

## Abstract

Alienation has often long been linked with insanity or some mental illness, but later on, it has been attributed to man's estrangement from God. However, alienation may also be an estrangement of a person or his affections, from something very close to him. Basically, alienation stems out of a feeling of variance with the contemporary society and the milieu. For some its cause is because of this world being only a shadow of a real world that exists beyond this world as Plato believed and for others it is because we are not paid for what we deserve as Marx explained it as such. Similarly, there are others who believed it to be an essential component of human being's existence as Heidegger, Renata Salecl believed it, and for some others it is because of being damned to be free or because of leap of faith.

Alienation in philosophy is an existentialist concept that refers to the feeling and fact of the human person being torn away from some grounds where she is familiar and finding himself/herself in a place - maybe life in the world generally - where he/she is a total stranger. An alien is a stranger. Thus, the philosophical concept of alienation denotes that feeling of being an alien, a total stranger in this world that sometimes comes upon us when life hits at us. It is that feeling of being lost when one feels that no one really cares.

Positively, alienation can lead one to take full responsibility for one's life. It can enable one to make greater and better use of their autonomy and freedom. Negatively, alienation can lead one to despair and ultimately suicide. It can paralyse one and push them down into full-blown depression, paranoia and schizophrenia. The remedy is always to make the positive vibes out of the normal human experience of alienation.

Alienation is a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict; hostility felt toward something seemingly outside oneself, which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is actually no defense but an impoverishment of oneself. Many different interpretations of alienation have been given with different definitions and meanings.

According to Webster, 'alienation' means "estrangement of a person," "conveyance of property to another" and "mental derangement" (Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary: 37).

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, 'alienation' means, "the action of estranging or state of estrangement in feeling or affections" (The Oxford English Dictionary: 19).

Encyclopedia Britannica explains 'alienation', "a term used with various meanings in philosophy, theology, psychology and the social sciences, usually with emphasis on personal powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation or self-estrangement" (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol.1, 243).

In the Dictionary of Social Sciences, Kurt Lang defines alienation as "an estrangement or separation between parts or the whole of the personality and significant aspect of the World of experience" (Lang 1964).

In the International Encyclopedia of Social Science, Lichtheim has described the concept of alienation "as a basic ontological theme in Western Culture stemming from a Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation" (Lichtheim, 1968: 264-268). Here he traces the fusion of this concept with early Christian interpretations of creation.

The discussion of alienation as historically constituted is, at best, only partial if the causes of this existential condition are not understood. It must be remembered, however, that this process of causation is not the static, unitary causation found in mechanized scientific methodology, nor is it simply that alienation results from an external cause. While the specific causes of alienation will depend on the conception of the authentic self that grounds any discussion of alienation but in general, its causes are complex, multi-faceted and, importantly, non-biological. It is because alienation does not have a biological aspect to it.

Alienation relates to the way the actual self reflectively lives and comports itself in the world as this is defined in relation to a specific normative conception of the preferable, or authentic self; it does not define a physical disease or ailment. However, this requires that the researcher should introduce a subtle point that recognizes that while alienation is not a disease, disease can lead to alienation if the

disease prevents the individual from living in accordance with the conception of the authentic self that underpins the discussion. But while the body may prevent the individual from living authentically this is not due to the body itself. Rather, it is due to the way the body permits the individual to exist in relation to his or her world. In other words, alienation arises from the way the individual's body allows him or her to exist rather than from the individual's body itself. Rather than reject the concept, we must take it seriously, uncover its normative ontological grounding, and seek to incorporate it into attempts to understand the actual self.

One of the most profound themes of literature is the isolation of self. Separation and alienation from society can be as encapsulating as the physical remoteness of one trapped on an island. Psychological isolation is one of the most prominent and complex themes in literature. Often, there is no escape, or at least no complete escape. This is one of the major themes of the existentialists.

