

ALIENATIONAL POWERLESSNESS AND MEANINGLESSNESS: A NEO- THOMISTIC APPROACH

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Abstract

Most modern research in social alienation was based upon the factors identified by Seeman (1959, 1967, 1971, 1975, and 1983) as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, estrangement, and cultural estrangement. Postmodernism reevaluated and redefined the factors within the postmodern paradigm. It was observed neither set of definitions included a spiritual component. It was proposed a redefinition of the *self*, as *individual* and *personality*, within the Neo-Thomist position of Jacques Maritain could assist researchers of social alienation in a deeper understanding of the alienational factors of powerlessness and meaninglessness.

Introduction

The Soviet Union collapse, postmodernism emergence, technological advances, globalization, and ethnic conflict reawakened an interest in social alienation that experienced waning interest during the last decade of the 20th century. (Bao, Zhou & Zhou, 2006; Geyer, 1996; Seeman, 1983). Earlier social alienation studies followed the neo-Marxist tradition of conflict theory and viewed the problem as the consequence of the loss of human nature resulting from labor commodification, labor division, and private property ownership (Ritzer, 2005). When Seeman (1959, 1967, 1971, 1975, 1983) proposed the multidimensionality of alienation and delineated the factors of social alienation as powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, estrangement, and cultural estrangement, the foundation for most alienation studies in the United States and Western Europe was created. Questions arose as to whether alienation was unidimensional or multidimensional with research providing varied findings (Mau, 1992; Travis, 1986; Nair & Vohra, 2009; Lacourse, Villeneuve & Claes, 2003; Geyer, 1994; Roberts, 1987; Travis, 1986). It was postulated that Seeman's factors were inadequate or that alienation was too plastic a theory for sociological research (Geyer, 1994, 1996; Gest & Seiferling, 2011; Kanungo, 1979, 1982; Mottaz, 1981; Overend, 1975) and lead some to question whether various dimensions were antecedents or consequences of alienation (Kanungo, 1979; Mottaz, 1981; Overend, 1975). When Gergen (1996) observed the need for a reevaluation of the concept of alienation, it appeared as

though alienation had reached an academic stalemate. Despite continued studies, there appeared to be little consensus on the definition of alienation leading Geyer (1994) to conclude that alienation had become increasingly diverse not only in its definitions but in its applications to social issues, where there was little agreement on the nature of alienation and it was a rather vague umbrella concept.

Reminiscent of the Foucault-Habermas debate, Langman and Kalekin- Fishman (2006) viewed social alienation as rooted in dysfunctional communication and power within a civil society. Alienation was returned to an individual need and social response for recognition. While the dimensions of alienation varied depending upon age, socio-economic status, race, and gender, an underlying commonality existed, the relationship between the individual and society (Geyer, 1994; Nauta and Derckx, 2007). Southwell (2008) investigated the alienational relationships between powerlessness, meaninglessness, and cynicism among U.S. voters between 1964 and 2000 and found a correlation suggesting powerlessness and meaninglessness as important dimensions in political alienation. Individual perceptions of powerlessness and meaninglessness appeared to be prominent dimensions of social alienation.

It was suggested that the Thomist approach of Maritain could be useful in redefining the factors of social alienation as a struggle between the *individual* and *personality* finding consensus with society. As Maritain (1945) observed, Thomism

answers modern problems, both theoretical and practical. In face of contemporary aspirations and complexities, it displays a power to fashion and emancipate the mind. We therefore look to Thomism at the present day to save, in the theoretical order, intellectual values, in the practical order, so far as they can be saved by philosophy, human values (p. 1).

While Maritain did not address the problem of social alienation directly, there were excerpts in Maritain's writings that discussed the nature of the self in society. Neo-Thomism provided a means of redefining social alienation by examining the causes instead of the symptoms of the problem.

