

## MARX'S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION AND ITS IMPACTS ON HUMAN LIFE

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**Abstract.** Alienation is a state in which a person feels one-self alone, estranged, worthless and meaningless. This may be the result of socio-political setup or due to capitalist surroundings but it is accepted fact that a person who suffers this has to bear a psychological agony. In our history of religions, it has been reported that Had'rat Adam complaint loneliness and asked God for a companion. This makes clear that loneliness makes a man estranged from one's own surroundings. This estranged situation, for some thinkers is purely psychological, for some ones it is an intellectual phenomenon but for Karl Marx it is a material and social process which affects human beings. In modern time, psychologists have explored its variety of forms and their effects on persons and society. This research paper presents its meaning, history, types and its effects on individual as well as on society.

**Key Words:** Absolute, Capitalists, Class Struggle, Emanation, Estrangement, Objectification, Self-realization, Workers

The feeling of being stranger or sense of loneliness, strangeness or sense of having no belonging in the surroundings is termed 'Alienation'. The Latin term *alienare* means, 'to remove or take away.' So, to separate legally a person's possessions or rights to property (or liberty, in the case of slaves) becomes a kind of alienation, and because some kinds of property or rights could not be taken away, they came to be known as inalienable,..."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Garrett Ward Sheldon, ed., *Encyclopedia of Political Thought* ( New York: Facts on File, 2001), 07.

*Webster Essential Vocabulary* describes multi aspect meanings of *Alienation*<sup>2</sup> e.g. to transfer land ownership to another; to estrange; make unfriendly; to cause to be detached or withdrawn; to cause a change of affection; to sell a piece of property to another is to alienate.

From above references one can figure out the following aspects of alienation which will be focused in this article.

- In ordinary sense it indicates “turning away” / “Keeping away” from related ones.
- In legal terms it denotes the shift of possessions from a person / party to someone other, either as gift or by purchase and sale.
- In Psychological researches and Psychiatric practices, it signifies digression from routine or normal way.
- In Modern Sociological investigations and also in Psychology it means man’s feeling of alien-ness towards society, nature, people or even from one’s own-self.

### **Plato’s Concept of Alienation**

We may trace the concept of Alienation in Plato’s philosophy. He holds that the “Ideas” exist independently of mind in a world of their own which is beyond the spheres of Space and Time and that is the world of the absolute realities. In this way, the world of Ideas,<sup>3</sup> and the spacio-temporal world, the two worlds came into existence which are absolutely contrary to each other e.g. the realm of Ideals / Ideas and the domain of space and Time or of sense...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Herzog, ed., *Websters Essential Vocabulary* (Canada: Wiley, Hoboken, NJ. 2005).

<sup>3</sup> W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1920).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

In Plato's system, the soul plays the role as a mediator between the former and the latter e.g. of the Ideas and of the senses...<sup>5</sup> The mentioned first (the realm of Ideals / Ideas) have a separate and independent existence of its own. It is a domain beyond spacio-temporal limits.<sup>6</sup> And "...Ideas exist apart, not only from the sensible things that are modeled on them, but also from God..."<sup>7</sup>

Each and every thing in this spacio-temporal world is only but a dim shadow of those eternal Ideas or realities. Each thing owes its existence to its relative Idea which is its cause, its origin. Similarly a *MAN* is also an imperfect copy of its relative idea of man. In this context this world of becoming becomes as an alienated world and a *MAN* as an alienated *MAN*, or a dim copy of its own reality. So human beings are separate from their own reality and they are alienated.

### **Plotinus' Concept of Alienation**

His concept of alienation 'emanates' from his own "Theory of Emanation", according to this theory, the universe and all other things and beings emanated from the indivisible Unity (The GOD). The One is so perfect and His perfection "Over-flows" and step by step everything "emanates" and "overflows" from Him. The further you go, the more steps of emanation occurs, the more things came into existence but the more alienation takes place.

On the contrary, the more you becomes nearer the ONE, the alienation diminishes the more, till you shade off into the unity of The ONE. It means that the more alienation, the more your existence and the less alienation, the less or nothing you are.

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<sup>5</sup> W. T. Stace, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1920).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* Vol. 01. 09 vols. (New York: Image Books Doubleday, 1993).

### **Alienation in the Old Testament**

Some philosophers trace the roots of this concept into *The Old Testament* and use the term "Alienation" and "Reification", which means such an action that can transform the humanistic attributes as the properties and aspects of material things which are independent and unrelated to humanistic properties and humans as beings and that govern the lives of human beings.

