
ETHICS AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANKIND, REALITY OF THE HUMAN EXISTENCE

Lidia-Cristha Ungureanu *

‘Ștefan cel Mare’ University, 13 University Str., 720229, Suceava, Romania

(Received 26 February 2016, revised 2 March 2016)

Abstract

The world reveals itself to man as a multiplicity, as the sum of simple unitary elements, of which man himself is the most important as a being among other beings. For the time being, we consider this aspect of the world as *given*, therefore real, and since we do not develop it consciously, but find it made as such, we call it perception. We perceive ourselves in this world of perceptions, too. Yet, this self-perception would simply be like any other if it did not generate something that can connect perceptions in general, thus creating a link between the entirety of all these perceptions and our self. This something which springs out of self-perception is not mere perception any longer. Nor is it something that we can take for granted, as reality is. That is why reason is, first and foremost, expressed in the inner reality; but it is not purely subjective, since the self becomes a subject only with the help of reason. This reasonable way of relating to ourselves is an essential determinant of our personalities. But with it we can only exist on a purely idealistic level.

If we call such a connection based on reason ‘knowledge’, and if we define the state of knowing as the wellbeing based on the same connection, then we should consider ourselves as exclusively knowledgeable and real beings - supposing the assumption above proved to be true. Yet, in reality, the assumption does not prove to be true. We do not solely project our perceptions to ourselves ideally, through concepts, we also consider feelings, since we are creatures whose life contents is purely conceptual. The realist sees in feelings a more realistic life of the personality than in the purely idealistic element of controlling reality through reason. As, according to the fundamental principle of reality, everything that can be perceived is real, the feeling is proof of the reality of our own personalities.

Keywords: life, morality, reality, ethics, realism

1. Introduction - reality of the human existence

Starting from the idea that man is, essentially, a social being, we can develop a number of previously assumed determinations, namely the major ones found at the level of social life that make him be what he is: a reasonable being that, in relation to certain values, aspirations and beliefs, projects his own destiny, transforming himself and his environment.

*E-mail: lidiacristha@yahoo.com

From the Aristotelian definition given to the man as ‘zoon politikon’, rational reporting to the natural and social environment is inevitable, as well as projecting and assuming his own destiny, individually and collectively related to the norms and values of a historical era’s specific reality. Thus, an important role in the becoming of a human being into a social being is played by the conscious, programmatic and transforming action of reality, determined by a certain social and individual project.

Along with the transforming action, the rational and projective dimensions of the human behaviour contribute to individually or collectively defining, understanding and interpreting reality. Thus, we can establish a relation between a coherent and efficient conception on the social behaviour and a dynamic and fluid reality.

The problem raised by accepting a social behaviour can be defined as follows: is reality an objective given, exterior to any subjectivity, reflected as such by its own reason and in relation with which we define our actions? Or is it, on the contrary, a projection resulting from a complex cognitive activity, placed within a clear bias?

The complexity of social reality as well as relations between man and his reality, be it assumed or not, require different approaches to build social reality and, therefore, the theory of social behaviour. From the perspective of such an approach, social reality is seen as a “psycho-social and cultural construct, done in an interactional context with the help of specific operators: psycho-individual, psycho-social and socio-cultural” [1].

Building social reality involves multiple cognitive, attitudinal, emotional, motivational and actionable dimensions; these dimensions are psycho-individual, psycho-social as well as socio-cultural, depending on the individual’s social background, affiliation or reference groups, as well as specific causal factors of a particular historical period.

The dynamics of social reality primarily depend on the socio-cultural community development, the accumulation of social experience and the system of principles, norms and values which define community life at a certain stage of its development. Social reality is the result of a dual process: cognitive and constructive. As a result, this knowledge cannot be separated from the process of developing a representation-structured system through which the plurality of factors acting on the individual acquires actional and cultural significance, thus leading to the foundation of what we call ‘social reality’.

From the definition of society, we can pick out the basic elements that explain its existence, namely those related to relationships between members, on the one hand, and the material basis of these relations, on the other hand.

A fairly brief analysis on how human society works leads to the conclusion that it must be defined as a self-regulating complex system which is dynamic and open in relation with the natural system on which it builds itself. The general functions of the system result from the need to ensure the sharing of material and spiritual existence of the society, through activities that have a

constitutive character in relation to the overall system: production-efficient activities, political activities, educational activities, social ones, etc.

Aiming the objective aspects of founding a society, from the social existence we distinguish two fundamental levels, which are in a relationship of mutual preparation and determination: the material reality and the spiritual reality. In material reality, the substantial or energetic elements, though are natural, have suffered direct or indirect human transformative action. Thus, the 'natural objects' become 'things', both through their transformation in order to provide some practical functions and through a cultural 're-signification', achieved amid interactions by assuming norms and values specific to the stage of development of that society.

Spiritual reality has its source in the individual and social consciousness, an ontologically fundamental mutation, understood as "all artistic, moral, philosophical, scientific or religious values, by which man 'personalizes' nature, discovers it, valorises and interprets it in relation to his needs and aspirations, but also exceeds it by building a new universe of symbols" [1]. From this perspective, society is a complementary dimension of culture, composed of practical and functional aspects of it: society defines how culture is objectified in social practice and in structuring the psychosocial relationship.