Classical Thought

Social Alienation

The concept of alienation had its origins in the ancient Greek philosophers, who noted that "humans were always distanced from their ideal states and were destined to fall short of perfection by design" (Brooks, Hughes, & Brooks, 2008, para. 3). Such an observation implied the existence of an idealized state of existence consistent with realism, a belief maintained in much of the current alienational research defining alienation negatively. Homer noted that while alienation from the *polis* was tragic, it was not brutal; it had the ability to promote a revitalization of the self and the *polis* (as reported by Bloom & Hobby, 2009).

Where Rousseau claimed that alienation occurred in social settings and that control was

needed in one's life to overcome alienation, Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard observed that alienation was the absence of a spiritual connection through which one could find meaning in life (as reported by Schmitt, 2003). To fully commit oneself to an authentic spiritual existence was the only means of escape (Brooks, Hughes, & Brooks, 2008). Friedrich Nietzsche defined alienation in terms of the relationship of the individual to society as a whole and viewed it as a weakness and the darker side of man's existence related to modernity (as reported by Deleuze, 2006).

The somewhat restricted view of alienation was broadened under Marx, who, strongly influenced by Hegel and Feuerbach (Gouldner, 1980), related alienation to a larger historical process in which humans became estranged from nature and from the products of their work. For Marx work was an activity through which man had an opportunity for self-realization. The presence of private property, transformation of labor into a commodity, and the system of division of labor promoted an increased sense of alienation within the individual from their society and themselves (Marx, Engels, & Tucker, 1978). While most of Marx's focus was on the industrial worker, alienation referenced the perception of estrangement from the group frequently experienced by the individual living in a multifaceted industrial society, where depersonalization and a loss of unity was experienced when faced with bureaucracy (Kilminster, 2002). Weber concurred, and viewed alienation as a result of bureaucracy, loss of individuality, and loss of the abilities to obtain one's realistically selected purpose (as reported by Brooks, Hughes, & Brooks, 2008; Weber, 1968).

Durkheim's concept of anomie or normlessness was the result of man's separation from the society that denied him the ability to determine what to expect or desire in life or to affect necessary change in society. As society became increasingly industrial, a conflict occurred between labor and capital due to the abrupt transitions that led to a loss of the norms, which regulated behavior. With the decline of controls, the rise of the market, and the praise of acquisition anomie resulted (Durkheim, 1979). Deflem (2007) observed that anomie among non-Marxists was a palatable substitute for alienation. Merton (1968) observed that given the inherent inconsistency between social goals and means within American culture anomie was promoted, resulting in subversion, retreat, rebellion, or ritualization. Retreat due to anomie translated into cynicism, which as Parsons (1991) observed "should be regarded as a reaction to disillusionment, the feeling that it just isn't any use in ego trying to do his part, because 'what do I get for it?'" (p. 178). The chasm between the individual and the world, Berger (1990) observed, widened because the conscious dialogue between the individual and the world was broken.

Put differently, alienation is the process whereby the dialectical relationship between the individual and his world is lost to consciousness. The individual 'forgets' that this world was and continues to be co-produced by him. Alienated consciousness is undialectical consciousness. The essential difference between the socio-cultural world and the world of nature is obscured—namely, the difference that men have made the first, but not the second. Inasmuch as alienated consciousness is based on this fallacy, it is a false consciousness (Berger, 1990, p. 85).

Seeman's (1959) attempt to clarify the dimensions or factors of alienation was designed to identify "the social conditions that produce these five variants of alienation, or their behavioral consequences" (784). The assumptions were that social conditions create one or more of the dimensions of alienation and there were related observable behaviors.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness was "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes or reinforcements he seeks" and that it was best understood as "the depiction of man's relation to the larger social order" (Seeman, 1959, pp. 784-785). Powerlessness was therefore defined as both a personal and social condition; the definition of person and change implied by the use of occurrence, demanded further investigation.

