Surveying the Concept of Alienation in the Thought of Erich Fromm

Zahra Alizadeh* and Ehsan Khan Mohammadi

1. Department of Educational Sciences, Payame Noor University, I.R of IRAN
2. M.A. student of sociology, Yasouj University, Iran

Corresponding author: Zahra Alizadeh

ABSTRACT: Alienation is a phenomenon vastly discussed today, but this concept has a long history. Many thinkers have tried to talk about it, but this research has dealt with examining the concept in the thought of Erich Fromm. In this context, data have been collected by using library and documentary method. First, the concept of alienation is discussed, and then the thought of Erich Fromm is surveyed. Erich Fromm a social psychoanalyst discusses that healthy human is a man who connects with the world by love and fruitful activity, but aliened human turns toward domination, submission, destruction or combination. Fromm discusses that the root of alienation is found in capitalist society and is released through socialism.

Keywords: alienation, Erich Fromm, capitalism, socialism

INTRODUCTION

Every era has a major moral concept that can formulate its problems. For Kant, who lived in the bureaucratic and ascetic community of Prussian, "duty" is produced through life concept. "Peace" was the main aspiration of Hobbes who lived in England during the Civil War. "Happiness" for Bentham represents the main goal of the British middle class, which challenged the landed aristocracy government. For a long time, the concept of "exploitation" was placed in the midst of political philosophy of most liberals and socialists. Today, many scholars have concentrated on the concept of "alienation", which also has a long history (Foyer, 1968). The origins of alienation is the Latin word of «Alius", which means the 'other'. «Alienation» essentially means frenzy. Thus, it can be said that it refers to the domination of an aliened creature on human, by which human is unconsciously surrounded and form human's thoughts and behaviors (Mesbah and Mohiti Ardakan, 2011). Alienation is one of the most important anthropological issues, which is considered in the various disciplines of the humanities such as sociology, philosophy, theology and psychology and means the separation and alienation of elements that are interrelated (Milner and Brawit, 2006). One of the scientists who studied this concept is Erich Fromm a social psychoanalyst. Before him, great thinkers were involved in the discussion of human alienation, but no one has detailed the analysis of the concept as Fromm did. According to Erich Fromm, the pain of modern human is alienation from self. We can say that the basic concept that is the prominent in all entries of Fromm is the concept of alienation and other thoughts of Fromm are related to this concept. Given the lack of research in this field, this paper seeks to compare the concept of alienation, its origins, its manifestations, and also proposed ways to solve this problem in terms of Erich Fromm. Library and documentation methods are used. Data are collected through note-taking method. In the selection of relevant literature, we have tried to use the batch of original texts and books. Although previous researches have investigated the phenomenon of alienation in the researches such as "comparative alienation through the perspective of the Young Hegelian and some commentators of the Qur'an" (Ali Ahmadi, Teimori Aasl and Mahmoud Minmand, 2011); "Alienation, the view of Islam and Muslim thinkers" (Ahmadi, 1996); "theism, self-discovery and alienation" (Sadeghi Hassan Abadi and Ganjour, 2010); "Ali Shariati and cultural alienation" (Roshan, 2007) and some other researches, but none of them has dealt with surveying the concept of alienation in thought of Erich Fromm.

