ALIENATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL IN THE MODERN WORLD

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Abstract: The author of the paper discusses the position of an individual in the modern world. By analyzing the structure of personality and various factors that affect its formation, the author places an individual in the social environment that represents the only natural environment for every modern person. It has been stressed that a person represents an inseparable part of the culture and society, so that they, by themselves, cannot function outside the society.

The accent has been put on the influence that social factors have on the formation of a personality and functioning of a person in the modern world. The concept of alienation of an individual from other people, the social community and themselves has been discussed.

The author also mentions the mechanisms of overcoming the feelings of detachment and isolation. In the process of overcoming the feeling of alienation from their self, an individual crosses a long way of advancement from an individual to a personality. A developed personality overcomes the feeling of alienation that has been present with an individual and turns toward other people and the world around them.

Key words: individual, personality, alienation, detachment, solitude, society.

Introduction

A person is a social being. According to their nature they strive for contact with other human beings. A person alone does not exist nor could they function on their own. Myths about Robinson Crusoe or alike, or an idea about a man surviving on a desert island, in isolation, without a real contact with other people, remain myths only. Reality proves exactly the opposite: a person cannot function outside a human community. Therefore people always “strive for fellowship and avoid isolation. Accordingly, rejection of an individual by society or some other smaller group, represents a sentence which has its communicological name – excommunication” (Radojković, Miletić 2008, pp. 8).

Therefore prison as punishment for criminal deeds has not been designed by chance. The whole concept is not about hard living conditions, because they are more than satisfactory. Prisoners are offered accommodation and food and a possibility to participate in community service work. What represents a “real” punishment is the fact that prisoners are deprived of freedom, of contact with their family and relatives; and for the most serious criminal offence and law-breaking they are punished by solitary confinement – without any contact with other people. In situations like this, people turn to the only possible way of communicating - intrapersonal communication, i.e. communication with themselves. It has nothing to do with mental disorders, but with a special kind of communication characteristic for people, which now gains primacy as the only way of communication, which illustrates the need of people for communication with other people and communicating at all. Turning towards God and religion in situations like this through intrapersonal communication is also evidence of the constant need of people for communication with other human beings.

The basic characteristic that differentiates a man from other animals is that in the first place a man is a conscious being capable of thinking. “This birth of a man may have lasted for hundreds of thousands of years, but what is important is that a new species originated which overcomes nature, that life has become aware of itself” (From 1963, pp. 46). A person also works and communicates with other people.

People, as well, gather into groups which differ from other beings’ groups. While the latter are formed according to natural laws, spontaneously, human groups through history tend to separate more and more from the law of nature.
The first human groups were based on blood relation and basic human needs. From the first tribes up to the modern societies, human groups evolve and separate from nature and its laws more and more. On this way towards civilization and modern societies the key role is played by language by means of which people communicate. It is with the help of language and speech that a man “has become a different, much more powerful and developed being from all the other kinds of creatures” (Rot 2004, pp. 25). As such a being a man does not stop communicating with other people and trying to realize a social contact with them.

**Formation and Development of Personality**

As a man has evolved in their development from homo erectus, through homo sapiens and homo habilis to a modern man, each individual, from the act of their birth and further, evolves in their own development physically as well as intellectually, forming a unique personality. After birth there is a range of infinite possibilities for forming a personality.

Various courses in philosophy and psychology have treated the phenomenon of development of a personality in different ways. While biological determinism put accent on instincts and the aspects of the inborn, so certain characteristics are predetermined, behaviorists put accent on the influence of the environment. They claim that a person is neither good nor bad, while the main contribution in personality formation is allotted to learning. Humanists, on the other hand, emphasized the merits of a person as an individual and believed that a person was born good, and that deviations and negative characteristics that could be traced in people’s characters represent a consequence of various frustrations.

The truth is probably somewhere in between. A person inherits some genetic predispositions which, by themselves, could not form a personality without the influence of the environment. However, in the symbiosis of these two factors, with the help of free will, creativity etc., final and complete personality traits are formed.

This viewpoint is well illustrated by the very words of Erich Fromm: “I understand personality as a totality of inherited and acquired mental statuses which characterize an individual and make them unique” (From 1984, pp. 54-55), as well as the point of Edward Sapir: “Formation of a personality is probably mostly predetermined by the anatomical and physiological composition of an individual, but it cannot be completely explained by them. Conditioning factors – that can be gathered together, as socio-psychological determinants of a childhood – must be considered at least as important for the personality development as the inborn biological factors” (Sapir 1984, pp. 285-286).

