

On the Apparent Freedom of Contemporary Individualism

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Abstract

The present paper discusses the origin and evolution of individualism in contemporary society, reveals some of its stark paradoxes and presents its consequent mythologies. The analysis follows the consequences of individualism phenomenon from psychological, social, cultural, epistemological level up to the metaphysical level of Being.

Keywords: *Individualism, freedom of thinking, civilizing process, paradoxes of individualism, myths of individualism, illnesses of the Being.*

The present paper starts from the observation that, aside from our axiological assessments, beliefs, expectations, preferences or wishes, the individualism is an undeniable reality. It is one of modern man's characteristics just like other realities of our contemporary world as globalization, pollution, bureaucracy, denaturalism, etc.¹ Unfortunately, it has been uncritically taken as a positive achievement; another step on the human civilizations path to greatness. And although, this fact is true, it is serious misunderstood. “One of the *toposes* used by the modern world to flatter itself, to permanently eulogize itself is headmost the individualism. Even the adversaries of individualism, the most severe critics of the individualist presuppositions of modern thinking, Charles Taylor, feel compelled to bow to the subject and recant that individualism is the most distinguished result, the most exquisite creation of modern thinking (Taylor).”²

¹ See for example Pablo López López, “Naturalism, Supernaturalism & Denaturalism,” paper presented at XV Inter-American Congress of Philosophy, 12-16 January 2004, Lima, Perú, retrieved from <http://www.crvp.org/book/Series01/I-39/ch30.htm>, on November 8, 2010.

² Adrian-Paul Iliescu, “Individualismul modern ca ideologie justificativă” (Modern Individualism as a Justificatory Ideology), *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, No. 4, Spring 2003, the author makes reference to Charles Taylor.

The main goal of this article is to show there is something wrong at the ontological level with our contemporary individualism on all its three levels: that of Being, social being, and individual being. There are too many efforts and too much energy spent proving the contrary, the positive value of individualism, to not consider it to be the rightness or wrongness for our Epoch. Individualism can be found everywhere: it pervades all existence, social relations, epistemological patterns, nature, culture, sciences, our minds and souls, ideas, beliefs, hopes and memories. We are bombarded by its forms from all directions: through movies, commercials, schools and workplaces, in family life, by friends and public opinion. Our slogan seems to be: you are the master of your own destiny, you have to make it alone, you are the only one, it is the imperative “be yourself” (B.U.?). “The expression individualism includes the most heterogeneous things imaginable”³ whilst it is used to justify our past, present, and future as well as our actions, behaviors, all our economic and political measures, and even our birth and death.

For my purposes it is less important for us to see how this state of affairs came into being from the perspective of the history of ideas or, to say it differently, *via* ideologies (even “scientific” ones). If we refer to the naturalization of the religious space,⁴ or to the destruction of pre-modern social harmony in the course of privileging of the private space,⁵ these are, in the best case good accounts of what humanity has become, but they lack any explanatory insights. Unfortunately, too many approaches prove the “anthropological sleep” of their authors and their inability to go beyond the fashionable psychologism and sociologism (or even intellectualism). It does not matter if we stress the changes in the ideatic, social or natural domain, our approach would remains unilateral. None of these three entities alone are sufficient to explain what means to be human. If we nuance the homogenizing sociological view, and dissociate the social and cultural realm, Maslow’s claim proves its veracity: “culture is only a necessary cause of human

³ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, second edition, Routledge, 2001, note 22, p. 122.

⁴ Louis Dumont, *Eseu asupra individualismului* (Essays on individualism), CEU Press/Anastasia, 1997. The author considers the modern mundane individualism (individual-in-the-world) as the successor of the Christian individual-outside-the-world.

