

Published by the decision of the Scientific Council
of Khachatur Abovian
Armenian State Pedagogical University



Department of Philosophy and Logic
named after Academician Georg Brutian



W I S D O M

2(22), 2022



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YEREVAN – 2022

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

THE PROBLEM OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL ANOMIE

Abstract

The article is devoted to some prospects for personal development. In contemporary societies, personal development often occurs in parallel with significant larger-scale changes of a social, socio-psychological and cultural nature. These include wars, socio-economic crises or unfavourable changes in epidemiological situations that lead to the distortion and modification of social norms and values. In such conditions, a person succumbs to uncertainty and is alienated from their environment. These phenomena are characterized by the term “social anomie”. Hence, out of all the factors contributing to personal development, professional activity significantly contributes to a person’s ability to overcome anomie and reintegrate into society.

Keywords: social anomie, personal development, social norm, integration, environment, adaptation, professional activity.

Introduction

The problem of personal development remains relevant even today. It is studied from various angles (communication, motivation, self-realization, personality traits, etc.), with attention to all manners of factors: psychological, philosophical, environmental, and their effect on the person. There is also considerable debate over specific patterns of personal development – previously staples of developmental psychology; these are now criticized and no longer convincing. The external environment has changed, with it, the patterns of personal development.

In reaction to difficult situations, a person experiences certain deeply embedded stunted or dogmatic ideas and thoughts, just as well as emotions. From the point of view of Gestalt psychology, these events act as mechanisms of interaction with the world. As the theorist of Gestalt psychology, P. Goodman (as cited in S. Ginger

& A. Ginger, 2016, pp. 128-130) put forward the concept of “Self” as a process of creative inner fitness to the external environment. He made a distinction between the concepts of “I” and “Self”, theorizing that the “Self” is a unique process within each person which describes the uniqueness of the reactions mentioned above, or responses, given in a particular style in a given time. The “Self” is not only where the person resides but also his means of residing in the world, and this can change depending on the situation.

F. Perls (as cited in S. Ginger & A. Ginger, 2016) thought that studying a person’s activity examines the phenomena that occur during a person’s contact with the surrounding world. It is within that scope that psychological developments take place. The thoughts, behaviour and emotional experiences of a person are tools of interaction: they allow the person to attend to the situation. F. Perls referred to this contact as a

chain of needs being satisfied and this chain consisting of certain stages.

Several authors in Gestalt psychology propose the “contact chain” concept, with a varying number of stages; however, this only helps to explain where failure occurs. Social anomie is encountered in these conditions, and it manifests in the depreciation of socio-cultural affiliations in a person’s view, disagreements with social norms, and weakened ties to society in general (Merton, 1938).

Social Anomie: Definitions and Features

Social anomie is currently a rather comprehensive and multilateral term. Social anomie results from large-scale societal changes, such as emergencies, war, spread epidemics, conflicts, and asocial phenomena.

Although the term anomie has been circulating in social sciences for a considerable time (Nartov, 2010; Napso, 2017, pp. 22-30), the phenomenon of social anomie is not yet thoroughly studied in terms of personal development. It is no coincidence that the anomic peculiarities of personal development are the subject of interdisciplinary investigations. E. Durkheim (1996) emphasizes the role of social norms in regulating a person’s behaviour and the expectations of the person’s environment. S. Frolov (2007) highlights the contradictions between the person’s needs and the ability to satisfy them as a condition of social anomie, and R. Merton (1994) believes that anomie causes a feeling of unavailability of the environment’s socio-cultural norms.

In a state of social anomie, the person’s contact with the environment is disrupted. The person does not understand or admit changes in society, resulting in no capacity to adapt to the changes in social and cultural norms. In other words, we see that the norms and values of society are alienated. As a rule, the person appears uncertain, as the former social environment has already been stripped of meaning. Previous con-

tacts with society do not work, and the new socio-cultural norms and values have not yet been internalized to serve new contacts.