Certain authors put accent on inheritance while the others emphasize the significance of the environment in the personality formation. According to Freud’s theory of personality, the structure of personality make: *id*, *ego* and *super-ego*. *Id* represents a sum of inherited instincts, *ego* is considered to be built up on the basis of *id* by developing a sense for outer reality, while *super-ego* represents a sum of socially conditioned factors which limit an individual in the direct realization of the needs of *id*. This kind of theory of personality where subconscious is overstressed and is considered the cause of the entire behavior of a person, has been criticized in the first place because of overstating the significance of sexual instincts, as well as of the advantage that the author gives to inheritance over the environmental influence, i.e. the influence of society.

From, on the other hand, emphasizes the influence of environment, i.e. society, on personality formation. His opinion is that a person is perfect, but imperfect society makes them alienated and destructive. Through history and different social gatherings, from the first tribes to the modern capitalist society, people have been separating from nature more and more, so the feelings of solitude and alienation have become more serious.

Paradoxically, by realizing more freedom, a person becomes lonelier and the fear of isolation becomes larger. By the act of separating from the other animals due to their consciousness and the need for contact and communication with other people, a person constantly moves away from nature. “Modern society consists of ‘atoms’ (if we use the Greek word for ‘individual’), small particles which are separated from one another, but which hold together by selfish interests and the need to be useful to each other. A man is, after all, a social being with a deep need to participate, to help, to feel as a member of a group. . .” (From 1963, pp. 146). According to From, a personality is formed under the strong influence of society and culture which impose demands on an individual to fulfill in order to be a desirable member of society.
These demands are usually not in accordance with the basic natural characteristics of a person, so this disbalance results in the feeling of alienation and destructiveness.

Maslow’s theory of personality can be called a theory of actualization of personality. The author claims that psychoanalytic understanding of personality wrong because it is directed towards a deranged person, while very little attention is devoted to creativity and positive feelings. Abraham Maslow tries to explain human nature through actualization of a healthy creative personality. The aim of the studying should be healthy aspirations for self-actualization, for perfection, for progress. This process should be studied on healthy, “normal” people. According to humanistic understanding, people are either good or indifferent, but by no chance evil! They should be provided with normal conditions for self-actualization. If those conditions are thwarted, we face destructiveness, since possibilities for self-actualization have been thwarted. Maslow considers that realization of goals is something that causes a feeling of satisfaction in a person, except that a complete feeling of satisfaction is never achieved. Instead of that a person sets themselves new, higher goals to be achieved and for the achievement of which they long and look forward to. These goals are set hierarchically from the least important like satisfying the physiological needs, then the needs for security, the needs for belonging and love, the needs for respect, to the highest priority needs, which are at the very top of the ladder like the needs for self-actualization. It is only when those needs for self-actualization are satisfied that a person achieves a complete development of their personality. This way, a person realizes their natural needs for realization of their inner possibilities, and the realization of their potential depends on the conditions that the society they live in offers them. Depending on the society and culture they belong to, a person will realize their needs in a different way.

Let’s consider a need for respect, for instance. Some things may be rated very highly in one culture, while they could be marginal in some other, and vice versa. A very interesting fact is that basic needs of human beings do not differ as much as their everyday individual needs. “It is obvious that goals themselves are more universal than paths leading towards these goals, since those paths are locally determined in specific cultures” (Maslov 1982, pp. 82).

Allport (1969) describes the structure of a personality in a characteristic way. For the first time he mentions the notion of personality traits. He has traced a certain consistency in people’s behavior if it is studied for a longer period of time. One person will show a characteristic behavior in different situations. For example, one person will show persistence, while some other will show cowardice, and another one aggression.

According to Allport (1969), it is all about typical personality traits that represent permanent characteristics and direct a person’s behavior in a certain situation. The author’s opinion is that each person represents a unique individual, so it is absurd to “assume that any two individuals on Earth (except from identical twins originated from the same egg and same sperm) could have a mutual stack of heritage” (Olport 1969, pp. 13). Therefore, each individual should be studied separately, instead of driving mutual conclusions for a large number of people.

Besides different approaches to understanding of the notion and structure of personality, we can form a conclusion that personality represents a sum of hereditary and acquired factors, and that social impact is of crucial importance for its formation. In that case, important characteristics of a personality are also their temper and character, while the first one represents the influence of genes and heritage and the latter is taken care of by the influence of the environment, learning process and the society the personality is formed in.