### **Islamic concept of Alienation**

In Islam also, we can trace the roots of Alienation in the legend of The Fall of Adam and the Eve. MAN disobeyed God and resultantly expelled from The "Jannat", a place which is absolutely free from Alienation and here the man is in continuous struggle to 'regain paradise'.

### **Hegel's Concept of Alienation**

Hegel gave indications of the doctrine of alienation that latter attracted Marx in the 1840s.<sup>8</sup> The concept of Alienation is central theme of the philosophy of Hegel. According to his philosophy, whatever exists, that, in last analysis is only *Absolute Idea* or *Absolute Spirit* or *Absolute Mind* which in common parlance is regarded as *Absolute God*. Moreover, the totality of existence is only an expression of that.

The whole universe is a rational system and nothing is unrelated and independent in this universe. Everything occupies its particular place in the scheme of the universe.

None of the among, mentioned above "*Absolutes*" e.g. the *Idea*, the *Spirit*, the *Mind*, is either just a set of something fixed natured or a totality of something static properties of anything. But it is just a *Dynamic Self* which is continuously engaged in activity which is called a course of Alienation and De-alienation. Man is just a partial manifestation of this dynamic Self.

The sum of human history is just human beings' knowledge of the that which is called *the Absolute* and that is simultaneously the

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Borchert. ed., *Encyclopedia Of Philosophy* Vol. 4. 10 vols. (New York: Macmillan Reference, Thomson Gale, 2006), 263.

development of self-knowledge of the Absolute also. "Alienation" for him is a technical term; it is a necessary moment in the process whereby *Spirit* would achieve true self-knowledge.<sup>9</sup> "The human mind separated from nature, is isolated and lost in a world that is not its own. It is alienation. This may be overcome by growing human consciousness, which can recognize that both nature and itself are aspects of a wider unity The Absolute Spirit, or God."<sup>10</sup>

### Feuerbach's Theory

**God as Alienated Man.** He admitted that Hegel's view is acceptable that human beings might be alienated from themselves. But Feuerbach refused the views e.g. firstly, that the nature is something which is a self-alienated form of the *Absolute* and secondly, the view that human is the *Absolute* which is engaged in the course and process of *de-alienation* and Man is not a *self-alienated* God<sup>11</sup>

The case is contrary, The God is self-alienated man. God is "Absolutized" essence of man *Who* has been estranged from man. Man has not been alienated from himself. Feuerbach rejects to admit nature as a *self-alienated form of the God*. According to him, it is the case that man becomes alienated from himself when man makes and formulates or creates *something* and puts above himself that *something* as an alien, imagined, superior being and higher above himself and bows or kneels down before that superior being by regarding himself just as a slave. The de-alienation of man dwells in the abolition.

Feuerbach thinks, traditional religions arose as a result of man's endeavour to "objectify" his nature. Man idealized his capabilities such as Wisdom, Power, Dignity, Beauty etc. and ascribed them to the gods and these divine attributes are only manifestation and projection of human nature. Man worships his own ideals. Man alienates from himself

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<sup>9</sup> Maryanne Cine Horowitz, ed., *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (New York: Thomson Gale, 2005), 48.

<sup>10</sup> Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas Of Karl Marx* (Sydney: The Book mark Publications, 2004), 61.

<sup>11</sup> Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, s.v. "Alienation" Version 1.0, London and New York: Routledge, 1998.

when he bows before his own essence regarding it as an alien and Higher Being.

### **Karl Marx's Theory of Alienation**

Alienation is a purely intellectual phenomenon for Hegel and Feuerbach. It is the consequence of viewing the world in an erroneous way.<sup>12</sup> But for Karl Marx it is a material and social process. He uses the term *Entfremdung* (estrangement) which is his "Alienation Theory" which delineates the separation or detachment of beings or things that are or have been naturally united together. This also describes the causes, placement and the effects of antagonism among things and persons or groups that are or have been in proper harmony.

Conceptually and etymologically, *Entfremdung* (German) depicts the situation of alienation in social affairs e.g. peoples' estrangement from prospects of human nature (*Gattungswesen*, "species-essence") as a result of living in a class-based, class-conscious ranking or stratified society. In a capitalist society he elaborates, the workers are bound to sell their power, strength, expertise and skills to the capitalists. Consequently, the workers have no control over their product of labour and on the labour itself which is their life activity and this becomes only a means to an end of the capitalist. So they got estranged from it and fall a prey to alienation. Due to these circumstances the workers became estranged from their own-self and their own-nature on the one hand and also alienated from other human beings as well as from their work.<sup>13</sup> This situation creates two classes viz. *The Worker Class* and *The Capitalist Class*. The former is labouring and alienated and the latter is non-worker but controls the workers and gets the profits of others' labour.

