

EXAMINATION OF KARL MARX CONCEPTION OF ALIENATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON SOCIETY'S WELL-BEING

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Abstract

An area of contention in Marx's works is the idea of alienation. Based on the idea that workers' alienation from the products of their labour is the basis for alienation as a universal characteristic of capitalist societies, Karl Marx made this claim. These commodities in capitalism are known as capital, money, and commodities. According to Marx, communism must triumph over capitalism in order to end alienation. Examining and studying Marx's major works is important in light of the debates surrounding his concepts of alienation, as these provide a typical and more lucid image of his ideas. This research study aims to reexamine Marx's theories in order to gain a deeper understanding of them by examining the concept of alienation as it is expressed in Marxism. We shall achieve this by looking at the history and significance of Marx's concept of alienation. In light of this, we will explain how capitalism affects society's general well-being. For Marx, Alienation is a systemic outcome of capitalism. After a brief discussion of other viewpoints that influenced Karl Marx's theories, we will critically examine his concept of alienation.

Keywords: Karl Marx, Alienation, Capitalism, Communism

Introduction

Prior to delving into this research article. It is imperative that we become familiar with the concept of "Alienation." This will make it easier for us to fully appreciate and comprehend Marx's viewpoint. How Does Alienation Occur? The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines alienation as a noun that comes from the verb "alienate," which means "to make somebody feel that they do not belong in a particular group or to make somebody less friendly or sympathetic towards you." In the Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary (2016). The feeling of not belonging to a group or community is another definition. As we may infer from the definition above, alienation is synonymous with the experience of feeling cut off from a group or society. Once we have defined alienation theoretically, we will quickly look at the opinions of other philosophers who had a significant impact on Karl Marx's thinking. These philosophers included Ludwig Feuerbach and Hegel, whose intellectual theories had an impact on Marx.

Karl Marx benefited from reading Hegel's works on the philosophy of history, particularly from his understanding of dialectics. "Any current state of affairs and what it was becoming was always strange for present state of affairs in the process of being changed into something else," the speaker asserted. Thus, the process of dialectics involves the

interaction of opposites, or the thesis and antithesis, which result in their reconciliation and transformation into a new form known as the synthesis (Engels, 1934:6). However rather than using economic terminology, Hegelian dialectics provided a metaphysical explanation of the historical process. He placed more importance on spirit than on stuff. He understands that spirit exists. Engels (1934:15) asserts that spirit is ever-present in the world, always expressing itself through human awareness. The concept of alienation is defined in an idealistic manner in Hegel's dialectical idealism. Hegel outlined the historical stages that the human spirit goes through as it moves from ignorance to perfect self-understanding (Engels, 1934:19). As spiritual ignorance, we learn that spiritual self-understanding is the ability to overcome self-alienation.

Materialism of Feuerbach

Hegel's dialectics is accepted by Marx; however Marx rejects idealism in favor of "materialism," which helps to understand his concept of alienation in the context of the economy. Feuerbach was a source of inspiration for Marx and his collaborator Engel, as he encouraged them to reject the idealism of the younger Hegelians. Marx and Engel introduced a crucial idea to Feuerbach's philosophy, which is that "being is not determined by thinking" (Lenin, 1959:18). The basis for the materialist interpretation of history. Marx materialism, also known as new materialism, was pragmatic in contrast to Feuerbach materialism, which was antiquated and theoretical. Marx utilized Feuerbach's materialism as a springboard for his own brand of materialism since he recognized its flaws. While Feuerbach's "The Essence of Christianity (1841)" contends that the concept of God has alienated human traits, Marx's theory of alienation does not rely on this work (Lenin, 1959:22). After making an effort to outline the many interpretations of alienation, we will move on to discuss Marx's interpretation of the idea.

Marx on Alienation: An Overview

Unlike his predecessors Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx did not see alienation as having its roots in the mind or in religion. Marx, however, believed that alienation was "something rooted in the material world." Losing control, particularly over labor, was what alienation signified (Lenin, 1959:25). The theory of alienation is defined as "the separation of things that are naturally belonging together or antagonism between things that are properly in harmony" in the writings of a young Karl Marx. According to Cox (1998), the concept's most significant application relates to people's alienation from certain aspects of their inherent humanity. Given this, in order to comprehend Marx's concept of alienation, we must look at his ideas regarding human nature. Marx argued that the need to work nature to meet human needs is the one constant feature of all human societies and the final condition of nature imposed on human existence. Marx opposed the common sense idea that humans have a fixed nature that exists independent of the society they live in, but he did not reject the idea of human nature itself; rather, he only showed that many of the features attributed to the unchanging human nature in fact vary enormously in different societies (Lenin, 1975:17). Marx contends that alienation is a systematic outcome of capitalism. Given the foregoing, it is imperative that we travel back in time to a period prior to the emergence of capitalism in order to better understand the genesis of Marx's concept of alienation.

