

Research on the Current Dilemma of Human Survival Based on the Economic Philosophy Manuscript of 1844

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Keywords: Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Alienation, Survival Dilemma, Free and Comprehensive Development of Human Beings

Abstract: While the social productivity is highly developed, people's daily life is gradually alienated. The alienation of science and technology, consumption, culture, and human beings are some of the specific forms of alienation. In the face of the existence dilemma of the common people in the current society, on the basis of in-depth study of the ideas about alienation in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, and starting from the current social reality, this paper puts forward some suggestions to improve the present people's existence dilemma theoretically and practically.

1. Introduction

Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, as one of the classic works in the study of Marxist theory, has received extensive attention from the academic world since its publication in 1932, and it has rich connotations, in which the idea of alienation has also been the focus of research.

There are various forms of alienation in modern society, and people are slowly falling into the state of alienation without realizing it, without asking questions and reflecting on their own living conditions. This predicament of human existence is an embarrassing situation prevailing in modern society, and now the first thing we need to do is to go back to the classic works of Marxism to deeply understand the theory of alienation, and then apply the theory to practice to analyze the root causes of contemporary alienation resulting in the predicament of human existence, and then find ways to improve the current predicament of human existence in practice.

In this work, Marx's formulation of the problem of alienation as well as his predecessors' discussion of the idea of alienation have far-reaching significance for the contemporary study of the predicament of human existence. This paper starts from the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 to interpret the present human existential dilemma, and tries to determine ways to improve it, to provide some inspiration for the construction of socialism in the new era.

2. Marx's Exposition of the Theory of Alienation

Marx elaborated and analyzed alienated labor from both workers and non-workers perspectives, and pointed out that "national economists are merely placing their desired conclusions in a

'fictitious primitive state', assuming as a fact what should be stated. "[1], That is, the assumption of private property, which should be accounted for, has never existed as a fact, without any account of the process by which it came into being, leads to a state of illusion and confusion, and in the whole of national economics, therefore is strongly condemned and criticized by Marx.

After discovering and criticizing the erroneous methodology of the national economists, Marx proposed to base his research on the facts of the national economy, on the actual situation at hand, and to develop a comprehensive analysis of alienated labor. From the workers' perspective, Marx focused on four provisions of alienated labor, "Alienation of things", "Alienation of self", "Alienation of man from his own kind of nature" and "Alienation of man from man", aiming to achieve a critique of national economics through a critique of the four provisions of alienated labor. Firstly, private property, or "private ownership," coexists as a corollary of alienated labor. National Economics saw private property as a self-evident historical antecedent. "He assumes what he ought to account for as a fact with a historical form"[2] and thus "when he wants to account for something, he is always in a fictionalized state of primordality." In the eyes of the national economists, "private property" manifested itself in the identity of "alienated labor" and "economic reason". "Economic rationality" and "alienated labor" were adjudged to be always in a state of static, eternal existence. "Alienated labor" was not seen as active processes that constantly define themselves, constantly reject their own definition, and constantly realize their own development, and thus they could not understand private property as a self-developing being that arises, develops, and perishes in the course of history. Secondly, "alienated labor" is nothing more than a special representation of a particular historical stage of the original "labor". Marx completed the demarcation of "labor" and "alienated labor" and proved that private property is nothing but a rebellious element of alienated labor or the alienation of labor. On the other hand, alienated labor is self-contradictory. Alienated labor sets up labor itself to be dominated by another part (capital), and the reality of the worker's living labor is legally entangled in the dead labor of capital. Thirdly, it affirms the national economics' grasp of the subjective nature of private property in the subjective direction. The understanding of private property in national economics has a pioneering implication compared to monetarism and mercantilism. In mercantilism and monetarism, they merely position private property as a precious metal external to the subject, as a tool for the symbolization of identity, status, and ownership, and understand it as a general, abstracted subordination of alienation. In the case of national economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, private property was revalued as an objectification and externalization of the essential power of the subject, and the obscured subjectivity of money was demystified in the form of the subject's intrinsic interests, and Engels saw the subjective excavation of private property as the Martin Luther Reformation in the field of national economics.

