TO THE QUESTION OF THE INCOMPLETE THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF ALIENATION IN CURRENT PHILOSOPHICAL-ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-HUMANITARIAN KNOWLEDGE

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Summary. Despite considerable time of study and comprehensive elaboration, the problem of alienation still does not have any holistic and clearly articulated interpretation within the framework of philosophical discourse. Moreover, the phenomenon of alienation is not the primary object of interest of modern socio-humanitarian and anthropological problems. It seems interesting from a theoretical point of view and necessary in current sociocultural realities to continue the tradition of comprehensive research into the phenomenon of alienation precisely as an essential characteristic of human existence. The work attempts to briefly critically analyze existing approaches as a basis for possible further research.

Key words: alienation; field of sociocultural practice; self-actualization; social machine; socio-humanitarian knowledge; sociocultural system; technogenicity; worldview system.

The problem of alienation has been formulated in the New European philosophical tradition at the dawn of its formation. But, despite quite a significant duration of study and comprehensive analysis, the Western philosophical tradition still does not have a holistic and, as far as is generally possible in philosophy, a complete concept of alienation in its integral understanding as one of the fundamental anthropological phenomena. Hegel, later Marx, existentialists, starting with Kierkegaard and ending with Sartre, representatives of the Frankfurt School from different sides tried to comprehend the phenomenon of alienation. These attempts were certainly very productive. However, the relevance of the problem of alienation is determined not only by its theoretical depth and correlation with the most important aspects of philosophical, anthropological and sociocultural knowledge, its direct relation to the essence of human existence, but also by the specifics of current processes that intensively deform all fields of sociocultural practice without exception and, inevitably cause shifts in the basic structures of the dominant ideological systems.

It is this second aspect of the problem of alienation that should cause particular concern in current circumstances, since, in contrast to its high problematic
status and elaboration in its ontological section, in its ontic aspect this problem has two important circumstances. The first is the factor of variability of specific historical circumstances, which can — while maintaining the general principles of the construction and functioning of sociocultural systems — significantly change the specific forms of their implementation. The second is the insufficiency of existing ideas about the essence and forms of alienation to develop a full understanding of the actual role of alienation in the process of the specific development of individual existence in the sociocultural space. And this insufficiency is observed in conditions not only of cardinal and rapid changes in the sociocultural landscape, against the background of which a person’s essential ideas about himself are also undergoing metamorphoses. It is important to note here that it is precisely these ideas, which form the foundation of self-awareness, that are, in fact, the key object of alienation in the direct personal-anthropological understanding of the problem [1]. But it is precisely this aspect that seems to be the least fully explored. Spiritual alienation, as will be shown below, is most often presented as a consequence of the individual’s involvement in specific forms of sociocultural practices.

From here arises not only a theoretically important, but also an ontically necessary task to demonstrate the fundamental interdependence of the individual subject and the sociocultural fields of practice that objectively enclose and form his activity with all their inherent regulatory mechanisms of socialization and adaptation. Not only the forms and formats of this inclusion of the individual in the functional space of the sociocultural system, but also subject positioning in it as one of the main aspects of the process of self-actualization are subject to study. This aspect of the mutual dependence and conditionality of social reality, which acts as the external contour of human existence, and its purely personal, individual contours of spontaneous activity, truly attracted the attention of researchers only in the 19th century, when the sociocultural issues themselves were finally formed. Although obvious indications of this dialectic pair can be found in philosophical reflections long before Marx and even Hegel. But the unification of these two aspects of human social existence in a single system of ideas is associated with fundamental difficulties, which are very clearly demonstrated by the history of the socio-humanitarian sciences, the modern stage of development of which is still characterized by the problem of a middle-level theory, designed to constructively (dialectically) remove the classical opposition between micro- and macro approaches, which essentially correspond to the mentioned above poles of individual positioning in the sociocultural space. This example clearly demonstrates the general tendency of theoretical knowledge towards the maximally possible generalization of existing ideas — with the simultaneous obvious difficulty of realizing this aspiration in the current circumstances [2].