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the character most isolated is Hamlet. He does not know whom he can trust, especially since his mother has remarried hastily after her husband's death, and Hamlet has discovered that his father may have been murdered by his uncle. Hamlet is an enigma. No matter how many ways critics examine him, no absolute truth emerges. Hamlet breathes with the multiple dimensions of a living human being, and everyone understands him in a personal way.

The mystery that Hamlet is stems from the fact that every time we look at him, he is different. In understanding literary characters, just as in understanding real people, our perceptions depend on what we bring to the investigation. Hamlet is so complete a character that, like an old friend or relative, our relationship to him changes each time we visit him, and he never ceases to surprise us. Therein lies the secret to the enduring love affair audiences have with him. They never tire of the intrigue. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare depicts alienation among the younger characters. Trusting no one, Claudius, the new king, and Polonius send out spies to obtain information from others to assure Claudius's rule of Denmark runs smoothly. Claudius killed Old Hamlet for the rule of Denmark and he fears that Hamlet might know of the murder. Both Claudius and Polonius spy on Hamlet to find out if he knows of the murder. Polonius sends his daughter, Ophelia, out to also gain information. Hamlet begins going mad and people claim that the cause is from the

death of his father. Truly, though, Hamlet knows of the murder. However, Claudius and Polonius are not the only ones, Gertrude, the queen, blames Ophelia for Hamlet's madness. Polonius's lack of trust in Laertes forces him to send Reynoldo to follow Laertes to France and spy on him. Shakespeare presents alienation of Hamlet, Ophelia, and Laertes resulting from a lack of trust from elders and the deception present in the royal family.

While Claudius and Polonius spy on Hamlet, Hamlet loses all of his hopes and happiness. The problems began with the Claudius murdering Old Hamlet and taking over the rightful throne of Hamlet. Procrastination prevents Hamlet from avenging Old Hamlet's death and only causes more problems for the entire family in the end. With the kind of problems he possesses, he has no one to turn to for help. Even his friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, are sent to spy on him. Hamlet cannot speak of the murder because of its confidentiality and spies he might not know of. With no one to turn to, the thought of suicide crosses his mind as a solution on several occasions: "I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me" (Shakespeare 146). Hamlet feels incapable of overcoming his procrastination to avenge his father's death due to the overwhelming problems that keep occurring.

*King Lear* is a tragic tale of family conflict, personal transformation, and loss. The story revolves around the King who foolishly alienates his only truly devoted daughter and realises too late the true nature of his other two daughters. Cordelia's exile by her father is one form of alienation. However, her alienation is more than just being exiled since Kent too is exiled. In fact, Cordelia's alienation lies more in the way she thinks. It is her way of thinking which alienates her from her father whom she greatly loves. Cordelia finds that she is unable to show her love with mere words and says in an aside:

What shall Cordelia do? Love, and be  
Silent. (Act I, Scene I).

Cordelia's nature is such that she is unable to engage in even so forgivable a deception as to satisfy an old king's vanity and pride as she says in another aside:

Then poor Cordelia!

And yet not so, since I am sure my love's  
More richer than my tongue. (Act I, Scene I)

When we first encounter Macbeth he is portrayed as the mighty general, the king's enforcer-in-chief, while the play ends with his inevitable, lonely, solitary death following his doomed, albeit brave, defense of the indefensible. So, it can be said, that the major pattern of the play is Macbeth's progressive movement from centrality to isolation. This pattern encompasses the whole play and expresses an essential process in every tragedy: the hero must confront his destiny alone. Macbeth's role is that of a man who begins as the central and most admired figure of his society and ends by being totally isolated from it in his lonely fortress in Dunsinane. His ultimate fate suggests that of a sacrificial victim. Having caused havoc in society and broken the bonds of nature, he must be isolated and destroyed so that natural and social order can be restored again – for the time being at least!

