his power in a society where egalitarian norms predominate. By ascribing commands not to personal discretion but to an impersonal rule, the superior avoids the appearance, to himself as well as to his subordinate, of the exercise of a purely personal status superiority, and thus avoids conflict with social values both he and the employee probably accept.[21] At the same time, however, he is reproducing the process Marx described in the attachment of exchange-value to commodities: concealing power relationships between human beings by mystifying them into the attributes of things.

The "Leeway" function of rules is a little more complex, since it involves keeping the rules in abeyance, in a kind of reserve, to be employed when necessary as part of a bargaining process.[22] But it illustrates particularly well the reified nature of organizational rules--since their

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[20] Ibid., pp.162-172.

[21] Ibid., pp. 169-170; Cf. also Crozier, Bureaucratic Phenomenon, p.54; and Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries of Class, pp.204-205.

[22] Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, pp. 172-174; Cf. also David Mechanic, "Sources of Power of Lower Participants in Complex Organizations," Administrative Science Quarterly, VII (December, 1962), p.363.

application is clearly unnecessary for the functioning of the institution--and the relationship between reification and power--since the very existence of rules provides a club for those who would not otherwise win bargaining processes.

The last of Gouldner's six functions is the only one that serves primarily the interests of employees at the lowest level. Rules serve and "Apathy-Preserving" function, says Gouldner, by establishing a "minimum acceptable level" of performance. So long as workers perform at that level, no matter how far beneath their capacities it might be, they are immune from punishment or coercion from their supervisors. "Apathy-Preserving" rules thus create an area of autonomy and discretion within which workers have as much freedom as they can muster.[23]

"Rules," says Crozier,

> protect the people who submit to them. Within the area delimited by the rules, they are free to make their own contribution according to their arbitrary whim. They can participate or take refuge in retreatist behavior, commit themselves to the organization's aims, or reserve their moral forces for some personal endeavor.[24]

More generally, he argues:

> The latent function of bureaucratic rigidity can be understood in this perspective as primarily a protective function. It provides the individual with the minimum of security necessary to him for dealing with his fellows in pursuit of the necessary co-operative

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[23]Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, pp. 174-176.

[24]Crozier, Bureaucratic Phenomenon, p.206.

activities.[25]

The results of bureaucratic rigidity produced by rules-fetishism are everywhere to see. "Red tape," the most notorious attribute of bureaucratic practice, is generally produced by the adherence of bureaucrats to rules in order to protect themselves, regardless of the interests of their clients or the goals of the organization. In addition, Red tape is compounded from similar self-protective motives by the creation of still more rules by those with the authority to do so. Just as the lower-level official protects himself by adhering to the rules, his supervisor can often protect himself by creating new ones, thus giving evidence that he has anticipated and sought to deal with all contingencies, and obviating the necessity for actually doing anything when those contingencies arise.

Taken together, the rules of a bureaucracy form what is generally called its standard operating procedure, or SOP. The ills to which SOP is heir are legion. "Bureaucratic inertia," produced by the routine and ritualized adherence to SOP even in the face of changing circumstances, has been blamed for everything from the Bay of Pigs fiasco to the

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[25] Ibid., pp.207-208.

bombing of Dresden.[26] The primacy of SOP has also been blamed for the inability of most public organizations to plan, and the resultant aimlessness and, ultimately, purposelessness of much of their activity.[27] At its most extreme, the slavish conformance to SOP becomes the case of the Nazi bureaucrat who was "just following orders," and thus considers himself immune from any retribution or, indeed, any questions of responsibility whatsoever.

Yet it must be remembered that complex formal organization is impossible without some number of rules and some standard operating procedure. The processes of standardization, routinization, and rule-governed decision-making make possible, as Weber insisted, the technical capabilities of modern organization.[28] Like all other reifications, then, what is important about bureaucratic rules is not any characteristic intrinsic in the objects, but rather characteristics which are imputed or ascribed to them--in short, the way they are valued.

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[26] For the examples, cf. Theodore C. Sorenson, Kennedy (New York: Bantam Books, 1966), pp.330-333; Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., Slaughterhouse-Five, or The Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death, Delta Books (New York: Dell, 1969), p.162; A more general discussion of the idea of bureaucratic inertia can be found in Graham T. Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," American Political Science Review, LXIII (September, 1969), pp.701-708.

[27] Cf. March and Simon, Organizations, p.185.

[28] Weber, Economy and Society, I, p.225.

As tools to organizational ends, bureaucratic rules and SOPs are entirely worthwhile and necessary; converted into ends-in-themselves in order to protect the private interests of alienated individuals, they become harmful. The simple, rational adherence to rules as means is an altogether different phenomenon from rigid rules-fetishism. It is precisely in the difference between these two attitudes that the problems of bureaucracy lie. So long as agreed-upon organizational goals remain paramount as the recognized ends of organizational activities, rules will not constitute a danger.

Just as they establish rules in order to organize and facilitate their activities, bureaucracies also create performance criteria, or measurement techniques, as a way of assessing how well their members are performing tasks necessary to the organization's functioning. At the broadest level, these criteria become sub-goals themselves, as with, for example, the fund-raising goals of charitable organizations. These sub-goals are often established for a directly reifying purpose, when an institution is without real goals or when there is considerable disagreement as to how their accomplishment of what goals they do have can be measured; in either case, agreement that a performance-measure criterion will be reified solves the problem. In those cases, the very existence of sub-goals is a direct product of alienation.

Frequently, however, non-alienated motivations lead to the creation of operational measurements as sub-goals. As Mohr notes, the successful attainment of organizational ends generally implies the necessity of a clear cause-and-effect understanding of the way organizational activities relate to the purposes of the organization.[29] For instance, in order to meet the goal of eliminating the possibility of a polio epidemic, local health departments must be sure to immunize at least 85% of the school-age population. The target of 85% thus becomes a sub-goal for organization members, as well as a criterion for evaluating how well the organization is doing its job.

To continue the hypothetical example, one can imagine a community in which residential patterns are such that 85% of the school-age population is very densely clustered around the center of town--which no doubt includes the offices of the health department--while the remaining 15% live in a relatively inaccessible area on the other side of the river, or whatever. It would be entirely possible for an 85% immunization program to include enough children from across the river to make an epidemic extremely unlikely, but if the sub-goal is reified, if the pressures of time, energy, and

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[29] Mohr, "The Concept of Organizational Goal," p.474; Cf. March and Simon, Organizations, p.151.

scarce resources cause health department officials to attempt to protect themselves by meeting a reified goal at the minimum acceptable level--achieving the sub-goal in the easiest possible way, with no attention paid to anything outside the very narrow confines of meeting the target--disaster is possible.[30]

Detective divisions in urban police departments, unable to accurately assess how well they are "controlling" crime, and indeed often unable to determine with any accuracy just how much crime is actually being committed, measure their performance with "clearance rates." The clearance rate is the proportion of reported crimes solved by the arrest of suspected perpetrators, whether or not they are convicted.

The heart of the matter is that crimes are "cleared" just as easily by the confession of someone the police have no suspicion of having committed them as they are when an arrest culminates a lengthy and successful investigation. So when detectives finally do catch a certain type of criminal, say a burglar, there is considerable pressure on them to induce him to confess to a large number of burglaries, even those he did not commit. In exchange, the police frequently offer a reduction in the charges for which he will

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[30]Cf. Peter M. Blau, The Dynamics of Bureaucracy: A Study of Interpersonal Relations in Two Government Agencies, Phoenix Books (Rev.ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp.44-47, 293-298.

be prosecuted.

As a result, a burglar who has committed a large number of burglaries, and confessed to still more, may well end up with a much less severe sentence than one who has committed a single crime, and confessed to no others because he hasn't committed any. And it is possible for a detective division to have an extremely high clearance rate while catching only a very tiny fraction of those who have committed the crimes which are "cleared."[31]

The most perfect example of reified performance measurements occurs, though, not in the literature of organizational sociology, but in fiction, although one suspects that the recounted incident is not entirely fictional. "The bomb line was a scarlet band of narrow satin ribbon that delineated the forwardmost position of the Allied ground forces in every sector of the Italian mainland,"[32] and the fliers on the island of Pianosa in Joseph Heller's Catch-22 became obsessed with it, since it stopped forty-five miles short of the fearsomely-defended city of Bologna, and unless it moved, they would be forced to attack Bologna once it stopped raining.

The rain stopped, but twenty-four hours were still needed in order to prepare the attack. The accumulated fear

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[31]Cf. Jerome H. Skolnick, Justice Without Trial: Law Enforcement in Democratic Society, Science Editions (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), pp.164ff.

[32]Joseph Heller, Catch-22 (New York: Dell, 1961), p.122.

and resentment of the fliers needed an object, and

> they began to hate the bomb line itself. For hours they stared relentlessly at the scarlet ribbon on the map and hated it because it would not move up high enough to encompass the city. When night fell, they congregated in the darkness with flashlights, continuing their macabre vigil at the bomb line in brooding entreaty as though hoping to move the ribbon up by the collective weight of their sullen prayers.
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> "I really can't believe it," Clevinger exclaimed to Yossarian in a voice rising and falling in protest and wonder. "It's a complete reversion to primitive superstition. They're confusing cause and effect. It makes as much sense as knocking on wood or crossing your fingers. They really believe that we wouldn't have to fly that mission tomorrow if someone would only tiptoe up to the map in the middle of the night and move the bomb line over Bologna. Can you imagine? You and I must be the only rational ones left."
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> In the middle of the night Yossarian knocked on wood, crossed his fingers, and tiptoed out of his tent to move the bomb line up over Bologna.[33]

News of this dramatic development passed up the chain of command, resulting in an immediate cancellation of the planned mission, and more:

> Colonel Cathcart was overjoyed, for he was relieved of the embarrassing commitment to bomb Bologna without blemish to the reputation for valor he had earned by volunteering his men to do it. General Dreedle was pleased with the capture of Bologna, too, although he was angry with Colonel Moodus for waking him up to tell him about it. Headquarters was also pleased and decided to award a medal to the officer who had captured the city. There was no officer who had captured the city, so they gave the medal to General Peckem instead...[34]

Everyone was happy: the fliers, Colonel Cathcart, Generals Dreedle and Peckem, headquarters, and the German defenders

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[33] Ibid., pp.122-123.

[34] Ibid., pp.123-124.

of Bologna, who were spared being bombed. The only exception was the embattled Allied ground troops, support of whom provided the original justification for the Air Force's existence in the first place.

The existence of conflict between the Army and what was then its own subordinate organization, the Army Air Corps, provides an easy transition to the third and final form of bureaucratic rigidity to be discussed, that resulting from problems of sub-organization and specialization. The sordid and brutish history of American inter-service rivalry will not be considered here, for want of adequate space.

But the example illustrates a central point: such rivalry, with all its destructive costs, could become a serious problem only when the sub-organizations of the American military were considerably institutionalized; the problem of institutionalization is, of course, endemic among military organizations. In fact, perhaps the best way of conceptualizing the problems created for bureaucracies by the necessary existence of component sub-organizations is in terms of the institutionalization of those sub-organizations.

It is perhaps no accident, then, that the most famous study of sub-organization problems was written by Philip Selznick, in his book on the TVA. The TVA was deflected from many of its most important goals because of the presence within it of agriculturally-oriented sub-organizations whose

members did not share the goals of the organization as a whole, but whose views and attitudes were given sufficient weight to permit the institutionalization of the agricultural program.[35]

The problem of sub-organizational reification has long been felt to be particularly acute in the federal bureaucracy, where it is generally perceived as a problem of coordination. Inter-agency rivalries, jurisdictional disputes, and, sometimes, open hostility occasionally result from differing conceptions of where the general good lies in areas of overlapping concern, but more often spring directly from the institutionalization of federal agencies. That institutionalization meets the status, security, and self-esteem needs of leading agency members at the expense of efficient functioning of the national government. And such conflicts are, of course, hardly unique to the federal government; on the contrary, they seem to appear at all levels of organizations of different sizes.

In the pungent phrase of Don K. Price, born of personal experience in the federal bureaucracy, "where you stand depends on where you sit."[36] Sub-organization representatives,

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[35]Cf. Philip Selznick, TVA and the Grass Roots: A Study in the Sociology of Formal Organizations, Harper Torchbooks (rev.ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp.262-264.

[36]Quoted in Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," p.711.

having come to implicitly accept the institutionalization of their agencies or departments, reflect the interests and needs of those sub-organizations even when they are consciously attempting to serve only the common good. Individuals come to adopt the biased perspectives of their sub-organizations, not because of cognitive inadequacies--the incapacity to grasp the "larger picture"--but because they lose sight of the overriding purpose of the enterprise as a whole. The more the sub-organization is institutionalized, the worse this bias will be, as the individual member comes, or is forced, more and more to accept the primacy of the institutional status of the sub-organization. Things are made still worse when coordination among sub-organizations is attempted through meetings or devices of that sort; sub-organization members become, either by choice or political necessity, "virtual representatives" of their sub-organizational interests. Inter-agency committees are thus composed of the "Agriculture view," the "Commerce view," the "Labor view," and so forth.[37]

In all important respects, the institutionalization of sub-organizations, with the consequent over-rigid commitment to the goals and practices of sub-organization at the

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[37]Cf. Norton E. Long, "The Administrative Organization as a Political System," in Mailick and Van Ness, eds., Concepts and Issues in Administrative Behavior," p.114.

expense of the organization as a whole, resembles the problems created for bureaucratic functioning by the employment of highly-specialized technical experts. Indeed, the two types of problems often merge into one, when sub-organizations are primarily composed of technical experts. Just as sub-organizations become reified and institutionalized, so too do the roles of technicians. The legitimacy attached to their skills and their important and hard-to-acquire knowledge provides professional experts with the power and autonomy characteristic of all reifications.[38] And there is absolutely no reason why technical experts cannot be just as alienated from the organization as anyone else.

The dysfunctions produced by the reification of expert roles often take the form of a kind of rules-fetishism, except that the values and practices of a given professional discipline, rather than organizational rules, are fetishized. More common, however, is the insistence by professionals that their status gives them the right to participate in and seriously influence the process of organizational goal-setting. When that de jure claim is denied, professionals often simply pursue their private goals de facto. Since the principal attribute of professional reification is the conviction among non-professionals that technical experts are indispensable,

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[38] Cf. Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries of Class, p.239.

serious problems are created for those seeking to promote the general goals of the organization.[39] Behind the cover of their reified statuses, professionals wield considerable organizational power, even in those instances where their expertise is largely irrelevant to policy determinations.

Things get still worse when lay officials, in order to somehow counter the reified status of expertise, decide that they too are professionals, expert in the "science" of "management." The internal workings of most corporations and government agencies consist largely, one suspects, of an elaborate charade in which alienated engineers, lawyers, accountants, and so forth make claims for their private interests concealed behind the cover of professional legitimacy, only to be countered by the private interests of their superiors masquerading as the determinations of professional managers.

The primordial conflict between "staff" and "line" reflects this kind of role reification, and resembles the conflicts between institutionalized sub-organizations. Both staff and line members seek to institutionalize their roles as much as possible, in order to protect their personal interests. But the sum of the imperatives of two separate institutionalized components never quite equals the unitary interest

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[39] Cf. Mechanic, "Sources of Power of Lower Participants in Complex Organizations," p.358.

of the organization as a whole. Instead, conflict between two reified sectors produces an outcome farther from original organizational goals than would be produced by the simple dominance of one reified component that, with less opposition, might be less vigorous in the protection of institutionalized interests.[40]

Taylor's notions of organizational management were overthrown primarily by the Harvard Business School group that conducted the famous Hawthorne experiments, and their most important discovery, that of the role of "informal organization" in the actual workings of large organizations. To be sure, Taylor's own writings, particularly in the condemnation of "soldiering," or output restriction, implicitly contained the idea of informal worker solidarity--which Taylor, of course, sought to supplant with a new relationship between workers and management. But the Hawthorne studies, and the strangely missionary scholarship which resulted from them, conferred on the idea of informal organization a new respectability, and identified it as the crucial problem for the management of enterprise.

Put most briefly, the idea of informal organization holds that within any formal organziational structure there

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[40]The most famous discussion of staff-line conflicts is in Dalton, Men Who Manage, pp.71ff.

exists, side-by-side and in parallel, a complex network of interpersonal relationships, with its own set of norms, communications channels, and patterns of behavior. The disjunction between formal and informal organizations is identified as the source of most of the problems and malfunctions of bureaucratic activity. And the remedy for these problems, it is suggested, consists of consciously accepting the existence of informal organization, combined with efforts by management to shape it in directions useful to the overall purpose of the formal organization.[41]

Informal organization often produces internal reification directly; that position is clear and well-documented. The values to which members of informal organization subscribe are often attached to particular intra-organizational objects, whether formal or informal, such as traditional patterns of organization or conduct, symbolic activities or products, or even the roles of specific individuals. So long as that valuation is unopposed, it remains unreified; but when conflict between formal and informal organization arises, as it so often does, the objectifications around which informal organization is centered are reified, as a central weapon in that conflict.

Gouldner's description of the gypsum plant in the

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[41]For an excellent summary of the entire school, cf. Mouzelis, Organisation and Bureaucracy, pp.101-103.

period of the "indulgency pattern" abounds with examples of such reifications-in-embryo, which the management overthrew only at great cost and considerable peril to its own objectives. The practices of permitting workers to take home wallboard, of transferring those with injuries to the sample room, of totally ignoring certain sets of organizational rules, had all become objectified after long years of practice. When management sought to increase its control over the internal workings of the plant, they became reified by the workers in order to prevent that extension of control, and their overthrow was met by considerable resistance.[42]

The most famous, or at least most widely-discussed, examples of internal reification produced by informal organization involve a slightly different process, the output restriction with which Taylor was so obsessed. That production employees, and others, generally work at a rate narrowly constrained by the values of the workgroup, which often falls far short of managerial expectations or desires, has long been widely known, and since the Hawthorne experiments has been attributed to the informal group structure in the workplace. Those groups possess a number of effective sanctions, ranging from subtle hostility to outright ostracism, which

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[42]Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, p.55.

enforce their production norms.[43]

Norms of output restriction are generally created by workers in order to shield themselves from management. In piece-work production, they forestall any decrease in piece-rates which might result from evidence that a "normal day's work" could produce more than is currently being produced; in hourly production they prevent speed-ups or the assignment of additional tasks. From the point of view of management concerned with maximizing production, they are simple reifications, mystified and unchallengeable facticities which they are powerless to overthrow without creating serious conflict. From the viewpoint of workers, on the other hand, they begin as an entirely rational response to management demands, creating a counter-source of power. Over time, however, they tend to become reified from the workers' perspective as well, as long practice shrouds in mystery the original motivations for something that has come to be valued in itself. Ultimately, as in companies challenged by foreign competition or the availability of competing products, the reified output norms can become counterproductive for the workers themselves, who generally have more to lose than management from

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[43]Cf. Loren Baritz, The Servants of Power: A History of the Use of Social Science in American Industry (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1960, pp.98-100.

a decline in sales of their product.[44]

The scholarly literature on informal organization, particularly the work revolving around the Hawthorne study, displays a collosal and, one is tempted to believe, willful naivete, in its underlying assumption that the interests of all organization members are essentially congruent, or at least capable of being made congruent. One suspects that the preference for "human relations" theories to Taylorism among industrial managers is rooted in the assumption that workers' perceptions of their interests in the workplace can be brought into line with those of management without any substantive changes in attitudes or behavior on management's part.[45] But, as Dahrendorff rightly insists, there are always two classes within every organization, and especially within any profit-making organization: us and them.[46]

Just as rules-fetishism and narrow technicism are the principal responses of alienated individuals to the organizational environment, so informal organization, with its

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[44]Cf. Donald Roy, "Quota Restriction and Goldbricking in a Machine Shop," in Faunce, ed., Readings in Industrial Sociology, pp.311-334; Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries of Class, pp.100-103.