⁵ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994. It is less probable there was a time when sexual relations were totally free of any socially regulation (some rules or norms) unless the term society would be used in a very peculiar sense. And this state of affairs would universally produce some sort of division between public and private bodily domains. See H.-P. Duerr, *Intimität*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1990.

nature, not a sufficient cause. But so also is our biology only a necessary... and not a sufficient cause...”⁶

The history of ideas is both instructive and extremely limited – because it lacks feedback from the other constituents of human reality. This approach usually considers that changes are in the realm of ideas without any transformation of social relations. These ideas are considered to shape by themselves these social relations. Although the ideas can transcend their own temporality, because there is a grade of autonomy in the ideatic world, they develop a strong interrelatedness with the social and material realm. The problem with the “ideo-logical” analysis is that it is restricted by the imagination ability to interrelate with rest of the reality. The ideatic entities can create new realities, or can be just self-sufficient paintings of never-being possibilities. Information is *about, for* or *a* reality. Human being is information, but also social interaction and biological organization. This threefold complex makes up the human individual. Therefore, for understanding what individualism is, we have to simultaneously address to all three components of individuality. But if we take into account our present situation, this project is very difficult, because the social dimension has subordinated the others, contaminated our understanding, and claims to cover by itself the entire definition of the human being.

In order to comprehend individualism we have to begin with the question: What does it mean to be human? If we give up to our phony hubris and adhere to Occam’s razor, we’ll discover that human beings are not so unnatural or special as we want to believe. Like any other organism, one of the prime activities and goals is adaptation. Under this perspective, the human individual is nothing but a being that adapts to its environment the best it can (more so in regards to the natural environment, because it is an active adaptation). But it is a being which functions well on all three human environments: natural, social and cultural; and each environment can overrun and dominates the others realms. The tendency towards biological/physical comfort which, in modern society, changed into search for wealth, subordinated the other modes to the verb TO OWN; the tendency to psychic comfort manifest itself in the freedom TO BE, which takes the shape exerting power (a process which has had its cultural dimension opened up for us through the Nietzsche’s formulation, Will to Power); and avoidance of the fear of the unknown has been addressed by means of the adaptation to the cultural-informational and politically secure environment, gives us the propensity TO

⁶ Abraham Maslow, *The further reaches of human nature*, The Viking Press, New York, 1971, p. 156.

KNOW. These features make humans no different from any other living being. The difference is only ecological, assured by its special (socio-technical) environment *fostered by itself*. The man built culture as its habitat. This medium became vital, more than the natural one, as in the case of others beings. This fact is usually omitted. The modern individual is no longer forced to “survive” in the natural environment, but rather in the social one (and more and more in the informational medium). Finding one’s way in society has become much more important than surviving in nature. That is why the distinction, given by the Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga, as a hallmark of humanities’ true existence still proves today its entire truth, in an unexpected way. Blaga said that man is an amphibious being that lives both, in the *immediate* and for *preservation* (like any other animal) and into *mystery* and for *revealing*. Sadly, modern man is so busy living in this eventful environment, which is society, that he has forgotten his dependence on the Others. From this perspective we can say that people have only evolved from *animalitas* to *societas*, but in no way have they reached *humanitas*. In our world people are only concerned with finding and preserving their places in Society, but not in the Cosmos, because we have lost the holistic view of Reality. Modern man has reduced the Cosmos to the Society (conceived ecologically). And paradoxically, we are so engaged with the task of surviving in society, that we no longer find the time to socialize! And this is the first explanatory insight of the unparalleled emergence of individualism in our contemporary world.

At the same time, we never talk about individualism within nature although we admit the individual exists in this context. This also proves that individualism results from an over-socialization upshot. The modern times can be characterized, as in fact it already was, as the Age of the mob. Individualism is the natural result of such democratization, of such a *mob*-ized reality, the reaction of the inner “immune system of the being”, of the human beings. It is the manner in which the being reacts to this “disequilibrium” that emerged within the non-generic unity of man. The individualism became our way of being, and, hence, we are compel to use its lens to evaluate our present state, and from voilà the explanation of our so-often celebrated individualism in our days.