Notion of Feudalism

In the medieval ages, feudal manorial systems prevailed throughout Europe prior to the rise of capitalism. This system describes a civilization where the first-born son of the feudal lords receives land from their ancestors. In this system, land ownership was based on bloodlines, and your future was determined by where you were born. Land ownership

was the first step toward private property ownership in a feudal society. Under the medieval manorial system, serfs are compelled to labor on land that is used to gather necessities by force on behalf of feudal landowners and church authorities. The peasants had to work continuously due to the low level of productive power. In this system, however, the peasantry puts in more effort to produce more in order to save some for their own needs as well as the needs of their different family groups. The dominance of feudal rule was shaped by this alienation, which resulted from the low level of productive forces caused by human subjection to the soil. Nonetheless, there were boundaries to the extent of alienation that occurred throughout time, since the peasantry occasionally kept 50, 60, or 70 percent of the overall product of their labor. Male-to-male interactions in the medieval society were also ones of dominance and servitude, but they were undoubtedly social ties. After taking a closer look at the characteristics of feudal society and the alienated man during this time, we will continue our conversation to witness how alienation functions or is felt within the framework of capitalism.

Concept on Capitalism

Capitalism, as Lenin correctly notes, "sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with the class antagonism, but has instead established new classes, new conditions of oppression and new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" (Lenin, 1959:31). In this passage, Lenin introduces us to capitalism, a new kind of exploitation that allows for the continuation of human enslavement in feudal societies (Lenin, 1959:31). A hallmark of the violent enclosure of common land during the shift from feudal to capitalist society was the first-ever denial of direct access to the tools of production for the mass of people. Peasants whose means of sustenance have been taken advantage of by capitalists will submit to a new type of exploitation in which they will be paid in wages for their labor in order to survive. Every item in society would be able to be bought and sold for a price, according to bourgeois ideology. As an economic system, capitalism is defined as one in which private individuals own the means of production and exchange. According to Cox (1998), it exhibits the pinnacle of private property growth and capital's exploitation of wage labor. The capitalist economic system, in which labor suffers alienation at its height, is vividly and characteristically described to us. Marx held that alienation was the most constant aspect of capitalist society and that it was a systematic outcome of capitalism.

Marx Four Aspect of Alienation

Marx distinguished four distinct forms of alienation: "In capitalism, a person is alienated from the outcomes of his labor because they belong to the capitalist; he is also alienated from the labor process, his fundamental nature, and, finally, from other men" (Lloyd, 1985:953). We will address each of these alienation-related aspects separately in order to fully comprehend them all.

Alienation from the Product of Labour:

Since the capitalist, who owns and disposes of the product, owns it, the worker feels estranged from it. People in every community use their creativity to create things that they can sell, trade, or use. Under capitalism, on the other hand, this turns into an alienating activity since the worker, no matter how desperate his needs, is not granted permission to touch what these same hands have produced because everything he produces is the property of someone else. The worker cannot use what he produces to survive or to engage in additional productive activities.

As a result, workers construct houses they will never live in, make automobiles they will

never be able to purchase, cultivate cash crops for the market, and make shoes they cannot afford to wear. Marx maintained that as the product of labor starts to dominate the laborer, the alienation of workers from what he produces intensifies. Using the example "let us suppose, yet in the course of hours (necessary labor time) to cover the cost of his own maintenance, and in the course of the next six hours (surplus labor time), he create 'surplus' product, or surplus value for which a capitalist does not pay," V. I. Lenin draws attention to the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the production of commodities when discussing Marx's theory of value (Lenin, 1975:23). From the foregoing, it is clear that a worker in a capitalist system is paid less than the value he creates but is nevertheless denied.

Alienation from His Productive Activity Or Alienation in The Labour Process:

Marx describes a lack of control over the manufacturing process as the second component of alienation. The working environment, organizational structure, and the physical and psychological effects of their jobs are all outside the control of the employees. Our ability to work creatively is transformed into its opposite by this lack of control over the work process. Not only is the working process outside the workers' control, but capitalists and their managers have a strong incentive to force us to work harder, faster, and longer hours. Furthermore, Harry Braverman notes that "dividing the craft cheapens its individual parts in a society based upon the purchase and sale of labor power" (Cox, 1998:4). Thus, it is in the interests of capitalists and bosses to divide up the labor process into smaller components. As Marx put it, "factory work exhausts the nervous system to the uttermost; it does away with the many-sided play of the muscles, and confiscates every atom of freedom, both in bodily and intellectual activity." The result is a rigidly repetitive processes that buries the individual talents or skills of the worker. The unique ability of every insignificant factory worker disappears at a negligible rate in comparison to science, immense physical forces, and labor force that are combined to form the factory mechanism and the master's power (Cox, 1998:4). Since the time of Marx, the fragmentation of the labor process has intensified due to modern methods of production. The conditions of the work are predetermined; the management and engineering staff have envisioned, measured, equipped with training and performance criteria, and planned out the complete work operation down to its smallest motion. This includes the duration of the workday and the area we occupy. The goal is to turn the subjective aspect of labor into an objective, measurable, controlled process by treating workers like simply robots.

Our Fellow Human Being

We are disconnected from one another, which brings us to our third point. The bourgeois class and the proletariat class in society are inherently antagonistic, which contributes to the alienation of some people. According to Marx, "if his activity is a source of torment for him, it must bring pleasure and enjoyment to someone else. If, therefore, he views the result of his labor, his objectified labor, as an alien, hostile, and powerful object that exists independently of him, then his relationship to the object is such that another man- an alien, hostile, powerful, and independent man- is its master." If he views it as serving others while being subject to another man's authority, compulsion, or yoke (Cox, 1998:6). Marx was able to pinpoint the source of alienation—which sprang from our fellow humans- in this instance. According to him, this feature of alienation was brought about by class conflict in the context of capitalism. Furthermore, the purchasing and selling of the goods we generate binds us to other people.

Numerous people each day have an impact on our life. People whose labor has created our

homes, food, clothes, and other items. Yet, the only way we are aware of them is through the goods we purchase and use. As personifications of various production relations, capital, land, or labor, rather than as individuals, we are related to one another. According to Marx, the goal of mass commodity production is not to advance human potential but rather to take use of it for financial gain. We view other individuals from the perspective of gain or loss. We turn our needs and abilities into ways to make money, which leads us to view other people as either competitors or superiors.

Our Human Nature

Alienation from what Marx referred to as our species being is the fourth ingredient. Our capacity to deliberately alter the environment around us is what distinguishes us as human; this idea is covered in the section prior. Our work is forced and compelled in a capitalist world. Our overall interests or our inclinations as individuals are unrelated to our work. We are able to generate much more thanks to the capitalist division of labor, yet the wealth creators do not receive the rewards of their labor. Marx's description of this process in his "economic and philosophical manuscripts" is a potent critique of the system, saying that "work produces hovels for the worker and marvels for the rich." For the workers, it results in deformity but also beauty. He replaces labor with machines, but in the process, he turns some workers into machines and forces others back into cruel types of labor. For the workers, it yields intelligence but also cretinism and stupidity (Cox, 1998:9).

Since humans are social creatures, we have the capacity to act in concert to achieve our goals. But under capitalism, the talent is buried behind private ownership and the resulting class division. Though under capitalism, the anarchic quest for profit reverses our ability to carefully organize our outputs to match what we produce with the changing demands of society. Therefore, we cannot control nature or even predict the consequences of our activities, so we cannot consciously shape it. For instance, new and less expensive production methods could result in acid rain or chemicals that deplete the ozone layer, causing global warming, if they are used repeatedly throughout industries. In a similar vein, a capitalist may unintentionally slow down the rate of profit for his class as a whole by increasing production in his factory. When a product is produced to satisfy a specific, high demand, it turns out that other companies were first to market, creating a glut in the market rather than just satisfying need. This implies that although we generate more, it is merely undesired. All earlier communities experienced scarcities, starvation, and crop failure. A recession in a capitalist economy is characterized by workers producing too much and consuming less. Furthermore, they don't consume as much because their labor is too productive. Our social structure is what keeps us from realizing the full potential of our production capacity, not the economic crisis we find ourselves in. Marx, however, is confident that, in the context of capitalism, man may triumph over alienation and be free from it. As the research is conducted, we will talk more about this perspective.