[45]Cf. Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp.139-144; Mouzelis, Organisation and Bureaucracy, pp.115-118.

[46]Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1959, pp.28-289.

values, roles, and expectations, is the response of the alienated group. In this sense, the reification of sub-organizations occupies an intermediate category, in which the existence of an alienated group is formally recognized by those in authority. But in general, the conflict between formal and informal organization can best, perhaps, be conceived as the conflict between those holding organizational power and their alienated subordinates, and the responses of the alienated are essentially similar to those of the alienated everywhere in the face of hostile power. They create reifications.

It is necessary to insist once again that, when speaking of alienated individuals or groups within organizations, that alienation is relative to the organization. Alienated members of an informal organization are alienated from the will of the organization. Whether or not they are alienated from other social institutions, or from society as a whole, remains an entirely separate question.

In light of the analysis of institutionalization, it would seem that, say, the executives of leading corporations are at least as likely to be alienated from society as their employees. And in keeping with Marx's analysis of the proletariat,[47] it is even probable that the less corporate

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[47] Cf. above, p.51.

employees are socially alienated, the more likely they are to be alienated from their employers.

We are back to the question of internal reification in institutions. Within an institution like a corporation, the existence of informal organizations may well comprise the major bulwark for the protection of societal values against the interests of the formal organization. It is a safe guess that the General Will of society would hold that no individual should have to work at a pace greater than physical comfort or even health demands; and it is only symptomatic of the generally alienated condition of society and its institutions that guaranteeing that will requires the existence of internally-subversive, reified informal organization.

Observers of bureaucracy are often most forcefully impressed, not with their lethargy and red tape, not with the varieties and forms of conflict within them, but with what can only be described as their sheer stupidity. Large and powerful institutions, representing great agglomerations of talent, experience, and wisdom, supposedly organized in a way to make maximum use of all the tools of rationality, engage in a thoroughly ridiculous invasion of Cuba, or invest hundreds of millions of dollars in an Edsel or Convair 880, build expensive airplanes that won't fly, or hire incompetent adventurers to burglarize the Watergate.

Put most simply, and perhaps most charitably, these disasters and the hundreds like them can be attributed to failures of organizational intelligence, the inability of institutions to perceive what lies directly in front of them, or to act rationally on what they do perceive.[48] In one sense, formal organization itself consists of little more than an established pattern of communications and information flow; and while there are causal dissimilarities, the disjunction between the way those communications patterns are expected to operate and the way in which they actually do operate bears considerable symptomatic resemblance to the disjunction between formal and informal organization. Both are caused largely by reification, which in turn is caused by alienation. But while the reification that creates problems of informal organization must, almost by definition, be internal, failures of organizational intelligence can be created by both internal reification and external reification —institutionalization.

Many of the organizational malfunctions already discussed create intelligence problems in addition to the specific diseases more narrowly associated with them. Red tape and over-rigid adherence to rules produce delay and waste-

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[48]The term "organizational intelligence," as well as much of the following discussion, come from Harold L. Wilensky, Organizational Intelligence: Knowledge and Power in Government and Industry (New York: Basic Books, 1967).

fulness when speed is of the essence. Excessive concentration on reified performance measurements or sub-goals can serve as a kind of filter in which all information not directly relevant to the attainment of the sub-goal is screened out, no matter how important. And since information can be an important resource and source of power,[49] conflicts between sub-organizations, between laymen and technicians, between formal and informal organizations, often involve the suppression, distortion, or falsification of important information.

Other kinds of distortions in the information process are produced by institutionalization. When organizational members are not alienated from the institution, but rather share its alienation from society in general, their loyalty, by definition, is not to the institution's original stated goals, but to the good of the institution itself. Since selective perception--the inability to perceive what one does not wish to perceive--takes more extreme forms the more the perceiver is emotionally committed to a goal or object, those primarily responsible for providing the institution with information about the outside world may well be too blinded by loyalty to perceive accurately what is really happening. Occasionally, this can work to the institution's

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[49] Cf. Mechanic, "Sources of Power of Lower Participants in Complex Organizations," p.357.

advantage, with soldiers or salesmen, say, incapable of accepting defeat. More often, though, it causes the institution to act in wildly irrational ways. Stewart Alsop, at least, attributes the entire Watergate scandal to precisely this phenomenon.[50]

In addition, the mechanisms by which organizations and institutions collect, process, and distribute information can become reified themselves. The problem of bureaucratic secrecy has long fascinated sociologists;[51] some level of secrecy is no doubt necessary for the successful goal-attainment of some organizations, and many institutions. But once instituted, practices designed to provide the necessary degree of secrecy can become fetishized and reified in order to serve the interests of particular alienated individuals.[52] In the "Pentagon Papers" case, Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo were indicted and tried for challenging the legitimacy of a reification that, it is perfectly clear, in no way protected the legitimate interests of the nation or any of its officials, but did permit them to promote their alienated individual and institutional interests.

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[50]Stewart Alsop, "Our Supererogatory President," Newsweek, April 9, 1973, p.120.

[51]Cf. Weber, Economy and Society, III, pp.992-993; Simmel, Sociology, pp.330ff.; Merton, "Bureaucratic Structure and Personality," pp.363-364.

[52]Cf. Wilensky, Organizational Intelligence, p.139.

Similarly, in Cyert and March's model, organizational "search" tends to be "simple-minded" because of conflicts within the organization, because of selective perception related to institutional or personal loyalties, and because of "bias reflecting special training or experience of various parts of the organization."[53] This last involves either the employment for intelligence purposes of specialists whose perspectives are narrowed by technical training, but whose roles become reified, with the information they provide going unchallenged as a result, or the establishment of special structures in order to handle intelligence problems, which outlive their usefulness but become reified and thus continue to operate, in what is then a counterproductive way. Wilensky insists that certain types of structural arrangements are best suited to certain kinds of intelligence problems, but sub-organizations and their members' roles become institutionalized and hence no longer expendable, preventing the necessary adaptations to new intelligence problems.[54]

Corporate officials and institutional managers, frustrated by the failure of their complex mechanisms to perform as they are supposed to, and anxious to justify and

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[53]Cyert and March, Behavioral Theory of the Firm, p.122.

[54]Wilensky, Organizational Intelligence, pp.174ff.

legitimate their power, have long sought from the academic community an effective science of management, which would reveal the secrets of bureaucratic malfunctioning. The academic study of organizations has prospered considerably, at least in the material sense, from this concern, but it has not served its patrons very well. Contemporary organization theory consists largely of the elaborately pseudo-scientific methodology of "operations research," on the one hand, and the dismal science of Herbert Simon and his contemporaries --which supports the desire for highly-mechanized problem-solving techniques, but also accepts as a fundamental proposition that "satisficing," rather than "optimizing," behavior is the best one can ever hope for--on the other. The limitations on human rationality and human personality are simply too great, Simon argues, to ever permit the kind of perfect rationality and perfect control which managers seek.[55]

Lower-level organization members have had to look elsewhere for succor, largely to their own resources, but they have been little better served. While internal reifications protect autonomy and personal power in a very narrow sphere in the short run, they are, like all reifications, fundamentally ironic. Either individuals become trapped in their own reifications, as the workers whose output restric-

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[55]Cf. Simon, Administrative Behavior, pp.39-41, 240-241.

tions ultimately cost them their jobs, or their reifications induce counter-reification, as in Gouldner's "vicious cycle of control" in the gypsum plant.[56] The final alternative is also the least happy; alienated workers can create little spheres of autonomy for themselves on the job, but the reification that requires involves self-conscious hypocrisy and the willing abandonment of cherished values like honesty and workmanship that produces still further alienation, in addition to the deep psychic scars of the "hidden injuries of class," of which Sennett and Cobb speak.[57]

Those who must deal with bureaucracy from the outside are no better off. As noted above, bureaucracy produced by the internal reification of purposive organizations frustrates, harasses, and alienates those the organizations are supposed to serve. Institutionalized bureaucracies demand that the masters should serve their tools, and internal reifications often add insult to injury. Being robbed by a public utility or private corporation or government agency is one thing; being robbed in a discourteous, frustrating, and inefficient way is still worse.

Bureaucracy, says Hannah Arendt, "could properly be called rule by nobody," but that, "is not necessarily no-rule;

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[56]Gouldner, Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy, p.159 et ff.; Cf. Downs, Inside Bureaucracy, p.147.

[57]Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries of Class, passim.

it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruelest and most tyrannical versions."[58] For rule by nobody is not necessarily rule by no-thing. Most often, in fact, it is rule by reifications, by non-human, impersonal, uncontrollable objects.

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[58]Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Anchor Books, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1959), p.37.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONCEPT OF THE CORPORATION

> The destruction of a corporate body is not a homicide.
> --Deputy Thouret, French National Assembly,
> quoted in Nisbet, The Sociological Tradition

In its pure form, the modern corporation, along with the other institutions of modern capitalism, provides an immensely attractive target for the student of reification. The development of the theory of reification within the Marxist tradition has, not surprisingly, produced an emphasis on economic institutions; the modern theory of reification originates, as has been discussed, in Marx's distinction between use and exchange-values--in his criticism of capitalist markets. Later generations of Marxists have focussed not only on the price system, but on the institutional forms of capitalist society and--a subject which has received great emphasis, particularly in recent years--the tendency of capitalist development to create new, "artificial" economic needs among consumers in order to fill its insatiable demand for growing markets.[1]

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[1]Cf. Paul A. Baran and Paul M. Sweezy, Monopoly Capital: An Essay on the American Economic and Social Order, Modern Reader Paperbacks (New York: Monthly Review Press,

Moreover, many of the most important non-Marxist critiques of capitalism and its institutions can be readily restated in terms of a theory of reification. Veblen's analysis of the conflict between "business" and "industry"--between the conflicting imperatives of servicability and vendibility; Tawney's vision of a "functional" rather than "acquisitive" society; Arnold's dismemberment of the "folklore of capitalism"--all fall comfortably into the general theory of reification.[2]

From these and other criticisms, as well as from some of the literature of contemporary economics, I have extracted a number of themes and ideas which seem to fit particularly well with the theory of reification. But there are literally thousands of corporations in the United States alone, differing from one another in everything but the term "corporation:" the following discussion should not be taken to apply perfectly to any one, or set, of existing institutions. Similarly, the following argument draws from time to time on assertions that are popular, but hardly uncontroversial, in contemporary economics, and one suspects that at least some of the differences among economists can be accounted for by the assumption

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1968), pp.112ff; Cf. Lukács, History and Class Consciousness, p.91; and Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation, pp.145-146.

[2]Cf. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of Business Enterprise, Mentor Books (New York: New American Library, n.d.); Tawney, Acquisitive Society; Thurman W. Arnold, The Folklore of Capitalism (rev.ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954).

that different corporations behave differently. What follows, then, might best be described as an ideal-type, which identifies characteristics present, to a greater or lesser extent, in most, but perhaps not all, corporations, and which links those characteristics to the theory of reification. When the term "corporations" is employed in this chapter, it should be taken to mean "most corporations, more or less."

The actual corporations that conform most closely to the ideal-type comprise, it should be noted, what Galbraith has called the "industrial system." According to Galbraith, the "industrial system" is the "heartland of the modern economy."[3] In his opinion, and my own (much less informed), it is also the wave of the future.

This chapter will proceed rather straightforwardly. First, the ideal-type of the corporation, the predominant social form not only of modern capitalism, but of all modern society, will be considered. The separation of ownership from control--actual direction of the affairs of the corporation passing, over time, into the hands of professional managers lacking a vital stake in profit maximization, and ultimately to the highly-specialized members of the "technostructure"--has long been the central theme in the study of modern corporations, and will provide the starting point for

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[3] Galbraith, New Industrial State, p.21.

this analysis. Thereafter, the behavior of corporations managed by individuals other than their owners will be considered, with particular emphasis on the pricing and product policies of modern oligopolistic firms. The ideologies with which modern corporations justify their existence will then be discussed, not only in regard to the question of how corporations have gotten away with behaving as they do, but also as a means of transition to the next topic, the broader rationales of contemporary capitalism, particularly its twin goddesses of profit and growth.

As does every critical liberal examination of capitalism, this chapter will conclude with a brief consideration of alternative economic systems. There, the theory of reification becomes especially important. Comparison of economic systems inevitably degenerates into a dispute between apples and oranges; different kinds of institutional arrangements obviously promote certain values at the expense of others, and only utopian visions have ever produced economic systems that protect equally the principal values on which most individuals are agreed. But it will be argued here that most of the undesirable effects of capitalist and non-capitalist systems alike are the products of reification, and that once reification is abolished, those effects disappear, as well as most of the putative differences between alternative forms of economic organization. The theory of reification thus

provides not only a general framework for the analysis of differing economic systems, but, inescapably and thoroughly liberal in its inclinations, a resolution to the most serious historical and political dilemma of liberalism--the seemingly unavoidable attachment to the capitalist system and all the manifold evils emanating from it.

The ideal-type of the large, publicly-owned, internally complex corporation conforms precisely to the definition of "institution" proposed in Chapter VI. Its primary goals are survival, growth, and profit; all inwardly-oriented and self-concerned, or, in Mohr's terms, reflexive. It legitimizes its activities by reifying its products and its alleged goals, and generally by reifying itself as well. Even Peter Drucker, one of the most ardent defenders of the modern corporation as a social form, agrees that, "a corporation is an institution and no longer a mere tool."[4] Or, as Baran and Sweezy, two of the most effective critics of the modern corporation, have written, "the replacement of the individual capitalist by the corporate capitalist constitutes an institutionalization of the capitalist function."[5] The perennial

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[4]Peter F. Drucker, The Concept of the Corporation, Mentor Books (rev.ed.; New York: New American Library, 1964), p.41.

[5]Baran and Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, p.44.

example of the individual enterpreneur who, in order to raise capital for the promotion of his private purposes, incorporates his activities, but then loses control of his corporation to the stockholders, provides the simplest paradigm of the corporation as a reification.

Originally, though, the concept of a corporation contained few of the characteristics of institutionalization; on the contrary, the early development of economic corporations was narrowly limited to the development of controllable tools for the service of public ends. The historical evolution of the corporate form since then, characterized throughout by a growing distance between ownership and control, represents little more than the development and legitimation of generalized institutionalization.

The first economic corporations in the Anglo-American tradition were direct creatures of government, created by the state for the pursuit of narrow public ends, like the building of canals or other public works, the development of trade, or the economic exploitation of colonial areas. Corporate charters regulated their powers, duties, and areas of activity with narrow precision, and were always understood as direct grants of sovereign authority, directly revocable for failure to conform to the charter's specifications.[6]

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[6]Cf. R. W. Boyden, "The Breakdown of Corporations," in Andrew Hacker, ed., The Corporation Take-Over, Anchor Books

The tight reins on which the early corporations were held resulted from the experience with earlier, non-economic, corporations such as religious orders, educational institutions, guilds, and towns. Their social purposes, for the attainment of which their autonomy was granted, having become obscured by the passage of time and the workings of institutionalizing ideologies, late-medieval corporations were able to promote their private interests in direct conflict with the public commonweal, at least as it was conceived by the monarchs, behind the shield of reified legitimacy. Chastened by this experience, the national governments of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were determined to keep the noses of economic corporations to the grindstone of public purpose.[7]

It was not, indeed, until the middle of the nineteenth century that general acts of incorporation were adopted in most of the American states or Great Britain. The ease with which general incorporation, unlimited by, or subject to, social purposes, and with only the narrowest public guidance and limitation, came to be accepted in both this country and Great Britain is a complex historical subject, too lengthy

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(Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1965), p.49; Earl Latham, "The Body Politic of the Corporation," in Edward S. Mason, ed., The Corporation in Modern Society (2d.ed.; New York: Atheneum, 1972), pp.221-222; Adolf A. Berle and Gardiner C. Means, The Modern Corporation and Private Property (New York: Macmillan, 1932, pp.128-129.

[7]Cf. Boyden, "The Breakdown of Corporations," pp.48-49.

and complicated to be examined here. But there can be no question that the modern juristic form of the corporation, effected at the very height of laissez-faire ideology run amuck, represented a deliberated rejection of the principle that corporate entities should be dominated by commitment to public purposes.[8]

The adoption of general incorporation statutes recognized the confusion between persons and things as legally legitimate. The personification of objects, which so often plays a central role in reification, was made easier by the obliteration of legal distinctions between individuals and the objective agents of their economic activity. And this mystifying personification, combined with the crucial attribute of limited liability, created, in the corporation, a potential source of enormous social power which did not go long unexploited.[9]

In this country, the gradual application, in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, of Constitutional guarantees to the legal fictions of corporations was crucial to that development. At the very time it narrowed the scope of the Bill of Rights in matters of individual liberties, the Supreme Court, in a

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[8]Ibid., pp.50-51; Berle and Means, Modern Corporation and Private Property, pp.136ff.

[9]Cf. Arnold, Folklore of Capitalism, pp.185ff.

series of decisions which represents the very apogee of naked capitalist power, held that requirements of due process and civil freedom applied to corporate entities.[10] As a result, the corporation acquired all the protections and guarantees which had originally been thought to be the natural rights of individuals, without at the same time incurring any of the obligations or duties of citizenship, let alone any of the needs or desires of human personality. The value which a democratic society necessarily attaches to human beings was thus appropriated to social objects, permitting those objects to govern human activity. Or, in other words, corporations became infused with intrinsic value that, historically and ethically, had previously belonged only to human beings.[11]

The selfish enterpreneur, anxious to enrich himself at the expense of society, thus had the perfect instrument at his disposal. The entirely predictable results are too well-known to merit any discussion. But by the time public opinion began to recognize the reified character of the great corporations, their constitution had already begun to change. The first wave of popular hostility towards the corporation

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[10]Cf. Walton H. Hamilton, "The Path of Due Process of Law," in Leonard W. Levy, ed., American Constitutional Law: Historical Essays, Harper Torchbooks: The Academy Library (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp.131-154.

[11]Cf. Arnold, Folklore of Capitalism, pp.33ff.

was directed at the Rockefellers, Morgans, Hills, and Pullmans, lone individuals hiding their private interests behind the reified legal bulwark of corporate status. Yet before that wave had even passed, a newer, and still more thoroughly reified form was coming into dominance.

The publication of The Modern Corporation and Private Property in 1932 marked one of those rare moments in intellectual history when the popularization of an idea coincides almost exactly with its concrete realization. The great holding companies of the twenties to which Berle and Means devoted so much attention as a device for effectively disenfranchising the majority of stockholders represented, in fact, the last great instances of individual sovereignty produced by any kind of ownership over a large corporation.[12] Before the aftershocks of the crash of 1929 were over, the Insulls and Van Sweringens had passed from the scene, and new legislation made their reappearance unlikely.[13] In their place, with the exception of a few quaint anachronisms like Ford or Montogomery Ward, were the corporations in which stock ownership was so widely diffused as to make absurd even the idea of minority, let alone majority control.

Given the abuses prevalent at the time they wrote,

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[12]Cf. Berle and Means, Modern Corporation and Private Property, pp.172-180.

[13]Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, pp.129-131.