The old ones lived disavowing the value of individual, the supreme value being the society as a whole (i.e. a generality). Gradually the individualism and individual imposed themselves upon European culture: first, “in the version of the hero (maybe the philosopher/sophist) in ancient Greece, and then later in the Christian person, then finally the model of the free person from modern European

culture.”⁷ Now, the supreme value is the individual – but, under outlandish circumstances, the rejection of the individual’s substance as well.

The contemporary individualism maintains so many logical problems that we must be extremely suspicious about its precepts. Inconsistencies at every level of reality testify this. The *social paradox of individualism* (post-individualism): “In the society of individualists one has to shuttle and negotiate all the time with the other individualists in order to actualize oneself. So, the more individualists, the more difficult it may be to actualize oneself. Sharply, the society of individualists may mean paradoxically the collapse of individualism.”⁸ The *economic (quantitative) paradox of individualism*: individualism is a paradox because all of us try to be individuals in the same way and this result in homogenization of human reality. The *political paradox of individualism* is that “it can only work when it works in a collective manner for the common good.”⁹ The *theoretical paradox of individualism*: in order to work as a whole, all individual closed systems need to be re-adjusted by a sort of “pre-established harmony”.¹⁰ The *epistemological paradox of individualism*: individualism appeared at the social level at the same time as increasing use of statistics in analysis. Even “strong individualism”¹¹ is annihilated by statistical analysis at the social level. People have become statistics while simultaneously we see the unprecedented spread of individualism.

This “haunting of individualism by its opposite side” is not the result of the permanence of more or less general pre-modern elements, which “have survived”

⁷ Constantin Noica, *Sase maladii ale spiritului contemporan* (Six Maladies of the Contemporary Spirit), Humanitas, Bucharest, 1997, p. 110.

⁸ Sari Näre, “Visual Harassment, Intimized Culture and Sexualization of Public Space,” retrieved from <http://www.gap.lt/main.php?id/605/lang/1>, on December 14, 2010.

⁹ Interview of Andrew Denton with SIR BOB GELDOF, in the TY show “Enough Rope” at ABC TV, screened on Monday, 11 April 2005, 9.30 p.m. “We work on the basis of individualism, our society. The Africans work on a collective society, which is why we’ve always had this disconnect. We’ve imposed ideas on them coming from an idea of individuals that can’t possibly work. And we’ve never listened or looked at the way they actually achieved their society. But the paradox of individualism, without being too boring, is that it can only work when it works in a collective manner for the common good. That’s how individualism works, and that’s how, when you ask what can the individual do, working in a collective manner towards the common good, you will succeed in changing things.” Retrieved from <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/enoughrope/transcripts/s1343226.htm>, on January 21, 2011.

¹⁰ Like in Leibniz’s *Monadology* the independent development and cohabitation of totally autonomous individuals is impossible unless a common original pattern of their development is presumed.

¹¹ That version of individualism which claims that the individual is the only reality and the results on social level is given by the sum of individual actions, a doctrine which deny the social determinism.

and which determine the individualist values which are subtly mingled with their contrasts (opposites, antithesis).¹² The emergence and effects of contemporary individualism can be explained by the time lapse that was experienced by the contemporary systems of social organization in their path to the crystallization into autonomous entities. The contemporary individual is acutely aware of this unprecedented fact, because for the (individual's) history all of these organizations are systems and the system and the individual are at odds. He can only be and make sense of the world as an individual by paralleling the three aforementioned plans: the biological, the social and the informational. But each of these systems had developed too much and now they are in turn overwhelming the individual.