Marxist Socialism

We acknowledged the transitional end of the alienated man as identified by Karl Marx, i.e., the Revolution- which led to the establishment of a communist society- in the previous sections, where we also looked at the origins of Marx's concept of alienation and factors that influenced his thought on the subject. However, now that we have exposed Marx's ideas, it is necessary to critically evaluate them in order to shed light on the various issues he raised. Given this, the main goal of this section is to evaluate Marx's theories critically in order to determine their validity and significance. To its shortcomings and suitability as well as its applicability to the current historical development stage. Karl Marx's socio-

political theory came into being due to the circumstances that we have observed. Alongside Engels, he studied the works of other socialists like Feuerbach, Robert Owen, Dainde-Hernide, Rouvry Saint Samson, Charles Fourier, and Hegel's idealism. With this knowledge, he was able to develop a social structure that he felt would best ensure individual freedom and lead to the ideal society. They call this system Marxist socialism. It's sometimes called scientific socialism because of its focus on human behavior.

Marxism is a critique of the capitalist system that emerged from the writings of Karl Marx and his collaborator Fredrick Engels. Marxism presents a historical materialist account of humankind. By doing this, it is assumed that all social processes and constitutions are based on the creation of goods and services and the means of exchanging them. Marx contends that the ownership or lack thereof of the means of production separates every society into classes. There are two types of people in society: those who possess property and those who do not. He contends that the motivation behind history comes from the class that exists between classes. The conflict between the force of production- the relationships between individuals involved in the processes of production, trade, and distribution- and the availability of building materials, on the other hand, is reflected in the class struggle. Social relations eventually become a barrier to the latter since they develop more slowly than the power of production, which makes social revolution inevitable. Marx demonstrates how the capitalist system is split into two classes: the proletariat, or working class, and the few capitalist bourgeois who control the means of production. Antagonism characterizes the interaction between these two classes since the bourgeois oppress and misuse the proletariat in order to increase profits. Marx predicts that "a revolutionary situation will arise as the contradictions of the capitalist system become more acute, during which the proletariat will over throw the capitalist and the dictatorship of the proletariat will be established." The primary goal of the short-lived would be to construct a socialist society and use the accumulated capital for the benefit of society as a whole (Ebenstein, 1993:3). The ultimate goal of the revolution is to construct classless society based on the Marxist tenet that "from each according to his ability and to each according to his needs"- ultimate communism (Frankena, 1995:49). This position, however, can be justified because, contrary to Marx's predictions, no civilization has ever reached this point in its historical development.

Inadequacies of Marx's Ideas

Marx's call for a classless society is a result of his belief that "a society free from alienation stands curtailed" in the pursuit of the perfect society. This is true in the sense that it is impossible to obtain in areas where there are people who already own the means of production. In a scenario such as this, agitation for change will lead to what Marx refers to as a classless society. Yes, in every society there will eventually be a class fight. However, it lacks the strength to shift the ownership of the means of production to the proletariat. Marxism's much-discussed failure stems largely from the fact that, overall, most of what he advocates for in terms of the historical process has not materialized and is seriously questioned as to whether it ever will. Chief among these are "revolutions" that aim to alter the social order and maintain the proletariat's dictatorship, as well as the lack of nations that we can identify as truly communist in both theory and practice. This is especially true "when a strong communist nation, united Soviet Socialist republic (USSR) disintegrated between the late 1980's and early 1990's" (Townsend, 1996:5)).

Based on the aforementioned, we may infer that while Marx's theory is philosophical, the idea that human alienation can be overcome through revolution and lead to communism is

still a fantasy of his as there isn't a typical example of this happening. Furthermore, we can argue that Marx's theories regarding the triumph of human alienation foster or incite militancy among the proletariat, or the labor force of capitalist society. After taking into account the shortcomings of Marx's theories, it is crucial to clarify and highlight the concepts' applicability.