Berle and Means were most concerned that the separation of ownership from control would provide rapacious managers the opportunity to rob blind the corporations they were supposedly managing in trust.[14] But whether the reform legislation of the '30s made that outcome unlikely, or simply because executive compensation has remained so outrageously high that further attempts by executives to milk the hand that feeds them would be ludicrous, mismanagement for purposes of personal gain has been the exception--although, as the history of the Penn Central indicates, it is not totally unheard of--rather than the rule.[15] As a result, the separation of ownership and control, instead of being met with continued outrage and alarm, has come to be accepted and even, in many cases, welcomed. Even Berle reconciled himself to it.[16]

But from the perspective of the theory of reification, the less that corporate managers are committed to purely personal motives, and the more to the good of the corporation as an institution, the more severe a problem their autonomy becomes. For the honest commitment of corporate managers to the goals of the corporations for which they work means that they, too, have accepted the reified nature of the corporation,

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[14]Cf. Berle and Means, Modern Corporation And Private Property, pp.119-125.

[15]Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, p.128

[16]Cf. Adolf A. Berle, The 20th Century Capitalist Revolution (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954), pp.61ff.

and that no one in a position to exercise any power or control over corporate behavior is any longer concerned with the way in which the corporation is meeting anyone's human needs.

As discussed earlier, the existence of reifications in alienated society provides alienated individuals, through the mechanism of identification, the opportunity of attaching themselves to socially powerful entities. The more a corporate manager attaches himself to the goals of the corporation, the more legitimate his action will be considered by a society which still values loyalty to institutions, no matter how reified, and the more his standing in the community will advance. Material rewards--which also come from faithfulness to the corporation's interests--are not the sole motivation. Status and prestige attach precisely to those who appear to be most unselfishly serving the interests of something larger than themselves.[17] And yet the goals which loyal and dedicated corporate managers are serving are precisely the goals of no one, but of a reified thing.

The situation is made still worse, and still more ludicrous, by the continued existence of, and continued belief in, the myth of fiduciary responsibility of managers, who are thought to hold in trust the management of stockholders' interests. Demands for corporate action in the public interest

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[17] Cf. Arnold, Folklore of Capitalism, p.320.

are generally met with the rebuttal that such actions would not be in the interests of stockholders. Given the foregoing analysis, it is entirely possible that corporate managers, in taking such a position, are both entirely sincere and feel themselves enitrely constrained by their formal legal and ethical obligations.

But there are no stockholders. Or, more precisely, the carefully cultivated image of widows and orphans reliant on their quarterly dividend checks has, by this time, only the most remote connection to the truth. Corporate stock is owned largely by other institutions. The "stockholders" in whose interests corporate managers putatively conduct the affairs of the corporation are primarily banks, insurance companies, and pension funds, most of which are themselves institutionalized.[18] The most important of these, the major banks, largely own themselves through their trust departments, in the final extension of institutionalization.[19] And those individuals who remain active investors in common stocks and corporate bonds are primarily occupants of sufficiently high tax brackets to be far less concerned with dividends, which are taxable as income, than with capital appreciation, which is at best only indirectly connected with the day-to-day

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[18] Cf. Richard J. Barber, The American Corporation: Its Power, Its Money, Its Politics (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1970), pp.54ff.

[19] Ibid., p.65.

operations of any corporation.

There is still one more stage in the separation of corporate management from submission to the interests of any human beings. For if Galbraith is right--and this, his most important assertion, has gone largely unchallenged--then the actual direction of large corporations has passed progressively from the hands of top management to the inner bowels of the "technostructure." The diversity and complexity of information required to make major decisions in large corporations have produced, says Galbraith, a system of decision-making by committees whose members possess specialized knowledge no one individual can be expected to have. In other words, individual human beings no longer make decisions at all; and as any executive will tell you, a committee is far different from the sum of its parts. The grounds on which the technostructure's committees make their decisions are those of the narrow, specialized disciplines which the committee members represent.[20] In other words, Galbraith's technostructure represents the institutionalization of formal rationality, in the form of engineering, sales and marketing techniques, and "operations research."

Even if Galbraith's analysis is less than perfectly applicable to all large corporations, the reification of

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[20]Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, pp.71ff.

of formal rationality within the corporation can be created by another source. One of the ways in which corporate apologists, both in business and academia, have reacted to the unavoidable fact of the separation of ownership from control is to speak of, and attempt to further, the "professionalization" of management. So long as they have spent sufficient time at Harvard Business School, the argument seems to go, corporate managements can be trusted to protect the interests of stockholders and the general public.[21]

But professionalism of any sort, as has been seen, consists merely of an attachment to a specific set of techniques and values which, it is entirely likely, may conflict with the interests of the organization for which the professional works, as well as those of society as a whole. Moreover, professionalism supplants individual autonomy and commitment to organizational goals with allegiance to an impersonal and frequently reified code of behavior that may have nothing to do with the goals of any individual.

The question arises, as it so often does in the discussion of reification, as to just what it is that is being

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[21]Cf. Barber, American Corporation, pp.96-98; Robert L. Heilbroner, The Limits of American Capitalism, Harper Torchbooks: The Academy Library (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p.33; and, most importantly, Edward S. Mason, "The Apologetics of 'Managerialism,'" The Journal of Business, XXXI (January, 1958), pp.1-11.

reified: where do the goals and imperatives to which management dedicates itself, at the expense of everything else, come from? The answer, legally recognized and codified, is the "going concern." The intangible sum of experience, know-how, and "goodwill" constitutes, for most corporations, the overwhelming part of their assets, or valuation; certainly, the scrap value of its physical plant represents only a small fraction of the market value of the modern corporation.[22] In this sense, the legal recognition that the core of the corporation is the "going concern" only coincides with, and confirms, the assertion in Chapter VI that institutionalization revolves around an internal core of practices and procedures, which are preserved at all costs, and which in a very real sense constitute the immortal soul of the institution. The soul of the corporation is the "going concern," to the salvation of which everything else is subordinated.

In sum, the modern corporation in its ideal form is almost perfectly reified, both within and without. Powerful, purposive, and important as it may be, it directly serves the goals and interests of no one or set of human beings. Rather, it promotes its own interests--the interests of a reified, non-human object--according to the dictates of impersonal and

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[22]Cf. John R. Commons, Legal Foundations of Capitalism (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), pp.143ff.; Arnold, Folklore of Capitalism, pp.201-202.

often reified formal rationality. Andrew Hacker has drawn a portrait of an imaginary corporation possessing most of the attributes of the ideal-type so convincingly, and so chillingly, that it is worth quoting in full, despite its considerable length:

> By 1972 American Electric had completed its last stages of automation: employees were no longer necessary. Raw materials left on the loading platform were automatically transferred from machine to machine, and the finished products were deposited on the other end of the factory ready for shipment. AE's purchasing, marketing, and general management functions could be handled by ten directors with the occasional help of outside consultants and contractors.
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> Beginning in 1962 AE's employee pension fund had started investing its capital in AE stock. Gradually it bought more and more of the company's shares in the open market, and by 1968 it was the sole owner of AE. As employees became eligible for retirement--some of them prematurely due to the introduction of automation--the fund naturally liquidated its capital to provide pensions. But instead of reselling its AE shares on the open market, the fund sold the stock to AE itself, which provided the money for pensions out of current income. By 1981 the last AE employee had died, and the pension fund was dissolved. At this time, too, AE became the sole owner of its shares. It had floated no new issues, preferring to engage in self-financing through earnings.
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> By 1982 the ten directors decided that AE would be well served by the passage of legislation restricting the imports of certain electrical equipment. They therefore secured the services of a public relations firm specializing in political campaigns. The objective was to educate the public and sway grassroots sentiment so that Congress would respond by passing the required bill. The public relations firm was given a retainer of $1 million and told to spend up to $5 million more on advertising and related activities.
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> Within months the public began to hear about the dire consequences that would follow the importation of alien generators. National security, national prosperity, and the nation's way of life were threatened by a flood of foreign goods. The public relations firm placed several

hundred advertisements in newspapers and magazines, and almost a thousand on television. At least fifty citizens' committees "spontaneously" arose to favor the legislation, and over two hundred existing groups passed resolutions in its support. Lectures were given to women's clubs, and films shown in high schools. By the end of the year--an election year--public sentiment had been aroused and hardly a Congressman was unaware of the popular ferment.

The bill was introduced in both chambers, and a good majority of senators and representatives, abiding by the wishes of their constituents, voted for it. The President signed the bill, and it became law. AE's profits were substantially higher the following year.

A group of senators, however, were curious about what had been going on, and they decided to investigate AE's foray into the political arena. One of the directors was happy to testify, for he knew that no law had been violated. No bribes had been offered, certainly, and no contributions to legislators' campaigns had been made. Toward the end of the inquiry, after all of the techniques employed by the company and the public relations firm had been brought out, the following colloquy took place:

DIRECTOR: ...And if we undertook these educational and political activities, it was our view that they were dictated by the company's best interests.

SENATOR: Now when you say that these campaigns were on behalf of the "company's" interests, I am not clear what you mean. Were you acting for your stockholders here?

DIRECTOR: I am afraid, Senator, that I cannot say that we were. You see, American Electric has no stockholders. The company owns all its stock itself. We bought up the last of it several years ago.

SENATOR: Well, if not stockholders, then were you acting as a spokesman for American Electric's employees --say, those whose jobs might be endangered if foreign competition got too severe?

DIRECTOR: No, sir, I cannot say that either. American Electric is a fully atuomated company, and we have no employees.

SENATOR: Are you saying that this company of yours is really no more than a gigantic machine? A machine that needs no operators and appears to own itself?

DIRECTOR: I suppose that is one way of putting it. I've never thought much about it.

SENATOR: Then so far as I can see, all of this political pressure that you applied was really in the in-

> terests of yourself and your nine fellow directors. You spent almost six million dollars of this company's money pursuing your personal political predilections.
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> DIRECTOR: I am afraid, Senator, that now I must disagree with you. The ten of us pay ourselves annual salaries of $100,000 year in and year out, and none of us receives any bonuses or raises if profits happen to be higher than usual in any given year. All earnings are ploughed back into the company. We feel very strongly about this. In fact, we look on ourselves as a kind of civil servant. Secondly, I could not say that the decision to get into politics was a personal wish on our part. At least eight of the ten of us, as private citizens, that is, did not favor the legislation we were supporting. But we were acting in the company's interest and in this case we knew that it was the right thing to do.
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> SENATOR: And by the "company" you don't mean stockholders or employees, because you don't have any. And you don't mean the ten directors because you just seem to be salaried managers which the machine hires to run its affairs. In fact, when this machine gets into politics--or indeed any kind of activity--it has interests of its own which can be quite different from the personal interests of its managers. I am afraid I find this all rather confusing.
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> DIRECTOR: It may be confusing to you, Senator, but I may say it has been quite straightforward for us at American Electric. We are just doing the job for which we were hired--to look out for the company's interests.[23]

Returning to his own voice, Hacker reiterates that. "the corporation, however, is power--the power of productive assets--without a human constituency. It has interests to promote and defend, but they are the interests of a machine."[24] And it is clear that the specifics of Hacker's portrait are unimportant; ownership by a large number of institutional stockholders is not very much different, in effect, from

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[23]Andrew Hacker, "Introduction: Corporate America," in Hacker, ed., The Corporation Take-Over, pp.3-5.

[24]Ibid., p.5.

self-ownership; having the interests of no employees to worry about is not very much different from the general de facto ignoring of those interests anyway; and while many corporations pay bonuses to management which are tied to the level of profits, any jacking up of those profits in the short run for individual advantage is unthinkably unacceptable conduct. Certainly, no manager of General Motors would think of selling off the Cadillac division in order to reap a quick one-year profit.[25]

The final element in this portrait has still not been added. For even Hacker's caricatured Frankenstein has one limitation. American Electric is a national corporation, functioning within the territorial limits of one nation, and governed entirely by its law. Indeed, it seems to have its own foreign policy, but that is simply one of erecting protectionist walls around its sphere of business. The largest and most powerful modern corporations, however, are multinational, doing business in a number of nations, and submitting to the needs or policies of none.[26] Before national governments have begun to seriously confront their size and power, then, the largest corporations have already evolved

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[25]Once again, the Penn Central seems to be the exception which proves the rule. Cf. Joseph R. Daughen and Peter Binzen, The Wreck of the Penn Central, Signet Books (New York: New American Library, 1973), p.126.

[26]Cf. Barber, American Corporation pp.250ff.

one step further, to the point where no single national government could entirely control them, even if it wanted to.[27]

Before turning from this description of the modern corporate form to a discussion of its behavior, one obvious objection must be dealt with. Corporations, it has been argued, are governed by and responsive to no one, certainly not to their stockholders, managers, or employees. But it might be objected that they are responsive to their consumers; that since the entire rationale of corporate activity is the production of goods which are demanded by consumers, corporate behavior is highly and perfectly functional, since it provides things people want. Moreover, this argument might continue, it is necessary for corporations to continue making considerable profits in the performance of this function since profits provide the capital that insures that goods can be produced in the future as new demands arise and population expands. Such a position, no doubt, would be taken by most corporate apologists in response to the arguments made here.

The apologetic position would seem, however, to be directly contradicted by the constant tendency of corporations to diversify their product lines, and the more recent trend towards the removal of any hint of functionality from corpo-

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[27]Cf. Ibid., pp.280-283; Robert Sherrill, "Invisible Empires: Multinationals Deploy to Rule," The Nation, April 16, 1973, pp.488-495.

rate names and symbols. Any organization truly commited to the production of socially-desired widgets should look without trepidation on the possibility that the demand for widgets will evaporate; but in actual practice, corporations are generally eager to guarantee that, if demand for one of their products should fall, they would have available alternative products to justify and make possible their continued existence.[28] The frantic efforts of tobacco companies to diversify over the past decade is only a particularly clear example of this phenomenon. Similarly, the change in corporate name from United States Rubber to Uniroyal, or United Airlines to UAL, or Corn Products Corporation to CPC, gives evidence of a clear desire to remove any connection with social function from corporate identification. What a corporation does has, finally, come to be completely acknowledged to be less important than what it is. Its mere existence becomes justification enough.

If a cursory analysis readily establishes that corporations are reifications, additional analysis can easily demonstrate that they behave like reifications as well. First of

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[28]Cf. Barber, American Corporation, pp.45-52; F. M. Scherer, Industrial Market Structure and Economic Performance, Rand McNally Economics Series (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1970), pp.67-69.

all, like all other institutions, corporations seek above all to survive.[29] The institution seeks to perpetuate itself, even at the price of total abandonment of its original functions, or, for that matter, of any social functions. As--once again--an extreme case, the Penn Central has essentially sought to guarantee its continued existence by going out of the railroad business altogether, concentrating instead on safer endeavors like real estate.[30]

In this desire for self-perpetuation, corporations are considerably abetted by the law. As Drucker says,

> the corporation is really socially and politically a priori whereas the shareholder's position is derivative and exists only in contemplation of law. This, for instance, is the position taken in our bankruptcy laws which put the maintenance of corporate integrity above the rights of the shareholders.[31]

Or anything else, it might be added.

But in a society of great affluence and constantly-increasing apparent prosperity, mere survival is hardly enough of a goal to keep corporate managers occupied and off the streets. Corporations certainly have other goals. Notwithstanding the extensive literature on the subject, the suggested alternatives, or the lamentations for days gone by,

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[29]Cf. Drucker, Concept of the Corporation, p.30; Galbraith, New Industrial State, p.177.

[30]Cf. Daughen and Binzen, Wreck of the Penn Central, p.112.

[31]Drucker, Concept of the Corporation, p.31.

the primary goal of most corporations is profits. To be sure, managers may "satisfice" rather than maximize their profits;[32] be more concerned with the rate of growth of sales or profits than with the absolute level of profits themselves;[33] seek profits only within the framework of a number of serious constraints.[34] But seek profits they do. The ways in which profit-seeking as a goal in itself has been legitimized and reified will be discussed shortly, but first it is instructive to look at the ways in which large modern corporations seek profits, in order to illustrate the ways in which reifications behave.

The primary fact about the behavior of large, oligopolistic corporations is that they possess considerable power to determine what prices they will charge for their products. Unlike the theoretical enterpreneur of classical liberal economic theory, oligopolists are not forced to take prices from the market as a given.[35] On the other hand, it has never been plausibly argued, despite Baran and Sweezy's valiant attempts, that oligopolies determine prices in the

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[32]Cf. Simon, Administrative Behavior, p.24.

[33]Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, pp.178-179.

[34]Cf. Cyert and March, Behavioral Theory of the Firm, p.43.

[35]Cf. Paul A. Samuelson, Economics (8th ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p.461.

way pure monopolists would do, that is, by equating marginal costs with marginal revenues.[36] Oligopolists' prices generally tend to fall somewhere between the two extremes.

What oligopolists do, in fact, is set prices either to guarantee some arbitrary percentage return on their capital, or to insure some arbitrary mark-up on costs.[37] General Motors, for instance, has for more than twenty years followed the policy of setting prices to guarantee a 20% return on capital after taxes even if production is limited to only thirty-six weeks of the year.[38] Such profits, while clearly extortionate, are not quite those of a pure monopolist. Regulated industries, like utilites, on the other hand, provide the clearest examples of corporations which calculate all their costs and then seek to insure a certain level of return beyond that. Epic battles have raged in regulatory agencies and the courts over just what that rate of return should be.[39]

The most immediate impact of this kind of behavior

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[36]Cf. Baran and Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, p.59.

[37]Cf. Andrew Shonfield, Modern Capitalism: The Changing Balance of Public and Private Power (rev.ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.359; Samuelson, Economics, pp.485-486.

[38]Cf. Heilbroner, Limits of American Capitalism, p.47.

[39]Cf. Leonard A. Weiss, Case Studies in American Industry, Introduction to Economics Series (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), p.100.

occurs on the general macro level of the economy, in the problem of inflation. Large producers, whose prices are the most important for the health of the economy as a whole, simply pass along the increased costs of labor settlements or raw-materials to their consumers.[40] So automatic is this process that it has come to be taken for granted, as in the establishment of wage-price controls, when it was simply assumed that large producers would be permitted to pass along all their cost increases.

Simple reflection reveals that accepting such a system implies the complete foregoing of any income redistribution. If the share of labor in corporate income is to increase, the absolute level of that income must be increased as well, but if the increase is passed on to consumers, the corporation's employees, who are also consumers, are no better off in the long run. If small, independent suppliers seek to increase their often perilously narrow margins, the large corporations pass on those increases as well, thus increasing the suppliers' costs. And increases in corporate taxation in order to provide transfer payments to low-income citizens become self-defeating when the costs of those taxes are passed on to the recipients of transfer payments.

The recent spectacle of record corporate profits in a time of serious inflation and almost stable real wages is

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[40]Cf. Shonfield, Modern Capitalism, pp.359-361.

a direct result of this kind of behavior. Indeed, the very idea of "cost-push" inflation is grounded in a complete acceptance of the legitimacy of corporations behaving as they do, setting prices to guarantee an arbitrary level of return without paying attention to anything else. And since oligopolistic prices tend to be rigid downwards--they rise, but never fall--it is entirely reasonable to expect constantly increasing profits, accompanied by a continuing fixity in the distribution of national income.[41]

Above all else, corporations seek to minimize uncertainty. Like all institutions, they gurantee predictability by negotiating with their environments and governing themselves according to simple, regularized rules. Profits need not be maximized so long as the risk of loss is minimized;[42] and the certainty of modest gains is far preferable to the risk of incurring great losses in the search for great profits. Edward Mason, one of the wisest students of the modern corporation, sums up the situation well when he writes:

> What seems to have happened in our corporate society is that the prime movers of economic growth, the rate of capital formation, and the rate of technological improvement have become institutionally determined. And the political and economic balance among forces in society seems sufficiently resistant to change to prevent any marked redistribution of the fruits of growth. The stock of capital continues to grow at about twice the

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[41] Cf. Baran and Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, pp.71-72.

[42] Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, p.178.