If a person finds it hard to confirm contact with the world, they choose specific appropriate mechanisms to avoid direct contact. These are escape mechanisms that can manifest at different stages of contact. Often the person exhibits these escape mechanisms without conscious understanding; that is, the person considers them forms of ordinary behaviour. Only in case of an emergence of a psychological problem does the analysis allow us to understand what really happens between the person and the surrounding world. The person in the process of satisfying their needs encounters various obstacles that do not allow them to complete the chain; hence the chain is disrupted, which often acts as an unfinished gestalt.

Thus, in a state of social anomie, human behaviour’s mechanisms of avoidance or resistance become stable, constant phenomena. From the point of view of psychology, there is no distinction between positive or negative, necessary or unnecessary psychological traits. Instead, there is the issue of the person’s socio-psychological development and adapting to society. From that stance, we investigate forms of exposure to socio-cultural or environmental factors for human development. According to several authors, the process of human development, with an emphasis on socialization and professional stability, in particular, is estimated through the presence of certain psychological qualities, some of which are subject to development, while others are the main individual qualities of a person (Aghuzumtsyan, Petrosyan, Poghosyan, & Khachatryan, 2016; Amelina, 2017, pp. 61-66).

Specific Factors of Personal Development

R. Krichevsky (1993) presents a well-grounded series of personal qualities subject to development. He examines personal development in

the context of the manager's activities and distinguishes qualities for effective management such as dominance, confidence, emotional stability, stress resistance, creativity and drive for achievement, initiative, responsibility, reliable problem-solving independence, and sociability. Therefore, the general efficiency of the person's development and activity is based mainly on work experience, with consequential professional and life experience (Aghuzumtsyan et al., 2016). I. Kon (as cited in Hakobyan & Khachatryan, 2021) singles out three main concepts for the description of individual development as a whole: "life time", "vital phase", and "way of life". They express the spatiotemporal and social characteristics of the person's inclusion in a social environment in the event of a violation of which the anomic phenomenon of the person's marginalization appears.

The stretch of "lifetime" (or life-space) is the period between birth and death. The term does not specify what constitutes this time-space or whether it is socialized or marginalized. The term "vital phase" is more defined. It assumes that life is subject to a well-known pattern, and its stages are in a perpetual circular motion, upon violation of which we encounter different forms of marginalization. Despite the "vital phase" concept, it is impossible to understand the essential processes for developing individual identity without the emphasis on its interaction with other people or social institutions, expressed mainly through professional factors.

The most applicable and effective term is "way of life". This concept differs from the concept of the "vital phase" (cycle) mainly by its versatility and implying many different aspirations and branches of development within a single biography. The heart of its periodization is the idea of permanently limited stages, i.e. life events, instead of a linear progression of said stages. The time, sequence, and means of actualizing any life event are no less important than the fact that the event has occurred. This point of view allows us to talk about sociological, psy-

chological and historical preconditions and separate a person's professional orientation and experience (Kon, 1984).

In our opinion, the phenomenon of social anomie is closely linked to the professional aspects of a person's development. These impact the individual's prospect of life and lead to average life satisfaction at best. R. Allen and S. Lindy have shed much light on this topic with their methodology for estimating probable life expectancy, which allows us to deduce correlations between, on the one hand, individuals' perceived expectations of life and, on the other hand, their intrinsic values and certain aspects of their professional life. Professional factors such as work efficiency, management skills, the scope of thinking, professional motivation and professional destructivity prevention lead to a stage of personal development where prospects for life and plans for the future are extended. In other words, the existence of these professional factors has a significant impact on an individual's life prospects and represents an avenue for self-realization (Heckhausen, 1986). In H. Heckhausen's opinion, achievement contributes to self-realization.

H. Heckhausen relays his theoretical standpoint on the formation of value systems and connects it to the desire to achieve goals or, in a more general sense, to the concept of directed action, which the author terms "achievement activity".