The Feeling of Detachment

A man is not born as a personality. They become one under the influence of various factors: biological, hereditary, social. However, a man is a reasonable, conscious being. They possess the awareness of themselves, their closest relatives, of their past, and only partially of their expected future. „That awareness of themselves as a detached being, the awareness of their short life span, of the fact that they have been born without their free will and that they will die against their own will, that they will die before those they love, or that they will die before them, the awareness of solitude and detachment, of helplessness before the forces of nature and society – all that makes their detached alienated existence an unbearable prison” (From 2008, pp.18).

This feeling of detachment creates extreme anxiety and unpleasantness with an individual. A
person feels as if they were in a prison, they want to unbrace the “chains” and connect with other people, since, after all, a man is a social being constantly striving for contact with other people in order to realize communication with them. This human need to overcome detachment is primordial; it is in human nature. It is not connected to any specific age or culture. It is connected to a man as such.

The very same question imposed trouble on a cave man as it does on a modern technologically equipped person; it equally preoccupies the thoughts of a night warden and a university professor. It is connected to neither time nor status, neither education nor living conditions. It is all about a primordial need of a person for contact with other people which cannot be substituted by any modern technological achievement.

Living in contemporary, technically equipped society, a man takes over some characteristics of modern technology and its functioning on themselves and their life style. As technology keeps developing, the production is fastened and the time needed for performing certain activities is shortened. As a consequence, a man is starting to project this speed of functioning on themselves and their own functioning. As time is becoming money, a person starts adjusting to this fast way of functioning, so they start performing more things at the same time. At the same time they cook, talk on the phone while music is playing in the background. They have formed a habit of performing activities as fast as possible. And finally, when they are faced with some spare time, they have no idea how to spend it but to lose it in a certain way; usually in some non-productive lying around, surfing the Internet for hours or chatting with some unimportant people, usually complete strangers, or just watching TV shows under the lowest levels of quality. In situations like this, a person actually does not communicate. On the contrary they alienate more and more, spending hours and hours with computers, TV or headphones, having some kind of pseudo conversation without being aware that every second they are moving further away not only from other people but from themselves as well.

**So Close but so Far Away**

As an early man was inseparably connected to nature, and the process of separation was very slow and gradual, with development of different societies and realization of social relationships, a modern man from the very act of their birth starts their process of separation and individualization. While being an infant, a person does not feel detached or isolated, since their self is not developed enough and therefore a baby feels the unity with their mother. When a person “becomes an individual, they are alone and they face everything that is dangerous and superior in the world. Certain impulses appear which try to make them quit individuality and overcome the feeling of loneliness and weakness by total adapting into the outer world” (From 1984, pp. 26). As a child grows up, they develop the feeling of detachment and individuality. Mother’s presence is not enough any longer to eliminate the feeling of isolation. It has to be overcome in some different ways. A person turns toward other people and tries to realize friendly, kindred or partnership relations.

A question is imposed whether it is more essential to find the right “object” for love or develop the ability to love for realization of a healthy relationship between two people, since most people believe that it is easy to love while the only problem is to find the object worth loving. The answer is hidden in the development of modern society and the change that has occurred in the choice of the subject of love. In some traditional cultures marriages were arranged in advance and the future spouses often had not met each other. After that, there was a period of familiarizing ahead of them, while love was expected to “appear” later on. In the modern society there appeared an idea of romantic love that emphasizes the object of love. The other characteristic of contemporary culture is the need for satisfying the idea of exchange which is mutually profitable. A man is inseparable part of the society and culture they live in, and the modern consumer society offers the idea of satisfaction of purchase, where a modern man achieves satisfaction by the very act of purchase either paying in cash or on credit. According to the “philosophy” of consumer society a man experiences emotional relationships. Therefore, an “attractive package” would be a sum of characteristics fitting the current social values, so a person “falls in love with a partner of such human qualities available to their own possibility of exchange” (From 2008, pp. 11-12).

Are then relationships based on consumer, market values really a realization of true contact and uniting or just a substitute of love? Do relationships based on these grounds really provide elimination of isolation and solitude or does a person even more radically move away from
their essence and become more isolated and alienated? In such relationships people do not succeed in realizing a true connection with the aim of mutual complementing and elimination of isolation and alienation. Such a relation represents just a set of two individuals separately realizing their selfish goals without a true mutual contact. These two people do not become close. Moreover, by creating an illusion of a so-called ideal relationship, they walk in parallel towards their future, without any possibility of meeting each other, moving away not only from each other but also from their essence because they live in illusion.