Despite all this, via the process of “status quo’s valorization”, our epoch sustains not only the *inevitability*, but also the *desirability* of individualism, through the creation of a *self-laudatory structure*. I dare to say that is a natural process of justification of the existing reality; part of the “natural” mechanism of any society that needs to re-adjust its own founding narrative in terms of the existing reality. But “individualism, far from being a great constructive revelation, a positive substantial contribution to the development of ideas and mentalities, should be seen as the manifestation of a crisis, as the necessity to justify a series of not at all enthusiastic human realities, such as *hate* as the main constituent of life and human relationships – *solitude*, and *selfishness*, the naturalness of *egoism*, things less flattering for the modern individual, things which him was, of course, obliged to integrate them into a metaphysical conception or a magnificent vision to confer them more respectability, and to confer them an importance in the modern thinking.”¹³ This led to a more or less aware “manipulation” of the foundational narrative of the social system. In just the same way as individualism came to be explained as one of the important achievements, a necessary step on the road to progress, into which, sooner or later, human kind had to evolve.¹⁴ From the need for the justification of social structures (i.e. a justification of their negative consequences) an extremely west-centered re-interpretation of social and human history (and the present reality) appeared. This is how the modern myths of Natural Economy and Social Contract came into being.

¹² Louis Dumont, “Preface” on Karl Polanyi, *La Grande Transformation*, Gallimard, Paris, 1983.

¹³ Adrian-Paul Iliescu, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Otherwise, the individualism seems to be a mandatory step on the dialectical progress of human species toward the collective consciousness (mind, brain). See, for example, Howard Bloom, *Global Brain: The Evolution of Mass Mind from the Big Bang to the 21st Century*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, 2000 or even G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, J. B. Baillie (trans.), Harper & Row, London, 1967.

In spite of all historical/sociological counterevidence, the idea of a natural economy, which comprises the modern ideas of market and free change, is broadly avowed. But modern economy emerged in parallel with politics, in a system that was founded later, inside of what we call society and on the basis of state structures. This two are interdependent because the economic reproduction of the system is impossible without a “state” which provides its security and ensure its fluxes. This concept is a normative and speculative modern invention, which intends to legitimize and justify the economic practices of liberal capitalism. The traditional economy seems to have been based upon an intricate combination of accumulation and forms of symbolic ritualized destruction of goods (the potlatch). This “natural” feature is absent in the discourse and economic practices of modern capitalism. The elimination of the symbolic constituent determined, on the one hand, the immense capital accumulation in modern economies and, on the other hand, the alienation of the subjects involved in the process. The symbolic constituent had precisely the role of preventing the detachment and instrumentation of the object as alien(ated).¹⁵ The sheer alienation of the object occurs alongside the alienation of the subject who put it as such.

Moreover, the constant application of the individualist principle (i.e. liberalism) imposed the social security regulations that brought us to contemporary post-liberalism. This was not *introduced*, but *forced* into acceptance. This complex dialectic was triggered by the very application of individualist values. Social measures were the effect of the liberal (individualist) principle.¹⁶ But when a journalist identifies the welfare state as “the true cause” of the New Orleans hurricane disaster, we can see how deeply rooted can be the belief in the redeeming-qualities of individualism: everything that does not function is attributed precisely to the lack of “blessed” individualist attitude.¹⁷ What is missed

¹⁵ And so we encounter another paradox: the subordination of activity to accumulation for spending was ultimately justified through the freedom from subordination for the (basic) needs. But, it was just a tricky solution, a new (form, of an ancient) subordination appeared, that for spending. To put it in other words: “People provide for themselves all that is necessary to live and they strive to avoid suffering not because these functions would be a sufficient result in themselves, but in order to accede to the sovereign function of free spending.” George Bataille, *Partea blestemată* (The Accursed Share), Institutul European, Iași, 1995, p. 208.

¹⁶ See Karl Polanyi, *La Grande Transformation*, Gallimard, Paris, 1983.