Stars, hide your fires,  
Let not light see my black and deep desires;  
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be  
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. (Macbeth: 1.4.48-53)

This passage comes at the beginning of the play, when Macbeth first begins to struggle with the idea of becoming a murderer. Here Macbeth attempts to evade the responsibility for his crimes through self-alienation. He pleads with the stars to “hide [their] fires” so that they will be “see [the] black and deep desires” or his soul. Trying to come to terms with the horror of the crime he is going to commit, Macbeth wonders if he can separate his eye from his hand (“Let not...The eye wink at the hand”). He wants essentially to disengage his hands from the rest of his body because they are the evil part of him, which will commit the murder. Later in the play Macbeth's desire to separate hands from the rest of the body repeats itself. After he commits the murder of Duncan in Act 2, he looks down and asks himself “What hands are here?” as though he does not recognize this part of his own body. Both of these passages demonstrate the divided state of Macbeth throughout the play — his desperate desire to usurp the Scottish throne and create a lineage of kings vs. his guilty feelings of the murders he commits to achieve his goal.

Othello is alienated from society because he is black. Frequently referred to as a “Moor”, the alienation also occurs through constant references to the colour of his skin in an insulting, discriminatory way. For example “the blacker devil”, “old black ram”, “thick-lips”. Othello is clearly established as the ‘other’ in the rigid hierarchical society of Venice, and to an Elizabethan audience this would also ring true.

He is also alienated from the men under his command and Desdemona through Iago’s plan. In order to move Othello to a “jealousy so strong that judgment cannot cure”, Iago isolates him from other characters. If you look at the setting of pivotal scenes such as 3.3 or 4.1, they take place in Othello’s office with just these two characters. This means that a role reversal happens and power is transferred from Othello to Iago, leading the former to become more isolated and alienated.

Alienation may also occur as some of the prejudice Othello feels is ingrained in himself. At times of introspection, Othello almost blames the colour of his skin for his misfortune. For example “haply for I am black and have not these soft parts of conversation”, “begrimed and black”. There is an argument at hand that debates whether the significance of the moor is to show a color prejudice side or to identify the distinction between external appearance of devilishness and the inner reality. The author then states broadly that he agrees with the opposing argument and believes the play abstractly universalizes negative stereotyping of the moor. The author of this article believes that by showing Othello’s blackness, his past, his morals, and his language they setting up a complicated and individualized protagonist for the audience to be drawn to. The author then continues to carry out his reasonings for siding with the opposing argument at hand as to what the real significance of the moor is.

## **Chapter Division**

There are six chapters in this dissertation

Chapter One: Alienation and the Search for Meaning in Human Beings: A Historical Introduction

Introduces historical perspective of human being’s alienation from earlier myths to Greek philosophers, their understanding of the meaning of life; how life came into being, what is the main force/purpose of life, creation alienation? It also introduces

alienation in contemporary society from Hegel, Marx, Eric Fromm, Durkheim, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre to Victor Frankl. Their understanding of alienation and how a human being's alienation would lead to authenticity or inauthenticity of his/her existence.

#### Chapter Two: Hamlet

Discusses the alienation of Hamlet, and critically analyses the soliloquies and other textual elements to highlight how the bridge between society and a human being's existence gets shattered.

#### Chapter Three: King Lear

Discusses the alienation of King Lear and critically analyses various textual elements to highlight how the bridge between society and a human being's existence gets shattered.

#### Chapter Four: Othello

Discusses the alienation of Othello and critically analyses various textual elements to highlight how the bridge between society and a human being's existence gets shattered.

#### Chapter Five: Macbeth

Discusses the alienation of Macbeth and critically analyses various textual elements to highlight how the bridge between society and a human being's existence gets shattered.

#### Chapter Six: Conclusion

Discusses the impact of philosophical study and its application of texts and the findings that explain how Shakespeare's characters in these four select tragedies are alienated in different contexts and how the bridge that connected them with society and the real world is shattered and how after this alienation they de-alienate themselves or fail to do so.