To assert, however, that the stated problem is, in principle, deprived of actual theoretical status will be fundamentally incorrect. But the alternative judgment about the sufficient knowledge of the mechanisms and forms of inclusion of the individual in the sociocultural space of experience and activity is also one-sided. In fact, we can talk about the presence of a number of concepts of varying degrees of coverage and elaboration, which from different angles highlight the various facets of this multifaceted process. On the other hand, it seems just as obvious that — due to the lack of a universal model — they cannot be unambiguously removed as having lost
their relevance due to their inclusion in comprehensive doctrines of a higher degree of abstraction and those conceptual schemes that were proposed earlier. And above all, this relates to Hegel's dialectical understanding of the dual nature of the individual's involvement in social reality. Especially considering that the approach proposed by Hegel itself is obviously primarily a method rather than a model. And even the relative obsolescence of the ontological provisions of Hegel's philosophy should not interfere with the further development of the approach itself. It was precisely this creative development of the Hegelian method that objectively ensured the emergence of the most productive concepts that can be indicated in relation to the stated general problem of alienation.

The view of alienation as a certain secondary, derivative form of human existence-in-the-world, conditioned by the individual's involvement in certain circumstances of an economic or political nature, seems in this context, if not superficial, then at least incomplete, affecting only the external contour of the problem. The real depth of the phenomenon can be illuminated by the understanding of alienation as an essential dimension of human existence, as a form of realization of his potentials. In the context of such an understanding, the question of the specific acuteness of the problem of alienation for Western culture, the tendencies towards the growth of corresponding cultural forms, may receive additional possible interpretations. Clarification of the anthropological essence of alienation can make it possible to more clearly identify the genesis of its various forms and the existential and social conditions that determine its development. Therefore, the processes of expansion of technology into fundamentally new spaces of collective and individual practice, which were traditionally considered by the authors as one of the most important factors of alienation, should certainly remain the subject of tireless theoretical analysis, since they reveal those aspects of the problem of alienation — including the most immediate consequences of technogenic impact, which could remain outside of current awareness at previous stages of technical and technological development [3].

An expanded interpretation of alienation suggests that technogenicity is unconditionally and closely related to alienation and is one of the key conditions and forms of its existence, not unilaterally, when technogenicity is considered as an external conditioning factor. Moreover, this relation is not only a factor of the new European industrial civilization. It is also necessary to reveal the feedback between human existence in the world and technogenicity as a form of its manifestation. It is impossible, even in the first approximation, not to detect the presence of technogenicity among the essential characteristics of the sociocultural process as such, if we understand technogenicity as the conditioning of a person's spontaneity by the technical tools of his activity. And since human activity is always fundamentally technical, then reverse technical conditioning must also be of a fundamental nature, regardless of the level of technological development. This conditionality is only scaled up in the process of the historical development of the technosphere, but in itself stems from the essential forms of human presence in the world.

Understanding of technology should not be reduced to a narrow, purely instrumentalist context. In the original Greek concept, technology meant not so much a tool as a way of using its functionality, that is, a certain skill-mastery, which implies a certain algorithmic approach not only to the direct handling of the tool-
means, but also to the objective representation of the object and, more broadly, the situation. Moreover, activity is a necessary form of providing a person with the conditions of his own existence. That is, the technosphere is not just the result of human activity, a certain by-product, but a necessary condition for human existence and the reproduction of society. It is due to the very specifics of human existence in fundamentally artificial, non-innate cultural forms of intergenerational continuity and the increasing complexity of the inherently technical means used to adapt, generalizable in the functional integration of social subsystems. Moreover, these subsystems themselves — in direct dependence on their functionality — also act as specific tools of the social whole, the totality of which Karl Jaspers functionally and essentially defined as an apparatus for ensuring existence. If we consider that the main function of this apparatus is the transformation of human spontaneous activity into purposeful collective actions, then the use of proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari concept of social machine as a complementary definition will be fully justified.