The problem of agency was addressed in early philosophical inquiry, wherein cause, or *aitia* (αἰτία: cause, reason for action, accusation), contained a moral implication implying both causation and a liability to be summoned to respond to the responsibility of the act, an illustration of the legal definition was in Homer's Iliad (1.153-7, 2.87, 15.137, & 21.370), where just retribution was sought for immoral acts. The early Greek concept embraced both a subject's responsibility and object cause, a notion expanded considering the Greek concepts of *phusis* (φύσις: being or nature) and *logos* (λόγος: word or account). The use of *prophasis* (πρόφασις: motive or pretext) implied time, a notion necessary for differentiating being and becoming. For the Milesian Pythagoreans and Heraclitus, *phusis* (φύσις) included becoming; however, as Mayr (1968) observed, by the time of Plato becoming related to the external manifestation and did not affect the reality of the being. As Mayr (1968) observed

The self-understanding of man in time and history expressed through the medium of language is in fact the manifestation — at various stages of reflection — of the grasp of causality. It is giving an account of (λογον διδόναι, later *rationem reddere*, explaining) and seeking the sufficient reason (αἰτία, ἀρχή, later *principium*, principle or ultimate ground) for all that is (p. 271).

Aristotle asserted a paradox of change occurred in previous theories, as Jones (1970) clarified. "If we say that A changes to B, we seem to be saying that A is both itself and not itself. It must be A, for we say, 'A changes'; it cannot be A, because we say it is B. If water is water, it is not ice; if it is ice, it is not water" (Derksen, nd., para. 6). Aristotle focused on the relation to the essence of "a thing from all its qualities and focused upon what a thing really was, upon its essential nature" (as reported by Strumpf, 1982, p. 88), and observed four predicated types of causes or αἰτιον (pl. of αἰτία) existed: material, formal, efficient, and final (Aristotle, 1984). The material cause was that of which a thing was; the formal cause indicated the essence of a thing that will be; the efficient cause was that by which a thing was made to be; the final cause was the purpose for which the things was made. To use a classic example of Aristotle's causes, one

could make the following statements: (a) a pot-formal cause, (b) of clay-material cause, (c) by a potter-efficient cause, and (d) for wine- final cause.

As Derksen (n.d.) observed, the material, formal, and efficient causes were familiar to the modern mind; the final cause was not familiar largely due to the influence of Enlightenment thought, where the idea of a thing having a purpose inherent in its nature, a reason for its existence, was viewed as worthless. The final cause, purpose for existence, was better defined as use instead of its reason for existence, a subtle but important distinction as it involved the *telos* (τέλος, end, result) as opposed to the *techne* (τέχνη, skill, trade), the root for the modern term *technology*.

For Aquinas this was the state of philosophical inquiry. Aristotle's *hylomorphism* denied immaterial substance and was incompatible with Christian belief, as was Aristotle's perception of form and matter of individual substance, as it was restricted to temporally finite physical substances or composite substances and did not address nonphysical substances or simple substances (as reported by Aquinas, 1965). Aristotle's *hylomorphism* was problematic for Aquinas, who proposed that while the essence of composite substances were matter and form, the essence of simple substances were form thereby positing the notion that a thing's essence is not essentially its substance. Aquinas insisted that "existence is other than essence or quiddity, unless perhaps there exists a thing whose quiddity is its existence", implying that essence does not by necessity entail existence (Aquinas, 1965, p. 77). Aristotle's concept of change was "reinterpreted as actuality and potentiality" (as reported by Derksen, n.d., para. 29). The result of existence relating to the essence as *act* relating to potentiality placed Aquinas in the position to expand Aristotle's four causes with introduction of an exemplary cause (Aquinas, 1947, Q1:44:3), which asserted that causality was initiated upon an exemplar or model in the mind of the efficient cause. Of the types of causality, exemplary cause introduced the exemplar (thought or idea), which as Derksen (n.d.) observed

thus enriches and refines Aristotle's four causes, because unlike the formal, material, efficient, and final causes, the exemplary cause refers to ideas, to the realm of essences and potentiality, since it is 'a form or idea in imitation of which something comes to be.' This distinction Aristotle was unable to draw due to his conviction that all individual substances are necessarily hylomorphic (para. 39).

The example statement previously used would now appear as: (a) a pot- formal cause, (b) of clay-material cause, (c) by a potter-efficient cause, (d) for wine- final cause, and (e) based upon *an idea of design* in the mind of the potter, exemplary cause.

Crucial to the development of modern empiricist philosophy, Hume's assertion, that through inductive reasoning humans were capable of understanding the cause and effect relationship; he asserted that no logical relationship existed between the two, only an explanation of initial or primary causes. Hume claimed that causes found their origin in the mind of man (as reported by Beebe, 2006). Kant asserted that cause was an a priori principle, and "everything that happens, that is, begins to be, presupposes something upon which it follows according to a rule" (Kant, 1965, p. 218).

With cause came effect, the modern definition of which was naturally alien to the concepts of causality maintained by both Aristotle and Aquinas and with the added dimension of control in the modern definition because one could attribute events to outside forces (external, situational) or to variables within the individual's control (internal, dispositional). How people saw the causes of behavior and explained it led to the creation of attribution theory and supported the concept that the perception of optimal control occurred when one "attributed outcomes to internal, stable, and controllable causes" (Alexander & Winne, 2006, p. 353). If one had control over the cause, one had control over the effect; hence, one's perception of control had internal and external implications (Rotter, 1954, 1966; Seeman, 1959, 1967, 1975).

Heider (1958) laid the groundwork for research by Rotter, who in 1954 published *Social Learning and Clinical Psychology* in which he defined his social learning theory. According to Rotter (1954, 1966) the personality was comprised of the interaction of the individual with the environment; by changing the environment, one changed the individual; by changing the way one thinks, one changed the environment; therefore, the individual's perception of control or locus of control over the environment and rewards could be measured across a continuum from external control or the perception of being acted upon by external forces to internal control or the perception of being the primary factor stimulating the rewards. For clarity, an examination of the statement previously used would now appear as: (a) a pot-formal cause, (b) of clay-material cause, (c) by a potter-efficient cause, (d) for wine- final cause, and (e) based upon *an idea of design* in the mind of the potter, exemplary cause revealed the modern concept of causality, as control. Rotter's (1966) observation that by changing the environment, one changed the individual; by changing the way one thinks, one changed the environment could be restated as by changing the material cause (of clay), one changed the efficient cause (a potter); by changing the exemplary cause (based upon an idea of design in the mind of the potter), one changed the efficient cause (the potter). Two questions arose: what initiated the changing of the material cause; what initiated the changing of the exemplary cause?

Philosophically, the modern concept of causality implied the addition of control or authority into causality. As Gissurarson (2002) observed, social cohesion was dependent upon authority. While there was a persistent disagreement amidst social theorists regarding the nature of authority as a result of varied worldviews, most agreed that two operations existed: de jure and de facto. The former was compliance with the opinion of authorities based upon socially accepted norms; the latter was submission to the opinion of authorities based upon the authorities' rightful claim. Arendt (1960) observed that authority was a social contract in which a balance of individual freedom and obedience was maintained.

Weber (1968) identified three types of authority including rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. It has been argued that all three of Weber's types of authority were actually based on traditional authority (Winch, 1967). Rotter's (1966) locus of control was used to identify

individuals who were internally and externally motivated based upon the perception of control. Those who perceived an internal locus of control tended to be associated with higher levels of productivity, compliance with authority, social participation, and compliance with social norms, as opposed to those identified as externally motivated (Perlow and Latham, 1993; Spector, 1982). Cause, authority, and locus of control became major components of organizational theory, formulated by Durkheim (1964, 1974, 1983) and Weber (1968) and was concerned with the issue of industrial organization and economics (Wilson, 2002). With increased industrialization and technology, circular causation and cumulative causation arose.

While powerlessness was defined as an individual perception that one's behavior could not predict the results and reinforcements sought in relation to society (Seeman, 1959, p. 784-785), the connection to causation was no longer understood in the classical sense of Aristotle and Aquinas but within a postmodern definition. Geyer (1996) observed a new type of powerlessness has emerged, where the core problem is no longer being unfree but rather being unable to select from among an over-choice of alternatives for action, whose consequences one often cannot even fathom" (xxiii). Powerlessness was confusion and was not the result of a need of freedom but the exposure of too much freedom due to an overexposure to the complexity of the world.