> rate of growth of the labor force. The average yield per unit of capital falls slightly or not at all. The per capita real earnings of labor increase at about 2 per cent a year and the shares of property and labor in the division of the product change with a glacial slowness.[43]

The crux of the matter is that the most important economic decisions in modern society are not made by the market's invisible hand--or, alternatively, by the maximally rational greed of the individual enterpreneur--but are, instead, "institutionally determined."

It should be mentioned only in passing that the institutional determination of prices and porfits in the modern corporate system often involves the sacrifice of product quality or consumer satisfaction. Veblen made the distinction between "vendibility" and "serviceability" almost seventy years ago,[44] and demonstrated that deliberate management "sabotage" was often required to guarantee the former.[45] Certainly, General Motors could make superior cars, or General Electric better toasters, at no higher prices if they were willing to sacrifice some of their profit margins. And, as will be discussed shortly, those profits are no longer necessary to perform all the economic functions assigned to them by classical

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[43]Edward S. Mason, "Introduction," in Mason, ed., The Corporation in Modern Society, p.3.

[44]Veblen, Theory of Business Enterprise, p.26.

[45]Thorstein Veblen, The Engineers and the Price System (New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1921), pp.9ff.

economics. But the reified attachment to a fixed level of return distorts the decisions of all large oligopolists, and, particularly, puts a serious limit on quality and qualitative improvement. An arbitrary rate of profits, which even in classical economics was justified only with reference to larger social functions, has become entirely an end in itself--even though it benefits no actual human beings--and the cornerstone of the most important economic decisions in society.

Apart from pricing policy, the most important way in which corporations guarantee continued profits lies in the creation of demand. To some extent, the invention and marketing of new products remains an entirely useful and necessary social function, from which rewards can justly be expected; the creation of a better mousetrap "creates," in a sense, its own market. But one is loath to say the same thing for vaginal deodorants, small cigars, or microwave ovens.

The creation of new and presumptively spurious consumer demand has long been a central feature of the Marxist critique of capitalist reification; by constantly creating the demand for new products, the capitalist system, it is argued, not only guarantees perpetual markets, but also keeps its workforce in a state of constant felt need, thus assuring that even when workers become adequately fed they will stay

lashed to the wheel in order to buy a second car.[46]

Veblen, too, made the creation of demand, through the mechanisms of "conspicuous consumption" and "pecuniary emulation," a central theme in his critique of industrial society.[47] In our own time, Galbraith's description of the "dependence effect"[48] has been the most eloquent and effective description of this phenomenon.

No discussion here could match either the economic or expository skill of these masters. But it can be suggested that a new product, for which demand is artificially created in order to serve the selfish needs of the corporation, is an almost pure reification. The techniques of product marketing and advertising center on the attachment of non-instrumental value to a product or brand name, so that the consumer prefers Cadillac to Chevrolet for reasons having nothing to do with the fact that both are modes of transportation.

More subtly, and perhaps more importantly, value is attached to products by the creation of new needs, the fulfillment of which provides the entire value of the product.

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[46] Cf. note 1, p.199 above.

[47] Cf. Thorstein Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions, Mentor Books (New York: New American Library, 1953), pp.81,85.

[48] John Kenneth Galbraith, The Affluent Society, Mentor Books (New York: New American Library, 1958), pp.124ff.

What is spurious and reified about needs of this sort, such as the demand for electric pencil sharpeners or anti-perspirant deodorants, is that the value of meeting the need, through the purchase of the product, is created first, and the need then manufactured. This "revised sequence" as Galbraith aptly calls it,[49] clearly involves the reification of products through the creation of needs.

So far, it has been established that reified corporations seek profits in reified ways. But the goal itself, that of making profits, has not yet been adequately shown to be the reification that it is. To do so requires a discussion somewhat different from the instances of reification that have been adduced so far; to this point, most of the reifications discussed have been institutions, in the sense of formal organizations. But the value attached to profit, as well as to similar ideas like "growth," and "the economy," and "Gross National Product," involves the reification of an idea, an abstraction.

Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, the idea of reification has generally been taken to refer primarily to abstractions; the process of reification was itself thought to involve the assumption of thing-like characteristics by a non-thing, an abstraction. That is the way the dictionaries

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[49]Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, pp.221-228.

define the term, and the way in which non-Marxist social scientists have generally used it. The situation in the Marxist camp, because of its attachment to dialectic, has been somewhat more complex, but there too the idea that reification involves a distortion or misuse of abstractions has long been prevalent.[50]

The usage of reification employed here does not deny the applicability of the term to abstractions so much as it blurs the distinction between abstract and other entities. As objectifications known by, and influencing the behavior of, all members of a culture, abstractions like "profits" are no more or less real, no more or less objective, than material objects or institutions. Even a formal organization, of course, is largely an abstraction--some mental process recognizes the identity and commonality in the actions of a number of individuals--but so, too, for that matter is a "purely" material object like the famous table of linguistic philosophy, which is given cultural meaning only through its connection with abstract ideas of function and use.[51] In other words, abstract social objects like ideas or concepts are not importantly different, for purposes of the theory of reification and the sociology of knowledge, from more substantial

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[50]Cf. above, pp.70ff.

[51]Cf. Kovesi, Moral Notions, pp.1ff.

material objects, and there is no reason why they cannot be analyzed in the same way.

The dismal science of Adam Smith and his nineteenth-century disciples was the beneficiary of one of the most thorough and sustained public-relations campaigns in human history. Seized upon by the newly emergent bourgeoisie in order to legitimize their status and their new-found riches, liberal economics has been the subject of conscious reification since its origin.[52] The campaign continues. If anything, it became more concerted and virulent, in this country at any rate, after the Second World War, when the continued threats to business hegemony of New Deal remnants at home and creeping socialism abroad engendered a last desperate rush to the battlements. Today, corporate leaders still speak disingenuously of educating the public on the importance of profits to the nation's health and their own well-being.[53]

And yet the "science" of economics, such as it is, has never quite conformed to the claims of those who would use it as a weapon. First, it suffers from a fundamental dilemma of all social sciences: it describes the actions of self-conscious actors to self-conscious actors. What

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[52]Cf. Mason, "Apologetics of Managerialism," p.5; Arnold, Folklore of Capitalism, pp.83ff.

[53]Cf. Galbraith, Affluent Society, pp.56-58.

appear in the technical journals, or with more assurance in the apologetic literature, as immutable scientific laws, are nothing more than the reports of how individuals have behaved and how they will continue to behave so long as certain assumptions are met. Since the findings of economics became an important political tool very early in the development of the discipline, a truly ridiculous situation was created in which, for instance, hedge buying in anticipation of inflation created inflation, or, alternatively, angry employees could prove, by the laws of Ricardo or Malthus, that their wages were held at the bare level of physical reproduction, even while their employer, who had read both Malthus and Marx, attempted to avoid the fate he found predicted for himself by paying substantially more. The neat, mechanical world of strict rationality assumptions and theoretically powerless actors became a complex zoo in which the individual, assuming that everyone but himself was acting in accord with the laws of economic science, could try to make a killing by acting differently.[54]

This tendency was made even more extreme by the propensity, also common in the social sciences, but seriously aggravated in economics by the political potential of its doctrines, to equate the real with the ideal. What Adam

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[54]Cf. Robert C. Turner, "'The Apologetics of "Managerialism"': Comment," The Journal of Business, XXXI (July, 1958), p.245.

Smith might have dispassionately described as an unavoidable, and perhaps even regrettable, fact, became transmuted into an ethically-charged rule for human behavior. Description was converted into prescription. That many of the great earlier economists were also ardent proselytisers did not reduce this propensity, nor did the use of terms like "efficient" and "optimal" to describe purely technical ideas.[55] So workers demanding decent wages, or small retailers seeking protection from the predatory practices of the large chain store, could be informed that their actions were not only hopelessly irrational, but ethically suspicious as well. A purer example of reification would be hard to find.

Liberal economics, appropriately perverted, thus provided a mystifying, reified screen behind which alienated capitalists could promote their interests, pointing whenever challenged, not to their activities themselves, but to the "higher laws" of economic science.[56] That this is still done, commonly and on a day-to-day basis, requires no extensive proof.

What is perhaps most ironic, if not amusing, about this process is the extent to which economics has been, and continues to be, simply wrong. The economics of Ricardo, for

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[55]Cf. Veblen, "Why Is Economics not an Evolutionary Science," passim.

[56]Cf. Arnold, Folklore of Capitalism, pp.187-192.

instance, may fairly be said to have rested on four pillars: the commodity theory of money, the labor theory of value, Malthus's law of population with its corollary, the iron law of wages, and Say's law. None are any longer accepted by modern economists, and the labor theory of value is now understood to stand in direct contradiction with another of Ricardo's assumptions, that of diminishing marginal returns.[57] Yet Ricardo's beliefs about the social value of profits and enterpreneurial actions are still pointed to aggressively by those who seek to rationalize corporate behavior.[58]

On a slightly more sophisticated level, the whole edifice of liberal economics was constructed on a number of assumptions about the nature of markets and market activities that, in this country for an example, have simply not held true for close to a century.[59] The heroic efforts of the Sherman Act to legislate the assumptions of classical economics succeeded only at channeling the deviations from those assumptions into different forms, indicating at the same time both the continued, reified appeal of the ideas of defunct

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[57]Cf. Samuelson, Economics, pp.27-28.

[58]Cf. John Kenneth Galbraith, "Economics as a System of Belief," American Economic Review, LX (May, 1970), pp.469-470.

[59]Cf. Berle, 20th Century Capitalist Revolution, pp.11-12.

economists and the powerlessness of those ideas against willful actors who choose to ignore them.[60]

The laws of the purely competitive market simply do not apply to an economy of price-making oligopolists. Contemporary economics has given recognition to this reality in the "theory of the second-best," which holds that if any one of the assumptions about basic market structure or actor motivation is violated, the theories and predictions grounded on those assumptions must, at the very least, be significantly modified.[61] Yet in a world where hardly any of the assumptions ever hold, the rest of the the theories are still generally treated as divine revelation.

The phantasmagorical world of liberal economics, in which disembodied abstractions play out their private logic on an ideal plane far removed from the actual content of human affairs, but still exercise control over those affairs, constituted, as was discussed earlier, the core of Marx's theory of reification, from which the theory here has been generated. The concepts of economic science mystify and distort what is really happening in the social world, partially because --like all efforts of the human intellect--they are often simply wrong, partially because they are asked to do a job

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[60]Cf. Galbraith, Affluent Society, pp.21-25.

[61]Cf. Scherer, Industrial Market Structure and Economic Performance, pp.23-27.

for which they are, by their own admission, incapable: explaining a world which displays none of the neatness or logical consistency which theory seems to demand. And this mystification and this distortion are self-consciously used by those who hold power in order to protect their interests, in order to give their status the appearance of natural immutability, and in order to deflect the attention and distort the energies of those who would oppose them.

The rationales for the social utility of profits, which legitimize the activities of reified corporations, are the products of this system. Still, it is not enough to discard the rationales because of their dubious parentage; at the very least, their social importance merits more detailed attention.

In essence, four separate, if related, rationales are offered for the pursuit of high levels of profits. In ascending order of importance, they are that profits, through dividends, provide income for stockholders who have no other sources, being retired or incapacitated or widowed or orphaned; that the rate of profit plays a central role in making possible the allocative functions of the capital market, guaranteeing that each marginal dollar of social investment will go to its most productive possible function; that profits insure the continued health of large corporations, and thus the secondary

benefits that they alone are capable of producing, like innovation, scale economies, and high levels of employment; and that investment financed from retained profit, or from bank loans made possible by a corporation's record of profitability, is the key to national economic growth and national security.

None of these arguments withstand serious scrutiny. Their continued employment belongs not to the class of plausible statements about relationships between means and ends, but to the class of mystifying defenses for reifications. It is clear that corporate decisions are motivated in large part by the desire for profits. Indeed, it would not be inaccurate to say that the modern American economy is directed largely by the search for profits. But the rationales for profit-making can not withstand even cursory scrutiny. That is because the pursuit of profits, at least for the large corporation conforming most closely to the ideal-type elaborated earlier in this chapter, has become the pursuit of an entirely reified goal. Profits are sought, not to serve any larger purpose, but because they are valued in themselves.

Perhaps because they themselves are so acutely aware of the changes in stock-owning patterns, corporate apologists appeal to the widows-and-orphans argument less frequently than they did in the past. For, as discussed earlier, individuals who must rely on corporate dividends for the most important part of their income constitute a small, and

declining, proportion of the owners of corporate securities. Most dividend income merely represents the transfer of funds from one wealthy institution to another. And those individuals who do rely on dividend income have available alternative avenues of investment, in savings institutions and government securities. If all corporate dividends were abolished tomorrow, it is extremely unlikely that anyone would starve as a result, and certainly no one would if some small fraction of the total dividends now distributed were made available as transfer payments to low-income individuals.

The capital-market argument is a little more complex, but not much. The major actors in the market, the large institutional investors and those who advise them, are themselves complex institutions, subject to the same ills of institutionalization and internal reification as any others.[62] The stock market has its own unique institutional characteristics that give the lie to any beliefs about a perfect, perfectly rational market. There is frequently more Las Vegas than Adam Smith--and certainly more 'Adam Smith' than Adam Smith--in the workings of the major stock exchanges.[63]

Moreover, the very existence of capital markets, in

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[62]An excellent description of leading financial institutions is provided by 'Adam Smith' [George J. W. Goodman], The Money Game (New York: Dell, 1969), passim.

[63]Cf. Veblen, Theory of Business Enterprise, p.74.

lending as well as the stock market, introduces another kind of distortion in corporate behavior. Rather than being the subjects of an impersonal market for capital, corporate managers, as one might reasonably expect, seek to exercise some degree of control and establish some degree of autonomy by manipulating the ways in which their corporations are perceived by financial institutions. The sad history of R. Hoe, a corporation whose stock increased in value over a hundredfold as a result of some creative management accounting, only to go bankrupt when it could no longer keep up appearances, is only an extreme example.[64]

The third rationale for the protection of profits hinges on what might be called the "Galbraith hypothesis" of the essential benevolence, if not unavoidability, of large, oligopolistic corporations. But Galbraith has already been refuted on his argument that corporate size produces technological innovation;[65] traditional arguments of technological economies of scale evaporate in the face of multi-plant corporations; and Galbraith's revised version of that argument, that there exist economies of scale in planning behavior,

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[64]Cf. "The sad story printed by R. Hoe," Business Week, July 19, 1969, pp.35-36; for similar creativity in the Penn Central, cf. Daughen and Binzen, Wreck of the Penn Central, p.221.

[65]Cf. Edwin Mansfield, The Economics of Technological Change (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1968), p.217; Scherer, Industrial Market Structure and Economic Performance, pp.377-378.

remains convincing so long as one fails to remember that by planning Galbraith is talking about the long lead-times involved in the introduction of the kinds of new products he criticized so severely in his earlier works.[66]

There is nothing socially useful, in other words, that large corporations do that they can be conclusively shown to do better than small ones. Most of the arguments in defense of corporate bigness revolve around a kind of misplaced "realism" which accepts what exists because of the difficulty of imagining alternatives, and is entirely characteristic of reified consciousness. That corporate growth and financial health lead to increasing employment is true, for instance, so far as it goes, but there is no reason why that same employment could not be provided by government agencies or non-profit corporations. Indeed, as Heilbroner points out, only one out of ten new jobs created by the American economy in the 1950s came from the private sector.[67]

The "realistic" acceptance of the unavoidability of large oligopolistic corporations is carried to its logical extreme by apologists for those ologopolists that, as a result of serious managerial incompetence, find themselves in danger of going under. At that point, the spurious unexpendability

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[66]Cf. Galbraith, New Industrial State, pp.23-29.

[67]Heilbroner, Limits of American Capitalism, p.52.

of institutions is openly emphasized and argued for. Thus, when a major defense contractor, because of its own failures and dishonesty, nears the edge of bankruptcy, its defenders, both in the corporation and the government, contend that continued maintenance of the going concern is necessary for the national defense, despite the palpable fact that, were the corporate structure to go bankrupt or even disappear altogether, its physical assets--the only part necessary to the national military--would not only remain, but probably be available to the government at bargain-basement prices.[68]

That the total collapse of a "going concern" need have only the most marginal impact on the social utility of its assets is readily demonstrated by the experience of the Penn Central, which also sought to protect the interests of its stockholders and creditors by appealing to the "national interest."[69] When the government refused to be hornswoggled, bankruptcy did ensue, with no apparent loss in the admittedly limited quality of the Penn Central's services.

The reification of the going concern, as opposed to

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[68]Cf. John W. Finney, "President Urges Prompt Passage of Lockheed Aid," The New York Times, July 25, 1971, 1:8; William H. Moore, Chariman of the Board, Bankers Trust Company, Letter to the Editor, Ibid., July 27, 1971, 32:3; "Aerospace: The case for helping Lockheed," Business Week, May 15, 1971, pp.41-42.

[69]Cf. Daughen and Binzen, Wreck of the Penn Central, pp.260-265.

the actual socially-functional attributes of the corporation, perfectly embodies Veblen's distinction between "business" and "industry,"[70] The business structure, it is argued, the corporate form, must be protected and permitted to seek its profits in its own way, so that the industrial structure may continue its productive activities. This argument, however dolled-up and mystified, is the heart of much of the defense of reified corporations. But it is simply false, and creates only reification.

Finally, there is the bigdaddy of all the apologetics, that corporate profits, both through the investment of retained earnings and the attractions provided by profits for outside investors, fuel economic growth. But that argument merely defends one set of reifications by reference to another.

The recent scare attacks on the "limits of growth" have, no doubt, been overdrawn, but it is clear that a considerable amount of economic and political activity over the last several generations has been justified in terms of an extremely dubious goal. The reification of Gross National Product distorts the degree to which that measure obscures and confuses unquestionably important human values. Gross National Product is obviously not a measure of net, or even gross, national welfare. A market system of any sort fails to measure,

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[70]Cf. Veblen, Theory of Business Enterprise, p.19 et passim.

as has increasingly come to be recognized, many social costs and "disamenities" of economic behavior, and only in economics is sheer physical increase any longer taken as a matter of qualitative improvement.[71]

The reification of Gross National Product has a recognizable political history itself, springing from the tacit post-Second World War alliance of Keynesian liberals anxious to reduce unemployment through government spending, and conservatives anxious to create an invulnerable defense posture. Those two positions, fundamentally in conflict at root, could both be accomodated to a vaguer goal of national economic growth, and in the post-McCarthy period it was seductively easy to tie that goal to Cold War strategy, even if the linkages between the aggregate level of national income and the effectiveness of a nation's military establishment are far more problematic than the easy equation would imply.[72]

In a sense, the national obsession with Gross National Product in the last twenty years or so represents merely the replacement of one guiding reification by another. With the advent of Keynesianism, fiscal concerns supplanted monetary

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[71]Cf. E. J. Mishan, The Costs of Economic Growth (London: Staples Press, 1967), pp.3ff.; Galbraith, Affluent Society, pp.110-112; Shonfield, Modern Capitalism, p.227.

[72]Cf. John Kenneth Galbraith, How to Control the Military, Signet Broadside (New York: New American Library, 1969), pp.50-56; Galbraith, Affluent Society, p.143.

ones, and instead of the gold standard being the preeminent economic reification, national output was put in its place. The world economic crises of the '30s are simply incomprehensible unless one recognizes the extent to which monetary standards were reified--despite the fact that every economic text for a hundred years had recognized that gold, or any other currency, is merely an arbitrarily-established medium of exchange. The sociologists knew better: in pre-Keynesian capitalist society, gold was the ultimate reification.[73] And one might go so far as to argue that Keynes's greatest contribution was not to economic theory, per se, but in the mechanism he provided for phasing out an old and obviously obsolete guiding reification, that of the gold standard, by replacing it with a new one, that of national output.