It is important to emphasize that on closer examination, social machines as the primary source of technogenicity as the determination of the social whole and the existential private by their technical tools for the reproduction and realization of potentials do not arise at a certain historical stage of the development of society, but are inherent in it immanently as a condition of its existence. At the same time, it is obvious that the very possibility of the functioning of a social machine implies a certain degree of involvement in its functioning of human as the only real primary source of any activity. The mechanisms and possible forms of this inclusion are fundamental for understanding the primary mechanisms of technogenic alienation of human existence. This aspect of the problem of the technogenic conditioning of the social process by social machines is reflected in the classical works of K. Marx, K. Jaspers, N. Berdyaev, L. Mumford, G. Deleuze. Already Marx clearly indicated the relation between the functional development of formations (in essence, various ways of organizing social machines) and various forms of alienation. It is fundamentally important that Marx showed economic alienation only as a primary form, which in its further development leads to existential alienation. Berdyaev sought to show the interaction of a machine and a person directly in its primary existential plane, where technogenic alienation appears as a form of experience and realization by the subject of the incompleteness of his existence. And in a certain sense, these two approaches to understanding alienation as a consequence of the necessary involvement of a person in the algorithmic functioning of the machine are complementary, leading to a single phenomenon from different sides — from the forced conditioning of the objective conditions of social existence and from the subjective forms of self-actualization of the individual.

At the same time, it seems fundamentally important that the obvious theoretical elaboration of the problem of technogenic conditioning of human collective and individual existence is not a sufficient condition for even the exhaustion of the problem of technogenicity as such. And even more so, such skepticism is fair in relation to the problem of alienation, especially if we strive to consider its subjective premises. It is fundamentally important to understand that in the process of integrating human activity into the unified functioning of the social machine, not only – and sometimes not so much – this “external” activity itself is
alienated, namely subjectivity as such [4]. Therefore, to truly penetrate into the essential dimension of alienation, it is necessary not only to fix the objective forms of its implementation in social practices and the functioning of sociocultural mechanisms — despite all the unconditional importance and preliminary usefulness of such fixation. These external factors of the phenomenon of alienation were discovered and described primarily because of the obvious visibility of their manifestation in specific sociocultural practices. Less obvious, but perhaps more primary, is the subjective aspect of the problem, which was revealed much later — only in the second half of the 19th century and, it seems, never received a complete representation. Therefore, of paramount importance is the study of these subjective processes, from which, through which, in the form of which alienation unfolds as a specific process of personal self-actualization, as a subjective project, implemented albeit under the influence of external circumstances, but always within the framework of individual choice acceptable and permissible forms of activity.

Here it would be very useful to pay attention to the revolution that applied psychology experienced in the second half of the 20th century (in its marketing, manipulative dimension), and which is currently being fully implemented directly in social engineering. This large-scale, inherently technogenic process of construction and reproduction of an alienated subject clearly indicates specific relations between objective forms of collective life and subjective self-awareness — while at the same time there is no general theoretical discussion on the problem of arbitrary engineering expansion into the sociocultural space that is adequate in terms of manifestation in the dominant discourse [5]. In this context, the question of the subjective conditions of the very possibility of not only such external control, but also the fundamental possibility of secondary interiorization of such forms of self-actualization, which would seem to obviously deny the subjective validity of the individual, authorizing this interiorization in the space of his own existential freedom, seems fundamentally important and even paramount.

In this context, we can talk about a certain primary basis and primary forms of alienation, which are formed and developed in the space of subjective experience and its reflections in the individual worldview. Nevertheless, possible forms of “secondary” alienation in social forms — economic, political, sociocultural — stem from, or at least have as their basis and condition this specific subject positioning, self-description and self-determination. Thus, we can consider alienation as a specific form of conjugation of two extreme horizons of human social existence: the most objectified forms of sociocultural reality and the opposing forms of individual processes of self-actualization. Objectified forms constitute the essence of the social machine, which most obviously opposes human as a personal subject; but they also make social life possible, in which only any personal project can be realized. This dialectical dilemma constitutes the cornerstone of the obvious problematic of sociocultural reality.

A clear example here is the theoretical ideas of Jürgen Habermas, who understands alienation as a consequence of a “gap in experience” caused by insufficient transparency of communication, which, in turn, is a consequence of the degradation of trust as a necessary condition for valid communication (similar motives can be found already in Simmel and Weber). Habermas explains this degradation by the conditioning of communicative practices by technicalized forms
of their implementation. As a result, the individual projects onto others certain generalized stereotypical image of an actor, which acts as a kind of superposition of the communicative space in its typified representation. Technization, first of all, is manifested here precisely in those prescribed and expected forms of activity that ordinary (“normal”) actors should demonstrate. Such routinization (according to Weber and Giddens) is a necessary condition for simplifying communication through its mechanization, and re-projection of a standardized image of an actor is possible only with a certain self-identification as an individual projection of this normative routine, accepting it as a personally acceptable form of first one's external activity, and then self-awareness. Habermas, thus, identifies precisely objective forms of communication as the primary source of alienation, although he shows the mechanism of their internalization.