*The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, was published by Karl Marx. In it he described the course and methods due to which the workers' class was exploited by the capitalists. He also elaborated, how the Capitalists, by adopting such modes of production which can benefit them and cause exploitation of the workers. Due to

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<sup>12</sup> Alex Callinicos, *The Revolutionary Ideas Of Karl Marx* (Sydney: The Book mark Publications, 2004), 70.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

that exploitation the Capitalists and the Worker classes estranged. He regarded that process and occurrence as *Alienation*. That means that working people put everything into their jobs but get little in return. That causes class conflict and estrangement between the both. So Marx claimed that under the capitalist rule or in a society of capitalism, the workers and the workers' class becomes alienated. This alienation is multi-dimensional and encompasses all areas of life– religion, politics, social and economic relations – but it particularly effects in labour.<sup>14</sup>

## **Types of Alienation**

This alienation in labor or earning, appears as the following types of that alienation<sup>15</sup> e.g. alienation in the process of production, alienation from the produced objects which the workers produced by their labour and alienation from other workers, from the rest of humanity and even alienation from nature also.

### **1. Objectification** (Alienation of or from Things or production)

Marx defines man as Labouring Animal (*animal labourans*), and labour is differentia of man. Production is permanent condition for the existence of man and permanent feature of human nature. But when a man produces an object by his labour then that object stands in conflict with himself. The producer ceases to own the thing of his own making. He goes on producing and the world of the produced objects surrounded him as an alien and hostile world. So this type of relation found among the Producer and the things Produced and the world of objects that surrounds.

He thinks that the Primitive Man was alienated due to the hostile Nature but Modern Man's Alienation is caused by the hostile environment created by him-self e.g. nuclear weapons, economic circumstances, industrial and technological development etc. civilized man has become a helpless puppet in the hands of the environment of his own making.

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<sup>14</sup> S. Sayers, *Marx and Alienation, Essays on Hegelian Themes* (Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Donald Borchert. ed., *Encyclopedia Of Philosophy* Vol. 1. 10 vols. (New York: Macmillan Reference, Thomson Gale, 2006).

## 2. Self-Alienation (Alienation from one's own Activity)

In this form, *MAN* alienates from his own-self and his own activity. In this form, a man begins to deny his own self and doesn't affirm himself this causes self annihilation, Man becomes unsatisfied, discontented and unhappy. He is not able to nourish or develop his mental energy or physical abilities. Moreover he mortifies his body and ruins his mind, drops himself in a feeling of humiliation.

The creator or worker considers himself as an 'out-sider' or unrelated to his production or work. He is not at home when he is working. His is the "Forced-Labour". It is merely a mean to satisfy needs external to him.

This aspect of Alien-ness is more explicit when there is no compulsion or any physical damage, In such circumstances the labour or work is regarded as burden or misery and tried to be shunned. This external type of labour is self-sacrifice and mortification. The workers' work, labour or production appears not his own but someone else's fatigue. This alienation of activity takes place when labour is thrust upon the worker. He becomes a screw in machine and sinks to the level of commodity. Society is deprived of his actual usefulness and talent. This dull routine snatches away all charm and activity from his labouring activity and "degrades him to the level of an appendage to a machine"

## 3. Species Alienation (means Man's estrangement from his species being or essential nature).

To explain this type of alienation, we have to consider the theory about human being presented by Karl Marx. In this, he considered *Man*, not as an isolated entity or individual without any social life. What an individual calls his own private and inner life, it is in fact, shaped previous history. Negating previous philosophers' view, he holds that reason alone does not constitutes the essential nature of man. He takes man as a whole, in all plenitude of his being. He agrees with Hegel and Feuerbach that man is a universal being. But his reference is contrary to them.

Labour is what distinguishes man from lower animals. Animals also do labour but their activity is strictly under compulsion. Man can only produce when he is free and his production is in conformity with the ordains of beauty and commensurate with the laws of nature.



The production of anything freely, is the expression of essential nature of man. He becomes alienated from his species being when his labouring activity is degraded to animal or mechanical function in "Estranged Labour".

