

Alienation in Modern Society

Dr.Pinki Chugh

Assistant Professor

Dr.Rashmi Gupta

Associate Professor,HOD

English Deptt.

College of Engineering Roorkee, Roorkee

ABSTRACT

Alienation is perhaps the most common disease in today's ultra modern and ultimately social society .Though this statement sounds quite ironical ,it is true .Man may claim to have gone far out today with the advent of technology ,there is no denying the fact that this technology has added a lot to the woes of people who long for a company.

Social media sites like WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram etc. claim to bring the people together. Such sites are known for eradicating distance and mastering time. But it is also a fact that loneliness and alienation are mushrooming up in the psychological roots of modern individual.

In this paper, I will acquaint the readers with negative aspects of social media-based modernism and the effect on the society as a whole. The definition of alienation given by various psychologists and philosophers will be discussed in the light of today's so -called modern man.

Key words:

Alienation,WhatsApp,Facebook,Instagram,Society,Social media, Modernism

UNDERSTANDING ALIENATION

“Human beings are compelled to live within a lie, but they can be compelled to do so only because they are in fact capable of living in this way.

Therefore not only does the system alienate humanity, but at the same time alienated humanity supports this system as its own involuntary master plan, as a degenerate image of its own degeneration, as a record of people's own failure as individuals.” (Havel)

The analysis of confused concepts has been one of the central functions of Philosophy since Socrates. It is becoming increasingly common to hear life in the present age characterized in terms of “alienation”, they usually mean to convey to their readers that it deals with some aspect of “the plight of modern man,” or that of some significant segments of the population in modern society. Social commentators contend with growing frequency that “alienation” is one of the greatest problems confronting us today. It is seen in the generation gap, in the

hippie phenomenon, in the antiwar movement, in the credibility gap, in the challenge to the “old politics” beginning with the McCarthy candidacy, in the Black culture and Black Power movements .We hear of “alienation” in critiques of the nature of work in modern industry and bureaucratic organizations, the quality of life in middle class bourgeois society, the relation of the government to the governed, and the neglect and despoilment of our environment. Reference is constantly made to it in connection with the growth of superficiality and impersonality in interpersonal relations, the compartmentalization of our lives, the stunting of personal development, the wide spread existence of inhuman or neurotic personality traits, the absence of a sense of the meaningfulness of life, and the “death of God.” There is almost no aspect of contemporary life which has not been discussed in terms of “alienation.” Whether or not it is the salient feature of this age, it would certainly seem to be its watchword.

The English term “alienation,” as well as its French and German equivalents, alienation and Entfremdung have traditionally had several uses. These uses were well established long before Hegel and Marx. The term Entfremdung occurs in Middle High German literature and “alienation” goes back through Middle English and Old French to Classical Latin.

Alienation is indeed the projection of human experience in thought or social institutions. It falsely separates man in abstract speculation from himself and his fellow men consequently; he is never truly whole and never truly at home. He experiences some variants partially or totally in life. The first variant is “Powerlessness” where he thinks that his destiny is out of his own reach. It is controlled by some external power, i.e. fate, luck or institution. The second variant can be termed as “Meaninglessness”. To man now life has a “A generalized sense of powerlessness” as he points to the incomprehensibility or inconsistent meaning in the domain of action. The third is “ Normlessness ”. Here man lacks commitment and does not share social norms or prescription for behaviour. This gives birth to widespread deviance, distrust and uncontrolled competitive action in him. The fourth variant which man experiences is “Cultural Estrangement”. In it he deviates from the conventional institutions or established values in society. The next variant of alienation is “Social Isolation” in which man suffers from a sense of loneliness and feels himself excluded in social relations. The last one is “Self-Estrangement” which is comparatively difficult to explain. However, it can be explained as man’s feeling of estrangement with himself.

The ideas of estrangement and alienation received their first full-dress philosophical presentation in Hegel’s *The Phenomenology of Mind*. The climax of this presentation is in the second section of the historical development of Geist (spirit, mind) in chapter VI, entitled ‘Spirit in Self-Estrangement’.

Hegel use the term “alienation” in two different ways. Firstly it refers to a separation or discordant relation, such as one might obtain between the individual and the social substance, or (self-alienation) between one’s actual condition and essential nature. This is termed as Alienation1. The second use of the term is: a surrender or sacrifice of particularity and willfulness, in connection with the overcoming of Alienation1 and the reattainment of unity. When it is to be understood in this sense, Hegel employs the subscript “2”(Alienation2).