There are quite a few examples of celebrity marriages shown in ideal light. Both of them are gorgeous, rich and famous. They have picked a “package” that corresponds to their own; and everything is just perfect. Their love for each other is enormous, the business could not be better. The public is extremely interested in their lives and everyday routine. Magazines are full of stories and pictures about them being ideally designed: they open their homes to the public in order to show the “mortal” that they are just “regular people” living in this perfect shining home that looks almost unreal. And then, all of a sudden, a crash! An unexpected end of such an enormous love story that no one could have pictured in their wildest dreams. What is the bottom line of a story? Do these people plan the whole story because of attracting the public’s attention and raising the capital? Or, more probably, they have convinced themselves to believe in the story designed for the public. They believe that the perfectly designed package is the one that suits them perfectly and that they have finally found the love of their lives. And when the beginning enthusiasm goes down and the partners face a real relationship that should be worked on, they realize that in their excessive happiness they are actually unhappy and in their alleged closeness they are really distinct.

A similar situation is reflected with non-celebrities. When the wall standing between two strangers falls down and they become close, in this enthusiasm they get the impression that they have find the love of their lives, i.e. an appropriate object of love. However, this enthusiasm is not long-lasting and it finally loses its glow. They are, though, not aware of this fact at the very beginning but actually they “take the intensity of enthusiasm, this ‘going crazy’ for each other as a proof of intensity of their love, while it can only witness the level of their previous loneliness” (From 2008, pp.13). What happens now is that instead of elimination of solitude and realization of a union, partners experience more suffering and loneliness than the one they had experienced before getting into the relationship, while the feeling of alienation is stressed. When a relationship is not grounded on right motives but on a superficial and illusory union of two people, the feeling of detachment that the two people have been trying to overcome becomes overstressed after the feelings of enthusiasm fade. These people resemble alcohol or drug addicts who, by resorting to these vices, create some kind of temporary illusion of having eliminated the suffering caused by isolation. Instead, after the effects of opiates die away, the suffering comes back as a boomerang with stronger effect. As opposed to this situation, mature, real love means preservation of your own individuality. “Love helps a person overcome the feeling of isolation and detachment, and still lets them be themselves and keep their integrity. There is some paradox happening with love when two beings become one and still remain two” (From 2008, pp.32).

Social Alienation

From the first human groups and primitive societies, a man has been striving for union with other people. As time passed societies have become more complex but also more demanding. In the modern society as well the urge for a union with a group represents a basic motive of each individual in order to overcome detachment. „It is a union where the individual self disappears to a large degree and where the urge to belong to the crowd domineers “ (From 2008, pp.23). In order to be accepted as desired members of a society, we try to comply with its norms. This kind of a union is based on conformism, on adjustment to a group. In order to be a member of a group, a person should adjust their dress code, their behavior, their way of thinking with the group customs and, in no way should they be different from the rest of the group. By the act of adjusting to the group, an individual gets the impression of being saved from this awful feeling of loneliness and alienation. And while dictatorships used deterrence in order to achieve conformism, modern democratic society uses propaganda. Most people in contemporary society are not forced to conformism; they want to be conformists. In most cases they are even unaware of the fact that they live in illusion of...
following their own ideas and thoughts. They are convinced that their ideas by chance coincide with the ideas of the rest. The need for individuality is fulfilled in some other ways, by some other less important issues, believing that they are somehow different from the rest, while the real individuality does not exist. Since there is no perfect social order that would enable a person to fulfill their natural needs that usually do not coincide with the imposed social norms, a person is unfulfilled in this field. As a final result, instead of being eliminated, alienation is becoming deeper and deeper, when a person is alienated not only form the society and other people, but also from themselves and their very essence.

**Freedom or Slavery**

The concept of freedom in the modern society could be approached from two different directions. On one hand it represents a growing independence of a modern man from authorities, while on the other it represents a growing feeling of powerlessness as a result of that isolation. Therefore the structure of modern society causes two opposite feelings with a modern man: they are becoming more secure and independent on one hand, but more detached and scared on the other. It is hard to understand that the concept of freedom could have negative connotation since freedom has traditionally been achieved through fighting bonds and authorities. A logical sequence of events would be for a person to feel free now that they have eliminated traditional restrictions and limitations, so it is hard for us to understand the “appearance of new, different enemies, enemies that essentially are not the outer restrictions but the inner factors that prevent a full realization of personal freedom” (From 1984, pp. 79).

In his book *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm talks about the freedom of speech that we all are very proud of as a product of modern democratic processes. Although the freedom of speech represents a sort of triumph over traditional restrictions and authorities, we should not forget the fact that because of conformity and adjustment to the society, most of what a modern person thinks and speaks about is, in fact, what other people think and speak about. In this manner, enchanted by the triumph over the outer authorities, we ignore the importance and influence of the inner authorities such as public opinion, which draw their strength out of our need for adjustment and fear to be different from the others. It is in this process that we lose our individuality and move far away from our self.