According to Heckhausen, achievement activity must:

1. Lead to a tangible result, which
2. Must be estimated qualitatively and quantitatively while
3. The thresholds of estimation must neither be too low nor too high for the activity to be crowned with success, along which it is also necessary to spare time and efforts towards it.
4. It is necessary to include a scale of comparison and a normative level within that scale.
5. Lastly, the action must be taken for a desirable subject, and the recipient of the result must be this subject.

R. Cattell (as cited in Spasennikov & Golubeva, 2013) considered the problem of personal development through the lens of personality trait theory, according to which personality traits are exhibited through stable and predictable descriptors of human behaviour. According to R. Cattell, personality traits are grouped into several categories:

1. Constitutional traits – traits that develop based on the person’s biology and physiology.
2. Environment-generated traits – traits based on the influence of social and physical environments.
3. General traits – shared by people of the same culture to different extents.
4. Unique traits – possessed by a handful of people, or even just one.
5. Surface traits – a set of behavioural descriptors that act as one whole for observation purposes.
6. Primary traits – baseline constructs, considered the foundation of an individual. Different modes of behaviour exist through extended lengths of time when more profound levels of individuality are considered.

In the psychological literature, the examination of personal development also relates to communication issues regarding inquiries on inclusion within society or alienation from it. B. F. Porshnev (as cited in Heidmets, 1979, p. 18) considers this question of communication (i. e. human co-interaction) a central problem of social psychology and discusses the whole process within the system of suggestion and anti-suggestion. According to him, human co-interaction or suggestion can be studied only through anti-suggestion. He considers physical distancing from the suggestor an actual act of anti-suggestion. Porshnev also clearly differentiates the external influence on a person from their inner resistance, presents the relationship of these “forces”, and attributes a decisive role in the process of a person’s self-actualization within an environment. Among American researchers on the topic of personal development within a society, a

notable figure is I. Altman (as cited in Heidmets, 1979, pp. 19-20), who has pioneered the “privacy theory”, a thesis on private space and people’s tendency to distance themselves from social functions. Altman views privacy as a process of regulating interpersonal boundaries that dictate a person’s communication with others. It has the following primary components:

- There exist two sides to privacy – desirable and real. The optimum situation is when desired privacy matches absolute privacy, while the opposite results in incongruence, leading to social anomie.
- Privacy is a dialectic process consisting not only of deviations leading to marginalization but also of socially accepted norms of communication.
- Striving for privacy can be observed in different social units – an individual, a family, a group etc.
- There is a wide selection of methods of achieving privacy – verbal and paraverbal behaviour, creation of personal spaces, different cultural and subcultural mechanisms (traditions, norms, etc.)

Undoubtedly, Altman’s theory plays a huge role in the research of interpersonal relationships within an environment, but there are slight reservations. Firstly, his point of view of privacy is exaggerated, and the concept of “regulating boundaries” is an umbrella term for too many actions. Secondly, Altman views privacy subjectively; it remains on the level of individual open/closed behaviour and does not address person-group or person-society relationships, which can be examined especially through the study of professional factors of personal development.

M. Heidmets (1979) presented the problem of personal development through descriptors of interpersonal relations, or “contacts”, such as the number of social contacts, their stability (the impossibility of separation) and others, which can be viewed as professional factors as well (p. 6). Quantitatively, the volume and intensity of relations are considered more than their content. The

more intense a person's social/professional contact with others becomes, the more the person's actions submit to the environment's demands. We consider the extent of the reliance on social environments and the centralization of regulating the person's actions. Regulation can be performed by both the environment (external regulation) and the individual (internal regulation). This distinction is not absolute, of course – in reality, a single component of regulation can dominate over the rest. It can be said that the presence of social/professional contacts increases the external regulation of the person. Generally speaking, any professional cooperation implies the transformation of internal regulation into external regulation and increases a person's reliance on the environment (Heidmets, 1979, pp. 10-11).