After examining this perspective, Marx also addressed the perspective of the alienation of non-workers, the alienation of capitalists. First, the non-workers are alienated from the human-like essence. In a capitalist society, non-workers are non-laboring and naturally alienated from the class nature. Second, the non-workers are alienated from the workers. Because workers are real and practical, their attitude in production is "realistic and practical"; on the contrary, the non-workers have only a theoretical attitude towards the product of labor produced by the workers. The capitalists will only exploit and oppress the workers uncontrollably, without any regard for the interests of non-workers, and will only regard the workers as "living" tools, and will never compromise or make concessions unless it is necessary, and will take it for granted under the umbrella of the theory of national economy. Third, the alienation of non-workers and workers is different. Since workers are the objects of exploitation and oppression by non-workers, the alienation of workers is far more serious and unfavorable than that of non-workers. In fact, from the last sentence, "Let us examine these three relations further", we can also know that Marx wanted to

continue to explore the alienation of non-workers in detail.

3. Contemporary Alienation Creates Dilemmas for Human Survival

The problem of alienation seems to be far away from us, but in fact, alienation is all around us. They may only exist in a different form, but they really exist in life, and have even caused the survival of the current human predicament.

Firstly, the alienation of science and technology. The progress of science and technology has brought unprecedented changes to our daily life; however, science and technology is a double-edged sword and has also caused many serious problems. The existence of cell phones has made most of us become heavily dependent on science and technology, and we are in the process of alienation without knowing it. The networks develops rapidly so that we are surrounded by a large amount of mixed information, we are accustomed to accept rather than to screen the authenticity of this information, and gradually lost human autonomy and creativity. In the cyber world, people lose the freedom they possess as human beings and are reduced to tools dominated by the machines they create, and this scientific and technological alienation is something that almost everyone can directly feel in their lives.

Secondly, the alienation of consumption. When society develops to the point where people's basic material needs can be met, the traditional market reaches saturation, and only through constant consumption can capital continue to accumulate. In order to achieve this goal, the bourgeoisie began to create new needs and instill "false needs" in the public through propaganda, so that consumers would mistakenly believe that this kind of consumption was necessary. Consumers become slaves of capital in this kind of alienated consumption without realizing it, and still pursue new alienated consumption to get rid of their misery, becoming increasingly unfortunate in the continuous cycle. The alienation of consumption is an important manifestation of contemporary alienation, further deepened in conjunction with alienated labor.

Thirdly, the alienation of culture. In essence, the alienation of culture is the alienation of the relationship between man and nature and between man and man. Driven by the interests of capitalism, human beings have intensified their plundering and appropriation of nature, and the resulting culture is also alienated. And there is the alienation of man and his social relations. Human beings can still transform themselves and their relations with each other by virtue of their labor. In capitalist society, culture has become an appendage of capital and a manifestation of the will of the bourgeoisie. In order to maximize profits, "the consumption of the use value of commodities is alienated from the consumption of the symbolic value of commodities, and it is only in the act of consumption that human beings can realize themselves and obtain satisfaction." [3] Driven by advertising, people no longer attach importance to the use value of commodities, which are supposed to be produced by human beings, but are enslaved and tortured by them. All of this are further exacerbating the gap and disconnection between human beings. Such silent capital control makes culture no longer an expression of the essential power of man, allowing people to potentially subscribe to the logic of capital, unconsciously changing their values and eroding national self-confidence, and the culture loses its independence and freedom, becoming in turn an alien force that rules, oppresses and dominates people.

Fourthly, the alienation of man. The most direct difference between human beings and animals is the class nature of human beings, but today human beings are increasingly reduced to tools and means of labor. On the highly developed and standardized assembly line production, man is technologized and mechanized, and gradually loses his individuality, autonomy, and creativity. Although people's material needs are satisfied, their spiritual life is empty and depressing, and with money becoming the only criterion of measurement, people slowly lose their spirit of independent

thinking and questioning. Such people are no longer what Marx called "free and fully developed human beings", they have lost the dignity and value of life, and have completely lost their freedom.

In a society with advanced science and technology, a wide range of consumer goods, and a colorful popular culture, people fall into the process of alienation without being aware of it, and are ruled and enslaved by the products they create. With the spiritual world being extremely empty, it is inevitably resulting in the existential dilemmas of the people of the present time.

4. How to Improve the Current Existential Dilemma

In the face of the prevailing human existential dilemma, we should not only analyze the solution path, but also deal with the problem from the current social reality and realistically. The following are a few suggestions for the several contemporary forms of alienation mentioned earlier.

The alienation of science and technology is not a mistake of science and technology itself, but the people who use science and technology do not view and use it reasonably. Therefore, both the main body of development and the main body of utilization should establish a correct view of science and technology and enhance the sense of social responsibility. Although the pursuit of economic benefits in the process of science and technology development is not wrong, it is always necessary to adhere to the bottom line, not to use science and technology to do things that are detrimental to the interests of the country, society and the people; at the same time, as users of science and technology, we should also use them rationally, so that they can serve our own needs, improve efficiency, and help to find the meaning of life. Secondly, we should establish and improve the laws of science and technology to restrain people's behavior. On the one hand, the state needs to improve the laws and regulations on science and technology according to the actual situation, so that there is a law to follow; on the other hand, citizens should also take the initiative to learn the legal knowledge about science and technology, and use science and technology to benefit mankind with some fear in their hearts. Finally, "alienated labor is the direct cause of the phenomenon of scientific and technological alienation"[4], so it is necessary to let labor become reasonable practical activity, create and use science and technology according to human needs so that people can feel freedom and happiness in the process of practical activities, improve the quality and efficiency of life, and find the value of life.

Man, as a human being in society, is bound to produce consumption behavior, and when deep in the predicament of consumption alienation, the first and foremost thing to do is to recognize the reason consumption alienation arises. Therefore, as consumers, we should establish a healthy concept of consumption, learn to identify if our own consumption needs are real or just influenced by advertising campaigns under the cover of false demand, to achieve realistic consumption according to our own economic capacity and the actual situation. Secondly, according to psychological analysis, when alienated consumption occurs, people will produce false happiness. Of course, to a certain extent, quantitative changes will inevitably lead to qualitative changes, and the continuous accumulation of pain will eventually break through the pseudosatisfaction brought about by false needs. Finally, it is important to recognize the fact that capitalism is always chasing surplus value. Capitalists are constantly creating false consumer demand for consumers, generating purchasing power economically with a sense of belonging, and politically with a sense of identity to wear down class consciousness. So as a proletariat, we must recognize the essence and law behind it, not to be controlled by capital, and consume just to get the use value, not some false existence.

In the face of the dilemma of cultural alienation, the first and most important thing is to grasp the principles of socialism, to be guided by Marxism, to truly carry forward the main theme, spread positive energy, and strive to create a positive mainstream cultural atmosphere, to break the negative impact of the phenomenon of cultural alienation on people. Secondly, we have to carry

forward the excellent traditional culture of the Chinese nation, apply the wisdom therein to life, and endeavor to carry forward the culture of the nation. Thirdly, based on social reality, we should face foreign cultures of times, absorb and learn from the excellent achievements of human civilization. Finally, when confronted with alienated cultures that endanger society and poison the spiritual world of people, we must resolutely resist and ban them in accordance with the law, to promote the construction of socialist spiritual civilization and the great development and prosperity of socialist culture.

Since human alienation is the most essential form of alienation, it is only by entering a communist society that human alienation can be truly eliminated and the free and comprehensive development of the human being realized. Communism's positive renunciation of private property does not merely mean the abandonment of private property as an entity, but more importantly, the elimination of its bondage, enslavement, and alienation of man. "It is the restoration of man to himself, to the social, i.e., to the humanly human, a restoration that is complete, conscious and generated within the context of the full wealth of previous developments." [5] It is only after the elimination of private ownership and the entry into a communist society that the contradictions between human beings and nature and between human beings will be resolved, and the free and comprehensive development of human beings will be realized in the true sense of the word, and thus it is not merely an improvement in the present existential predicament, but the real elimination of the existential predicament of human beings [6-8].

Until today, Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844 still have high academic value and research space for the current existential dilemma in which people are living. Based on the theoretical foundation of the related study on the alienation problems arising in various fields of society, the abstract theories will be implemented into concrete practice and then put forward the methods to improve the existential dilemma of the people at present [9-10].

5. Conclusion

Marx made a clear exposition of the theory of alienation from the perspective of workers and non-workers. Although this idea was born more than 100 years ago, it is still very forward-looking to see the hidden alienation problem in the society at that time and put forward the solution path to enter the communist society on the basis of this idea. Not only that, Marx's research on the idea of alienation is still applicable to today's society, and an in-depth study of the idea of alienation will provide us with valuable reference and guidance for solving the contemporary alienation problem, such as the alienation of science and technology, consumption, culture, human beings, etc. caused by the existential dilemma.

It has been a longstanding consensus that there is widespread alienation in capitalist societies, but is there alienation in socialist societies as well? Although the main contradiction in our society has been transformed, it does not mean that the phenomenon of alienation and the dilemma of existence no longer exist, but instead they are silently hiding in our daily life in a more secretive form. Therefore, it is crucial to realize that alienation also exists to a certain extent in socialist societies, to correctly view the phenomenon of alienation, to find ways of eliminating alienation on the basis of understanding the causes of contemporary alienation and improve the present plight of mankind's existence in the last.

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