Meaninglessness

Seeman's definition of meaninglessness was "the individual is unclear as to what [he or she] ought to believe – when the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met...sense of understanding the events in which he is engaged" (p. 786). Like powerlessness and causality, the meaning of life was at the heart of a great deal of philosophical examination. Unlike Plato (trans. 2003) who identified the meaning of life as the attainment of the knowledge through trained philosophical inquiry, Aristotle (trans. 1985) identified the meaning of life as the attainment of *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία) or happiness and *arête* (ἀρετή) or virtue.

A primary feature of Aristotle's concept of meaning in life was the integration of the virtues accomplished through a life experience in which the rational soul guided action. A secondary feature in Aristotle's meaning in life was the external elements inducing happiness, such as good friends, wealth, and power, the lack of which reduced one's ability to fully perform virtuous acts. External elements could be the result of fortune; virtuous activity was not endowed by fortune but by rational action and responsibility. A tertiary feature of Aristotle's concept of happiness was the development, in which "a low-grade form of ethical virtue emerged in us during childhood as we were repeatedly placed in situations that called for appropriate actions and emotions" (Kraut, 2010, para. 18). As one matured, so too did the abilities to make decisions based upon prior experience; likewise, emotional responses were improved. Those of virtue who became skillful in performing intricate and complex activities perceived a sense of gratification in applying the rational abilities necessary to perform the tasks.

Once a decision was made to act in accord with virtuosity, there was no anxiety to act to the contrary. "He does not long to do something that he regards as shameful, and he is not greatly distressed at having to give up a pleasure that he realizes he should forego" (Kraut, 2010, para. 18). How one arrived at virtuous action was determined by the *meson* (μέσον) or mean of the two extreme actions (Aristotle, 1106a26-b28). How one determined the mean of the action, which was between deficiency and excess, was from experience.

During the Enlightenment two themes emerged that followed the classical arguments. Kant argued that the meaning of life could be found in the actions performed in accordance with the moral obligations found in the categorical imperative (Guyer, 1998). Taylor (2005) observed that the emphasis on personal autonomy and the development of the virtues was a major part of Kantian philosophy. Bentham and Utilitarianism, following the argument of Epicurus, who defined the meaning of life as the search and attainment of the absence of pain and fear, believed that the meaning of life could be found in that which served the best for all (Annas, 1993; Rosen, 2003). Developing during the late 19th century, Peirce, James, and Dewey promoted the philosophy of Pragmatism, maintaining that truth and meaning was best identified by their practical purposes and usefulness (as reported by Menand, 1997; James, 1909, 1981). Opposing rationalism and positivism, existentialism "came into being with individual existence seemingly doomed by bustle, the struggle for life, the pace and tumult of the machine" (Jaspers, 1952, p. 8). Existentialism maintained that meaning was created through man's freedom of decision, not upon an objective truth. Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Schopenhauer addressed the issue in ways that demonstrated the importance of the individual in finding the purpose of life (as reported by Appignanesi, 2006). The Cartesian concept of self, embedded in the modern definition of man, led to an alienation of man not only from himself, but from the cosmos. Within the postmodern definition, meaninglessness was not the lack of ability to perceive the importance of events in which one is occupied, but the lack of filtering important information needed to determine significance (Geyer, 1996). The postmodern approach echoed Kant's claim that "the world was a buzzing confusion...known only through thought processes that filter, select, and categorize these events" (Ritzer & Goldman, 2004, p. 26).

Seeman's (1959) definition of meaninglessness as "the individual is unclear as to what [he or she] ought to believe—when the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met...sense of understanding the events in which he is engaged" (p.786), could be engaged in a fashion similar to that of powerlessness. Meaning, as sense, can be defined either subjectively or objectively. The former addressed that in which the mind applied a linguistic value (y means x). The latter addressed the significance. The application of meaning to alienation was objective and implied that to have meaning, including significance, value, or purpose, there must be an implied goal. If the goal was meaningless, then the significance of the means by which the goal was obtained was questionable. Therefore, the goal must have at least equal significance to the means by which it was obtained. The means had an absolute,

indispensable, and exclusive significance to the goal, which were potentially a means to yet another higher goal. The recognition of the significance of a mean implied the idea of purpose, intent, or justifiable existence. The meaningfulness of both the means and the ultimate goal were determined by the person in a societal context and was an agreement with the self in self-agreement and in accord with other beings in the world (Splett, 1969; Maritain, 1938, 1947).