¹⁷ “But this is not a natural disaster. It is a man-made disaster. (...) The man-made disaster is not an inadequate or incompetent response by federal relief agencies, and it was not directly caused by Hurricane Katrina. (...) This is where just about every newspaper and television channel has gotten the story wrong. (...) The man-made disaster we are now witnessing in New Orleans did not happen over four days last week. It happened over the past four decades. Hurricane Katrina merely exposed it to public view. (...) *The man-made disaster is the welfare state.* (...) People living in piles of their own trash, while petulantly complaining that other people aren’t doing enough to take

here is that the individualistic attitude is nonsense without a safe and well-conditioned social medium, or “the armor of civilized conduct would crumble very rapidly if, through a change in society, the degree of insecurity that existed earlier were to break in upon us again, and if danger became as incalculable as it once was.”¹⁸ Furthermore, even individualism is nothing without a presumed built environment. Individualism supposes a civilized Other which makes its own existence possible. “...Individualism only makes sense when there is a surrounding civilization to relate to.”¹⁹

A similar phenomenon is present at the level of political organization. Here, the ideology of individualism proves to be just as pernicious and ungrounded, as it is in the previous case. The analysis of Social Contract’s theories, for example, which purportedly grounds the legitimacy of the State (and of the democratic organization, as well), leads us to paradoxes. No matter the version, every Social Contract melds people who are individuals in the political body. First, they assume a “natural” existence of individuals: free and untied by any social bonds, an impossible state. Next, this power and autonomy is “voluntarily” snatched them away, and their individuality is destroyed inside the social contract. On individual’s level, a sort of mechanism of psychologically defense emerges, a sort filter for understanding which protects their agency and uniqueness, from the obvious fact that entering the contract decimates their individuality. This contract is depicted as the only necessary and reasonable thing precisely because it has to legitimize the present state of things.²⁰ It left us with a society which has lost its non-human (outside-world) countermeasure because... “The people must be free”? Not, but because that such a contract is perfectly suited to convince people that there is nothing that can stop capital’s expansion or slow the production and consumption, in other terms, he same old poem of justifying the existing state of affair. This is more noticeable in the modern paradigm of Natural Rights when one compares it with the Ancient one. “For the Ancient people, except for the stoics,

care of them and then shooting at those who come to rescue them – this is not just a description of the chaos at the Superdome. It is a perfect summary of the 40-year history of the welfare state and its public housing projects. (...) The welfare state – and the brutish, uncivilized mentality it sustains and encourages – is the man-made disaster that explains the moral ugliness that has swamped New Orleans.” Robert Tracinski, “An Unnatural Disaster: A Hurricane Exposes the Man-Made Disaster of the Welfare State,” *The Intellectual Activist*, Sep 02, 2005.

¹⁸ N. Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

¹⁹ Bill Boushka, “The rise of individualism,” 2001, retrieved from <http://doaskdotell.com/content/indiv.htm>, on June 10, 2010.

²⁰ See also, James M. Buchanan, *The Limits of Liberty: Between Anarchy and Leviathan*, Central European University Press, 1996.

the human is a social being, nature is order, and what is to be retained is that, beyond the conventions of every particular *polis*, the natural or ideal foundation of the right is a social order *in accordance with* the order of the nature (and consequently with the inherent human qualities).)²¹ The modern Natural Rights theory, in contrast with the former one, points only towards individuals (i.e. self-sufficient people, autonomous beings, depending on no social or political bond). With this clause when we weigh the options considering the *de facto* theory that the “state of nature” is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short”²² and the lone salvation, the unique *rational solution* envisaged, is the Contract, we are finally convinced (but it can be shown Hobbes was wrong). In order to enter under the contract, the individual has to give up some of his prerogatives and liberties. Through obedience he gains comfort and security and ensures the development of his own potentialities within society. So, in the paradigm of Social Contract theory individualism actually transforms into its opposite: the powerful individual in the State of Nature is compelled to self-destruction (as independent individual) within the State, in the name of his own preservation. *This is the inconsistent story that the tribunes of vulgate liberalism are expecting us to believe!*

Today we witnessing to a number of autonomous auto-poetic systems that share(d) and rule(d) the human world. Society as an organic whole was divided by these systems, built by man for his “own good”. The systems have changed into autonomous realities, structuring structures which are self-perpetuating; following their own self-defined goals independent of the individuals who put them into motion. This proves that the theory aims to a partial goodness (an instrumental one) and not to an integral good (The Good as such) that would benefit all humanity. In my view this is the moment when people start to lose their sense of intimacy with nature due to the growing importance of the social and cultural realms. One proof comes from observing how the legal theories gradually changed their interpretation of society from *universitas* (organic unity, corporate) to *societas* (association, partnership); a transformation which began in the Middle Age.²³ “As individualism replaced holism, the social thus conceived was replaced by the legal, the political, and later the economic.”²⁴ This process of individualization not only impinges on the lives of humans settled within the atomized society, but it generates an individualization of some systems within the

²¹ L. Dumont, *Essays on individualism*, 1997, *ed. cit.*, p. 94 esq.

²² Thomas Hobbes, “Chapter XIII,” in *The Leviathan*.

²³ See Otto Gierke, *Natural Law and the Theory of Society, 1500 to 1800 with a lecture by Ernest Troeltsch*, Cambridge, 1934.

²⁴ Louis Dumont, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

society. Specialization is one of the main outcomes of individualization, and one of its ongoing sources. The political (and/or administrative), economic (and/or financial), legal, informational (and/or cultural) systems are each individualized (i.e. therefore having a high degree of autonomy) inside of what we call now “society” when it is actually the case that each of these systems are interconnected. So, this passage from holism to individualism encompasses:

1. Ideological changes including the shift from the supremacy of society which overcomes the individual to the valorization of “autonomous and independent human being” which, it is claimed, precedes the social wholeness.

2. An altered inner structure of society which began as an integrated whole and gradually changes in an assemblage of autonomous interrelated structures. And, as we will see:

3. The breaking of the unity of human reality because, on the one hand, the reality splits into self-directed systems (i.e. nature, society and culture are conceived as disconnected from one another), and, on the other hand, because the individual reality and its determination doesn’t fit with the coveted general.

In this paper I am not as interested in the epistemological or explanatory value of the auto-poetic systems theory, but only in its descriptive significance and as depiction of a self-perpetuating organized system.²⁵ Contemporary society consists of a variety of systems, as the political (and legal) system or the economic (and financial) system. Every system gets feedback when something isn’t working, and corrects itself, so it is totally self-sufficient in its operation: each part of the system feeds into the next, so that rules can be set, any malfunction is corrected and so it could accomplish its function (or goals, almost) no matter what external conditions are, because it also has a process for updating the rules as conditions change, and so the system perpetuates itself. Just think of our not so basic needs, as consumerism creates them, of the administrative organization, where the bureaucracy leaves us without a trace of power over the system, or of communication, where the inflation of alternative discourses weakens our own narrative of the personal identity (and the only alternative left is cynical self-perception).²⁶ The effects of this situation on individuals are obvious. System’s

²⁵ For a brief but competent presentation of Luhmann’s theory see Alex Viskovatoff, “Foundations of Niklas Luhmann’s Theory of Social Systems,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, Dec 1999, Vol. 29, Issue 4, p. 481, 36p. For some objections on his theory see Jürgen Habermas, “Excursus on Luhmann’s Appropriation of the Philosophy of the Subject through Systems Theory,” pp. 368-85, in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.

²⁶ The last form of the false consciousness after lie, error, and ideology.

autonomy and overgrowth brings specialization, and specialization brings alienation.