#### **4. Alienation from other People**

This form of Alienation is in fact corollary to the 3<sup>rd</sup> form. This is an instant and abrupt effect of man's estrangement from his work or labour. It effect man's life and its relating activities. Man feels alienation from his own species-being, relative and associates. This expands from man to man and to the society also. Because if a man feels confrontation with or within his own-self, then he is in confrontation with others also.

#### **Conclusion of Marx's views about Alienation**

Marx concludes that estranged labour gives rise to private property. If labour, (the result of labour e.g. production) confronts the worker as an alien, hostile and independent power, in whose service is this labour done? It is obviously, in the service of the *Non-Workers* or *the Capitalists*. He elaborates that because of alienation, society splits into two classes e.g. "the toiling masses" and "the non-workers" and he terms them as "*the haves*" and "*the haves-not*" classes.

#### **Alienation: Its Aspects and Impacts**

Alienation as an experience and as a behavior or more clearly as an aberration of human psychological mode of dealing others in a society, is seen everywhere in the world, not only in developing countries but also in developed states also. It is manifested as mental disorders, depression, criminal thinking, anti-social thinking and slogans, rebellious behaviour, discontentment and even physical and health problems. This also causes deviations from social norms which are expected to be practiced in society.

**Recently Discovered Types of Alienations.** Here are some modern and most common as well as dangerous forms of alienations.

**Parent Alienation** is the most viewed form of alienation in every social set up which generally takes place due to *separation* and *divorce* of parents, this occurs when a child finds oneself in a state of unjustified dislike-ness or unreasonably hatred for one parent and makes

impossible for the abhorred parent to access. This situation might be created by negative indoctrination or comments by a close parent and the lack of warmth and closeness of the left parent.

**Social Alienation** is the feeling of isolation and a sense of being set aside or alone in a society. This form is generally viewed in developing countries and this cause stress and worthlessness among the people.

**Powerlessness Alienation** is the feeling of being powerlessness in a society that creates alienation due to the fact when a person wants to do something but feels incapable and powerless in doing whatever the person wants, so that one feels estranged and becomes alienated.

**Meaninglessness Alienation** is the state in which a person feels oneself as mere a meaningless drop in the stream of time and the one has “no say”, so becomes alienation of meaninglessness and worthlessness and becomes estranged.

**Relationships Alienation** takes place when in a mechanical society everyone indulges in the rat-race of earning livelihood and forgets the worth of human relations.

### **Analysis of All Forms of Alienation**

All the forms of alienations which Marx has enumerated are, in the last analysis have same origin. All forms in reality are different aspects of human being's self-alienation or his estrangement from his own “essential nature”. This is, ultimately responsible for the growth of all social evils and antagonistic relations between the individuals and society. The self-alienated worker remains unaware of his historically created possibilities. Consequently, the society cannot benefit from the immense talent and unlimited potentialities of its individuals.

Modern Researchers differed greatly in their enumeration of the basic forms of alienation.

For example, Frederick A. Weiss presented three basic forms of alienation, e.g. self-anesthesia, self-elimination, and self-idealization.

Ernest Schachtel expounded four forms of alienation, e.g. alienation from their fellows, men's alienation from nature, alienation from the production and labour of their hands and mental activities, and even from themselves.

Melvin Seeman, researches and distinguishes five forms e.g. social isolation, meaninglessness, powerlessness, self-estrangement and normal-less-ness,

Lewis Feuer, holds that there are these six ones e.g. the alienation of competitive society, alienation of class society, alienation of mass society, alienation of race, alienation of industrial society and alienation of generations.

### **ALIENATION IN THE FUTURE<sup>16</sup>**

For those thinkers who consider the occurrence of alienation as an inevitable historical phenomenon, the question arises that where is the end of this fact of alienation or when the 'de-alienation' or 'dis-alienation' will take place?

In response to this question there are two groups: the first one claims that absolute de-alienation is possible. The radicals in this group claim that alienation in principle has been eliminated and if it is seen it is only insignificant relic of capitalism. While the second group presents a more realistic theory that complete de-alienation is not possible but only relative de-alienation.

The conclusion of all the discussion presented above is that whatever Karl Marx presented, it was in the thoughts of the old history of thought as seeds. It is a great idea which Marx elaborated as a scientific process within the framework of his peculiar theories. It is not just a concept but a social phenomenon that effects every type of society and effects human beings greatly especially in the developing countries.

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<sup>16</sup> Donald Borchert. ed., *Encyclopedia Of Philosophy* Vol. 1. 10 vols. (New York: Macmillan Reference, Thomson Gale, 2006), 124.

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