Still, as anyone with even a passing interest in international economics can attest, currencies retain much of their mystical power, perhaps more in Europe than in the United States; each time a nation must devalue its currency, it is said to have suffered a serious injury, while anytime it revalues upwards its national prestige soars accordingly. The very real price paid for this reification by citizens of nations with weak currencies seeking to strengthen them by reducing the real incomes of average citizens only attests

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[73]Cf. Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), pp.24-28.

to the remaining reified power of currency.[74]

The modern capitalist economy is reified from top to bottom. Its principal units, the giant corporations, are internally reified and externally institutionalized, seeking reified goals and legitimizing them by appeals to higher reifications that justify the concerns and policies of national leaders--national economic growth and currency stability. It even becomes possible to speak of economic actions or policies which are good for the people but bad for "the economy," as when Wall Street leaders criticized Senator McGovern's plans for income redistribution on the grounds that, by transferring income to lower-income groups, the gross level of investment in society would be reduced, and economic growth thus retarded.[75]

Baran and Sweezy talk of the "elementality" of the capitalist system, the fact that its principal mechanisms seem to function with the unavoidable and unstoppable force of natural events.[76] Goldmann, it should be remembered, spoke of the "anarchy" of capitalism.[77] Both "elementality" and "anarchy" are the direct products of the reified character

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[74]Cf. Mishan, Costs of Economic Growth, pp.27ff.

[75]Cf. Michael Ruby, "McGovern Through a Loophole Darkly," Newsweek, September 11, 1972.

[76]Baran and Sweezy, Monopoly Capital, p.338.

[77]Goldmann, Recherches dialectiques, p.70.

of the capitalist economy.

But the historically important question is whether these destructive attributes of capitalism could be avoided by the adoption of a fundamentally different set of economic arrangements. The analysis of capitalism in terms of the theory of reification suggests not, at least not in the conventional terms by which economic systems are generally identified. For internal reification and external institutionalization are evils to which public organizations are as susceptible as private ones, so long as alienation prevails in society. And the development of and attachment to reified goals at the expense of actual human well-being seems, the historical evidence would indicate, as likely to occur in non-capitalist societies as capitalist ones.

Central to the Marxist critique of capitalism is, of course, the thesis that the alienation which creates reification is more likely to develop under capitalism, and indeed would be abolished under true communism. To some extent, that argument follows directly from the degree to which the Marxist definition of alienation is tied to relationships of production; the broader definition of alienation adopted here suggests, on the other hand, that relationships of production are only one of the spheres of society in which alienation is created and manifests itself. Alienation is likely to exist in any society, regardless of its basis of organization, and

to the extent that it does, it is likely to produce reification, which creates the socially harmful effects normally associated with capitalism. Still, this counter-argument remains, for the time being, rather facile and shallow, and must await further development in the last chapter, where alienation and reification in general will be considered.

On one point, though, the Marxist critique would seem to have capitalism by the throat. The rational, self-conscious control of the economic sector by society must be a central part of any non-reified, non-alienated society. Indeed, conscious social control for human purposes is the very antithesis of reification, and to the extent that it is absent, reification and alienation are likely to flourish. And the ideology of capitalism is grounded, to a considerable extent, in the closing off of spheres of autonomy to the public, in the recognition of private rights of property, of economic decision-making, and economic activity. Central to capitalism is the idea of the self-regulating market, which by definition remains outside the control of conscious social forces. Uncontrolled, and uncontrollable, elementality--or anarchy--is the very soul of capitalism.

But as every schoolchild knows by now, there is a considerable divergence between ideology and reality. Andrew Shonfield has rather convincingly demonstrated, for instance, that a wide variety of devices are available for those who

wish to exercise some social control of a market system, and modern capitalism, even in so unreconstructed a bastion of free-market mythology as the United States, contains a significant admixture of social planning and direction.[78]

Indeed, as the theory of reification reveals, it is only by appealing to broader social purposes that the principal economic actors in a modern capitalist society like the United States are able to legitimize their continued existence. That those appeals are generally mystifying attempts to hide behind social goals which are themselves reified only indicates the next area of major concern for those who would seek to reduce the level of reification, and its consequent alienation, in capitalist society. What must be brought to the forefront is not the comparison between idealized systems of economic organization, but the needs and desires of society and its members. In Tawney's terms, "the acquisitive society," concerned primarily with production and growth whether it permits the existence of private property or not, must be replaced with a concern for the function of all economic activities for the satisfaction of human needs.[79] To date, no society of which I am aware has self-consciously approached its economic organization in such strictly functional terms,

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[78]Cf. Shonfield, Modern Capitalism, pp.61-67.

[79]Cf. Tawney, Acquisitive Society, p.84 et passim.

without any obeisance to reified, non-human ends.

What matters is not the existence or nonexistence of private property, nor the name by which the economic system is described, only the extent to which society purposively and self-consciously takes its economic fate into its own hands, permitting neither selfish interests nor their reified defenses to deflect it from its course. Once the needs of actual human beings are made paramount, details of organization and ideology necessarily fall into their properly secondary places.

CHAPTER IX

A NOTE ON THE NATION-STATE

> ...ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.
> --John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address

The analysis of reified institutions in the preceeding chapters does not pertain solely to the specific institutions and organizations mentioned. If the theory of reification is sound, it should apply to many other types of institutions as well; and if its presentation here has been coherent and comprehensible, individuals other than this writer should be able to perform that application.

The most important reification yet to be discussed is that of the modern nation-state. The nation-state is particularly well-suited for the theory of reification, not only because the theory seems to fit so well, but also because the legitimating myths and historical development of most modern states begin with a commitment to unreified, purposive service to the citizenry. Moreover, the tradition of liberal political thought--with which, I have been anxious to establish, the theory of reification presented here is intimately connected--has been explictly and thoroughly concerned with

the proper nature, form, and functioning of the state. An institution like the present government of the United States can thus be doubly condemned: first, becasue by the standards of the liberal theory of reification, it is reified; second, because it was explicitly founded as an instrumentality, the reification of which was to be combatted by a number of organizational and ideological devices.

But there will be no lengthy attempt here to apply the theory of reification to the American nation-state, or any of the many other nation-states it might describe so well. The task is simply too large. It merits not a chapter, but a companion volume, or several. On the other hand, the topic of the nation-state is too important to be ignored entirely. So what follows consists of only a few suggestive remarks, designed to demonstrate how the theory of reification might be applied to the problems of the nation-state, without actually essaying that application in any detail.

The idea that the individual, endowed with inalienable natural rights, exists historically and morally prior to the state lies at the core of the theory of the American Constitution, the political philosophy behind it, and much of the ideology which supports it. Government is created to serve certain purposes for its citizens: in Locke's words,

to remove the "inconveniencies" of the state of nature;[1] in the language of the Constitution, "in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility," and so forth.[2] The idea of a contract, central to liberal theory--and actually effected, to a considerable extent, in the preparation and ratification of the American Constitution--also contains the belief that the state is a construct created by its citizens to serve their ends. The state, in other words, is supposed to be a tool, a means to the ends of its citizens.

Hard questions like those of conscription--Hobbes said it was necessary to protect one's protection[3]--and the need for abstract loyalty to and respect for the institutions of government, in order that they might function at all, arise immediately. In keeping with the resolve of earlier paragraphs, they will not be unravelled here. But a few comments may be in order.

Considerations of "honor," "prestige," or "greatness" are funny things to attach to a tool. They refer, not to functional characteristics, but to values thought to inhere

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[1]John Locke, Two Treatises of Government, ed.Peter Laslett, Mentor Books (New York: New American Library, 1960), §90, p.369.

[2]Constitution of the United States of America, Preamble.

[3]Hobbes, Leviathan, ch.29, p.246.

in the tool itself. When objects acquire dignity or value, individuals who deal with them tend to lose dignity and value. It is also odd that it should come to be taken for granted that the tool must exist forever, and that in order to insure its continued preservation, many of the ends for which it was established in the first place must be sacrificed. When guns are necessary to ensure the continued provision of butter, that is one thing; when their continued maintenance for the separate purpose of promoting the "dignity" or insuring the "supremacy" of the state in its relationships with other states impoverishes the citizenry, that is something else. More drastically, a state established in order to "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity,"[4] may attempt to guarantee its own stability by eavesdropping on the conversations or burglarizing the homes of its citizens, not to mention detaining them on obviously specious charges. And it has already been shown how the desire to maintain national "prestige" as embodied in a currency can lead to economic policies seriously destructive of the welfare of individual citizens.[5]

There has been considerable discussion in recent weeks

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[4]Constitution, Preamble.

[5]See above, p.244.

of the proposition that, regardless of the behavior of any individual incumbent, the office of the Presidency must retain its legitimacy and its respect. In order for the government to continue to function, the argument seems to go, the role of President must remain reified. Historically, the roots of that position lie in the fact that, for much of the last forty years, the interests of the relatively powerless majority were most actively promoted by Presidential action, while Congress remained the largely inactive and incapable playground of narrower interests. A theory of the "strong" Presidency was thus developed.[6] But that theory contained two fundamental flaws. First, the strength of "strong" Presidents in the promotion of public interests flowed primarily not from the reified trappings of the Presidential office and role, but precisely from the extent of popular support, as reflected in electoral majorities, they acquired by acting and speaking in a manner agreeable to the interests of broad segments of the population. Presidential strength, in other words, had been produced by the functional, not the reified attributes of the Presidential role. No man ever exemplified the reified characteristics of the Presidential role better than Dwight Eisenhower, the nation's grandfather,

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[6]The most important example is Richard E. Neustadt, Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership, Science Editions (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1960), especially pp.183-195.

but he is precisely the President singled out by proponents of the "strong" Presidency as the weakest of modern times.[7]

Second, as the evidence of Summer, 1973, demonstrates, the Presidency, once reified, could be seized upon by those whose aims were radically different from those of the proponents of the "strong" Presidency, not to mention those whose interests coincided only with alienated wills.[8] Presidential statements in response to the Watergate revelations seemed transparent attempts to justify unjustifiable actions by hiding behind the shield of a reified Presidential role. One must suppose that former proponents of the "strong" Presidency wince visibly every time they hear the phrases "executive privilege" or "in the interests of national security."

Just as the "economy" and the corporation begin as artificial constructs designed to incorporate and fulfill the needs of individual human beings, but develop lives of their own unrelated to that original task, which often directly conflict with those of individuals, so does the state take on a life of its own, in which individual citizens, or even the citizenry as a whole, instead of being perceived and treated as masters whose interests must be served, come to be

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[7]Cf. Ibid., pp.163-171.

[8]Cf. Elizabeth Drew, "My Turn: What's Good for the Goose," Newsweek, June 11, 1973, p.13.

considered annoyances, obstacles, or even enemies.

But it would be wrong to imply that the mistreatment of its citizens by a reified state or its agents invariably represents an instance of minority tyranny--or even tyranny by no-body, by a thing. The reified nature of the state can be, and often has been, passively accepted, or even actively supported, by the majority of the citizens. There are three distinct possibilities: the reified state may be acting in the felt interests of no one, of a minority, or of a majority. In either of the first two instances, the critique of the state is simple, since it has obviously come to serve as the vehicle for the advancement of narrow, private interests at the expense of the general good. The third case is a little more difficult, but can be resolved once it is recalled that the will of all is not necessarily equivalent to the General Will. On this point Madison agreed with Rousseau: a majority was just as capable as a minority of uniting behind a private interest inimical to the general good.

Madison described the problem as one of "majority tyranny;"[9] in terms of the analysis presented in this work, it might also be portrayed as an instance of the way aliena-

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[9]Cf. James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers, ed. Clinton Rossiter, Mentor Books (New York: New American Library, 1961), #10, pp.78-80; Cf. also, Robert A. Dahl, A Preface to Democratic Theory, Phoenix Books (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1956), p.9.

tion and reification interact. For Madison's "majority tyranny" is nothing more than the use, by an alienated majority, of the reified state, in order to pursue alienated ends. The classic example in American history involves the reification of state governments, rather than the national government, in order to preserve white supremacy in the South both before and after the Civil War. Generally, it went under the name of "states' rights."

Appropriately enough, the remedies Madison designed for the problem of majority tyranny might best be described as those of internal reification, the establishment within the state of a number of separate and independent centers of power. Each would develop its own legitimacy, and all, taken together, would serve to frustrate the efficient and purposive attainment of alienated ends by the state as a whole. The 51st Federalist contains a remarkably explicit and self-conscious defense of the principle of creating an organizational structure that would always be at war with itself, or, in other terms, of attempting to hamstring a reified institution by creating internal reifications.[10]

Madison's system was not, however, entirely foolproof. Under the guise of "national security" or similar claims,

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[10]Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, Federalist Papers, #51, pp.32-325; cf. Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, The Concept of Representation (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Cal.: University of California Press, 1967), p.195

citizens have been persecuted by agents of the state since at least the time of the Alien and Sedition Acts. On a more mundane and humdrum level, the public weal continues to be starved by the demands for national "power," even when there are no legitimate national needs that that power could conceivably help attain.

On the simplest level of political rationality, it is easy to see why a conscious strategy of reifying the state would have considerable appeal for a political leader holding or seeking power within it. Alienated individuals like to be identified with a powerful reification; nationalism is thus part of most demagogues' stock in trade. Conversely, the leader of a reified institution becomes more powerful with every increase in the extent to which the institution is reified.

But this country has also experienced a definite process of historical development, extending at least as far back as the Civil War, and traceable as far back as Hamilton, in which the reification of the state, while serving the interests of particular individuals, has also been promoted to serve the interests of broader alienated groups. The reification of the government of the United States has been a long-standing aim of important elements of the business community and their allies in the Republican Party. With

a few deviations made necessary by peculiar historical or regional circumstances, those interests have continued in their pursuit of the reification of the state since the end of the Civil War.

For the business community, the reification of the state has had two advantages. First, it encouraged and made possible the undertaking of imperialist adventures which guaranteed dominance both of new markets for finished goods and excess capital, and new sources of cheap raw material. The development of a national concern for looking and acting like a "great power" was closely connected with the desire of capitalist interests to expand, particularly in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Charles Beard, indeed, went so far as to suggest that the very idea that such a thing as the "national interest" existed had been manufactured by business interests in order to legitimate imperialist activities.[11]

Second, it has been possible since at least the 1870s for conservative interests to identify domestic radicalism, no matter how indigenous, as being somehow foreign in origin or inspiration. In order to make that foreigness so unattractive, it was necessary to reify the nation. "Un-Americanism" can be a vice only when such a thing as "Ameri-

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[11]Cf. Charles A. Beard, The Idea of National Interest: An Analytical Study in American Foreign Policy, with the collaboration of G. H. E. Smith (New York: Macmillan, 1934), passim.

oanism" exists, and is valued. And "Americanism" was promoted and reified in order to protect the hegemony of private property.[12] Moreover, radical movements of the powerless tend, almost by definition, to be opposed to the existing organization of the state, since those with wealth and power are most likely to control the state apparatus. Reifying the state thus not only legitimizes the power of those who control it, but de-legitimizes their enemies. This is made most clear when holders of political office attempt to mystifyingly misinterpret radical attacks on their actions into attacks on the state itself, rather than the occupants of power within it.

The famous and lamentable destruction of the European Social-Democracy and its organizational embodiment, the Second International, at the onset of the First World War, demonstrates that this second process has not been unique to the United States. The leadership of the International, having read their Marx, was acutely aware that nationalism was the club with which the European ruling classes sought to keep radicalism under control. Nonetheless, they were incapable of countering its appeals, illustrating perhaps a kind of Gresham's Law of reification, in which reified attachments

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[12]Cf. Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution, Harvest Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1955), pp.203ff.

always win out over instrumental ones. Socialists in this country, emboldened perhaps by the three years which elapsed between the outbreak of war and American entry into the hostilities, were more courageous. That didn't prevent the government from taking advantage of the opportunity to throw hundreds of them into jail, destroy the Wobblies, and generally emasculate the entire native radical movement.[13]

Given the longstanding identification of the Republican Party with the interests of the business class, it would be easy to develop a simplistic explanation for the Grand Old Party's attachment to the processes of reifying the state. But it would probably be fairer and more accurate to contend that the Party, like George Washington Plunkitt, seen its chances and took 'em. Republican hegemony in national politics between the Civil War and the beginning of the Depression was originally founded on its claim to having won the Civil War, in opposition to the traitorous party of "rum, romanism, and rebellion." The Republican Party was the party of the Grand Army of the Republic. Later, it became the party associated with successful imperial adventures in

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[13]Cf. James Weinstein, The Decline of Socialism in America 1912-1925, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1967), pp.159-162; Daniel Bell, Marxian Socialism in the United States (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp.103-106; and for a highly personal, first-hand account, William D. Haywood, Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood (New York: International Publishers, 1929), pp.310ff.

places like Cuba and the Phillipines as well, as symbolized by Presidents Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft, respectively.

Having lost control of government to the Democrats as a result of the Bull Moose schism, the Republicans regained it by portraying themselves, once again, as the party of true Americanism: Protestant, dry, anti-intellectual, and anti-radical. The revival of nativist, isolationist, jingoism in the '20s may have met deep-seated psychic needs for much of the population, but it also carried a potent and direct political payoff. And the great raids on the public treasury conducted during the period of Republican domination, first by the robber barons and trusts, later by government officials themselves during the Harding Administration, only demonstrate how easy it is to advance private interests behind a shield of reified legitimacy.

The Republican resurgence after the Second World War was, similarly, founded largely on its opposition to the alleged twin threats of Communism abroad and at home. The career of Joe McCarthy, as Michael Paul Rogin has demonstrated, was entirely congruent with the traditions and attitudes of the mainstream of the Republican Party, at least in the Midwest.[14] In the 1972 Presidential campaign, a television

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[14]Cf. Michael Paul Rogin, The Intellectuals and McCarthy: The Radical Specter (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967),

commercial sought to imply that the Democratic candidate, if elected, would grievously weaken the military capabilities of the nation, reducing it to a "second-rate power" (which might, indeed, even be pushed around by a "fourth-rate power" like North Korea). While the commercial was sponsored by an organization calling itself "Democrats for Nixon," it fell well within the central traditions of Republican politics.[15]

It has not been my purpose in this brief historical survey to conduct a partisan attack on one of the political parties, nor even to imply that that party alone has been guilty of contributing to the reification of the state in order to further its pursuit of narrow political purposes. My feeling is that, if Republicans have been much guiltier than Democrats of reifying the state, it is at least partially because they have had more opportunities, and partially because the Democratic Party has long been dominated by an alliance between Southerners devoted to the reified values of white supremacy and big-city ethnic groups closely tied to that oldest and biggest of reifications, the Catholic Church.

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pp.233ff.

[15]An interesting sidelight, perhaps, concerns the famous propensity of the American electorate for choosing military heroes for the Presidency. At least seven Presidents have been high military officers before taking office. Of these, only one, Andrew Jackson, was a Democrat. And the very first Republican candidate for President, John C. Fremont, was also known primarily for his military career.

And certainly anyone seeking a stark example of the reification of the state need go no farther than John Kennedy's inaugural address, the most famous passage from which is quoted at the head of this chapter.

Instead, my point has been that the reification of the state, like all reification, pays, at least in the short run. It pays some--those satisfied with the status quo and the existing distribution of power--more than others. Under conditions of alienation, the strategy of reifying the state will often be highly rational, at least in the short run, and highly attractive for alienated individuals pursuing their self-interests. The nation-state is the biggest prize of all, and attempts to reify it will be unceasing.