The (myth of) individualism is more embraced nowadays than ever. As we have seen, it is the manifestation of a European Spirit (equally culture and civilization) stimulated by a very impersonal state of affairs: the inner necessities of various systems that we set up to preserve our biological, political and ideatic being.²⁷ The “individualistic slogan”: I am solely responsible for my own destiny and I shouldn’t rely on others because is a sign of weakness forgets that an individual is not merely born, but she/he is developed within a society of beings who belong to the same species. We developed such a complex socio-technological system for preserving order that none of us (who are fully integrated in a modern social group) needs to deal with natural necessities on our own anymore.²⁸ We are paradoxically compelled to live as separate individuals and yet are fully dependent on others for our existence (shelter, food, clothing, everything). The ancient truth, that all life is interrelated, became more and more obvious, ironically, with the increasing degree of individualism. We are witnesses to how modern Europeans (re)discover the Buddhist concept of “dependent origination” which holds that nothing exists in isolation, independent of other, that all beings and phenomena exist or occur only because of their relationship with other beings or phenomena. On a conceptual level, Alfred North Whitehead identified this epistemological individualism under the name of “fallacy of misplaced concreteness”. This epistemological error means to break the original continuity of existence up by instantiating distinctions which disregard the real interconnections of the things. This vision was induced by the ongoing reality of individualism in the very core of human understanding, and now the edge sciences (from natural to human sciences) should fight to escape from this paradigm.

Another reflection on European individualism reveals its cultural self-perception in contrast with other cultures. Studies suggest that the shame is not only one of the main emotions, but it plays the role of a key emotion in all

²⁷ Here my position meets, from a different angle, the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, most notably, his notes compiled under the heading *Will to Power*. If we read his writings with a more open concept of culture in mind, we find that he described these processes very accurate in particular the questions of necessity, hypocrisy, truth and lies and lent special insight into these problems.

²⁸ When I say technological I am referring also at the juridical, administrative, and moral technologies and not just to the engineering ones as such.

societies, both traditional and modern.²⁹ At the same time, it is obvious that shame is not in fashion today in western culture. A self-confident person – the prototype for the successful man – can be anything but shameless, because to be ashamed is a weakness – which states that you can be driven by others, that you could be manipulated. On the other hand, guilt *looks like* something that is under your own control, something more or less deliberate, making it an individual decision. The binary of guilt/shame manifested itself as the opposition between Western and the others culture. It is claimed that the difference between shame-culture and guilt-culture gives favor to the former, where the self-restraint as an individual matter assures real moral justice, unlike the latter where social justice (based on prejudice of the other) prevails with a prejudice towards the true.³⁰ In this trend of psychoanalysis, shame was considered a regressive emotion, characteristic for children, women and primitives, while the guilt (and anxiety) is the appropriate emotion for responsible adults.³¹ The argument here is, since the guilt-culture functions with regards to responsible people, it must be the right one, while the shame-culture is where the people are kept moral by the “social eye”, a society formed by unreliable persons. But here the “anthropological sleep” makes the difference. We have here some tricky reasoning. First the shame is taken only in its behavioral component, the shame of others, whilst the guilt is taken in the inner moral register. This is totally wrong. Shame has the same inner component too. Even responsibility implies, in the end, a reference to others. As Helen Lynd explains, guilt is most obvious because it is more specific and related to whether the acts may be done or not.³² Guilt is about one’s actions. Shame is about what someone is. Guilt involves the unity and inalterability of the ego: it is powerful and inherent to doing anything. Guilt is a self-centered individualist emotion (at least as it is thought), while shame is social-related one. Unfortunately, Lind’s analysis is only an exception.

However, most of the orthodox concept of psychoanalysis and sociology used for explaining the social compliance and resonance between individuals are clearly shame based ideas, although not in an explicit manner. In contrast, “rational” responsibility is a biased scientific concept, the outcome of

²⁹ Helen B. Lewis, *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, International University Press, New York, 1971; Silvan S. Tomkins, *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (Volume 2): *The Negative Affects*, Springer, New York, 1963; N. Elias, *op. cit.*

³⁰ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1951.

³¹ See a good comparative analysis on Thomas J. Scheff, “Shame and the Social Bond: A Sociological Theory,” *Sociological Theory*, 200, 18, pp. 86-99.