Applicability of Marx Theory of Alienation

Despite Marxism's current political and economic low point, its significance should not be undervalued. To state that or to assert ignorance of class struggle in any economic or political context would be inappropriate for this reason; instead, let us emphasize each of these points individually. One persistent issue in human society and relationships is class struggle, which may be seen in various domains such as politics, economy, gender, and family. This is a crucial turning point in Karl Marx's philosophy that makes him a philosopher for both the present and the future. (2) Economic and Social Welfare: Generally speaking, the government and private capitalists created various economic and social welfare programs for the working and jobless members of society (those who belong to the proletariat). This is done partially in accordance with Karl Marx's recommendations and with the intention of putting an end to any kind of uprising. For example, according to Noel and Bruder (2002), "the USA is embarking on this under the guise of liberal democracy". "The redistribution of goods through welfare, taxation and similar means of mere tokenism serving only to pacify the exploited classes in order to protect the exploiting class from uprising and revolt" was the claim made by liberals in the ideological debate with modern Marxists (Moore & Bruder, 2002:293). As can be observed from the above, Marxists oppose the economic and social welfare programs that the governments of some developed nations have implemented in an effort to lessen the exploitation that the proletariat endures and, as a result, prevent them from ever again rising up in rebellion against the capitalist ruling class. On the other hand, we can also argue that the government's initiative was only acknowledged in light of Marx's calls for a proletarian revolution against the capitalist system.

Evaluation of Karl Marx Conception of Alienation

We discussed concerning and examined Marx's concept of alienation's beginnings in the first half. We looked at other definitions of alienation in this, as well as Marx's definition, which defines alienation as "the separation of things that naturally belong together, or to antagonism between things that are properly in harmony." Additionally, we understood Marx's materialistic explanation of concepts, wherein he defined alienation in terms of the economy, in contrast to the theories of his predecessors Hegel and Feuerbach, who maintained that alienation originated in the mind and in religion, respectively. In addition, we discussed about Marx's dialectics and his rejection of Hegel's idealism in understanding Feuerbach's materialism. Nevertheless, Marx identified flaws in Feuerbach's materialism, which led him to develop a new kind of materialism. We also looked at how man's self-alienation began in the feudal memory system and how capitalism replaced feudalism, with the "brutal enclosure of the common land" as a result. The bourgeois capitalist advocated for a market economy where everything had a price. Human society saw significant growth and change as a result of capitalism, yet at its height, self-alienation was a common occurrence. In the second section, Karl Marx explained the various aspects of alienation and how he used dialectics to help people overcome their own alienation from themselves and achieve communism, which he believed would emerge through a global revolution marked by the confiscation of all private property. Regarding Marx's prediction of a hard world revolution that would end

man's self-alienation, it has not materialized as planned. The criticism of Marx's theories on alienation was the main topic of discussion in this section, which helped us highlight some of the concepts' shortcomings. We were taught that overcoming one's personal alienation from the world encourages labor militancy, or the use of force by the labor force against the owner of the means of production.

Marx's concepts on alienation were inadequate, but they did highlight important points that assisted some developed countries- the United States, for example—in creating welfare programs intended to quell the proletariat's insurrection against the capitalists, who own the means of production. Welfare packages, which include things like mortgages, scholarships, and unemployment benefits. Marx's views are still very relevant in the modern era, even though no country has managed to achieve communism as he beforehand predicted. Greater than ever before, he was able to convey the feeling of alienation that Project Man experiences in capitalist society. He also demonstrated the power of a cohesive labor force, which helped to advance unionism among the capitalist society's workforce as those in Nigeria (NLC) and (TUC), to name a couple.

Conclusion

Through our research, we were able to see that in a capitalist society, the government is essential in preventing the proletariat- the working class- from rebelling against the ruling class, or capitalists. By reining in the excesses of the capitalist, the government should show greater empathy for the predicament of the proletariat. "Revolution" will unavoidably follow if the government is indifferent to the aspirations of the proletariat, as Marx correctly notes. Like the Ogoni people's conflict with Shell Petroleum Company, whose operations severely degrade the environment and deny them their right to subsistence as fishing is their only source of income; the multinational organization's operations have severely contaminated the water, posing a health risk to the Ogoni people. We also observed the corrupt administration shielding the capitalist (shell) at the expense of the Ogoni people. Based on the aforementioned, it is imperative that we emphasize the significance of Marx's notion of alienation in the capitalist society's planning for the equitable development of the proletariat and the capitalist classes.

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