History of the Concept of Alienation

The concept of alienation or "alienated man" is one of the issues highly regarded by the philosophers and thinkers of the modern era. Thinkers such as Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Fromm and others in the West and Muslim thinkers like Farabi, Ibn Khaldun, Motahari, Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, each one has dealt with this subject extensively through a special perspective. The concept of alienation has a pedigree that can be delivered straight to John Calvin, who always felt that man is alienated from God by the
"original sin". Calvin stated that death is nothing but alienation of spirit from God because we are all born dead and live as the dead, until we become Christ's life partners (Foyer, 1968). In the modern era, the idea of Rousseau in an essay on inequality, which has depicted the image of a living man whose natural goodness and his corrupt society may be the origin of the concept of alienation (Kouzer, 1993). Hegel is perhaps the first thinker of his time precisely dealt with this issue. Hegel knows universe as a manifestation of a truth called absolute spirit. The essence of man and the outside world has one origin, but when human is not aware of the sense, he will consider the universe as a collection of strange things. Thus, since the outside world with his life has the same origin, so this human is aliened from self (Sotoudeh, 1994). Feuerbach has also dealt with exploring the concept of alienation. He states that religion destroys man. For him, religion denies the reality of the material world and the purpose of religion is the separation of world and material and separation of human biological life (Daryabandari, 1990). The religious man in Feuerbach's perspective is an alienated man. A detailed description of the concept of alienation is observed in the writings of Karl Marx. According to Marx's view, human history is a history of increasing human growth and development, and at the same time his increasing alienation date. According to him, alienation means that a person does not experience himself as the active agent's perception of the world, but the world remains aliened to him. By alienation, man experiences nature and the universe passively and as the separation of subject from object (Fromm, 2007). For Marx, the process of alienation is manifested in work and the division of work. According to him, work is an active link between man and nature and creation of a new world including creation of man. But, as private property and the division of work is spread, the work loses its character as a manifestation of human powers. Work and its products is considered as a being separated from man, his aspirations and programs. In such a situation, human will be dominated by their self-created powers, then they will be alienated (Marx, 2008). Horkheimer and Adorno, leading members of the Frankfurt School having a critical approach to modernity and its achievements believe that the role of "wisdom" has been alleviated to a means to achieve the objectives at a particular time. This causes people to spend their resources to produce items that are dominated on self (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1973). According to them, wisdom is a tool focused on the domination on nature leading human to worship capital. So man is aliened both to out-world and to human nature (Ahmadi, 1994). Herbert Marcuse believes that human's fate is intertwined with objects. Market and the system dominated on objects sees people and objects through one perspective and destroys human's freedom. Todays, technology has destroyed individuals' freedom and made human one-dimensional. Marcuse reaches to the conclusion that in a situation of technological life, personal freedom is impossible and alienation occurs (Marcuse, 1969).

Research Findings

Erich Fromm

Fromm was born in Frankfurt, Germany in 1900 and later traveled to the United States of America. He continued his education in the field of psychoanalysis and psychology and started researching and investigating in the Frankfurt School. He investigated Freud's ideas of social and cultural issues through a critical look. Fromm was also influenced by Marx and his thought was rather a compilation of thoughts and ideas of Freud and Marx. Fromm is known as the founder of the school of scientific humanism dealing with studying human through a secular and scientific approach. So, Eric Fromm provides his ideas by a scientific and non-religious approach. Many entries have been left behind by Fromm, which all the issues are about wandering modern human and his alienation. Some of his books include: Escape from Freedom, Man for Himself, The Art of Loving, Healthy People, The True Nature of Man, Beyond the Chains of Illusion and many others. Fromm deals with investigating the characteristics of healthy men. Regarding to the approach, he discussed that people having not the desired characteristics will be considered as aliened man. Therefore, healthy human should be recognized to understand Fromm's anthropology. The man who does not have health symptoms would be alienated.

Healthy Human

According to Fromm, birth does not mean beginning life, birthing process continues until death. All human life is nothing but self-creation process. In fact, when we are born, we die, although die before birth is the fate of the majority of people (Fromm, 2008). Man has demands coming from the conditions of existence. All human attempts are to find the answer to their existence and to meet their needs (ibid, 46-49). This man was once a part of nature, but left nature and could not come back to it. Man knows about his separation from nature. But loneliness and separation consciousness and awareness of the nature and misery makes life unbearable prison for him (Fromm, 2011). In addition to the human needs that are derived from nature and are physically, there are other needs that their origin is of human existence (Fromm, 2008). So, according to Fromm, life does not refer only to natural physical needs, but human needs are also addressed for a healthy man. For Fromm, responding to all human needs requires much attempts and efforts. Life itself is an art that, in fact, is the most important and yet most difficult and most complex art that humans experience. The goal of this art is not to do a certain work, but to provide an approvable life and growing inherent aptitudes (Fromm, A, 2011). Thus, one can give a good answer to all their needs and develop their talents by learning the art of living. Thus, as mentioned above, in
addition to the physical needs of people such as hunger, thirst and sexual instincts, people have other needs that the kind of answering them specifies health and disease. Man separated from nature requires to create new dependencies because man cannot tolerate this separation even for a while. In addition to seeking affiliation, a healthy man should also not ignore his independence. For Fromm, even if all physical desires of human are realized, loneliness and separation acts as a prison that man should leave it in order to maintain his moral and spiritual health. There are many ways to reach such dependence faced by man, which one of them merely can reach to his bliss, and that is love. For Fromm, love is defined as the solidarity and unity with person, object or outside world to the extent that individuality and dignity of the individuals is maintained. Only love can unite man with the universe and protect the standards of personality and individuality. Love is defined as an active and creative association of human with his fellow (Fromm, 2008). In love, people will overcome the sense of separation but man keeps himself and his personality (Fromm, 2011). So we can say that a kind of dependence is a condition for any mental health. However, among different types of dependence, that is love in that person in addition to affiliation or association with others, his freedom and dignity is reserved. Another position for human is in hid dependence and being as social animal and his need from passive animalism to bliss since healthy man is not only maintained at the level of answering to animal needs and aspirations and is constantly revolted. Man does not know about his birth or death. This position is not different from animals'. But human with the blessing of wisdom and thinking cannot be convinced in the role of passive social animal. In this way, human try to overcome this passivity by using two attempts, which only one of them reaches to bliss and growth; creativity and creation. Although human beings have been created, and has not have any role in his creation, he can be a creator. He is also well aware that is both creature and creator. Man creates an object by planting, invents art, creates thought, then exceeds the phase of animalism and reaches bliss and freedom (Fromm, 2008). In the other word, it can be said that Fromm exceeds a phase more than Aristotle. Therefore, a healthy man is a benefiter and is linked to the universe through love and creative work and is united with the world. He uses his wisdom to achieve objective realities and considers himself as a unique character and yet maintain their solidarity with the people (Fromm, 1974).

Alienated Human

When those needs originated from human's existence are not well responded, they will lead to lack of mental health, which Fromm recognize them as alienated human. When a man is not linked to love due to new dependence, there will exist a new cross-road which the four ways lead to alienation. First, capitulation or masochism, in which person can be capitulated to the universe through a person, group or batch and leave his separation through uniting with a person, group or a team and his identity is dependent on a power to that he is capitulated (Fromm, 1974). Another way (the second) that a person rely on to break separation is domination or sadism, in which it acts against masochism method. In this way/method, person will join the universe with power and energy and will eliminate his separation by dominating on others (Fromm, 2008). In this method, person attracts others to self, while in the method of capitulation, person is attracted by others. Desires originated from masochism are more exposed by consciousness than sadistic desires since they are socially less harmful (Fromm, 1974). In the both dependence, totality and freedom of human is eliminated. The two sides are more united, but they are lack in inner power and confidence which is needed for freedom, then human will be aliened. Another way (the third) by which person can overcome separation or loneliness is that person should be united with others. In this way, as a person is being more united, he will feel more security. His general goal is to be accepted by others and is more afraid of not been accepted by others. Being different and being in minority is something which threatens aliened person (Fromm, 1974). In this method, person is united with others and acts based on their acceptations. Thus, the difference between "me" and outside world is removed and the person will feel security. Fourth, an aliened person instead of joining creation and creativity, acts against creatures; destruction. Person thinks that if I cannot be a creator, I can be a destructor. Destruction will take human beyond life and place him beyond the level of social animal (Fromm, 2008). And makes person aliened. Destroying the outside world is imaged as a way to break the feeling of incapability. Destruction will reduce any threat coming from the outside world. All the four ways by which humans use to overcome alienation will lead to mental disease and make them aliened. For Fromm, merely love and productive and benefiter activity provides human health.