Neo-Thomist Thought

Man, Alienation, and Society

The questions could be asked: was the psychopathological phenomena the result of social alienation, or was social alienation the result of psychopathological phenomena? The cyclical natures of the questions stymied researchers, and each position had supporters (Cicchetti & Cohen, 2006; Mirowsky & Ross, 1986; Straeter, 2002). The problem of spirituality was rarely identified as a factor in recent social alienation research, the origin of which appears rooted in the Western dualist concept of the human being. Both Plato and Aristotle argued that the mind was immaterial, a belief embedded in the Western mind by Descartes and continued by Freud, Husserl, and Jaspers (as reported by De Block & Adriaens, 2011). The sociological issue of alienation was defined within a psychological paradigm and suggested a mind-body relationship to one's social setting. Extending the soul into the paradigm was problematic, as the perception of the mind was often linked to the human lifecycle, whereas the soul was associated less with the cognitive functions and more with the spiritual realm (Richert & Harris, 2008). Bloom (2004) posited that the concept of the soul was persistent, encompassing the nature of being human in all areas including the cognitive dimension. Discussing the nature of schizophrenia, De Block and Adriaens (2011) noted, "the critical error of dualistic understandings of mind and its pathologies is this: individual experience is stripped of its interpersonal, social, and existential dimensions" (291). A similar statement could be made regarding the sociological approach to alienation, as Seeman's factors were measured in a psychological construct with little consideration for the possible spiritual factor.

The question of alienation was rooted in an understanding of the nature of man. According to the Aristotelian theory of hylomorphism, all material beings were substance, consisting of prime matter and substantial form; the human was a composite of matter and entelechy or spiritual form. The nature of the human, according to Maritain, created a philosophical link for an understanding of the psychopathological breakthroughs (as reported by Allard, 1982). The duality in man was not that of Cartesian dualism; instead, it was two substances of one being, recognized and called *man*. Each man had a body and soul, coexistent and in unity from which each was provided its matter from the genesis of the cells that created it. The substantial relationship of the two within one body provided the individual with unique attributes distinguishing it from another human. While each substance existed with the person, each had its individual qualities expressed in *personalism*.

For Maritain (1971) personalism created the personal, unified, and synchronized aspiration in the human quest for freedom and social liberation. Found in each person was the individual or material and the personality or spiritual, united in the attempt. Allard (1982) noted the “trans-material intellect, the root of his freedom” provided man with the abilities of “self-possession, of self-perfecting and of free self-giving”; it must be noted that this did not imply a Manichean interpretation of the individual as being, in itself and by its nature, good (17). Such a concept denied the inextirpable relationship between the individual and the personality, cohesion until the moment of death. The balance of individuality and personality was such that Maritain (1947) observed evil actions were the result of the undue emphasis on the individual at the expense of the spiritual person.

A social being, the natural desire to live in society, provided man with the conditions necessary for existence, development, and perfections (Allard, 1982). As Maritain (1942b) observed

La personne est un tout, mais elle n'est pas un tout fermé, elle est un tout ouvert, elle n'est pas un petit dieu sans portes ni fenêtres comme la monade de Leibniz, ou une idole qui ne voit pas, n'entend pas, ne parle pas. Elle tend par nature à la vie sociale et à la communion (p. 18). Fruchaud (2005) noted that the implication of the individual and personality in society created a social contradiction resting in relationships: individual and personal good and the social common good. The social contradiction created a conflict of individualism and personality as well as one's role in society, specifically individualism that subordinated the common good or collectivism that subordinated the human. Maritain rejected both and observed that the primary purpose of political society was not economic but civilizing, the common uplifting of what it means to be human (as reported by Allard, 1982). “Society in the proper sense, human society, is a society of persons. A city deserving of the name is a city of human persons. The social unit is the person” (Maritain, 1947, pp. 296-297). Through society man was capable of cultivating activities of self-meaning culminating in the common good (Maritain, 1991). Society had to recognize individual dignity and promote the right of the individual to express his or her humanity. The “mystery of the person transcends the society, the state, and the common good” (Allard, 1982, p. 26). Society was not the ultimate aim of man's activities; instead, man's actions were directed to his relationship with God.

