The socio-theoretical significance of Erich Fromm’s psychoanalytic conception of narcissism in his socio-pathological theory of alienation

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Abstract

My research aims to show the socio-theoretical significance of Erich Fromm’s psychoanalytic conception of narcissism within the framework of his social theory of alienation. It should be noted that it is quite difficult to discern works contributing to research on Fromm’s conception of alienation, a Marxist philosophical concept, in terms of theoretical relevance to his theory of narcissism, a Freudian psychoanalytic concept, the theme of which is rarely tackled not only by psychoanalysts and psychologists but even by Fromm researchers.

It must be stressed, however, that no doubt, Fromm’s contributions particularly characterise a scholarly piece of him as a social theorist when another face of him as a Critical Theorist is referenced, apart from that as a Neo-Freudian. An awareness of this scholarly piece is of particular importance in Fromm research, for the contributions are aimed precisely at diagnosing and curing society by way of self-reflection in socio-logical psychoanalytic terms integrating Freud into Marx for the purpose of compensating for a theoretical defect of the latter’s theory, thereby leading society to change itself, the new society, in which the new Man can realise individuality based on productive work. For this purpose, Fromm is dedicated to providing effective remedies for the narcissistic society inducing alienation.

From this perspective, narcissism, functioning in market society, is a negative factor in democracy. In addition, it is noted that it is intertwined with another function of alienation, a social phenomenon that makes human beings the object of system, and the system thereby turns into subject. Under these social conditions, human beings feel unbearable pain while encouraged by the market system to stimulate malignant narcissism. For these reasons, it is of great value to demonstrate the theoretical connection between alienation and narcissism in Fromm’s socio-theoretical terms.

I conclude that in Fromm’s social theory narcissism functions on a socio-pathological level in the way that it synchronises itself with the socio-pathological phenomenon of alienation, which fulfils its function together with the marketing orientation under the condition of a free market society, and therefore that the concept of narcissism plays a predominantly important role in his theory of alienation.