Alienation1 for Hegel is a condition which occurs when a certain change in a person’s self-conception takes place. It is neither something one does nor the intended result of a deliberate action. One finds that the condition has come to exist. Alienation2, on the other hand, is-as it was for social contract theorists-something deliberate. It involves a conscious relinquishment or surrender with the intention of securing a desired end: namely, unity with the social substance. Alienation1 is to be overcome completely- in part, precisely through Alienation2. The latter, however, is to be permanent, or, more precisely, continuous; for only in this way can Alienation1 be kept from recurring.

First Sense of Alienation (as separation):

Consciousness of oneself as a distinct individual does not inevitably emerge in the course of life. This sort of self- conception is a relatively recent historical phenomenon; and it is by no means universal even today. It has been and continues to be quite common for people to conceive of themselves primarily in terms of the roles they occupy and the groups in which they live. Their identification with these roles and groups is not conscious and deliberate: rather, it is immediate and unreflective. Their relation to the social substance is one of complete and immediate unity. Hegel uses the expression “Ethical world” to refer to the stage of human development at which this immediate identification with the social substance obtains.

He then observes that conflicts can arise as a result of which one is “driven back into himself out of this actuality,” ceases to identify with the substance, and comes instead to limit his self identification to his own particular person and characteristics. Hegel considers this to be a desirable development, in that it marks the emergence of a dimension of distinct individuality and independent existence, which is necessary if man’s essential nature is to be realized complete. This dimension is “the reality of the self that is not found in the ethical world.” Because it is not found there, the unity with the substance which characterizes the ethical world “is the universal actuality of the self; but this actuality is directly the perversion of the self as well, and the loss of its essential being.” In order to overcome this deficiency, the complete and immediate unity characteristic of ethical world must end.

After this original unity is lost, and until a new one is established, the relation of the individual to the social substance is discordant. Absorbed in his new-found distinctness, the individual comes to regard the social substance with which he formerly was at one as something completely “other.” A “non identity in consciousness between the ego and the substance” emerges. The individual now views the substance as something “external and opposed” to him. It has become alien in his eyes; or as Hegel now says, it is “alienated”. This is one of Hegel’s uses of the term. The separation in question is the most important instance of alienation.

Second Sense of Alienation (as surrender):

Hegel uses the term “Alienation” to refer not only to various separations, but also to a kind of surrender or sacrifice, which is necessary if certain of these separations are to be overcome. The latter is the sense of the term which has been designated as “Alienation2”. While he regards the Alienation1 of the social substance as something unfortunate-although necessary-and to be overcome; he regards Alienation2 as something desirable and to be perpetuated.

He distinguishes between that individuality or independence which is consistent with and limited by the requirements of universality, and that which involves a disregard of these requirements and an elevation of particularity to a position of supreme importance. The latter involves “the possession of an individual will which is not yet surrendered,” and which is indulged at the expense of universality, thereby in effect destroying it. Unity between the individual and the social substance can be restored only if willful self-assertion is given up.

Hegel often uses the term “alienation” to refer to this renunciation. Having emerged out of its original immediate unity with the substance, the individual consciousness can again “make itself one with the substance only through the alienation of its self.” The individual for whom the substance is Alienated1 can overcome this Alienation1 and his self-alienation1-his separation from his essential self-only through the Alienation2 or surrender of his particular self (self-alienation2).

The definition of alienation may differ from philosopher to philosopher, the core of all the thoughts regarding this term lies in the fact that, there is hardly any society or culture which remains in a state of equilibrium with regards to values except those which are stagnant and have no tendency towards improvement. Modern society rests on conflict in values and compromise ,although compromise is brought at so high a price for man’s instinctual underpinnings that it becomes a retrogressive force. Disequilibrium is the feature of all the so called advanced societies. When it is eliminated, totalitarianism springs up. Totalitarianism results in alienation of man as it deprives him of his right to dissent.