Il y a ainsi un mouvement pour ainsi dire vertical des personnes elles-mêmes au sein de la société,— parce que la racine première de la personne n'est pas la société, mais Dieu ; et parce que la fin ultime de la personne n'est pas la société, mais Dieu ; (Maritain, 1942b, p. 32).

When society intervened and confounded the individual's attempts to fulfill his or her purpose, the result was frustration and man sensed socially-induced alienation. If alienation was essentially composed of such factors as powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and estrangement, it would not be difficult to integrate the factors into Maritain's Neo-Thomist framework.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness was “the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his or her behavior cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes or reinforcements he or she seeks” and that it was best understood as “the depiction of man's relation to the larger social order” (Seeman, 1959, pp. 784-785). Powerlessness was both a personal and social condition. Powerlessness, as the absence of freedom for the individual, destroyed the person. As Maritain (1971a) contended,

When you kill the individual you also kill the person... The ideal of the despotic conception is first take out our heart...and replace it with some perfect organ standardized according to rules of what everyone ought to be. The first operation may perhaps succeed; the second one is more difficult. Instead of a genuine human personality, sealed with the mysterious face of its Creator, there appears a mask, that of the conventional manner that of the rubber-stamped conscience, ‘incorporated’ (p. 35).

By acting freely the human was partially capable of constructing a personal reality with which one was revealed to oneself (Allard, 1982). Such freedom was not that of the existentialism of Sartre, denying God’s existence in favor of a superfluous and self-centered freedom. Maritain’s freedom contained two important features: freedom from constraint and freedom of spontaneity. The latter contained four degrees of spontaneity: spontaneity of material nature, spontaneity of constituted structure, spontaneity of sense knowledge, and spontaneity of the mind or autonomy (as reported by Allard, 1982). It was within the fourth degree, of self-directed autonomous spontaneity, man was endowed with the ability to act intelligibly to his own ends. “The true freedom of autonomy of persons is at one with spiritual perfection and the freedom of choice is the means of conquering it” (Allard, 1982, p. 33). Free will or the freedom of choice was the foundation of personal freedom and was the means by which humans were capable of controlling actions. Differing from the arguments of absolute intellectualism, denying freedom of the will and empiricism, reducing freedom of the will to natural causes and effects, Maritain (1942a, 1945, 2007) argued that free will was the first innate act of spontaneous awareness and experience of the human. There was no question of the existence of free will, as it was obvious. Aquinas’ statement, “Hence the whole root of freedom is located in reason” (Maritain, 1971a; Aquinas, nd, Q24, Art. 2, Reply), implied not only the necessity of man’s ability to reason for freedom but its origin from the will. Freedom of choice was not an end in itself but an extension of the will longing to find a fuller expression in order to attain its purposeful end (Maritain, 1942a, 1945, 2007). Between the primary freedom or will and the purposeful end was the “life of the mind, animated by the radical love of the saturating good, and impelling the person to seek this good” (Allard, 1983, p. 33).

Social powerlessness denied man’s ability to express his free will and denied him a purposeful end, which was man’s most primary desire at a spiritual level (Maritain, 1942b).

Such denial was based upon the social rejection of the wholeness of man, physically and spiritually, which was man's desire within society.

Le mouvement dont je parle tend à réaliser progressivement dans la vie sociale elle-même l'aspiration de l'homme à être traité comme une personne, c'est-à-dire comme un tout. (Maritain, 1942b, p. 50) "One does not die in the name of free will; one dies in the name of freedom of autonomy or exultation" (Maritain, 1940, p. 142). If the definition of powerlessness could be redefined to be not merely the "lack of one's ability to predict outcomes and reinforcements" but the perceived social repression of the expression of individual free will, the spiritual consequences of which were the denial of one's existence in "relation to the larger social order" (Seeman, 1959, p. 784-785), then one could view powerlessness as a state of becoming instead of being, a state denied by society in which he lived and attempted to find himself.