M. Magomed-Eminov's (1998) examination of professional factors also focuses on the level of opinions and emotions exhibited in certain life situations – opinions and emotions that emerge through motives like “desiring to be accepted by society” or “fear of rejection”, which are included in the affiliative structure of human motivation. From this point of view, the “being accepted by society” motive is intensely expressed when the abovementioned factors are present. The fear of rejection gradually increases based on age-specific characteristics of personal development, leading to specific changes in the affiliative structure of motivation. Notably, active engagement in said professional factors moderates the fear of being rejected by society and preserves the person's adaptive abilities.

Professional factors are important also within the context of the directionality of personal development (Golovakha & Panina, 1989), particularly in determining the life satisfaction index. It is also noteworthy that professional factors themselves represent psychological defence mechanisms, including in the person's psychological defence structures (Plutchik, Kellerman, & Conte, 1979).

We can observe the role of professional fac-

tors in regard to personal development within developmental programs in the modern higher education system. Several examples are presented below.

The University of Wolver Hampton employs a research program on the development of personal and professional qualities based on four interconnected fields: personal intellectual abilities, research organization, research efficacy and involvement in society, or the effect on it (Researcher development workshops, n.d.). Notably, the primary characteristics of personal development are understood within the scope of research efficacy and are represented by personal qualities, as well as self-regulation and professional development characteristics. This point of view, on the one hand, displays the role of professional factors considered side-by-side with personal development, and on the other, indicates the social significance of these factors and their function in effective personal development.

The effect of professional factors on personal development is also emphasized by other world universities and scientific institutions. For instance, the developmental program on personal and professional abilities of the University of Bristol (Personal and professional development course directory, n.d.) prioritizes personal development and well-being; in the University of Melbourne (Graduate research hub, n.d.), this connection is represented in the development of students' level of social activity. In particular, out of the professional factors affecting personal development, time management, social skills and purposeful research are considered to carry the most import. The developmental program of the University of the South Pacific (Strategic total academic review, n.d.) corresponds to several projects where the critical role of professional factors is linked to the person's affective field, where the characteristics of ethical, cultural and social coexistence are considered. Acquired professional abilities are essential in forming business habits, developing communication skills, and their application in communication process-

es. According to the practical research carried out by the University of Lisbon (Research skills development course, n.d.), out of the professional factors affecting personal development, professional communication, individual and teamwork, creativity, research management, and interdisciplinary cooperation have been found to be significant, and are included in the education program.

Psychological studies, as a rule, identify a person's certain activities. Within the field of management psychology, personality studies, in particular, explain the expressions of the person's psychological patterns within certain activities. Some studies examine personal characteristics in relation to professional work (Gevorgyan 2011, pp. 80-91; Aghuzumtsyan, Petrosyan, & Poghosyan, 2018). There have been extensive studies in the field of personal qualities necessary for management activity. These studies have discovered the interconnection of these qualities, leading to various personal development programs based on personal qualities. Although, the studies mentioned above examine the influence of some personal qualities on professional effectiveness or the expressions thereof. There remains the question of how personal development is expressed and how it relates to psychological qualities necessary for success. Follow-up questions such as how exactly a developed person behaves in a professional environment, what is a developed person and what are the identifiers of personal development are yet to be studied as well. Success in professional activities is measured both by career growth and professional development, but then again, what psychological level does the person who *has* achieved career growth or professional development exist on? Does that level correspond to a high personal development level? In other words, the question is, how does a psychologically mature person behave within a professional environment?

Conclusion

In order to resolve the questions above, we

consider it necessary to define measures of personal development, which will make it possible to describe a psychologically developed person. Among the measures of personal development, the nature of the person's professional activity should be an essential and decisive factor since the relationship with society is expressed in the act of carrying out professional activities. This attests to the notion that at the core of social anomie lies the incompleteness or distortion of measures of personal development, leading to the violation of the person's purposeful integration into society and the equivalent perception of the Self.

Professional activity in contemporary societies is perceived as a systematic factor of personal development, and consequently, the problem of developing personal abilities and professional skills becomes paramount. The person constructs their professional strategies to integrate into society and achieve socio-psychological significance.

Acknowledgement

The work was supported by the Republic of Armenia Science Committee in the frames of the research project № 21T-5A311.

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