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Spiritual Reflections on Meaning and Existence: Love as a Model for Resisting Material Alienation

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Abstract:

Materialism, in its contemporary manifestations, constitutes one of the most prominent existential and epistemological challenges confronting contemporary human beings. Modernity and postmodernity have led to a reductionist view of human existence, stripping it of its moral and spiritual meanings and reducing it to its functional and productive dimension.

This research paper, entitled “Spiritual Reflections on Meaning and Existence: Love as a Model for Resisting Material Alienation,” seeks to invoke love as a spiritual and ethical value and an alternative to materialism, presenting it as an ontological and ethical model that resists the reduction of human existence to material relations.

We seek, through this paper, to present love as a foundational ontological structure capable of restoring the spiritual dimension of the human being, with its profound interpretive and ontological significance, which has been obscured under the pressure of materialism.

Faced with this serious materialistic condition, which leads to reification and alienation, there arises a need to re-examine the materialist system from within and to seek alternative models capable of restoring and repairing human existence, reintegrating it into a coherent and harmonious existential context. Love, therefore, emerges as an interpretive, spiritual, and philosophical model endowed with the qualities necessary to revive life and renew the relationship between the human being and the cosmos.

Building on the foregoing, the central problem of this paper revolves around the following question: Can love, as a spiritual and existential value, constitute a spiritual, ethical, and philosophical alternative to the disorientation of materialistic human beings? And does this spiritual value possess sufficient interpretive and transformative power to restore meaning to human existence in the contemporary world?

Keywords: Materialism, human existence, modernity, alienation, love.

Introduction:

Contemporary human beings are experiencing an existential crisis manifested in the overwhelming dominance of materialism, which has marginalized human existence and values, transforming the world into a space of functions and construction rather than a home for humanity, spirit, and being.

This has caused human beings to shift from being the center of purpose and ends to the margins of their own mission, and from the status of the dignified human being to that of a servant of matter—governed by the logic and dictates of materialism: What do you own? What do you consume?—that is, production and consumption. The value of the human being has consequently come to be determined by the value of the material possessions they own or produce. For instance, owning a car, having money, possessing advanced technology, the type of phone one uses, or the kind of clothes one wears can all become criteria by which one's value and identity are determined.

Through this shift, the human being falls into a state of existential alienation and marginalization, losing their relationship with their own self. They have become a silent machine whose primary function is consumption, with their

value measured by material possessions and their relationship with others defined through what they produce and what they own.

Thus, human existence becomes conditioned by what one possesses rather than by what one knows, feels, loves, learns, and aspires to become. This striking paradox has revealed an abundance of means alongside a poverty of ends and purposes. It has deepened the gap between material and technological progress and human advancement along the paths of spirituality, thereby exposing a civilizational predicament that calls for a re-foundation of human consciousness on spiritual, ethical, and religious grounds—grounds capable of restoring to human beings their present reality and future, and restoring meaning to existence, through which the civilizational dimension can be fulfilled.

In this context, love emerges as a spiritual and human value with universal and civilizational dimensions, capable of restoring the lost balance between the human being and the self, between the human being and God, and between the human being and existence—or the Other.

Love, as an existential force, opens consciousness to the Other, narrows distances, encourages peaceful coexistence, and helps restore the gap that separates human beings from their own humanity. It does so by transcending selfishness and self-interest and by aspiring toward a horizon of love and unity with existence. In this sense, love re-establishes the bonds severed by separation and reconnects the relationship between the self and the Other beyond the logic of self-interest. It also reorganizes the foundations of humanity from within and reconstructs the hierarchy of values from the inner to the outer, and from essence to appearance.

From a spiritual and religious perspective, love represents the most effective path toward liberating human beings from materialism. It enables them to establish a new meaning of life founded on giving and love rather than on domination and consumption, and to adopt a conscious existential stance capable of confronting the alienation and reification experienced by humanity today in a world dominated by things and material concerns.

First / Defining the Concept of Existential Meaning :

1. The Term “Existence” Linguistically and Terminologically:

a. The Meaning of “Meaning” Linguistically:

According to *Maqāyīs al-Lughā*, the root ‘-Ayn-Nūn (ع ن ي), consisting of the letter ‘Ayn, the letter Nūn, and a weak letter, has three fundamental meanings. The first denotes directing oneself toward something with earnestness and concern. The second indicates submission and humility. The third refers to the appearance and emergence of something.

The first meaning is exemplified in the expression: “‘Anītu bi’l-amri wa bi’l-hāja”, meaning that one concerned oneself with a matter or a need. The Bedouin said: “‘Uniya bi-hājati wa ‘uniya ghayri”, meaning “He concerned himself with my need,” and it is also said: “Ta‘ayyanat” (to become concerned with or devoted to something).

The second meaning is found in the expression: “‘Anā ya’nū”, meaning “to submit” or “to humble oneself,” while “al-asīr ‘ānin” means “the captive is submissive.” Abū ‘Amr said: “I’ni hādhā al-asīr”, meaning: “Leave this captive until old age overtakes him.”ⁱ

Terminologically: Meaning is that which a word denotes; its plural is *ma‘ānī* (meanings). *Ma‘ānī* may also refer to the commendable qualities possessed by a person; thus, one may say, “So-and-so has beautiful qualities.” Meaning encompasses the various forms of human conceptualization and representation, and constitutes the essential element of linguistic communication, reflecting the fundamental function of language. There is also additional or secondary connotative meaning, which is the meaning that a word acquires through what it suggests beyond its purely conceptual meaning ⁱⁱ.

Through the linguistic and terminological definitions of the concept of meaning, it becomes evident that it encompasses notions of intention and will, as well as what is intended by a thing, whether in speech or in human existence. Terminologically, however, meaning refers to the significance that gives something its value and significance and answers the questions: Why does the human being exist? What is the purpose that makes human existence worth living? Thus, the concept of meaning goes beyond mere linguistic signification to encompass the search for purpose, value, and existence.

From a philosophical perspective, the question of meaning has been closely associated with the question of the purpose of human existence, particularly within existentialist approaches, which have made the problem of meaning one of the most prominent concerns of modern humanity. From another perspective, in the Islamic worldview, meaning cannot be separated from purposeⁱⁱⁱ. The true nature of the human being cannot be understood apart from the purpose for which they were created, as stated in the Qur’an: “And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me.” [Qur’an, Al-Dhāriyāt: 56]

Thus, we can observe that existential meaning in Islam is founded on servitude to God, stewardship, and the cultivation of the earth, rather than merely on material and instinctive pursuits.

1) Existence: Linguistic and Terminological Definitions :

a. Linguistically: The term **existence** (*al-wujūd*) derives from the Arabic root *w-j-d* (وجد), and denotes finding or attaining something. It may also mean presence and actuality, the occurrence, realization, and establishment of something, as well as finding, happening, and persistence^{iv}.

b. a. Terminologically: Existence refers to that which is objectively established and about which one can speak and hold a belief, particularly in the context of creed, divine attributes, and the Beautiful Names of God^v. This applies, for instance, when affirming the divine name “the One” or speaking of God by this name. The term may also refer to the entire universe, including all living beings, inanimate objects, and other forms of existence.

^{vi}“The Unity of Being” (Waḥdat al-Wujūd) is a Sufi concept that seeks to interpret the nature of the universe from a mystical perspective.

It subsequently entered the field of philosophy, where it came to denote the actualization and establishment of something in external reality or in the mind, as opposed to non-existence.

Based on the foregoing discussion, we can point out that the meaning of human existence cannot be properly understood independently of the question of its purpose and ultimate end. Thus, it is not possible to discuss the material dimension of human existence without considering the semantic and value-based significance of that existence.

Meaning is what transforms existence from mere material actuality into an existence endowed with purpose and value. It thereby moves the human being from a material mode of existence, subject to the logic of domination, utility, and isolation, toward a value-oriented mode of existence, enabling them to overcome the crisis of meaning—or what may be described as material disorientation—and to recover a spiritual and value-based understanding of the human being by reconnecting them with the source and purpose of their existence. In this way, love, as a spiritual value, is capable of rebuilding the relationship between the human being and their Creator, their own self, and the world.

Second/ Materialism and the Manifestations of the Crisis of Contemporary Human Beings :

Contemporary materialism, understood as an intellectual, axiological, and civilizational phenomenon, extends beyond the boundaries of the philosophical doctrine that asserts the primacy of matter in explaining existence. Rather, it refers to a mode of thinking and living in which material possessions, consumption, and utility become central criteria for judging human success, assessing human worth, and determining happiness.

The problem, therefore, does not lie in material things in themselves. Rather, contemporary materialism recognizes **only matter as the sole criterion for evaluating human beings and their lives**. It rejects God as a necessary dimension in judging life and denies the value of the human being whenever they transcend the material order. In doing so, it has moved beyond earlier materialist theories concerning the origin of the universe, the primacy of matter over human existence and all its associated forms of knowledge and values, the idea that natural needs determine human morality, and the view that morality, history, and human existence are ultimately conditioned by economic and material circumstances.

Contemporary materialism has thus moved beyond all these philosophical ideas and propositions to impose the dominance of matter over every aspect of life. It reduces human existence to a series of questions: **What material possessions do you have? What do you produce? What do you consume?** Consequently, matter has been transformed from merely one element of life into a criterion for judging human worth; from a means into an end; and from a legitimate sphere of benefit and use into a measure of human value and humanity itself.

This reductionist approach narrows the human being's existential horizons and weakens their engagement with questions concerning purpose, meaning, and destiny. It may consequently lead to a state of alienation and loss of meaning. From this perspective, there emerges a need to restore the spiritual dimension of human existence—not by treating the human being as a servant of material possessions, nor by withdrawing from the world, but rather by reconfiguring the relationship between the human being and material reality. In this way, material things can regain their function as **means**, while the human being can reclaim their position as an essential being who transcends the limits of consumption, utility, and indiscriminate material consumption.

Among the most prominent manifestations of contemporary materialism and its impact on the human being, we may mention the following:

1. The Reification and Alienation of the Human Being :

This refers to reducing the value of the individual to their functional or productive value^{vii}. and their consumer value. As a result, human beings lose their humanity, including their feelings and dignity, and in certain contexts become more akin to an object or an inert material entity. Their worth is measured by what they own, what they produce, or the amount of money and material wealth they possess, rather than by their human and spiritual values. They thus become a form of commodity within capitalist society.

In this regard, Georg Lukács, in his analysis of the concept of reification in capitalist society, describes the process of reification as being rooted in the concept of the commodity. He argues that the essential relationship between people ultimately assumes a reified character, given that the capitalist economy produces commodities that are sold before they are consumed by workers. Yet the worker is often the very person who produces commodities that they themselves cannot afford to use to satisfy their own needs.

On the other hand, Lukács argues that the ties and relationships between people become connected to things^{viii} . and appear as things. Such human relationships are not direct relationships between human beings; rather, they are reified and mediated forms in which laws necessarily shape and determine the immediate appearance of human relations. ix

This means that economic laws come to govern the nature of contemporary human beings. One of the consequences of this is the dominance of economic rationality over the individual, leading to their reification and reducing them to an individual subject to its mechanical laws. In other words, the human being becomes merely a part of the production process rather than an autonomous participant in it.

This is what Karl Marx emphasized in his book *Capital*, in which he addressed the fetishism of the commodity, referring to the reification of relations between human beings and the transformation of human qualities into rigid objects, thereby giving them an apparently autonomous and inhuman existence. These relations appear as though they were relationships between things rather than between human beings. xThus, human beings come to perceive one another as things—and this is precisely what is meant by reification.

The materialism discussed by Karl Marx differs from the mechanistic materialism adopted by the natural scientists of his time, which he rejected and demonstrated to be inadequate because it excluded history and its development. According to this mechanistic view, feelings and ideas could be explained merely as the results of organic and chemical processes. Although Marx was influenced by Ludwig Feuerbach's materialism, he nevertheless criticized it and demonstrated that it distinguished between ... It treated material objects and subjects of thought in an abstract manner; consequently, it was concerned with interpreting the world rather than with how to change it.^{xi} From this perspective, we can understand that social relations cannot be understood apart from production, just as the various forms assumed by these relations throughout their historical development are conditioned by it. There is a dialectical relationship between individuals and nature, and among individuals themselves.

Karl Marx was deeply concerned with the human being and with the ways through which human capacities could be actualized. The meaning of human existence is determined through labor; consequently, human nature is embodied and realizes itself through the historical process. This is due to the individual's sense of alienation from the self and from the external world, as well as the transformation of the human being into a machine following the development of the Western Industrial Revolution ^{xii}.

Marx explains the development of societies on the basis of the dialectic between the forces of production and the relations of production. The mode of production of material life—the economic base (infrastructure)—determines the forms of social, political, and spiritual life—the superstructure. When the material productive forces of society reach a certain stage in their development, they come into conflict with the relations of production founded upon private ownership of the means of production.

This contributes to the transformation of the human being into a commodity or a silent machine that operates incessantly. Labor thus becomes a source of the worker's alienation from himself, from his work, and from what he produces. His creative powers are consequently stifled because he is exploited by employers. The world, in Marx's view, becomes a negative and lifeless world when the individual does not produce; as a result, the individual experiences alienation and loses the meaning and enjoyment of life ^{xiii}.

The philosopher Herbert Marcuse launched a scathing critique of the capitalist system and of all forms of instrumental rationality which, instead of contributing to labor aimed at human liberation, have become the principal cause of the spread of the phenomenon of the reification of relations within capitalist society. Under capitalism, the human being is reduced to the value of the effort expended and the activity performed by his or her hands ^{xiv}.

This is manifested in the present day through advertising and the media, which reduce the human being to nothing more than a brand or a mere commodity, an inert and lifeless object. What ultimately matters is the profit and gain that the individual generates. This materialistic orientation toward the human being has contributed significantly to the emergence of the phenomenon of alienation, which has acquired an ontological dimension in contemporary social reality. The concept of alienation has reached its extreme manifestation in injustice, coercion, and oppression, giving concrete expression to what is known as the reification of the human being.

The solution proposed by Marxism to all these crises resulting from the adoption of the capitalist system was a return to socialism, through which private ownership of the means of production would be abolished and replaced by public ownership. This would constitute the return of the self-conscious human being as a real social being.

On the other hand, Marcuse agrees with Marx on the idea of the reification and alienation of human relations under contemporary industrially advanced societies. He went further, however, by regarding it as an anthropological phenomenon expressing the loss of the human being's essence^{xv}, manifested in his or her spiritual and intellectual powers as well as biological sexual energies. This occurs under the influence of positivist science, which views the world as a totality of objects existing in complete independence from the knowing subject. Marcuse also reaffirmed the reification of human values, considering it an inevitable consequence of positivist science, which is oriented toward private utility, or what is known as the struggle for survival. This capitalist economic system explicitly promotes the reification of human values such as peace, justice, and equality^{xvi}.

This is attributable to the technological and industrial development that has taken place, which has transformed people into hybridized elements within the apparatus of the existing system, a system that seeks to cater to human economic desires and to create a new relationship between the produced commodity and its consumer—a relationship that is not subject to any specific law.

This, in turn, transforms the human being, who possesses various human values such as freedom and the value of labor, into a mere desire that can be satisfied and gratified under the slogan: "Consume and remain silent!"^{xvii}

The crisis of contemporary humanity is rooted in rational and technological progress, which contributes to the intellectual, psychological, and biological repression of human beings, reducing them to something alienated from their own selves, consciousness, and existence.

Values and their meanings have changed, and the phenomenon of the reification of values has become widespread. Human happiness has come to be measured by what one possesses and produces, rather than by the values and moral principles one upholds.

In these industrial societies, people do not exhaust themselves through labor in an effort to reclaim their lost freedom. Rather, the prosperity provided to them by capitalist society has turned them into individuals content with the freedom they have, a freedom administered by institutionalized forms of governance. The human being has become

merely a consumer, incapable of exercising judgment over things. He has been stripped of all values and of his humanity, reduced to a silent machine that satisfies its instincts through material means.

Contemporary materialism has thus reduced the human being to a mere consumer devoid of awareness. This is a consequence of the absence of meaning from human life, the erosion of principles, values, and enduring foundations, and the transformation of everything into something fluid and marketable, capable of being bought and sold like a commodity. At this point, the human being finds himself in a terrible existential void: without values to guide him, religion or principles to preserve his dignity, worth, and humanity. He therefore turns toward the indiscriminate consumption of everything in an attempt to achieve happiness, seeking it outside the innate human disposition (fiṭra). This constitutes an attempt to obliterate the human nature upon which people were originally created, for example:

Mercy killing is presented as a search for the patient's happiness, while the Austrian case is concerned with the pursuit of sexual and instinctual happiness, as well as with the lost meaning that human beings have failed to find amid the spread of contemporary materialism and the complete absence of any sense of human meaning and essence. The human being has thus become a meaningless and non-existent entity.

Contemporary materialism has not merely reduced the human being to a thing; it has also come to control his consciousness, culture, choices, values, way of life, tastes, desires, and the evaluation of those desires. It exercises almost complete control over his life.

2. Individualism or Isolation:

In a general sense, individualism refers to the individual as opposed to the group. It is the condition in which the individual exists as an independent and separate entity from the groups to which he or she belongs^{xviii}, and is capable of making decisions based on his or her own resources and capacities, independently of the other members of the group.

Individualism initially emerged as a modern principle asserting that God's role was limited to creation alone, after which God would "die," leaving human beings to manage the world and exercise control over nature. This radical formulation arose from the practices imposed by the Church upon the human mind, which restricted thought through metaphysics and opposed reason^{xix}.

According to Edgar Morin, individualism emerged through self-centeredness and ethnocentrism, the common denominator between which lies in placing the self at the center of the world and regarding everything foreign or distant as something secondary, meaningless, or equivalent to oneself^{xx}.

In fact, modernity sought to achieve individual happiness by emphasizing individual rights and freedoms in all areas. However, individualism has deepened isolation, withdrawal, excessive selfishness, indifference, and other social ills. Communication and interaction among people have consequently diminished. For example, members of the same family no longer communicate with one another; each individual is absorbed in his or her own private world and smartphone. There are even people who die alone in their homes without anyone noticing, as a result of the breakdown of bonds of communication and kinship among individuals. At the same time, the decline of religious and social values has been accompanied by the weakening of the values of brotherhood, love, cooperation, and solidarity. The result has been a spiritual void, emotional dryness in human relationships, and moral deterioration.

This has led human beings to live in isolation from others, with each individual confined to his or her own private world and dominated by a detestable form of selfishness that gives rise to extremism in thought and action, as well as violence and brutality toward others, including murder, terrorism, rape, theft, the unlawful appropriation of people's property, gangs, crime, drug abuse, adultery, and other forms of violence.

The negative effects of individualism on social relations constitute the core crisis of modernity. They have driven societies toward a civilizational abyss, resulting in degradation at the level of human existence and a civilizational regression.

However, psychologists and sociologists have emphasized that excessive individualism leads to brutality, savagery, and extremism unless it is regulated by religion, morality, and law. This is also evident in the thought of Edgar Morin, who calls for activating mechanisms of living together.^{xxi} This requires the self to transcend individualism and open itself to the various components of identity. It thus becomes necessary to coexist with the Other, with whom one shares a biological, cultural, and social belonging, as well as the same human identity. This entails establishing communicative relationships without asserting the superiority of the individual's self-worth, but rather by elevating the value of the human dimension.

He also emphasizes the planetary nature of individual identity, which is manifested in human belonging and is shared by all humanity. Despite differences and diversity, we must therefore learn how to live on this planet, how to share its resources, how to communicate and unite, and how to learn from one another. We must develop a sense of our existence on planet Earth; it is not necessary for us to belong to a particular culture or religion, but rather it is sufficient to recognize our existence as earthly beings^{xxii}.

On the basis of our awareness of our existence, we must work toward achieving unity, harmony, and communication, rather than isolation and division.

This is what Erich Fromm emphasized through his study of the human being, in which he focused on all dimensions of human existence rather than reducing the human being to a single dimension. He viewed the human being as a complex whole, through the understanding and discovery of whose essence we can harness his or her capacities and potential in order to transform the existing society—one characterized by violence and brutality—into a better society in which the values of humanity prevail, values that derive from ethical principles. This leads us to restore the importance of spiritual

values rather than limiting ourselves to the material dimension. This can only be achieved by pursuing a path of active engagement, which constitutes virtue. Human beings must understand themselves and their capacity to love others and to produce for their own sake.xxiii

This is what Fromm pointed to in his writings concerning the human being's sense of loneliness and isolation, resulting from his separation from nature and from other members of societyxxiv.

On the other hand, Erich Fromm identified the various manifestations of alienation in contemporary capitalist society. Human life has become centered on the production, sale, and consumption of material goods, with the human being himself reduced to a lifeless commodity, stripped of the meanings of life. All of this generates anxiety, helplessness, and fear. By losing his purpose, the human being loses himself and becomes a slave to what he produces. In this state of human degradation, he relinquishes everything he possesses in terms of love, reason, will, and creativity, and instead devotes himself to the idols he has fashioned with his own hands: the worship of money, fame, prestige, power, and leadership.

Fromm also connected the source of human alienation from the self to the concept of freedom, which he examined from the perspective of capitalist society. He distinguished between negative freedom, under which the human being experiences fear as a result of isolation and an inability to express the capacities latent within his nature; consequently, he becomes overwhelmed by doubts about himself and about the meaning of lifexxv. Positive freedom, by contrast, means liberation from both external and internal authorities. Through it, the human being can achieve self-realization and independence. A person's sense of inadequacy, weakness, and helplessness causes him to lose his freedom; each time he becomes dependent on others, and this is the very essence of the alienation experienced by the human being.

3. Having and Being

The human being has endless needs and is compelled to satisfy them through the possession of thingsxxvi. This has turned the individual into an alienated and lost being, immersed in limitless consumption. To overcome the desire for possession, Fromm argues that the principle of being is the more appropriate alternative for overcoming alienation and enabling the individual to reclaim his or her self and existence. It refers to the human dimension within the human being, manifested in autonomy, freedom, and the presence of critical reasonxxvii.

Its essential characteristic is that the human being should be an active and positive agent, exercising control over his or her needs and self, guided by values and social norms, and characterized by a reduced destructive impulse. This destructive tendency is nourished by alienation, repression, existential anxiety, and persistent isolation. All of these factors lead to the distortion of life, particularly in the absence of inner security. The more alienated the human being becomes from his or her human nature, the stronger the tendency toward destruction, ultimately directed against both the self and others.

After addressing one of the deepest roots of the human crisis, Erich Fromm distinguished between two modes of existence: having and being. He demonstrated that the dominance of the logic of possession and excessive consumption leads to the erosion of human worth. This diagnosis, however, needs to be extended beyond the psychological and anthropological levels to encompass the social and cultural dimensions. This is what Zygmunt Bauman articulated in his writings. He shifts the question from: *What happens to the human being when possession becomes a substitute for being?* to a deeper and more fundamental question: What is the nature of the society that makes possession, consumption, and constant change dominant modes of life and human relationships?

In this sense, Bauman examined the social context that deepened the crisis of possession through his concept of liquid modernity—a term referring to the fluidity of things, relationships, and social structures—which he employed to explain the condition of instability. This fluidity has come to characterize social, economic, and professional relations in the contemporary era. Today's societies are no longer based on permanence and stability, as was the case with classical modernity; rather, they are characterized by continuous movement and perpetual change. Human relationships, values, social institutions, and even individual identities likewise undergo constant transformation, becoming temporary and transient. This produces a state of fluidity in which traditional concepts gradually fade and boundaries become increasingly blurred, creating an environment of uncertaintyxxviii.

From this perspective, the theory of liquid modernity assumes considerable scholarly significance because it is not limited to social transformations; rather, it provides a profound sociological explanation that links changes in social institutions to the transformation of individual experience within contemporary society.

The most significant implication of liquid modernity is that it represents a historical stage characterized by instability, in which institutions become temporary, relationships become temporary, and employment becomes temporary. It does not merely refer to social change; rather, it denotes an acceleration of change to such an extent that social structures themselves become temporary and continually open to reshaping.

One of its most distinctive features is the transfer of social responsibility from institutions to individuals. This transformation makes the individual the fundamental unit of social organization, turning social problems into individual ones, such as unemployment, divorce, and crime, as well as terrorism. It also leads to the fragmentation of social bonds, transforming them from stable relationships into fragile and temporary ties that increasingly resemble consumer relationships, which can be entered into and exited with ease. An example of this is divorce, in which obtaining a divorce certificate may, in some cases, be motivated by the desire to secure certain social benefits, such as officially provided housing.

This is accompanied by the privatization of risks, whereby the individual becomes solely responsible for his or her health, education, and future.

Third: Love as an Alternative to Contemporary Materialism:

If Fromm called for confronting the society of having and the need to reclaim being, and Bauman exposed the fragility of human bonds under liquid modernity, accompanied by the fluidity of identities, relationships, and social structures, this has produced various manifestations, including individualism, alienation, fragile bonds and relationships, and the reification of the human being. Human beings no longer merely consume things; they have also become vulnerable to having their relationships, and even their own image, transformed into objects of consumption—as is evident in the case of social media influencers today.

The crisis of contemporary materialism does not consist merely in privileging matter over spirit; rather, it entails a reconfiguration of the human being himself according to a materialistic and utilitarian standard. The values of meaning, coexistence, and responsibility have receded in favor of the values of utility and consumption. Thus, criticizing materialism amounts to a critique of an axiological and anthropological system, rather than merely a philosophical position. Such a critique cannot be complete unless it moves beyond deconstruction toward the search for a human-centered alternative capable of rebuilding what this trajectory has disrupted. This alternative should make the human being an end rather than a means, values guiding principles rather than subordinate ones, and human relationships based on recognition rather than utility. A humanistic alternative must therefore be grounded in giving, coexistence, tolerance, continuity, and responsibility, thereby realizing the true humanity of the human being.

From this perspective, love emerges as a concept and a human value capable of moving beyond merely criticizing the reduction of the human being to the material dimension toward establishing and embedding human relationships on the basis of compassion and communication. In this way, relationships shift from the logic of possession to the logic of participation, from consumption to giving, from use to recognition, and from individualism and isolation to solidarity and social connectedness.

Love, therefore, constitutes a humanistic alternative that reorders the hierarchy of human values and social relationships and restores the human being's capacity to recognize the Other and coexist with him or her. The Islamic conception of love gives it a profound spiritual and theological dimension that transcends the ethical and social spheres to encompass the existential and doctrinal dimension. Love, as an Islamic value, is thus grounded in a monotheistic theological foundation that begins with the centrality of God in the universe. It is initially founded upon redirecting human existence toward the love of the Creator, as He is the source of meaning, thereby realizing the true human value of such an orientation.

The Qur'an states concerning the creation of the human being: "Indeed, We created humankind in the best of stature" [Qur'an, Al-Tin: 4]. It also states concerning human dignity: "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea" [Qur'an, Al-Isra': 70]. And when speaking of the purpose of creation, God says: "I did not create jinn and humans except to worship Me" [Qur'an, Al-Dhariyat: 56].

Thus, the Holy Qur'an connects human life, from birth to death, with God Almighty: from Him and to Him.

Islam does not call for the abolition of material possessions or the rejection of ownership; rather, it rejects the transformation of material things into an end in themselves that takes possession of the heart and determines a person's worth. This principle stems from the centrality of the love of God and the human being's relationship with his Creator. Human love begins with this relationship with God. The Qur'an states: "But those who believe are stronger in their love for Allah" [Qur'an, Al-Baqarah: 165].

Divine love, therefore, is an inner energy directed from within outward, through which the human being realizes his or her servitude to God: "You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help" [Qur'an, Al-Fatihah: 4], thereby attaining a form of civilizational consciousness and engagement. Love gives the human being a sense of dignity and vitality, and lays the foundations for social and human relationships based on honor, coexistence, compassion, and cooperation. The Qur'an states: "They give preference to others over themselves, even though they are in need" [Qur'an, Al-Hashr: 9], and: "The believers are but brothers" [Qur'an, Al-Hujurat: 10].

Thus, love lays the foundations for a cohesive, harmonious, and compassionate society, structured around three fundamental levels:

- **First:** It reconstructs the human being's relationship with God, affirming that He is the Creator and that the human being is in need of Him.
- **Second:** It regulates the human being's relationship with the self and its desires, recognizing the human being as a servant devoted to God and as His vicegerent on Earth.
- **Third:** It deepens the human being's relationship with the Other and with the universe within a theological worldview, affirming that the human being was created for a purpose and a mission, rather than by accident. As God's vicegerent on Earth, the human being's ultimate purpose is to realize servitude to God. The love of God therefore entails loving one's fellow human beings, showing them compassion, and living with them in coexistence.

In Islam, love emerges as a theological and faith-based value whose essence derives from divine mercy. It thus becomes a principle that restores to the human being his or her worth, existence, and dignity amid the dominance of contemporary materialism and the negative consequences it has produced. It elevates the human being to the highest levels of gnostic and spiritual realization, and establishes for us a universal human model embodied in two inspiring

examples. The first is Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, who deepened the meaning of love and endowed it with a universal spiritual dimension, regarding love as a religion. In this regard, he states:

**“I profess the religion of love, wherever its caravans may turn
For love is my religion and my faith.”^{xxxix}**

For Ibn ‘Arabī, love transcends its doctrinal meaning and assumes a universal human dimension, owing to its capacity to overcome human differences within the horizons of monotheism, knowledge, and coexistence. For him, love is an essential value capable of embracing all creatures, including the human being. Thus, the meaning of religion here is humanistic rather than doctrinal; love is a manifestation of the mercy of God Almighty.

Second: Emir Abdelkader al-Jazairi, who translated this conception of love into a humanistic philosophy manifested in a civilizational mode of conduct embodying tolerance and coexistence with the Other. A notable example is his position during the events in Syria in 1860, amid the conflict that erupted between Muslims and Christians, when he intervened to stop the massacres and save lives. In doing so, he restored human existence to the path of coexistence and to a way of ^{xxx} life grounded in love and the shared dignity of humanity.

Conclusion

- ✓ **Contemporary materialism** is a philosophical conception that reduces human existence to matter according to the logic of possession and consumption. Human worth is thus determined by what one possesses or what one earns. Its effects, as highlighted by a number of philosophers such as Karl Marx, Erich Fromm, and Zygmunt Bauman, are manifested in individualism and isolation, the reification and alienation of the human being, the fragility of human bonds and values, and the fluidity of relationships and social structures.
- ✓ **The crisis of materialism** does not lie in matter itself, but rather in its transformation into an end in itself and a criterion for determining human value.
- ✓ **Love represents a humanistic alternative**, as it restores recognition of the human being and his or her intrinsic value, while seeking to establish a balance between the material dimension and the spiritual and religious dimension.
- ✓ **The Islamic grounding of love** gives it a profound spiritual and theological dimension, establishing the human being’s relationship with the self while placing the relationship with God at the center.
- ✓ **Love in its Sufi dimension**, particularly in Ibn ‘Arabī, offers a broad conception of universal human love, manifested in the principle of peaceful coexistence with the Other, exemplified by Emir Abdelkader in his response to the Damascus conflict of 1860.
- ✓ **The real challenge, therefore, is to embrace love as a spiritual alternative and a humanistic project** capable of restoring dignity and value to the human being and of rebuilding the system of values and human relationships on the basis of integration between the spiritual and material dimensions.

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Footnotes:

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- ⁱⁱ Omar Al-Mukhtar, *Semantics*, Alaa Books, Egypt, n.d., p. 40.
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- ^{iv} See: Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, 3rd ed., 1414 AH, Vol. 3, p. 445.
- ^v Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārīj al-Sālikīn wa-Manāzil al-Sā’irīn bayna Manāzil Iyyāka Na‘budu wa-Iyyāka Nasta‘īn*, Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Vol. 3, p. 69.
- ^{vi} Ibn Taymiyyah, *Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah*, ed. ‘Āmir al-Jazzār and Anwar al-Bāz, Dār al-Wafā’, Vol. 11, p. 395.
- ^{vii} The reification of the human being refers to the transformation of the immaterial into the material, whereby human values are reduced to the level of things. It also involves transforming the value of the human being from that of a living entity endowed with feelings and emotions into a material commodity possessing a monetary value subject to the logic of the market, namely, profit and loss.
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- ^{xix} Graham Renz, *The Good Watchmaker*, Religious Studies, Cambridge University, 2 February 2026, p. 8.

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- ^{xxvi} Having means acquiring or possessing something. It becomes a human goal before which values lose their power and prestige. It is an animalistic mode of existence that makes the human being a slave to material things, with possession and acquisition becoming his or her sole concern. The desire to possess is a psychological affliction that turns the human being into a slave to materiality. See: Erich Fromm, *Man Between Essence and Appearance*, p. 69.
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