In pre-modern political philosophy, the telos, or purpose, of politics was thought to inhere in the political community itself, and the activities of individuals were justified only so long as they were motivated by, and subordinate to, the larger purpose of the community. Hobbes symbolized the destruction of that view. The individual came first, not the collectivity, and the state existed only to serve the desires of individuals, not the other way around.[16] The

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[16] Cf. Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History, Phoenix Books (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp.182ff.

theory of American government, the theory of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, retains that order and that set of priorities. But the practice seems increasingly far removed from the theory. Ends have been converted into means, and means into ends. Reification has set in.

But the reification of the state differs, in one crucial way, from all other kinds of reification. Alienation, which produces reification, involves, as will be remembered, a divergence between the particular and the General Will. Yet if the General Will is to be embodied, expressed, and carried out by any social organ, the state is surely the likeliest mechanism. In liberal theory, of course, the state exists for precisely the purpose of embodying and enacting the General Will. Once it becomes reified, the last best hope for effective action in support of the General Will is eliminated. Other avenues remain available, but they are all considerably more cumbersome and indirect, and they will inevitably labor under the additional handicap of trying to act in opposition to the state. The revolutionary party, or countercultural commune--or more traditional organizations like the Church--may well come far closer to representing the General Will than the state does, but they can never act on it quite so effectively. Almost by definition, only the state is sufficiently inclusive to truly realize a <u>general</u> will.

So long as the state is reified, then, effective

action to combat alienation is likely, at the very least, to be considerably more difficult than it would otherwise be. But alienation leads to reification. The reification of the state, in a unique way, thus reinforces and perpetuates the reification of other objects in society as well. An unreified state can coexist in a society in which other objects are reified, but once the state is reified, it is highly improbable that other important social objects will long remain unreified, given the continued existence of alienation. The reification of the state thus constitutes, in a sense, the final nail in the coffin of unreified society.[17]

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[17]Historically, of course, the reification of the state preceeds the reification of most other social objects, with the exception of those objects to which religious significance was attached. But that in no way negates this analysis; instead, the very broad historical generalization that the rise of the modern nation-state from the ruins of feudal society coincided with the emergence of a widespread perception of alienation would seem to confirm it.

CHAPTER X

ALIENATION, REIFICATION, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

> Whatever approves itself to us on any ground at the outset, presently comes to appeal to us as a gratifying thing in itself; it comes to rest in our habits of thought as substantially right.
> --Veblen, The Theory of the Leisure Class

The particular instances of reification discussed in the preceeding chapters form more than a set of isolated and discrete phenomena. The microscopic analysis of reification cannot stand alone. It is necessary to develop a more comprehensive and developmental framework, in order to establish the ways in which reification works on the broader, macroscopic, societal level, in order to develop some understanding of the dynamics of reification, and in order to make possible the suggestion of some ways to deal with the problem. If reification were merely an attribute, like greeness, which attached to some social objects, the theory of reification might be of some descriptive interest, but it would have little utility for those who would like to better understand the social world, or change it. To have a greater usefulness, the theory of reification must contain some dynamics.

Regrettably, the attempt in this chapter to add a

macroscopic, dynamic component to the theory of reification makes necessary a return to more abstact levels of discussion, away from the concrete realities of social facts. Documentation gives way to argumentation, and facts to abstractions. One can only hope that there is some consolation in the recognition that this return to abstract theorizing marks, as well, a kind of summing-up and drawing of conclusions--the beginning of the end.

Alienated individuals, as has been argued throughout, seek to impose predictability, stability, and order on their social environments. The causal mechanism they employ is reification. And to a considerable extent, it will be argued in this chapter, they succeed. But the predictability, stability, and order they create makes mockery of their intentions and desires, and leads, over time, to a situation in which most people are worse off, and more alienated, than they were to begin with.

A good place to start is with the concept, originally Marxist, of historical or cultural lag. For Marx, of course, lag was essentially a relationship between substructure and superstructure, an historical process in which superstructural activities, like governance, culture, and social relationships, come to be out of phase with more fundamental relation-

ships of production.[1] But the concept of lag has a more general application, as Alfred Meyer, in his exegesis of Marx, develops so well. Lag, says Meyer,

> can be explained as the result of a certain inertia that may be inherent in formal institutions or formalized social relationships. Form becomes a fetter to content. By being cast into the form of institutions, men's social relationships lag behind the actual development of the social structure. The forms become aims in themselves. But it can also be explained as a result of the actions of conservative men, who seek by all possible means to perpetuate the social relations in which they have a vested interest, even though these social relations no longer correspond to the actual processes of production.[2]

In other words, reification, whether created consciously or unconsciously, produces lag. The existence of reified objects in the social world impedes the development of new forms of social relationships, and acts as a constant drag on progress. Because forms become "aims in themselves"--this particular point lies at the core of much of Simmel's sociology as well[3]--more important substantive social aims remain unfulfilled.

Meyer goes on to relate the theory of lag more specifically to Marx's conception of reification, even if he uses different terminology. "More generally," says Meyer,

> lag implies the recognition that man's actions exert an unwanted influence long after they have been committed. Man's creations assume an independent influence of their own and can even come to rule over their

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[1]Cf. Marx, Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy, p.21.

[2]Meyer, Marxism, p.62. [3]Cf. Simmel, Sociology, pp.41ff.

> creators, as in capitalism, which Marx once defined as the "command of the product of past labor over living surplus labor" and as "that specific social relationship in which past labor confronts living labor independently and overpoweringly." Lag is, then, the discrepancy between purpose and result, or the difference between man's making use of his environment, with unexpected results, and man's mastery of his environment.[4]

This process is part of what was described earlier as the irony of reification. The reifications created by past generations, in order to advance their interests at the expense of other individuals or classes, retain their power and importance unto the next generation, and the next, by which time they are frustrating the interests of practically everyone. Hacker's American Electric corporation comes immediately to mind.

Veblen, in different terms, described essentially the same process. Institutions, he said, were nothing more than "habits of thought," which, because of their habitual nature, invariably changed more slowly than the social conditions which gave rise to them. The result was a constant disjunction between social needs and social institutions. "Institutions," he wrote,

> --that is to say the habits of thought--under the guidance of which men live are in this way received from an earlier time; more or less remotely earlier, but in any event they have been elaborated in and received from the past. Institutions are products of the past process, are adapted to past circumstances, and are therefore

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[4]Meyer, Marxism, pp.62-63.

never in full accord with the requirements of the present.[5] For Veblen, social development was a kind of perpetual treadmill; no matter how much institutions evolved, they were incapable, by their very nature, of evolving as fast as their environments.

Veblen's theory of lag had a more specific sociological component as well. The wealthy--the leisure class--could afford not to adapt to changing conditions. Wealth served as a buffer which permitted the maintenance of outdated habits of thought. The conservatism of the rich was thus more an effect than a cause.[6] The existence of a wealthy, conservative class, on the other hand, necessarily implied the existence of a poor, deprived class, which because of the conditions of its existence was incapable of exerting the energy or influence necessary for social change.[7]

Veblen's analysis can be generalized to a broader paradigm of the effects of reification. Reification embodies a structure of power. The possession of power makes possible the production of reifications, which in turn serve to solidify and perpetuate power relationships. In a reified system, then, those with power have no incentive to change, since change involves the risk of destroying the power which inheres

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[5]Veblen, Theory of the Leisure Class, p.133.

[6]Ibid., pp.137-138. [7]Ibid., p.140.

in reified structures. Those who need and desire change, on the other hand, lack the power to effect it. They are opposed, moreover, not by the naked and socially-disapproved whims of selfish individuals, but by the institutionalization of those desires, which appear as necessary and proper social objects, and which the powerless themselves may believe to be legitimate.

The restless searching of power after power of which Hobbes spoke is thus replaced, in modern society, by a strange kind of static rigidity. Circumstances change, social relationships and attitudes evolve, but the predominant institutions of society go on and on, adapting, to be sure, to changes in their environment from time to time, but continuing to perpetuate their core procedures and practices, established in a time long past for purposes long forgotten. The rigid, formalized, extremely stable interrelationships of oligopolistic firms have replaced the restless competition of the atomistic market as the appropriate metaphor for social organization, and nothing is maximized while some things, at best, are satisficed.

Again, reification is fundamentally ironic, and the rigidity of modern society serves the interests of fewer and fewer individuals--in many cases, it serves the interests of no one. The structures of power embodied in reification were created not for the benefit of their present occupants, but

for generations long past, and while the holders of power in reifications are reluctant to abandon their relative security and status to the risks of unreified behavior, they are not particularly well-served by the power they command either. In order to successfully exist at the top levels of most reified institutions, it is necessary to accept the goals of the institution as one's own, and serve those goals rather than personal preferences. In a world without reifications, it is inconceivable that the individuals who now possess power as a result of their places in reified institutions would work so hard or so seriously in the pursuit of goals which are defined for them, not by personal preferences, but by institutional imperatives.

One should not lament too long the plight of the rich and powerful. Everyone else has it considerably worse. For the interests which dominate society, and which are not those of the great mass of individuals, are not even those of other individuals, but of impersonal, reified social objects. Reification removes from social activity the possibility of an enemy. The dominant interests in society are those of impersonal, legitimate objects, not those of other individuals, and can not be opposed in the same way that individuals--in a society that at least gives lip-service to the equality of all individuals--can be.

As a result, the frustrations and lack of satisfaction

in middle-class and working-class life are deflected away from their real causes, because the real causes are reified, and displaced onto ersatz enemies, either at home or abroad. Russian Communists or native blacks, lacking the legitimacy of reified institutions, receive the blame for mass dissatisfaction, not because they have anything to do with it, but because the true causes have been reified and legitimated beyond the point where they are considered acceptable objects of criticism. Instead, they are simply there, taken as social givens about which nothing can, or should, be done. The field of possible social action is thus reduced by eliminating any form of action that might do anyone any good. Instead, an "artifical stability" governs everything.

This artificial stability produces, and is reinforced by, patterns of thought and habits of thinking which occupy a central position in reified society. A system of reifications is perpetuated, not only by the intrinsic staying power of reifications themselves, but by a number of social attitudes and orientations. While these attitudes play, at most, only a secondary part in the maintenance of reified stability, they merit examination at this point in order to complete the theoretical portrait of reified society.

The best place to start is with the old poker maxim about not throwing good money after bad--when one's prospects

for the hand are poor, it is best to get out no matter how much you have already put into the pot. That kind of thinking occupies an important place in conventional wisdom, but like most homilies, is honored more in the breach than the observance. Once social resources have been invested in an institution, no matter how ineffective or even counterproductive, people are unwilling to do away with the institution altogether. The more reified it has become, the more likely good money--or time, or energy--will be thrown after bad. As concern with ends is replaced by solicitude towards the means, the means continue to be supported long after they are doing anyone any good.

Similarly, management textbooks and manuals of business management are firm in their admonitions that sunk costs must be treated very differently from prospective or variable costs; that once money is spent, it is spent, and that the past commitment of resources should not irrationally influence their future allocation. But anyone familiar with the history of the Convair 880 and 990, which almost drove General Dynamics into bankruptcy,[8] or similar business misadventures, knows that even within the largest and most sophisticated of corporations, products, practices, and procedures

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[8]Cf. Richard Austin Smith, Corporations in Crisis, Anchor Books (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1966), p.67 et ff.

which take the form of sunk costs often become reified, with destructive consequences.

In a sense, the argument that practice x or product line y must be continued because of the past investment sunk into it constitutes the reductio ad absurdum of reification. Things must be valued, treated as intrinsically important, merely because, like Mt. Everest, they are there. The logical fallaciousness of that sort of argument only makes more astounding its high incidence in social discourse. In a sense, it forms the last stage of Veblen's argument: habits of thought are perpetuated, not only because they are habitual, but because habitualness itself is valued.

Another kind of reified thinking is implicit in Karl Deutsch discussion of the "problem of commitment" in his Nerves of Government. Organizational commitment, says Deutsch, is one of the principal causes of loss of "autonomy," or the ability to be "self-steering." The more rigidly the structures and resources of an organization are committed to any particular set of functions or purposes, he says,

> the less readily available they are for recommitment, and the less are thus the chances for any rearrangement in the system. In political and social organizations, and perhaps in the life of individuals, this rigidity of commitment is linked to the problems of challenge and success. The more serious the challenge, or the greater the danger, the greater may be the need to commit our resources on pain of destruction; but in meeting such an "excessive" challenge, in Toynbee's usage of the word, the ability to recommit resources to

new functions may be lost.[9]

In other words, organizations, if they are to insure their survival and maintain their autonomy from their environments, must avoid, if at all possible, becoming too committed to the fulfillment of any one end. Success itself should be feared, because it may indicate that the organization has no capabilities other than those that brought that success, and will not be able to continue functioning. Or, put another way, the complete commitment of resources to the fulfillment of a valued social end runs contrary to the long-term best interests of the organization.

But just here is where Deutsch misses the point. If the goals of the organization conform to those of society, the organization itself should be valued only instrumentally, and no problem of over-commitment arises; if, like the salmon, the organization must accept its own extinction as the price for perpetuation of the species, that is perfectly all right. Only when the organization is valued for itself--becomes reified--is commitment a problem.

Reification thus produces conservatism in still another way. Not only does it create institutional lag and the overvaluation of sunk costs, but it insures that, within reified institutions, social resources will never be completely

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[9]Deutsch, Nerves of Government, p.227.

and whole-heartedly committed to the fulfillment of social ends. To do so would imperil the reifications.

Finally, there is the tendency to employ potential tools simply because they are around, regardless of their utility or whether there is any need for what they are capable of doing. When combined with the tendency of institutions to perpetuate themselves long after they have ceased to serve their original functions, this means that many useless and even harmful things are done because institutions are sitting around that otherwise would be doing nothing. The creation of entirely spurious products by corporations is only the most common and conspicuous example of that kind of activity; perhaps a better example is the construction of massive and totally useless public works--New York's Albany Mall or Louisiana's Sunshine Bridge, for instance--in order to give politically-favored building contractors something to do which does not force them to sacrifice their reified commitments to high levels of profit and existing technologies, as would the construction of low-cost housing or mass transportation.

What is wrong with this process is that it converts a useless, but essentially harmless, social object into an extremely dangerous one. So long as the National Guard didn't ever do anything, it remained only a minor drain on social resources. But its continued existence made its destructive

employment all but inevitable, and four students were murdered at Kent State.

In addition, as these examples illustrate, reified thinking of this kind misallocates social resources. The tendency to employ institutions at those tasks for which they are well suited qua institutions eliminates the possibility that they might be de-institutionalized in order to serve a necessary social function, or even abolished altogether, with the resources they had been consuming redirected towards a productive, unreified organization. Not sending the National Guard to Kent State would have been preferable to sending them, but not having a National Guard, and using the money and manpower for better things, would be still more desirable.

In general, then, reification produces conservatism. Things continue to happen as they have been happening because the predominant social institutions continue to exist and behave with as little adaptive change as they can manage. Moreover, the social distribution of influence and power becomes locked into a reified system, and is materially changed only by infrequent instances of dereification, or the greater relative success of one institution as opposed to others.

But this reified stability exists in a world where the underlying currents of social development and attitudinal

change are anything but stable. Reified stability at the institutional level coexists with alienation among individuals, and this coexistence produces a vicious cycle in which alienation continually increases at the same time as the social rigidity and inflexibility it produces. Stability engenders discontent, but discontent only produces more stability, and the gap between individual desires and social preformance widens continually.

Alienation, as has been discussed at some length, leads to reification; alienated individuals, in order to protect their interests, reify social objects. But reification also produces alienation, in at least three distinct ways. First, reification involves the endowment with power of alienated particular wills, which are not those of most individuals. Because these wills are reified, that is, legitimated in terms of values accepted by society at large, they cannot be opposed by society as a whole. Social action thus cannot satisfy the interests of individuals who do not benefit from any particular reification; if their particular wills are to be satisfied, they must be made to diverge from the General Will. Even if the individual is not alienated to begin with, he must <u>alienate</u> himself in order to advance his interests. He must pursue his goals privately, because they cannot be met publicly; the public accepts reifications acting counter to his interests. This seeming paradox exists because

reified interests, which in fact are in conflict with the General Will, appear to be, and are thought of as, conforming with it. In any event, the more reifications dominate society, the less well the particular will of any individual is socially served, and the more alienated he is likely to become.

This analysis holds equally well for cases of internal reification in the organizations and institutions with which the individual must ordinarily deal. Having one's will frustrated by internal reifications in an unreified organization is no different, theoretically or subjectively, from having it frustrated by an institution that has been reified as a whole. The statement that, "you can't fight City Hall," can be true in two different senses: either City Hall may embody interests counter to your own, or it may attempt to serve your interests, but be unable to help you, or even avoid harassing you, because it is internally reified. Both situations are equally produced by reification, and both are equally alienating, since the individual's will is incapable of realization through public activity.

Nor can the individual choose to remain alienated but attempt to permanently reduce his personal dissatisfaction by attaching himself to a reification. This strategy would be effective so long as he were the only one to employ it, but if one individual's reifications are met by the reifications of others--as they generally are--then everyone is

worse off than they were to begin with. In this sense, reification resembles what Garrett Hardin has described as the "tragedy of the commons." So long as a village remains small, its common pasturage will be of great advantage to everyone; but once more than a certain number of individuals attempt to employ it, everyone will be worse off, except the last individual to join the collectivity, and the total social benefit will be less than it had formerly been.[10] Similarly, the alienated individual who benefits himself by creating reifications is better off in the long run only if everyone else refrains from doing so, an unlikely outcome. When everyone attempts to create reifications, the sum total of personal dissatisfaction increases.

Second, reification, as noted above, deflects the attitudes and activities of alienated individuals away from the true causes of their alienation, and renders those causes unopposable. Either the alienated individual must direct his activity against non-reified groups in society, which will not decrease his alienation but will certainly increase theirs, or, as Sennett and Cobb describe, he will internalize his alienation, blaming it on himself because the real causes

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[10]Cf. Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," Science, CVXII (13 December 1968), pp.1243-1248.

are unblamable.[11] In either case, the alienated individual will be incapable of doing anything to reduce or change his alienation, and may well become still more alienated, as the repeated promises of social institutions, which appear to be embodying the General Will, to serve his interests go unfulfilled.

Finally, and most simply, alienated individuals are alienated in terms of some social status quo. Reification perpetuates the status quo and, with it, the individual's alienation. Alternatively, the interests and desires of non-alienated individuals are likely to change over time, and change more rapidly than social institutions. Institutional lag thus has important consequences for alienation; so long as reified institutions are perceived as embodiments of wills not in conflict with the General Will, the lag between their activities and practices and the changing needs of individuals will produce alienation.

Reification thus begets alienation just as alienation begets reification. Nor is the process a simple matter of one-time stimulus and response. Instead, it forms a self-generating and self-perpetuating process, in which the knot of reification is wound ever more tightly around society as alienation within it continues to grow. After some historic-

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[11] Cf. Sennett and Cobb, Hidden Injuries of Class, passim.

ally moot point in time, the cycle generates itself, going from alienation to reification to alienation and so on and on, driven by the internal dynamic of its own logic.

The recent history of urban politics in the United States provides an interesting example of this dynamic. Concrete events, of course, are always more complex and more multi-causal than any single theory can be, and it is hardly being asserted here that all the developments described in the example are adequately accounted for by the simple model of an alienation-reification-alienation cycle. But the politics of American cities in the last several decades does help to indicate the ways in which the cycle actually works, and shows that the broad outlines of the model have at least some connection with reality, a connection that has a certain amount of explanatory utility.

The growth of black demands for equal justice had its roots, almost by definition, in the alienation of black citizens, in the divergence between their interests and those of the major organizations of society. Whether the demands of blacks or the activities of those organizations better embodied the General Will is an important ethical and political question, but not directly relevant to the analysis here; alienation would have resulted in either case.