The social role (mask), prescribed by the dominant circumstances of communication, is a form of participation in the actual communicative field of social practice. But it is through this form only, anyway, the individual's self-realization in social space can occur. Which role is actualized is not so important, since they are all generated by a single space of normative routines (obviousness and omissions), which set the general principles of any normative relationship. It is precisely this conditioning of individual activity by normative routinisms generate primary forms of alienation: the individual is forced to squeeze his self-presentation into these available normative patterns, the complex coherence (complexity) and massiveness of which significantly exceed those characteristics of the majority of participants in communication (and in many communication fields, in general, all of them combined). The fundamental significance of this circumstance is due to the fact that the communicative space always precedes the appearance of a specific participant in it. Moreover, it is the sociocultural environment that forms the personal structure in the process of primary socialization through the individual's internalization of basic and derivative normative routines. The very process of an individual's actualization of his own existence, thus, is initially fundamentally determined by normative forms of social participation. It is in the semantic space of these forms that the first self-descriptions are developed individual and a certain primary identity is formed as a set of key correlations recognized in self-perception and self-presentations with external circumstances and their normative interpretations, and “own” attitudes (the quotation marks here are intended to draw attention to the fundamental conditionality of any “own” ideas of the individual by their original internalization, especially on primary stage of socialization).

However, a critical analysis of Habermas's concept can also point to a deep layer of the problem, which cannot always be expressed in the objectivist language of sociological knowledge, but this does not lose its primary importance. A necessary condition for alienation through the implementation of mechanisms of imposed technical communication is the subjective readiness to allow normative routines to be not only a necessary, forced external background, an acceptable form of communication, but also an essential pattern of selfhood. It is this compliance to external coercion that provides real feedback for the reproduction of the dominant mechanism of alienated communication as the basic condition for the functioning of the social machine. Existentialists radically pointed to personal self-actualization through self-standing in a position autonomous in relation to circumstances, but
they did this, most often, in a certain isolation from sociocultural reality, from extreme personalistic positions, in a certain sense, reproducing the extremeness of Nietzsche’s idea of radical autonomism of the individual. But in general, this position highlights the importance of subjective preconditions as, perhaps, the primary factors in the process of alienation.

Identifying the role of subjective disposition, however, is not a key problem in most concepts of alienation (Ernst Bloch, Jacques Rancière, Charles Taylor), which focused on various objective aspects of the individual’s social existence, which determine alienation. Thus, Slavoj Žižek considers the conditioning of the individual by ideological constructs and the symbolic attitudes dictated by them as a key factor in alienation, although he draws attention to the fact that the way out of the impasse of alienation lies in deepening the awareness of one’s own existence, through which only external forms of alienation can be overcome.

A shift into the subjective dimension of the problem of alienation can be found in Emmanuel Levinas in his concept of “face,” where it is the subjective disposition towards the “other” that is identified as the decisive factor in alienation as a form of self-actualization, that is, self-alienation. This interpretation reveals the other side of alienation, which, of course, brings it closer to the ideas of Sartre. The virtualization of personality as a consequence of its immersion in the totality of self-reliability of simulacra of reality is indicated by Jean Baudrillard as the root cause of the alienation of modern human, especially emphasizing the destruction of the individual’s primary relations with reality, which alone can act as the foundation for the actual constitution of the subject’s own existence.

However, all of the above concepts are characterized by immersion in modernity as a specific form of sociocultural reality, which, while such an understanding is correct, is still a manifestation of the locality of the view and inevitably makes it difficult or even impossible to identify the fundamental nature of the phenomenon of alienation as a form of human self-actualization. A fundamental, comprehensive development of the phenomenon of alienation is necessary for its actual essential grasp, without which the transfer of the problem of alienation from the category of general abstractions to the specifics of a real problem field cannot be realized, although it is certainly urgent.

References:


