

Review of: "Alienation, Values and the Destruction of the Subject"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The general aim of the present article could be described as an attempt at reconciliation, via a kind of the loosely tied Freud-Marxist tradition, between different and, in my opinion, irreconcilable categorizations of the phenomenon of alienation. As such, the article is very ambitious but ultimately feels convoluted and incohesive.

From a stylistic point of view, the phrasing is often unclear and difficult to read. At times it feels like the paper is a word-for-word translation of a text in another language. Rewriting of some of its parts could help to make the content clearer and its message more accessible. The main arguments of the text, while debatable, are presented in an organized manner. In this sense, the paper is well structured.

Regarding its content, in the present paper the author tries to trace the roots of alienation to both social and subjective causes and conceives it generally as the result of a clash between personal and impersonal values. To this end, the author claims to reject "Freud's naturalistic approach" (p. 2) in order to merge some of his theoretical contributions, such as his ideas on neurosis, with Marxist analysis, while at the same time being critical with the latter's alleged reductionist approach to alienation as solely dependent on the "external milieu" (p. 7.)

From my point of view, the intended objective of the paper is indeed very difficult to achieve, if not outright impossible. Psychoanalysis, especially Freudian and Lacanian theory, naturalizes alienation ("There is no subject without alienation; the subject emerges through alienation", has noted another reviewer here), which contradicts Marx's political project. To cleave on psychoanalysis means to brush Marxism off, since from this perspective (represented more recently by Samo Tomšič, Slavoj Žižek or David Pavón-Cuellar) the idea of a de-alienated society would be a mere metaphysical phantasy. If "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other", all actions, believes, or – as is mentioned throughout the article – values divide the subject into a conscious ego that believes it's in control and into an unconscious discursive constraints that "in reality" takes control. On this premise, the best the subject can hope for is, as I believe the article argues, recognition of the discourses by which subjects are constituted. Whereby discourse as such remains, a priori, an alien constraint that impedes the subject from being "really" himself/herself/themselves. In general, the Marxist conception of alienation is simply incompatible with the assertion that alienation is "a definite way of being, chosen by a human" (p. 1).

As a conclusion, I would suggest rethinking the theoretical framework and the main arguments that are to be presented in the final version of the text, so as to avoid incongruences and inconsistencies. If the author is to adhere to psychoanalytical theory, then Marxist analysis, as mentioned above, cannot be integrated. Marxism conceives alienation

as a result of a concrete mode of production, not as a clash of values chosen by subjects.