An individual, who is said to be alienated, suffers from isolation. He considers himself distinct from others. He is never truly whole and truly at home. He experiences some variants (of alienation) partially or totally in his life. The first variant is "Powerlessness". While undergoing this variant, he feels he is helpless. His destiny is controlled by some external power. Now this external power may be God, if we talk of religious alienation, and the employer or the dominating person, in words of Marx. It may also be some institution or some custom, in case we are discussing social alienation. The other variant is "Meaninglessness". Now life becomes a generalized sense of powerlessness. He finds no use of his life. Life is run by some external force and he has no control over his life. An alienated person never tries to adhere to the terms of life as it comes. He finds faults with each and everything and everyone around him. His life becomes meaningless. An individual, who undergoes such dilemma, sometimes even dares to commit suicide, if he is under the influence of destructive alienation. But he may be submissive and surrender his life before God or some religious personality and thus achieve peace of mind and extreme satisfaction and the real meanings of life. The third variant is "Normlessness". Here the man lacks commitment and refuses to accept the social norms set up for behaviour. This gives rise to deviance, distrust and uncontrolled action in him. The next one is "Cultural Estrangement". Undergoing this variant of alienation, the alienated person finds himself separate from the society and culture he lives in. He deviates from the conventional institutions and established values in the society. The fifth variant is "Social isolation". In social isolation man feels all alone and excluded from the social relations. The last one is said to be "Self-Estrangement". Experiencing this type of alienation, the man realizes that he and his spirit are two different things. He feels severe loneliness. Even though he is surrounded by group of friends who really care for him; he feels that he is all alone. This variant is the most destructive form of alienation, as nothing remains certain about the alienated person. Alienation is classified into these variants after enough study of the term and uses of it by famous scholars. Some philosophers believe that the concepts of alienation and estrangement are identical. These ideas received their full dress philosophical presentation in Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind*. "The climax of this presentation is in the second section of the historical development of Geist (spirit, mind) in chapter VI, entitled *Spirit in Self-Estrangement*", (Torrance, 21). Hegel uses the term alienation in two different ways. First is the cause of alienation and the second one is the remedy suggested. In first hand, it is a type of separation or a discordant relation, such as one might obtain between the individual and the substance or self-alienation i.e. a kind of separation between man's actual condition and the essential nature. This Hegel call as Alienation 1. The second use of the term is a surrender or sacrifice of particularity and willfulness, in connection with the overcoming of Alienation1 and

the reattainment of unity. When it is to be understood in this sense, Hegel employs the subscript “2” (Alienation²).

As Charlie Chaplin correctly said, “we, humans, are meant to live by each other’s happiness and not by each other’s misery.” Each one of us forms an integral part of this society and it is our prerogative to actively work to form a community which benefits all of us. I feel we are letting technology take us to places where we don’t want to be. We have forgotten the essence of belonging to the mankind race. We are meant to stand by each other in good and bad times. People generally say that technology has made our lives better and easier. No doubt it has made our lives easier, but has it really made our lives better in the real sense of the word? Technology has given us cures for so many diseases but the bitter truth is that alongside these cures has come numerous new diseases. Technology has drastically changed our lives both for good and bad. The optimum use of technology is certainly beneficial for us, but we need to stay away from is our over-dependency with technology. I encourage you to realize your technological usage, and evaluate if it is benefiting your relationships or hurting them. It’s essential that we maintain our balance in our society, whether that means with our electronics or without them.”(Saxena)

REFERENCES

1.Sahacht, Richard. “The Inevitability of Alienation”. An Introductory Essay-*Alienation*. By Walter Kauffman. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1970.xxxviii.

2.Torrance, John. *Estrangement, alienation and Exploitation-A Sociological Approach to Historical Materialism*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd.,1977.

Note - The quotes without citations are taken from internet, URLs are given below:

1. Havel, Vaclav, “The web’ Largest Resource for Famous Quotes& Sayings”,
URL:<https://www.quotes.net/quote/9043>

2.Plummer Ken & Macionis John J., “Sociology:AGlobal Introduction”,
URL:<https://lib.ugent.be/catalog/rug01:002299418>

3. Koteswar, Shivananda, “Are you socially connected or alienated?”
URL:<https://yourstory.com/2016/05/social-media-social-connection>

4. Saxena,Anuj, “Technology has Alienated Humans from Humans”, May 23, 2017 in Pearson Students.URL :<https://www.pearsoned.com/technology-alienated-humans-humans/>