Meaninglessness

For Maritain the meaning of life was love (as reported by Hudson & Mancini, 1987). Maritain stated, "The meaning of human life is to strive for perfection of love [charité], and I don't see anything exclusively Christian in this. Charity, rather, combines the rational and emotional features as assessed for any realist thought" (Maritain as cited in Blum, 2003, p.7). Love, both human and divine, was a "gift of nature and of grace: that is why it can be the first precept" (Maritain, 1971b, p. 97). Meaninglessness was the inability of man to find and express love due to social and political constraints (Maritain, 1938).

The problem of meaninglessness was rooted in the predicament in which man found himself in relation to a society suffering from a spiritual "crisis... characterized by the absence of a philosophy of life which would allow men to understand the reasons they have to live and die, Victor Frankl's 'meaninglessness'" (Allard, 1982, p. 117). The secular world, imperfect as it was, could only be improved, if man collectively changed his moral outlook (Maritain, 1938). The moral outlook that needed changing was rooted in the philosophies of Enlightenment thinkers, particularly those of Descartes, Hobbes, and Kant. The solution was a return to Christian concept of man as self, in which individuality and personality coexist in unity.

Conclusion

An understanding of alienation and two of its prominent factors as defined by Seeman (1959, 1967, 1971, 1975, and 1983) as powerlessness and meaninglessness prompted an understanding of the self. It was suggested that the concept of self was redefined since the Enlightenment, where the concepts of individuality and personality were confused. The modern definition of self was incomplete (Vitz, 1977), as it did not address the spiritual aspect of the person and confused the distinction between the two parts of the self. It was posited that a Thomistic definition in the tradition of Maritain could assist researchers of alienation with the addition of the spiritual component.

For one to sense powerlessness one had to have previously experienced power; for one to sense meaninglessness one had to have previously experienced meaning, both of which were experienced at a spiritual level. The liberation of the individual in both personal and social dimensions had spiritual importance. In *Laborem excercens* (1981) Pope John Paul II noted the importance of labor, which transcended the capital of the state. Labor was done in love, and this touched upon the importance of individuality and personality in man, as man sought himself, his relation to society, and ultimately his relation to God through Christ incarnate. As Maritain (1938) observed,

But the social polity is essentially directed, by reason of its own temporal end, towards such a development of social conditions as will lead the generality to a level of material, moral and intellectual life in accord with the good and peace of all, such as will positively assist each person in the progressive conquest of the fullness of personal life and spiritual liberty (p. 128).

For Maritain the ultimate meaning of life was found in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, as the ultimate goal of humanity. Meaning in life was found in the freedom, dignity, and rights of the human person, as well as the predominance of natural over human law.

Hobbes simply reworked the old themes of Cyrenaic and Epicurean ethics, making the latter into something more inflexible and more sombre by subjecting it to the yoke of determinism and incorporating it in the absolutism of the State (which was completely contrary to the spirit of Epicurus). He performed an essentially negative task, chipping away, eroding the already existing body of the classical tradition. He revealed no new constructive principle to moral philosophy. (Maritain, 1964, p. 94).

Implications for Future Research

Powerlessness and meaninglessness were two important factors of alienation. For the Christian scholar, several questions could be asked. Did those who were alienated maintain a worldview reflective of a classical view of power and meaning as opposed to the modern worldview? Did one who perceived powerlessness feel the inability to reach their fullest perceived potential as a human? Did one who perceived meaninglessness also feel the inability to express love for others in society? Did alienation have, as Homer suggested, positive implications as an indicator that one had a desire to attain power and meaning that transcended that provided by the current social situation? Admittedly, such implications would require a re-evaluation of current measurements of alienation to include the spiritual dimension in relation to the individual and society. The results, however, could improve a current understanding of social alienation.

(First of two articles)

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