Alienation Roots

In alienation, person will not consider himself as an active power unit, but considers himself as a passive power relying on external powers which have given him the power of existence. Alienation is comprehensive in the modern society and includes the relationship between human and work, usable materials, colleges and others (Fromm, B, 2011). For Fromm, people's behavior is effected by the society in which people live. People's behavior is formed under cultural, social, and economic patterns. Thus, child's behavior is effected by parents and parents are affected by cultural and social system. Most members of a cultural and social system have similar behaviors. According to him, individuals' behavior is resulted from cultural, individual, and life experiences with physical system. The whole of individuals' behavior is formed based on the way due to which behave with each other and
is defined by political, social and economic system, to the extent to which by analyzing a member of the society, total system of that society can be assessed (Fromm, B, 2011), (Fromm, A, 2011), and (Fromm, 2008). Therefore, surveying social and cultural patterns is needed to assess the roots of alienation as a disease influenced by culture, society, and economic patterns. Human alienation has a long history, which is called atheism in holy books. But, todays, alienation has been increased as society is being entered to capitalism. In the other word, capitalism is the main root of alienation. The main element of capitalist society is its economic patterns, to the extent that economy defines other social fields. Capitalism, on one hand is based on political freedom and on the other hand is based on market freedom, which regulates society's economy and as a result, it is based on social relations freedom. Goods market defines the conditions for goods exchange and regulates it. Then, objects, energy, and skills are turned into those goods that can be exchanged. This economic system has provided the hierarchy of values, then objects have become more valuable than work and human force (Fromm, B, 2011). Bureaucracy of capitalism; the creativity in work has been transferred from individuals to bureaucracy and people have increasingly lost their independence (ibid, 109). Duty division in capitalism; today's capitalism has generated a kind of work organization in which people have lost their individuality and have become a changeable element (ibid, 109). Today's, economic system is not controlled by majority of people, and there is no possibility for people to show creativity in their work. Nowadays, people are not harmed by poverty, but they are harmed by a machine that has changed their world (Fromm, 1974). People's creativity is less paid attention to in capitalism, which leads to non-beneficent work. Capitalism has provided a policy called market policy. In this orientation, people consider themselves as an object which should be successfully hired by market and be exchanged as a good (Fromm, 2008). This will influence people's creativity and independence. In capitalistic system, all economic systems are based on consumption and mass-production and make people step toward similarity and resemblance. In this system, all things have become as good and are exchangeable. People's creativity and capability is not well used. People distinguish is based on consumption. They step toward similarity and resemblance. In such system, there is no sign for love, beneficent and productive activity showing people's creativity.

**Out-Way for Alienation**

As Fromm states that alienation is rooted form social field, the going-out way is found in society, the way that steps forward healthy society. He thinks that in a healthy society no man is used as a tool for others. Human in such society is considered as a center and all social, political and economic activities are used to grow people. Healthy society increases mutual responsibility and cohesion of people and make them regulate their relations based on love and passion (Fromm, 2008). For Fromm, the only constructive way is found in socialism (Fromm, 2010), which aims at social and economic reorganizing in order to release people to be used as a tool for others. Then, it makes a social system in which mutual responsibility, wisdom and beneficence of person is increased and is not faced with any problem (Fromm, 2008). Fromm thinks that the out-way for alienation is not one-dimensional, and revolution for passing alienation requires cultural, economic, and political changes. The time for passing this phenomenon needs changes in all dimensions. On the economic front, it criticizes the division of work in capitalist society and deals with providing a model of management and labor in industrial organization, in which all human's skills are used. Workers are divided into small groups, then each group is aware of all tasks within the plant and the production process is also considered and active participation and responsibility is provided for anyone (ibid, 365 and 366). The political dimension criticizes today's democracy, so that modern democracy has caused alienation. Democracy focuses on majority and minority is ignored, while historically all thoughts are controlled by minority. Fromm suggests that the correct form is practical in small groups. In such small groups, daily issues are discussed. Therefore, anyone's role as a partner to share life and society will be returned. Thus, the process of alienation is changed and reduced (ibid, 383-388). The cultural dimension deals with criticizing education system and states that its goal is to change people into tools in conformity with the requirements of capitalist society. Recently, there has been a separation between theoretical and practical knowledge while working should be a work based on understanding and knowledge of person about work. If a man wants to feel relaxed and comfortable in this world, he should absorb knowledge not only by brain but also by all the senses. He should make a relationship between his thoughts and actions and make him self united with world. Thus, the thought and action will be simultaneous. Also, for Fromm, no change should be imposed by force, and if they were told to change economic, political and cultural aspects simultaneously, the change limited to one aspect will destroy the other.

**CONCLUSION**

Erich Fromm's concept of alienation was considered in the study. The idea of Fromm is systematic having a paramount coherent. In addition to the definition and identification of alienation, he deals with finding its roots and out-ways. Fromm has a specific definition of healthy humans and counts some features for it. A healthy man behaves with the world using love and beneficent work and retains his freedom and independence. But man
alienated loses his freedom and independence and starts domination, submission and destruction. Fromm believes that the roots of alienation having a long history are originated from capitalism in the modern society. Erich Fromm believes that way-out for alienation is found in socialism and argues that socialism can overcome the phenomenon of alienation.

REFERENCES