In response to black demands, which at least in the beginning were probably supported by a large part of the white

population, some institutions sought to change their behavior, only to be frustrated by internal reification, as in the case of corporations or public agencies locked into promotion on the basis of seniority or objective testing, who did attempt to hire increasing numbers of black workers, but then failed to promote them. Other institutions, desiring not to respond, were able to hide behind their reified legitimacy, and do nothing even when black demands were recognized by the general public as being legitimate. Because society was so highly reified, in sum, the response to black demands was woefully inadequate and slow.

In response, blacks began to attempt to develop counter-reifications of their own, through the device of hiring quotas, reifying government agencies sympathetic to blacks, and more symbolic matters of dress, public rhetoric, and symbolism. Alternatively, they sought to seize control of reified institutions such as city governments, and bend them to their own purposes, retaining the reified legitimacy but changing the actual behavior. These efforts as well were largely unsatisfactory, for two reasons. First, reification, as has been discussed, requires power, something alienated groups like blacks tend to be short of. Second, those reifications in which blacks succeeded at occupying the highest positions--in Newark or Cleveland, for instance--were so reified internally that it was almost impossible to change them

at all.

Nonetheless, the very evidence of attempts by black citizens to create or appropriate reifications of their own alarmed working-class and middle-class whites in the cities, who were themselves already alienated, if less visibly. The prospect of being confronted by black-dominated reifications, in addition to all the other reifications with which they regularly had to cope, created considerable anxiety among white city-dwellers. Many were able to flee. The others, now still more alienated by each small success in reification achieved by blacks, responded by creating counter-reifications of their own.

The most important of these has been the police. Never before in American history has there been so much attention paid to legitimizing and supporting the roles of the police, even at a time when the police are less able to contol crime than ever before. The newfound legitimacy of the police furthers black alienation, of course, but it also does little to meet the true needs of the white citizens who contribute to that reification. The reification of the police permits the institution to thrive no matter how ineffective it is, and thus removes an important incentive for efficiency; in addition, the simple costs of supporting the increased size and power that comes with reification is hardly compensated, for white taxpayers as well as black, by any decreases in the

level of crime, or even by psychic reassurance.

The process of alienation, reification in response, alienation in response, reification in response, and so on continues, but it might be useful to cut into it here in order to refer back to theoretical concerns. If anything is clear, it is that the workings of this cycle in major American cities has left everyone worse off: racial polarization increases, not declines; services, increasingly reified internally and externally, continue to deteriorate; and political campaigns become dominated by issues with no direct relevance to the real problems of citizens of either race. In the cycle of alienation, reification, and alienation, everyone loses.

Moreover, the history of black demands and the responses to them provides an excellent example of the difficulties involved in creating change when a high level of reification already exists in society. Those who desire to change society never have the luxury of a tabula rasa from which to start. They must always make do with the materials at hand, But since those materials consist primarily of the reified, dominant institutions in society, the direction of social change must be modified, or distorted, in order to accomodate to their existence. Instead of going directly from A to B, those who desire to change society must detour around x, y, and z; and the detour is so lengthy and fraught with peril

that they may never get to B at all.

If the cycle of alienation and reification were entirely self-enclosed, however, it would be far less dangerous and undesirable than it is. Alienation is far from the only social evil, and a social process that increased alienation as its only damaging consequence would be far from the greatest threat to social well-being. But reification, and the alienation it produces, have other, more serious effects. As the example indicates, polarization between various elements of society, deterioration of services for all members of society, and the general misallocation of social resources are all produced by reification. People are alienated because of reification, but they are also angered, mistreated, oppressed, cheated, robbed, and murdered on college campuses or ghetto streets. For some time, alienation has been opposed because it was thought to be intrinsically bad, and to some extent it is. But it also leads to other things, most of which are worse. It is both a cause and a symptom of the real problem, that of reification.

An alternative way of thinking about the systemic effects of the alienation-reification cycle involves a description of some of the ways in which reified society responds, or fails to respond, to its major problems.

By their very nature, institutions are incapable of

working effectively to solve recognized social problems and fulfill widely-felt social needs. In reified society, important problems go unsolved, no matter how much of society's resources are devoted to them. Indeed, the more strongly a need is socially felt, and the more willing society is to commit resources to its fulfillment, the more likely alienated individuals are to reify objects which might be employed in the process, in order to appropriate abundantly-available resources for themselves. The growth of the "education industry," in which large conglomerate corporations have sought to cash in on the growing concern for education, provides a useful example.

In addition, many legitimate problems go unrecognized when alienation is deflected onto unreified groups and organizations, in the process described above. And other problems, which are recognized, are thought to be insoluble because solutions would involve the destruction of reifications. The problems of large cities could, for instance, be solved much more effectively if reified political boundaries between inner cities and their suburbs were discarded.

Becuase so many problems go unsolved for so long, they tend to fester quietly until they become unavoidable crises. The planning and long-range commitments which rational mastery would require are replaced, in reified society, by "crisis management." Since "crisis management" might be

generally described as improvising with the best tools on hand, it often involves the process described above of employing whatever institutions are on hand for the uses for which they are suited qua institutions, and rarely contains any effort to attack or discard reifications, since doing so would require large expenditures of time and resources which are always in short supply for "crisis managers." Once again, Amtrak is a good example. Nothing was done about the long-standing deterioration of passenger service until action became unavoidable, and the actions then taken seemed concerned, above all, with not stepping on any reified toes.[12]

The continued inability of institutions to solve social problems, combined with their continuing efforts to legitimize themselves, can only create what might be described as a general devaluation of legitimacy. The more people are told how wonderful their institutions are, and the less well they are served by those institutions, the more skeptical, mistrustful, and alienated they become. Not only does alienation increase directly--but the generally high level of distrust and alienation makes it more and more difficult for legitimate, non-alienated organizations to obtain the public support they require in order to effect the General Will. Reified society is thus characterized by the paradoxical

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[12]Cf. above, pp.132-134.

situation in which anti-social institutions loudly proclaim their legitimacy while socially-useful organizations must work stealthily, in the dark of night.

Reification not only affects the ways in which society deals with agreed-upon problems. It also distorts social conflict when agreed-upon goals, or the means of getting to them, are absent. In order to counter reified structures of power, those who begin by seeking to advance the General Will must often, as has been noted, develop counter-reifications of their own, thus losing the battle before it is fairly begun. Moreover, because of reification, many solutions to conflict which might otherwise be available are eliminated from consideration, and less-attractive solutions, or no solutions at all, are made necessary. Finally, as has also been noted, the deflection of conflict away from the real sources of problems onto non-reified groups only increases the general level of alienation, and the general impetus for further conflict, without solving anything.

Bleak though this description may be, things can continue to get worse indefinitely. The separation of alienated individuals from one another can be overcome, said Marx, only by the development of <u>class</u> consciousness. But the reifications of modern society are so manifold and so numerous that organization on anything like a class basis becomes more and more difficult, and more and more unlikely. One man, one

reification might be a more appropriate motto.

CHAPTER XI

BREAKING THE CYCLE

> Only he who has the courage to be absolutely negative has also the power to create something new.
>
> --Ludwig Feuerbach, "On the Necessity of a Reform of Philosophy"

Reification is a problem of consciousness. Reified objects differ from non-reified objects above all in the ways they are perceived, thought of, acted towards. In this regard, reification differs crucially from alienation, which lies in the objective divergence between particular and General Wills, whether perceived or not. Reification can be permanently altered by acting simply on the level of consciousness. Alienation can not be.

Since reifications are created and maintained on the level of consciousness, their destruction can and must be achieved through consciousness. On the simplest level, but one not too terribly far removed from the truth, dereification involves only the commitment to no longer accept reification, a willful suspension, as it were, of belief.

Dereification is fundamentally a process of saying "no" to the world, of denying the importance or value of objects, of refusing to be taken in by myth. A political process,

it strongly resembles, and is materially abetted by, the techniques of sarcasm, ridicule, and surrealism in the arts. Perhaps the greatest single instance of dereifying activity was the midget on J. P. Morgan's lap.

Of course, one cannot simply cease to believe in General Motors or the United States Army and then blissfully expect them to disappear. Reifications are social objects, after all, and wishing will not make them go away. But the problem of belief, of acceptance, is central to the continued maintenance of reification, and the withdrawal of belief is the most important step in the destruction of reifications.

The willful suspension of belief makes it possible to ask of every social object what its contribution to the general good of society is, and to demand of it proof of its legitimacy. If that proof is not forthcoming, much of the power and importance of most large reifications simply evaporates. If the rationales for corporate legitimacy and the importance of profits to the nation disappear, and someone comes along with an alternative way of disposing of General Motors' profits, there is no reason why he should not be acceded to. If the nation-state and its government were to lose their reified legitimacy, engage in a militaristic foreign adventure, and then attempt to raise an army without actual physical impressment, there might finally be a war to which nobody came.

Yet the changes in consciousness necessary for dereification will not be easily achieved. Reification is accomplished through successful processes of mystification, which can not be easily reversed, if they can be reversed at all. The great engines of modern mass communications have long been at the service of those who would create reifications. Undoing their work would undoubtedly require more than an equivalent effort, since it is easier to create beliefs than to destroy them.

Moreover--and more importantly--once an object has become reified, it acquires power, Those who benefit from reifications have never shown any reluctance to employ that power for their personal ends; the continued reified status of General Motors is no accident. To be sure, power will wither away if dereification can be accomplished--that is why individuals benefitting from reifications are so eager to preserve their reified statuses--but the task of dereification can not succeed unless the power of reifications can be overcome.

And power can be successfully opposed only by power. Since power is the stuff of politics, this means that the process of dereification is preeminently political. Changing consciousness--inducing the suspension of belief--requires political action and political struggle.

Nor is the strategy of removing reifications one at

a time or even en masse likely to be effective, unless reification in general comes to be opposed, and alternative outlets for alienation established. Unless the changes in consciousness produce hostility towards all reification, the abolition of one reification will only be met by the development of another in its place. Reifying behavior will remain too attractive an outlet for alienated individuals unless that behavior itself comes to be discredited.

The political problem, then, is one of how alienated individuals can be mobilized to combat reification in general when their interests, by definition, diverge from one another, and when many protect themselves from alienated society only through the mediation of reifications. Individuals will continue to accept reifications, and create new ones, so long as reification itself is accepted as socially legitimate, and so long as reifications remain the strongest line of defense for alienated individuals, no matter how self-defeating that defense ultimately is. And they will not unite for common political action unless a mechanism is developed to identify and promulgate a General Will about which many can readily agree without endangering their positions in society.

If the problem is soluble at all, the solution has two distinct, if equally necessary, parts. First, alternative outlets for alienation must be identified and promoted,

so that individuals are no longer so anxious to create reification, so that the prospect of dereification will not cause them to fear being stripped naked of all protection in an alienated world. In economic terms, this half of the solution seeks to abolish reification by substantially reducing the demand for it.

Second, reification itself, in general, must be discredited. Even if individuals lack common interests, it may be possible to identify a common enemy--reification--thus providing at the same time a basis for political mobilization and a definition of the task towards which that mobilization should be directed. Discrediting reification seeks to cut off the supply by winning public acceptance of the conviction that it is socially and morally unacceptable, and by developing political mechanisms to enforce that conviction. It is a task of education, of political education.

Three alternative ways of dealing with alienation suggest themselves immediately. Two, the old liberal clichés of private property and individual political expression, are unattractively associated with all the evils of traditional liberal society, although they are the two most likely to succeed. The third, that of pluralist group-affiliation, has a much more seductive appearance, but is doomed to failure. It should therefore be considered first.

The concept of alienation, it should be recalled, originated as a polar opposite to that of community. Alienation consists of the absence of all the attributes of communitarian life. If the re-creation of an all-encompassing community at the societal level is impossible or undersirable, it might still be possible to establish surrogate communities, or at least surrogates for community, in a variety of other social forms. The warmth, supportiveness, friendliness, and mutual concern for others which are absent in society at large can be provided by affiliative groups founded on shared ethnicity, religion, occupation, economic interests, or political opinions.

This is the solution of pluralism. It has long occupied an honored place in American political science and American ideology, and it appears, to some extent, to reflect the realities not only of American social life, but of American politics as well, which often seems to be little more than the competition between such groups for political favors. In the pluralist view, the true loci of political community and individual expression and representation are the multifarious groups of society; the state is little more than an umpire which regulates their interrelationships.[1]

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[1]Cf. David B. Truman, The Governmental Process: Political Interests and Public Opinion (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), pp.14ff.

But it doesn't work. The pluralist model accurately describes only small, and increasingly less important, sectors of the American political system. More importantly, the pluralist solution does nothing to reduce alienation in society; it only displaces it. Alienation, it must be reiterated, is the divergence between the particular and General Wills; whether the particular will is that of an individual or a group, whether the particular will of the individual conforms to that of the group of which he is a member, makes no difference. All pluralism does is simplify matters somewhat by substituting for a world of alienated individuals a smaller cosmos of alienated groups, each alienated from the others and the collectivity.

Pluralists have sought to surmount this difficulty by denying the existence of a General Will, by contending that the level of generality of the interest-group is the most encompassing to which political actors can, or should, aspire. This assertion immediately produces an inescapable contradiction for the pluralists, since the entire system they describe is necessarily governed by a set of universally accepted norms and practices--if those are not a General Will, nothing is. More to the point of the current discussion, the pluralist denial of the General Will only adds another level of mystification to the problems of alienation and

reification in society.[2]

For alienated groups, just like alienated individuals, protect their interests by creating reifications. To a considerable extent, they reify themselves, a process made all the easier by the legitimating ideology which pluralist theory provides them. The result--to the questionable extent to which pluralist theory has ever been descriptively accurate--is a society dominated by alienated, self-serving, reified and hence unopposable interest-groups, differing from the reified society described above only in the specific content of the most important reifications.

Every time a Congressional committee holds hearings on tariff legislation or farm subsidies, the pluralist ideal is enacted in nightmare form. One alienated, reified group after another describes its interests to the committee, and makes demands on the basis of their reified legitimacies. The Congressmen, well aware of the political power of some of these reifications, listen deferentially, promise to do homage to their reified status, and generally act accordingly. The only thing excluded from the final legislation is any attempt to serve a conception of the general good.

The process as a whole reveals every socially destructive consequence of reification. Not the least of these is the promotion of still more alienation, as groups getting

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[2]Cf. Barry, "The Public Interest," p.160.

less than they consider to be their share find their interests still more opposed to those of everyone else, and still further reification, as those more-alienated groups strike back by strengthening their own reification or creating new ones.[3]

If attacking alienation on the group level seems hopeless, though, alternative approaches on the individual level may be more promising. The traditional theory of liberal society, as noted at the end of Chapter III, held that the device with which alienated individuals protected themselves was that of private property. Until very recently, of course, property in any considerable measure was available only to the privileged few; in addition, the history of liberal society has been dominated by the reification of property itself. But it is possible that the increased affluence of modern Western society, and the changes in the nature of that affluence, have finally produced a situation in which property can indeed serve, for the broad masses of the people rather than just the few, as an adequate bulwark against alienated society, without becoming reified.

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[3]For the critique of pluralism, see especially, Robert Paul Wolff, "Beyond Tolerance," in Wolff, Barrington Moore, Jr., and Herbert Marcuse, A Critique of Pure Tolerance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p.45; Henry S. Kariel, The Decline of American Pluralism (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1961), pp.32-33 et passim; and Grant McConnell, Private Power and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966),p.111.

Precisely that argument has been made by Tom Wolfe, who may well be the most perceptive sociologist in America today, although he would no doubt be chary of that description. In the introduction to his The Pump House Gang, Wolfe contends the affluence of contemporary American society has permitted many people to develop their own styles of life which at the same time free them from the oppressiveness of a communitarian status system, and permit them to simply enjoy themselves to an extent unprecedented in human history.

"Now," says Wolfe,

> this is not exactly what the great Utopian thinkers of the nineteenth century, the Saint-Simons, the Fouriers, and the Owens, had in mind when they envisioned a world of the future in which the ordinary working man would have the time and the money to extend his God-given potential to the fullest. The old Utopians believed in industrialism. In fact, it was Saint-Simon who coined the word. Yet the worker paradise industrialism would make possible was to take a somewhat more pastoral form. They saw it as a kind of Rousseauvian happy-primitive village with modern conveniences, with everyone, great and small, knit together forever after, as grateful as spaniels.[4]

The problem with this vision was the idea of community it contained. The Rousseauvian ideal was flawed;

> the community has never been one great happy family for all men. In fact, I would say the opposite has been true. Community status systems have been games with few winners and many who feel like losers. What an intriguing thought --for a man to take his new riches and free time and his machines and split from communitas and start his own league.[5]

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[4]Tom Wolfe, The Pump House Gang (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), p.7.

[5]Ibid., p.3.

In other words, the needs served by the community in traditional political theory can be served just as well by the nuclear family and its material possessions, without the costs of community.

The individual can be protected from alienated society by his possessions--and, irony of ironies, his purchasing power. Nor are these possessions necessarily reified--part of their great appeal lies in their expendability, which makes possible constant replacement by newer and better objects. In addition, seeking the solution to alienation through material possessions at least reinstates the proper relationships between persons and objects. Objects are conceived by this analysis to exist for the sole purpose of meeting human needs and gratifying human desires, and when they no longer serve those ends, they are discarded.

There are three obvious objections to attempting to deal with alienation through affluence. First, the wealth of which someone like Wolfe speaks, while broadly distributed, is still not shared by large segments of the population, and the affluence of the haves only increases the alienation of the have-nots. This objection is surely specious, since it can be met merely by extending the sphere of haves to everyone in society, something that could easily be done if the major reifications in the economy were brought under control, and excess profits distributed to the poor, a task which is

intrinsically worthy and necessary, regardless of its relationship to alienation.

Second, as Galbraith argued in The Affluent Society, an excessive concentration on private riches creates a serious tendency to slight the public weal; the general good gets lost in the accumulated pursuits of private goods.[6] The most obvious manifestation of this problem is the inability of government to raise adequate revenues without fears of a "taxpayers' revolt;" those who have finally attained some measure of affluence are reluctant to sacrifice any more of it for the general good.

Still, Galbraith himself argued that the overemphasis on private concerns was at least partly the result of the nearness of Depression memories in the public psyche,[7] and considerable evidence does exist that when people finally become comfortable in their affluence, generally in the second generation of middle-class life, they become more active in and more concerned about the community. Moreover, the resistance of ordinary citizens to making greater contributions to public revenues would certainly be mollified if the taxation system was less respectful of reified interests, and taxed the wealthy at least proportionately as much as the middle class.[8]

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[6] Cf. Galbraith, Affluent Society, pp.204-208.

[7] Ibid., pp.222-223. [8] Ibid., p.242.

Finally, and most tellingly, there is the argument that high levels of alienation continue to exist even in the most prosperous sectors of society. In recent years, the most visible example of affluent alienation has been among the adolescent children of the middle and upper-middle class. It would be possible to argue that this alienation represented merely a new form of fundamental and unavoidable generational conflicts, which can be eased only by the passage of time and the transition, for each individual, from adolescence to maturity.

But such an argument would make light of a legitimate problem. Instead, for the purposes at hand it is adequate merely to point out that the alienation of high-school and college students does not generally lead to the creation of reifications. Whether that is because the young generally lack enough power to create reifications, or, instead, simply because their values and attitudes have led them in other directions—adolescence is particularly characterized by a turning inward, and the manifestations of this turning, in the use of drugs or the emphasis on highly expressive patterns of conduct, differ fundamentally from reifying behavior, which is far more concerned with outward appearances--is unimportant to the question at hand. Alienation, among the young or anyone else, is a serious problem, but it is <u>less serious</u> than reification, and the alienation of the affluent,

as opposed to the alienation of affluent individuals within large organizations in which they may continue to create internal reifications, generally does not lead to reification.