Social awareness is another central concept of Social science, Philosophy, Political science or Sociology, being in its essence, the consciousness of a relationship, which exists and manifests through individual consciences but can only operate exclusively in the interactional field generated by existence and social action. Through social consciousness, reality is not simply reflected, but rebuilt as a moral expression of real social existence. Between social and individual consciousness there is a mutual conditioning, the first being structured as a direct result of the influence of individual consciences accumulated in phylogenesis and the second being affected by social consciousness influences in ontogenesis.

Given that principles function as a code of laws, on the basis of which any judgment or moral prescription is built, they are to be found in every society and they form the basis for any moral code. The principle of reality appears as the foundation of foundations of the moral sense ontology, starting with the conscience of the external world (moral), on to the moral consciousness of self and from here to the highest level, the moral sense, which is the consciousness of another.

Being there, for the other one becomes a sense of moral action; only after social pressures, man is a moral being. The form of existence in which the experience presents itself, inside the self, becomes a true principle of reality for the individual.

2. The morality, future of humankind

The domain of morality does not seriously affect society or it does it according to the limits of tolerance. However morality involves society as it

involves other's presence (of another) and makes sense only in a society and in relation to a society (for a society).

Society has in this context the form of a 'general will' of consensus. The individual must respond in his own moral judgment the question: 'What to do?'. 'How to do?' is a technical question, regarding the means. 'What should I do?' refers to the purposes of the action - mine personally, but also for humanity in general. This moral judgment is normative and cannot be determined by theoretical knowledge. Its source is the practical reason which is quite different from the science of phenomena.

Science deals only with phenomena which exist in space and time and show only what reality is. Therefore in morals we are condemned to judge ourselves. At the heart of morality there is moral duty to be found. It is the need to perform an action out of respect for the moral law. The duty is based on our free will: only a free person can have the notion of duty and only he who accomplishes his duty is truly free. Obviously, there is no other difficulty regarding duty, but to fulfil it. There is more and more debate over a theological realism with reference to the truths stated by religion. In ethics we also encounter the religious issue: faith in the divinity, in fate, in God. It is obvious nobody can rely exclusively on reality, as it cannot address wishes and it constantly ignores the individual. We believe in something that exists beyond reality, something which has all the necessary qualities to guarantee man that good will eventually prevail while the world will be rid of evil and sin.

The material progress humanity has reached following a trail marked by repression and renunciation aroused in the minds of thinkers the idea of cancellation of the reality principle. Among them there is also Herbert Marcuse, who confirms the report between the reality principle and the current material prosperity in his work 'Eros and Civilization' [2]. The interests of existence compelled the human being to work, giving up the pleasure principle and focusing his vital energies in productive activities. Necessity has dictated him to intervene on nature and modify it according to its interests. Through an efficient work and by constantly developing advanced techniques, civilization has progressed so far it can provide individuals an unprecedented material abundance.

All this development is marked by sexual coercion and aggression, leading to a profound feeling of dissatisfaction. Cultural progress has been held in light of the reality principle that Marcuse called 'the principle of efficiency'. "I named it the principle of efficiency to emphasize that, under its reign, society is stratified by competitive economic return on its members." [2, p. 15] The cultural society requires work efficiency, the body needs to be used in profitable activities. The repressive change of instincts is inevitable because there are not enough resources and goods to satisfy human needs. However, only the start and consolidation of a civilization imply these changes. Once labour has resulted in acquiring sufficient goods, one can imagine a removal of constraint.

But if the reality principle becomes superfluous, in whose interest is it maintained? Marcuse contends that it is in the interests of social domination and argues thus: if originally the principle of efficiency was as rational as it could have been, representing a tool of cultural progress, today, considering the material level achieved, it became totally irrational, being an instrument of domination. The fundamental repression through which man became a cultural being was substituted by the supplementary repression; in other words, the constraints are not maintained for progress. It is the idea of maintaining repression for the sake of repression [4]. Furthermore, the penury which determines labour results in a problem of administration. During the development of the civilization, penury has been artificially maintained as the existing resources are not available according to individual interests, but to those of domination.

Therefore, a better organization of resources would involve a reduction in work and would grant a greater freedom of self-life experiences, streamlined enough to make the principle of reality become unnecessary.

3. Conclusions

Civilization begins with the reality principle and can only be continued through its mediation. To support, along with optimists who believe in the empowerment of the reality principle, the nonrepressive cultural idea means to deny the human nature which was not only designed in order to obey the cultural requirements. That does not mean that we support the idea of legal easing impossibility, in other words, of reducing the levels of discharge. On the contrary, we are convinced that social goals can be achieved by a lower amount of discharge, one that is not felt by the human being in a very painful way.

However, social reality is a concept whose meaning does not always overlap with that of 'social existence'. As Constantin Noica remarked, "reality is not mere existence, which has the quality of being. From the stage of existence to the stage of reality, things have gone in a relationship, they acted and reacted. Reality does not exist, it only means matching a simple existence to a horizon." [3]

Thus, in relation to social existence, social reality appears as possessing the connotations of a "mental construct done in a relational and actional context, in a systematic social action context and amid some needs and aspirations specific to both individuals and groups" [L.-C. Ungureanu, *The Way in which Perception May Become Reality*, LUMEN International Conference: MEPDEV 2015].

References

- [1] L.-C. Ungureanu, *The Way in which Perception May Become Reality*, Proc. of International Christian Conference The Power To Be Different, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 2014, 209-213.

- [2] H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Romanian translation, Editura Trei, București, 1996.
- [3] C. Noica, *Jurnal de idei*, Humanitas, București, 1990, 139.