This feeling of detachment and powerlessness is too frightening for a modern man to consciously accept. Instead, it is covered up by everyday routine that a modern man falls into and which means going to work, previously planned activities, socializing, performing everyday tasks. And while a modern man is swallowed up by the everyday routine, solitude and fear remain. People have to try to run away from freedom completely if they cannot advance from negative freedom to positive one” (From 1984, pp. 97).

One of the mechanisms of escaping the pseudo freedom is a solution a modern man is forced to resort to in the modern society. Concerning the fact that a man is an inseparable part of culture, a person stops being an individual for their sake, but accepts the cultural patterns that have been imposed on them. This way they become not the kind of person they would like to be, but the kind of person like all the others, i.e. the kind of personality the modern society expects them to be. In this manner the distance between a person’s self and the world disappears and the conscious fear of loneliness and detachment vanishes. A person becomes an automat like millions of others around them and denizens in a way that they are not different from the others. They simply assimilate with the rest of the world. A person no longer feels anxiety and solitude. However, the price they pay for this is much too high, since in order to achieve this state, a person renounces their personality and consequently instead of eliminating the feeling of detachment and alienation they deepen it because they become alienated from their own personality.

**An Individual or Personality**

Is there a way out of this constant moving away from your own personality? The process of acculturation is opposed to by the process of personalization, so unlike an individual which is like any other individual under the influences of social factors in the process of acculturation, personalization represents a process of development of an individual into a special, unique, and above all self-aware personality that differs from the others.

The basic difference between an individual and developed personality is in the understanding of themselves and their goals. While an individual is self-centered and focused on realization of their own good, a developed personality is capa-
ble of decentering and making themselves available for others. In order for an individual to become a personality, they should redirect their own attention from themselves to others and the world around them. This way, an individual becomes a basis for personality development. On this road from childhood to adulthood, a person first develops their identity and sense for uniqueness. While the early childhood and adolescence are characterized by this self-centeredness, in the process of maturing the personality concept becomes a part of the individual and develops it.

According to the postulates of Personalism, a personality is formed under the mutual influence of heritage and environment. However, personalists consider a man capable of deciding about the hereditary and environmental factors and realize some of their ideas and plans. Personalists regard a tendency for growth and self-realization natural and inborn for a person, the principle of freedom being a basis for personality development. According to this, the more developed and healthier a personality is, the more capable for freedom they are. And vice versa: the more open to the principle of freedom a personality is, the more developed and completed they are.

The process of personality growth last for a lifetime. So, while an individual, through a process of conformism, moves further away not only from others but also from their self, a personality is turned towards the world, they actively participate in life and keeps trying to make their surroundings better according to their needs.

**Conclusion**

Personality traits represent a result of influence of numerous factors including heritage and environmental influences. When it comes to environmental influences, the key role is played by the society a person lives and functions in. Since a man is a social being and they can only function in a union with other people, the influence of society and social norms is the most prominent one in the process of personality formation.

Concerning the fact that natural needs of an individual for realization and self-realization are mostly opposed to the social norms that have been imposed on them, an individual resorts to the process of acculturation in order to assimilate with the rest of the society and to be just like any other individual in the society, and all this with the aim of overcoming the feeling of loneliness and isolation that appear as a result of prevention of realization of a person’s natural innate needs. This way a person just ostensibly overcomes the feeling of detachment since they assimilate with the rest of the world, i.e. they are not different!

However, the price a person pays for overcoming the feeling of isolation and alienation from the others is too high. Instead of elimination of this feeling, it becomes even deeper and more serious kind of alienation – alienation from themselves, from their own personality.

This sort of alienation, which represents even a more serious problem of a modern person than alienation from other people, can be overcome by various mechanisms. In order for a person to be able to overcome the feeling of alienation from other people, they have to eliminate the feeling of alienation from themselves first. Elimination of the feeling of self-alienation is the basic precondition for overcoming the feeling of alienation from the others, since only a person who is not alienated from themselves can build good relations with other people. The key way for overcoming self-alienation is personality development.

While an individual is self-centered and concentrated on realization of their own needs, a developed personality is realized and directed towards the others. This process of progressing from an individual to a personality represents a solution to a problem of alienation in the modern world. Only a developed personality, that has overcome the feeling of self-alienation, is open up to building good relationships with other people.

**References**


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