The third type of non-reifying response to alienation, that of individual attempts to master the environment, immediately leads to a set of problems and a field of inquiry far too broad to be even touched on here. But it might be possible to simply suggest some of the ideas expressed by Robert Coles in his Children of Crisis. Most of the behavioral "pathologies" associated with poverty and alienation are not, Coles insists, products of mental illness or personal incapacity, Instead, they represent rational and frequently constructive adaptations to unavoidable objective conditions --and in many situations, indeed, they represent the only possible response. Nor are these responses necessarily destructive of all that is good in human personality; on the contrary, poor people in oppressive conditions often display remarkable (to a white, Northern, middle-class professional) levels of self-assurance, courage, and joy.[9]

Extending Coles's conclusion from this argument to the problems of alienated individuals in general, the problem of alienation is primarily political. The types of behavior normally associated with alienation--including reifying

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[9]Cf. Robert Coles, Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear, Delta Books (New York: Dell, 1967, pp.346ff.

behavior--are rational and personally productive responses to political conditions. But another response to those conditions is possible, that of political action striking at them directly.[10]

Here, of course, lies Marx's solution to alienation. The proletariat ceases to be alienated, it should be remembered, not after the revolution, but as soon as true proletarian consciousness--revolutionary consciousness--is attained.[11] But his commitment to the revolutionary abolition of politics caused Marx to forget what many of his followers have known: politics itself provides an outlet for alienation, if not for its abolition, or the abolition of the other problems attendant on it. By engaging in political thinking and political action against its sources, individuals can respond to alienation in a non-reifying way that is also personally and socially productive.

This course of action requires considerably more personal risk and personal courage than the others. Rather than allowing the individual to construct bulwarks against alienated society, it directs him to attack the bulwarks of others, to take arms against the sea of troubles. Fortunately, it appears not to be incompatible with one of the other

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[10]Cf. Ibid., pp.173ff.

[11]Cf. above, p.51.

responses to alienation, that of unreified private property. Galling as it may be to adherents of traditional leftist doctrine, the possession of private property often allows the individual the luxury of political action against alienation.

Until this chapter, the link between alienation and reification was never specified in any detail. Alienation, it was argued, led to reification, but it was never made clear how contingent that link was, or what the alternative expressions of alienation might be. Now it can be stated that alienated individuals, in order to protect themselves, do, on the political level, any one or combination of three things: create reifications, either by themselves or as part of a group to which they belong; protect themselves through the acquisition and use of private property; or protect themselves by political action against some of the causes of their alienation. Which device the individual will choose depends largely on circumstances, the availability of resources, and the availability of choice.

In a society less than opulently affluent, but more than generally poor, most people will attempt reifying behavior when they can. But if an attack on reification can provide an alternative outlet while discrediting reification in general at the same time, reifying behavior will become much less common, and dereification may be accomplished. As

a result, the general level of reification in society will be reduced by the very mechanism which channels alienation into non-reifying forms. As a second-order effect, alienation will be diminished by the destruction of reifications which promote and reinforce it.

The keystone in this process is the second aspect of the overall strategy of dereification: political education. Reifications must be exposed for what they are, must be discredited in general, and specific reifications must be identified and opposed.

This, after all, is a liberal's argument, and faith in education has long been central to the liberal tradition. That this view is now so widely discredited reflects, one suspects, not its inherent weaknesses, but the current state, produced largely by reification, of most educational institutions. Reification is a problem of consciousness, and changes in consciousness are produced by mass media, by political activity, by face-to-face communications between "opinion leaders" and other individuals: by the sum of all the political education in society. The first step in this process, it should be noted, belongs to political theory; "the educator himself," as Marx said in the Third Thesis on Feuerbach, "must be educated."[12]

Hobbes argued that a central part of the reform of

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[12] In The German Ideology, p.198.

society would be the widespread dissemination and understanding of the Leviathan.[13] Were matters so simple, this writer could analogously propose that this work be made required reading in all colleges and universities, thus, perhaps, assuring the first step in the process of dereification--not to mention substantially advancing his alienated private interests. But political education is more complex and more difficult. It requires organization, mobilization, and persistent struggle.

Some first, tentative forms of this activity are already underway. The creation of "public interest lobbies" and "consumer groups" provides a basis on which alienated individuals can unite to promote a General Will which coincides with their particular wills, and an important popular forum for disseminating dereifying ideas about dominant institutions. Books and popular journalism that similarly discredit important institutions have become increasingly common, and increasingly popular, in recent years. And major institutions keep doing things to discredit themselves.[14]

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[13] Cf. Hobbes, Leviathan, ch.30, p.253.

[14] To the small extent that positive action has been taken against reification, however, it has been done by small sub-strata of the upper-middle class and their children. This might have been predicted by the observation above that having the protection of private property permits one the luxury of that sort of political action, but that accuracy of prediction offers scant comfort, for it implies that the large-scale mobilization of citizens bent on dereification may have to await a far higher level of affluence in society.

Whether or not substantial dereification can be ac-

More generally, the key to any changes in consciousness that would make possible the abolition of reification lies in a return to importance of old ideas about means and ends. So long as people can be encouraged to think about social reality in terms of usefulness, utility, function; so long as the process of identifying, defining, understanding, and disseminating general social goals has the importance it deserves attached to it, dereification will be easy. Political action to end reification must revolve around making as obtrusive and unavoidable as possible the questions of where we want to go and how we are going to get there. Goals must be formulated and kept in mind, and all social objects must be forced to justify themselves in terms of those goals.

Concrete examples of dereification are hard to come by, and those that do seem useful for exemplary purposes exist

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complished by a small stratum of the affluent remains very problematic. If it cannot, and if it is to be accomplished at all, completion of the task may well have to await the attainment of a considerably higher level of affluence, or, alternatively, the mobilization of great personal courage on the part of those lacking in property. Both alternatives require ceaseless educational work--the first, to insure that the alternative of private property does not become an end in itself, obviating any desire or need for dereification on the part of most individuals; the second, to cause working-class and lower-class individuals to recognize that they would be no worse off in an unreified world, that they have nothing to lose through dereification.

primarily on the macro-historical level.[15] The Reformation, for instance, might be described as the process of dereifying the Catholic Church. The career of Martin Luther was marked, in this sense, first by his participation in the dereification of one institution and then by his promotion of the reification of another. Similarly, the American Revolution marked the culmination of the process of dereifying the English crown and its colonial government in the American colonies, a process in which the Revolutionary War itself was only the final, almost post hoc stage. On a smaller level, Franklin Roosevelt's removal of the American economy from its cross of gold in 1933 provides another instance.

In all these examples, reifications, by their own actions or the effects of their existences, brought discredit on themselves, and sapped their own legitimacies. In addition, other crises and movements of historical change, to which the reifications were particularly unable to adapt, created much of the impetus for dereification. Neither circumstances nor their own actions played the central role in discrediting any of these reifications, however. They were all actively opposed by political movements which brought the question of their legitimacy to the public consciousness through active

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[15]Cf. Berger and Pullberg, "Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness," p.209.

struggle--even, in the first two cases, armed struggle.

Still, in each case the process was first--and foremost--one of consciousness; people stopped believing in the Church, the crown, or the cross of gold after a long period of attrition and a shorter period of active, dereifying political education. It is perhaps a good time to return to Marx: this analysis of reification and dereification suggests why the fate of the capitalist state is precisely that of withering away. All authority, said Weber, rests on belief, and when the belief vanishes, the authority withers away.

On the global level, there are only two alternatives to this strategy of constant education and constant organization to combat reification. The first is a continued acceptance of reification and all its costs. The second involves the attempt to attack alienation, the root cause, more directly, through the revolutionary reconstruction of society. For an explication of that alternative, it is necessary to return to Rousseau.

Rousseau devoted most of the Social Contract, as well as most of his political writings that came after it, to the problem of how men were to be forced to be free, how aliena-

tion was to be abolished once and for all. It was a complex task. As an institution-builder, Rousseau ranged from questions of demography, agricultural economics, and public finance down to the finest details of institutional organization, yet institutions were generally of less concern to him than was the problem of creating, through education and socialization, new men who would not have to be forced quite so hard to be free. Rather than attempting a summary of all the concerns Rousseau discussed, which would entail no less than a summary of his entire political writing, I would like to focus here on those of concerns which are most closely related to the problems of alienation and dealienation.

First, and undoubtedly most important, since it makes Rousseau's solution to the problems of alienation entirely moot as a practical solution for most modern societies, is his emphasis on small, poor, agrarian communities as the only ones in which the establishment and dominance of the General Will without overt conflicts with the will of the citizenry would be possible. Rousseau tended--as do many modern thinkers, still under his influence--to lump together the three different elements of smallness, poverty, and rurality; but they served different functions in his thought, were attacked by him for different reasons. It is not enough, then, to examine the ideal of the rural community as a whole; each of its constituent elements must be considered in order to fully under-

stand Rousseau's attitudes on community and alienation.

Size was clearly the most important factor. The larger the political community, the larger must be the sphere and scope of government, and the less likely the people would be able to control it. The size of nations and extent of states were, he wrote, the

> primary and principal source of human miseries, and above all of those countless calamities which undermine and destroy civilized peoples. Almost all small states, republics and monarchies alike, prosper simply because they are small: because all the citizens know one another and protect one another; because the officials can see for themselves the evils which exist, and the good which they must do; and because their orders are executed under their eyes. All the numerous peoples, flattened by the weight of their own mass, groan, like you in anarchy, or under the oppressive subordinates which a necessary hierarchy compels the king to impose on them. Only God can govern the world, and superhuman faculties are necessary to govern large nations.[16]

As a kind of second-best solution, Rousseau proposed the confederation of small, self-governing communities when further decentralization was not possible, but for reasons that will become clear later in the discussion, he was not happy even with that.[17]

Apart from the technical and administrative problems involved in overseeing too large a political unit, more fundamental theoretical issues were involved. For Rousseau, true sovereignty could be exercised only by an open public

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[16] Rousseau, "Considerations on the Government of Poland," in Vaughan, II, p.442.

[17] Cf. Ibid., p.443.

assemblage of all the citizens of the community.[18] Once the state grew beyond a very modest size that became, of course, entirely impossible, so that large populations and democratic self-government were simply incompatible. And Rousseau held it to be a fundamental law of politics that the larger the political community, the more centralized its government apparatus would have to be. Once the state grew too large, only the most post personal monarchy would be possible. Democracy, conversely, required a small state.[19]

Poverty was more directly necessary to the maintenance of the General Will. For worldy prosperity could be bought only at the price of the development of those institutions of modern capitalism which Rousseau most despised as destructive of individual autonomy. Bourgeois economic life was a complex web of interpersonal dependencies that mushroomed with every expansion of trade. The more prosperous the economic system, the more individuals became dependent on the whims of others. More importantly, the motors of trade and commerce were nothing more than the privatistic, egoistic, particular wills which destroyed any chance of community; luxury and corruption were inextricably connected.[20] Here, as elsewhere, Rousseau's

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[18]Cf. Social Contract, pp.94-95.

[19]Cf. Cf. Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Rousseau's Theory of the Forms of Government," in Cranston and Peters, eds., Hobbes and Rousseau, pp.484-497.

[20]Rousseau, "Political Economy," Vaughan, I, pp.341-349.

debt to, and reliance on, the examples of antiquity is unmistakable, and freely acknowledged. "All the ancients regarded luxury as a sign of corruption in morals and weakness in government,"[21] and he stood in strong agreement.

The insistence on limiting the development of commerce and production implied, perhaps, the continued survival of a largely agrarian society, but Rousseau saw the advantages of rurality in a more positive light. Isolated agrarian families were, by necessity, almost entirely self-sufficient; in the absence of landlords or priests to steal what little economic surplus or free time they might have, they could subsist entirely without money, or significant economic relationships of any kind with anyone. The dependency of individuals on other individuals would thus be eliminated. Abolishing this dependency would abolish as well all the ills it created, and citizens would be more healthy, more honest, more moral, and more committed to the common good, if only they could be kept down on the farm.[22]

It must be added, however, that Rousseau retained throughout his career an almost unnatural hatred of cities and city life.[23] As such, he was perhaps a typical romantic,

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[21] Ibid., p.342.

[22] Cf. "Project for Corsica," in Vaughan, II, pp.310-313.

[23] For especially virulent examples, cf. Émile, pp.26, 433.

squarely in the tradition of Wordsworth or Thoreau. The distaste for urbaness runs a recurring theme throughout the works of those who would oppose to alienation the solution of the small community, and was certainly no less strong in its greatest proponent.

Three other aspects of Rousseau's theoretical community-building touch directly on alienation and dealiention. First of these was his often-discussed emphasis on the role of the state as the sole educator and socializer of children from a very early age, with the definition of education expanded to include the most rigorous regulation of play, social, and cultural activity almost from the moment of birth. Children were not to play alone or even to be left unsupervised; Plato's rigorous educational prescriptions for the guardian class pale before the intensity and thoroughness Rousseau would have preferred, not only for Émile, but for all the children of Corsica or Poland.[24]

Second is the stated need for an all but superhuman legislator, himself not a member of the community, whose task it would be to ascertain and establish the laws of the community, and then disappear. Only a disinterested deity could be entrusted with so serious and difficult a task.[25]

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[24]Cf. "Considerations on the Government of Poland," Vaughan, II, p.437, for a very strong statement on this.

[25]Cf. Social Contract, pp.42-46.

Third was the emphasis on citizenship, patriotism, and civic virtue which pervades all of Rousseau's political writings, and which have justly caused him to be labelled as the father of modern nationalism. La patrie must come before everything; that was the fundamental content not only of all childhood education, but all social life in Rousseau's ideal community. "Citizen" and "patriot" were the two highest forms of personal praise, and all crime was, in a sense, treason.[26]

Taken together, along with his admiration of the city-states of classical antiquity, these opinions make it clear that, as an institution-builder, Rousseau was less a theorist of modern government than of the polis. Like Machiavelli, whom he so greatly admired and so often cited, Rousseau's utopia was distinctly pre-modern. He longed not for the creation of a new order so much as the rebirth of Sparta, or better, ancient Rome.[27] In attempting to solve the problems of alienation on the social level, Rousseau looked primarily backwards, not forwards.

The abolition of alienation requires, in other words,

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[26]For an excellent discussion, cf. Leo Strauss, "On the Intention of Rousseau," in Cranston and Peters, eds., Hobbes and Rousseau, pp.254ff.

[27]Cf. Patrick Riley, "A Possible Explanation of Rousseau's General Will," American Political Science Review, LXIV (March, 1970), p.88.

the total abandonment of modernity and all its trappings. Nor is that by itself a sufficient condition. Totalitarian education and socialization, rabid nationalism, and the assumption of superhuman powers by a single individual are also required. As described by Rousseau, then, dealienation comes at a very high price.

Nor does it help to look to Marx for a more optimistic theory of dealienation. For Marx, the situation was simple: "communism is the reintegration of man, his return to himself, the supersession of man's self-alienation." Communism is,

> the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature through and for man. It is, therefore, the return of himself to himself as a social, i.e. really human, being, a complete and conscious return which assimilates all the wealth of previous development.[28]

But Marx never specified, in any kind of detail, what communist society would be like, nor how it was to be attained. Here, even the most dedicated Marxist must look to Rousseau.[29]

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[28] Marx, Early Writings, p.154.

[29] Without explicitly citing Rousseau, Adam Schaff, a committed Marxist, must employ Rousseauian terminology to elaborate what Marx's conception of communism would look like. Cf. Marxism and the Human Individual, p.53; Cf. also, Nathan Rotenstreich, "Between Rousseau and Marx," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, IX (June,1949), pp.717-719, for the most thorough and interesting discussion of the parallels between Marx and Rousseau, particularly in terms of alienation, dealienation, and community; and Meyer, Marxism, p.55.

The function of the dictatorship of the proletariat could only be that of Rousseau's legislator; in order for it to wither away, it would also have to be an educator as skilled as Émile's tutor, banishing from the minds of citizens forever any of the impulses or instincts which might lead to the development of powerful particular wills.[30]

A strong vain of Jacobinism has, not accidentally, run through the history of revolutionary Marxism. The Jacobins, of course, were self-conscious disciples of Rousseau. The connection is not only theoretically necessary, but historically evident. In order to translate Marx's critique of alienation into a blueprint for dealienation, serious thought must be given to the details of constructing a new community. Marx never provided that thought. Rousseau did, and revolutionary Marxists have always had, like the argument here, to return to Rousseau.

Over any long perspective of time, then, the abolition of alienation may well be impossible. And even were it possible, it would undoubtedly be very costly in terms of crucial human values like self-expression and individual autonomy. No one has ever argued differently in a very convincing fashion.

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[30]Cf. Marx, The German Ideology, pp.23-24; Lloyd D. Easton, "Alienation and History in the Early Marx," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, XXII (December, 1961), p.202.

But the inevitability of alienation should not lead to nihilism or despair. It can still be reshaped. And there are other, more serious evils in the social world, which can and must be opposed as well. The leverage point, the fulcrum, for attacking alienations and its consequences, and other evils as well, is the problem of reification.

Ultimately, the theory of reification is nothing more than a new and slightly different way of looking at the world that, containing at its core the fundamental moral position that people are more valuable, and more to be valued, than objects, provides a new way of thinking about social institutions and social objects which harm the well-being of individuals. The existence of evil has not, for some time, been taken as adequate proof of the necessity of evil. "Is," as every student of elementary ethics knows, should not be equated with "ought." But objects continue to have attached to them intrinsic values, and that attachment distorts the processes of social change, sacrifices the interests of many individuals to those of a few, and devalues human needs at the same time it over-values non-human objects.

Carrying out the implications of the theory of reification will not abolish all suffering and injustice overnight, or ever. It will not even abolish alienation. But it would restore to humanity some control over its own destiny, and it would do so without any damage to human individuality, dignity,

or self-respect. Instead, it represents the translation of those values into a theory of society, and ultimately into a guide for political action.

The theory of reification returns questions of goals and purposes, of means and ends, of utilities and costs, to the center of political discourse. That is where they belong. By so doing, the theory of reification hopes to make possible the rational mastery of the political world by those who occupy it.

A world without reification, achieved by the political activity of individuals who, still alienated from one another, become conscious, and make others conscious, of the evils of reification, would be very different from contemporary society. Individuals would still be alienated, but they would have the resources and opportunities to exercise control over their own lives. Necessarily affluent--because the abolition of reification in Western society is probably impossible without high levels of affluence--they would find many of the values community is supposed to provide available to them in other forms: in the nuclear family, in friendships and associations freely entered into, unlike the unavoidable and often cloying closeness of small communities, in the use and enjoyment of physical objects, in meaningful political activity, without experiencing any of the deprivations of privacy, self-expression, or self-determination characteristic of communitarianism.

Predominantly urbanized citizens of an unreified society would find the city not the Dantesque purgatory of contemporary middle-American fantasy, but a cosmopolis of boundless variety and boundless choice for the expression of personal tastes, personal desires, and divergent "lifestyles."

Such a society would, no doubt, still experience racial, economic, political, and social conflict; poverty, injustice, and personal misery would no doubt continue to exist. But those evils, rather than being the unavoidable attributes of unchangeable institutions, would become targets of political activity which, at least potentially, could effectively opose them.

If this description sounds like the nearest thing to utopia a liberal can conceive--so it is. Even non-liberals, one suspects, would prefer it to contemporary society. The only obstacle, sizable though it is, between here and there is reification.

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