

ALIENATION

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INTRODUCTION:

The concept of alienation attracted many people from various fields of sociology, psychology and social psychology. Many definitions were established regarding this concept by many writers. The result is a wide range of definition which leads to many problems. The following paper tries to present the different meanings and the historical developments for the concept, followed by different theories of alienation and the causes of alienation. The paper will focus also on the measurement which has been established to measure alienation and the relationship between the concept and other sociological concepts. The discussion also will include investigation of the problems that arise because of the different meanings of the concept and will indicate whether or not the concept is useful in the field of social science.

DEFINITION OF ALIENATION:

The concept of alienation seems to have been assigned to a large number of definitions. Because of the variety of the meaning many writers tried to classify these definitions on the basis of several general classifications. Most of the writers agree that in our discussion of alienation we have to distinguish between two major uses of alienation, however most of them did not agree about what these two different distinctions should imply.

Israel (1971, p.5) indicated that alienation may refer to sociological processes or to psychological states. Nisbet (1966, p.265) suggested, two fundamental and distinguishable perspectives of alienation were to be found in 19th Century sociological thought. The first rest on an alienated view of the individual, the second on

an alienated view of society. Similar to this classification is Mizruchi (1964, p.253-267) classification. He indicated that on an empirical level a distinction can be made between alienation as a subjective phenomenon (one studies the individual's own experiences and the verbalization of these experiences), and as a subjective phenomenon (implies the study of objectively observable behavior).

Taviss (1959, p.46-57) indicated two general approaches in the study of alienation:-

- a. Social alienation, in which individual selves may find the social system in which they live to be oppressive or incompatible with some of their own desires and feel estranged from it.
- b. Self alienation, in which individual selves may lose contact with any inclinations or desires that are not in agreement with prevailing social patterns, manipulate themselves in accordance with apparent social demands, and/or feel incapable of controlling their own actions.

The following is a summary of the general classification for the term alienation which I feel covers the mentioned classification as well as others.

1. Philosophical explanation for alienation.
2. Alienation as sociological process and psychological states (although some of the writers emphasis on one of these aspects over the other) - still they do not deny the influence of the other aspect. For this reason I combine the two explanations together.

1- Philosophical Explanation for Alienation.

I will not discuss in detail the philosophical definition, but mentioning the major philosophical view may give us a clear picture about the philosophical meaning of the term. Generally we can say that alienation in the philosophical sense is the denial of the reality of the material world.

2- Alienation as Sociological Process and Psychological states:

Although we cannot find a definite distinction between the two (as I stated before) we can see some writers emphasize one explanation over the other, and at the same time the other explanation is taken into consideration. Keeping this in mind we can classify this approach to:-

- a. Alienation as sociological process
 - b. Alienation as psychological states
- a- Alienation as Sociological process:-

Several writers took this approach into consideration emphasizing the sociological explanation for alienation.

Marx indicated that the social process of alienation is created by:-

- a. Working power
- b. Division of labor
- c. Private property

As a result of these factors:-

1. The workers become alien to their own activity.
2. The individual experiences estrangement with regard to the result of this own activity.
3. He become alien to the physical world and social world (Israel 1971).

Gradzins (1956, p.134) defines alienation as the state in which individuals feel no sense of belonging to their community or nation, personal contacts are neither stable nor satisfactory. He sees the alienated person as the "potentially disloyal citizen".

Schecht (1970, p.176) describes alienation as the separation of man from his society.

Marcuse relates alienation to technology. He indicated that technology becomes the alienated system since it deviates from traditional values.

b- Alienation as Psychological states:

The emphasis here is more on the psychological explanation than on the sociological explanation, but at the same time, the sociological factors are taken into consideration.

Hegel used alienation in two ways (Schacht 1970, p.41-42)

- a. Separation: Disparity between a person's actual conditions and his essential nature.
- b. Surrender: Sacrifice which is necessary if certain of these separations are to be overcome.

Nettler (1957, pp.670-677), uses alienation as the feeling of estrangement from society.

Seeman (1959, p.783) defines alienation in terms of psychological states experienced by individuals. He distinguishes between five states namely:

1. Powerlessness
2. Meaninglessness
3. Normlessness
4. Isolation
5. Self Estrangement

McClosky and Schaar (1965, p.30) as well as other writers (Middleton) indicated that alienation means loneliness.

According to Fromm (1955, pp.110-120) alienation means a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien - he has become, one might say, estranged from himself.

Because of the wide range of the definition of alienation, some writers tried to discuss the major generalization in all or most of the definition. For example Keniston (1965, p.452) indicated that most usages of alienation share assumption that some relationship or connection that once existed that is naturally desirable or good, has been lost.

Kaufman (1965, p.143) indicated that "To claim that a person is alienated is to claim that his relation to something else has certain features which result in avoidable discontent or loss of satisfaction."

Feuer (1962, p.132) suggests that "the word alienation is used to describe the subjective tone of self destructive experience".

Although the above effort to generalize alienation should be appreciated, yet I do not think that they are valid since alienation has been used in a wide range of meaning, which cannot be generalized in one statement.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT:

The concept of alienation is not a new concept, and it has been used for a long period of time. We can classify the historical development of the concept in three classifications:-

1. The use of alienation before Hegel
2. The use of alienation by Hegel and Marx
3. Current development of alienation

1- The Use of Alienation before Hegel.

Historians of philosophy trace the concept back to a writing of Platinus. The Bible is also full of stories of alienation from the Fall of Adam and Eve to the repudiation of Christ by the Jews. For example in the Bible Paul said "They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart." Calvin saw man alienated through all time from God by his original sin (Feuer, p.128). Other writers such as Rousseau, also discuss the meaning of alienation. Alienation also was used in the philosophical sense which implied the denial of the reality of the material world. . .

2- The Use of Alienation by Hegel and Marx.

Hegel was the first person to define alienation in a similar way as it is used today in his book "The spirit of alienation 1807" Hegel

indicates two meanings for alienation: (as explained in the part of definition)

1. Separation
2. Surrender

He said that alienation is the consequence of the antagonism between totality and self-consciousness.

The concept achieved more clarification through the writing of Marx. He employed the term alienation in connection with a wide variety of things including labor, the product, the communal life, other men and man himself. Marx traces all forms of alienation to the work process.

Durkheim in his study of Suicide discusses one aspect of alienation namely anomie. He considers anomie (normlessness) as one cause for suicide.

3- The Current Period.

Recently a large number of social scientists contributed to the development and clarification of the concept of alienation. It began with Marx's writings "Manuscripts" when they were first published in Germany and were translated to the English language, and discussed by Fromm

Karen Horney also plays a major part in the discussion of "alienation from self" which was published in her book "New Way in Psychoanalysis in 1939".

As a result of the work of Fromm and Horney the concept of alienation became very popular and large numbers of writers started to investigate the concept more thoroughly.

Recent Studies of Alienation.

Merton (1957, pp.131-161) studied a sub-concept of alienation, namely anomie. He tried to relate anomie to deviant behavior. Anomie arises when there is no balance between the ascribed goals and the

acceptable means in the society. The result is deviant behavior.

Other efforts introduced by Seeman (1959, pp.783-791). In his attempt to clarify the concept, he described five sub-types of alienation. Powerlessness which is mainly discussed by Marx, meaninglessness, normlessness which was developed before by Durkheim (anomie) social isolation and self estrangement which was mainly used by Fromm and Mills. Although this attempt helped in clarifying the meaning of alienation yet many people criticized him (Ex. Browning 1961, p.791).

Other attempts which helped in clarifying the meaning of alienation already took place through the recent years. (For example - alienation has been used as lack of solidarity (Hajda 1961, pp.758-777), alienation as loneliness (McClosky 1965, p.30), alienation as dissatisfaction in social relations (Aiken and Hage, 1966, p.497). As a result of all these efforts which try to clarify the concept, some scales developed to measure alienation (the discussion about the measurement of alienation will be introduced later).

The most recent development is the study of the relationship between alienation and other variables such as apathy, political authoritarianism, conformity, cynicism, hoboism, political apathy, political hyperactivity, prejudice, privatization, psychosis, regression and suicide.

THEORIES OF ALIENATION

Several writers developed a large number of theories of alienation. Because of the wide range of meaning which this concept implies, it is very difficult to gather all the theories already established under one category. But one possible classification is to divide the theories as:

1. Sociological theories of alienation
2. Psychological theories of alienation
3. Philosophical theory of alienation

Although the above scheme might look beneficial yet it is very hard

to distinguish between pure sociological theories and pure psychological theories. Another scheme which I feel is more beneficial, was established by Israel (1971, p.50). This scheme is more helpful in clarifying the theories of alienation (the analysis of the theories in this chapter based on this scheme).

The following is the structure of the scheme:-

<u>Theories about the causes of alienation</u>	<u>Theory about human nature</u>	
I .Society-oriented (conflict: Man-Society)	Weber Durkheim	Rousseau
IIa. Individual-oriented (Conflict: Man-Society)	Simmel Fromm	Rousseau Marx's first Theory
IIb. (Conflict within Society)	Marx's second Theory Mills	

Figure 1. Classification of theories of alienation.

1. - Social Psychological Theories (society oriented)

The following is a discussion of some of the important theories mentioned in Figure 1.

Durkheim: Durkheim discusses the concept of anomie and considers anomie (normlessness) as one reason for suicide. He considers anomie as the lack of the balance within the social system. Here the social factors become too strong and prevent the individual from realizing himself.

II. a,b. Social Psychological Theories (individual oriented)

Simmel: Simmel did not speak specifically about alienation. He speaks of the personality of the individual as a totality which is split by social development. Simmel considers it as an unavoidable consequence of the development of modern culture based upon money economy. (Israele 1971, p.132).

Fromm: Fromm defines alienation as a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as alien, he has become estranged from himself. In his theory of personality he indicated that alienation depends on the social character that develops in the capitalist society, and prevents the realization of the individual "human nature".

Marx: Marx's theory try to relate alienation to the work. He tried to discuss four types of alienation:

- a. alienation from the process of work
- b. alienation from the product of work
- c. alienation of the worker from himself
- d. alienation of the worker from others

Mills: Mills developed a discrepancy theory. The discrepancy here between the potentialities a society has or it should have if certain normative standards are applied. So the social structure is seen as alienated structure and in which social process is seen as alienated process.

Philosophical - anthropological theories (society-oriented)

Rousseau: Rousseau speaks of a total alienation of each person associated with the social system and the transmission of all high right to the community (here the meaning of alienation is different than the popular meaning).

Philosophical - anthropological theories (individual-oriented theories)

Rousseau: Rousseau's main idea is that a human being lives in isolation and depends on the product of nature and he does not need anybody.

Marcuse: He stresses the idea that technology is an alienated system, since it deviates from the traditional value and seems effectively to prevent their realization (societal level).

SOURCES OF ALIENATION:

Many writers tried to explain the sources of alienation. Again they classify these sources of alienation into two categories :

1. Sociological explanation for alienation
2. Psychological explanation for alienation

1- Sociological Explanation for Alienation

The sources for alienation are to be found in the lack of:

- a. Commitment to values
- b. Conformity to norms
- c. Responsibility in roles
- d. Control of facilities (ex.Marx) (Scott, 1964, p.240)

2- Psychological Explanation for Alienation

The point of emphasis here is on the psychological factors which lead the individual to isolation. These psychological factors include: anxiety, aggression, mental illness --- etc., or in general terms personality disorder. Personally I feel that none of the mentioned approaches tried to explain why some people are alienated. For example, if the sociological approach said that the reason for alienation is the lack of conformity to the norms, we still can raise the question: why do some people do not conform to the norms ? In other words I think that all the attempts which were established to explain the sources of alienation give us the outside factor without going into depth as to why this happened. Therefore I feel there is a need for a more specific and precious explanation for alienation.

MEASUREMENT OF ALIENATION:

The development of the scales which try to measure alienation established recently after several attempts of some of the social scientists to clarify the meaning of alienation. The reason for delaying the construction of the scales is mainly due to the overinclusiveness and lack of operational referents in the use of the term. Lefcourt and

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Ladwing (1966, p.153), Srole (1956, pp.709-717), developed a scale to measure one dimension of alienation namely anomie. Rosenberg (1956, pp.690-695) developed the Misanthropy scale. Nettler (1957, pp.670-677) developed a scale to measure another dimension of alienation that is estrangement. Clarck (1959, pp.849-852) tried to measure alienation within the social system (in agricultural cooperation organization). Dean tries to develop scale to measure three dimensions of alienation namely: powerlessness, normlessness and isolation (Dean 1961, pp.753-759). Middleton found that the five components of alienation identified by Seeman could be operationalized into a single five item Guttman scale (Middleton 1963, pp.973-977).

As a result of the development of these scales Simonce (1966, pp. 30-372) tried to study the intercorrelation between some of these measurements. The scales which he took into consideration are: normlessness, powerlessness, social isolation, despair (Srole A-scale), Misanthropy, Low self-esteem, and life-dissatisfaction scales. He found a positive correlation between these measures. The highest positive correlation was between normlessness and powerlessness (.43), powerlessness and social isolation (.53), and between low self-esteem and life dissatisfaction (.43). The lowest positive correlation was between Srole Scale and low self-esteem (.02), and between Misanthropy and attitude uncertainty (.07), and between Srole scale and attitude uncertainty (.08).

Although all the attempts for developing alienation scales are greatly appreciated yet we do not have a good number of scales that can measure all the possible dimensions of alienation. Therefore there is a need for developing more scales to measure this concept.

EVALUATION FOR THE CONCEPT OF ALIENATION:

1- Problem of the Concept

The concept of alienation is vague and ambiguous. Many social scientists tried to clarify the different meanings of alienation and

they ended up with a large number of definitions. As a result conceptual and methodological difficulties in theory construction arise (Neal and Retting, pp.62-63). Kinston (1965) indicated that alienation is a vague concept, and cannot be defined in one general statement. He recommended solution for the problem through four questions he proposed if we want to understand alienation.

1. Alienation from what ?
2. What relationship if any, has replaced the lost one ?
3. What is the degree of alienation ?
4. Who or what is the agent of the alienation ?

Even if we assume that we will arrive at one clear definition for the concept, are we going to have one assumption or more than one assumption under the definition ?

In general we can say that the concept of alienation is ambiguous and vague and it needs an effort to clarify its meaning so that we can arrive at some agreement about its meaning.

2- The Usefulness of the Concept of Alienation

From the review of literature we can say that the concept was useful in explaining deviant behavior (Durkheim, Merton and Cloward and Ohlin). Also the concept explains some types of mental illness, isolation, lack of conformity --- etc. Many writers accept the usefulness of the concept but the only problem is the lossiness of the definition (Seeman 1959, p.849).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper tried to investigate the concept of alienation in the social science. The result indicated that the concept has been used by a large number of people for a long period of time. Some writers tried to clarify the meaning of alienation through a large number of definitions, which helped to develop some scales to measure alienation, and at the same time indicated the ambiguity and vagueness of the term. The concept

was very helpful in the field of social psychology as well as other fields such as deviant behavior and mental illness. At the present time there is a need for more clarification to the concept and a good effort for providing operational definition in order to develop new scales to measure the concept.

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