³² Helen M. Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity*, Science Editions, New York, 1961.

metaphysical definition of man as a rational being.³³ I wonder how this responsibility functions on social level; how it is possible to have social harmony if these individual responsibilities do not resonate with others.³⁴ With the absence of any externally revered criteria (and feed-back) self-responsibility can change and be understood by the individual in a different and even abnormal way. What is responsible behavior is judged and continuously negotiated in day-to-day interactions with the others. So, the “archaic” instance “shame” *triggers, orients, and fosters* such a responsibility.³⁵ A totally autonomous individual responsibility, a shameless responsibility, is nonsense; nothing but the utopian outcome of presupposed individualist conceptions. Moreover, guilt as self-responsibility is nothing when its tenets lose their sense. This problem is opened up in radical new ways through the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, *A Genealogy of Morals*. People are lost when responsibility ceases to be the responsibility to the other and it is replaced by the responsibility in front of Law, or citizenship duties. This possibility is strengthened by another individualistic phenomenon, social specialization: a splitting of social actions into autonomous branches (i.e. professional’s activities.). What is responsible action from medical, juridical, warlike, or economic points of view is different than human responsibility. Its moral dimension is lost and the guilt becomes conventional cynical reasoning. In this case, a guilt-culture is a social formation, ossified and turned in to convention; a culture where “a certain degree of porosity also arose, which was unknown to the forms of social control in «archaic» times and which gave people opportunities for freedom which they had never had before.”³⁶ When the association is made with so many others, the social bonds, which are more or less tied together, implies a “relational freedom.” But, at the same time, because violation of social norms and deviance are “less consequential; the person concerned does not lose the face, but one of their faces.”³⁷ So, the individual is not concerned with preserving the integrity of its person but only its image of itself; just as part of its person.³⁸ This is worse than the shame-culture’s presumed compliance, where the socially driven

³³ To be responsible only for rational reasons supposes the ability of common people to judge the social reality from a holistic perspective otherwise this is not the common viewpoint at all.

³⁴ See the aforementioned theoretical paradox of individualism.

³⁵ I think if the researcher tried harder to conceptualize this concept and instead of working on the assumption that everybody knows its meaning or it is self-explanatory, then he would discover its basic position in relation with the guilt.

³⁶ H.-P. Duerr, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁷ H.-P. Duerr, *Obszönität und Gewalt*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1993, p. 28.

³⁸ See our study on “Gobalized person,” in Bouduris K. (ed.), *The Philosophy of Culture*, Vol. II, Ionia Publications, Athens, 2006, pp. 162-176.

shame affects the entire person, because the individual's identity is itself broken and it can avoid the compunction. That guilt is related with a part of its person or behavior so to the "honesty" and the wholeness of the individual is "saved". The modern condition, "man as pretender", allows us to be anybody, and therefore nobody, because the liberty to be a hypocrite is not freedom. Social liberty, as we will see, is just a part of the freedom we desire, meaningless in the absence of a proper general. The human individuality needs both suitable determination and a general reality to submit in order to be fulfilled. This point is missed when we analyze the issue blinded by the fancy ideological trend to "defend the freedom with all costs" and see the difference between two types of social establishment merely in terms of control.

What happened to shame in western cultures? There is less shame, because shame has been replaced by guilt³⁹ or there has been an increase in concealed shame⁴⁰ (albeit covered by one of its quasi-individualistic form, guilt)? It seems that shame was programmatically ignored and denied, because it had to gone underground in European culture. Why it was concealed? Because the rationalization impedes the development of its function.⁴¹ Shame, as social-oriented conduct, i.e. external criteria), would oppose the efficiency of rationalization. If you try to represent the evolution of the image of the man according with that of Christian God, we can notice an evolution from the ruthless Old Testament's God, concordat with the basic human compulsions that required to be mastered, the merciful, loving and tolerant closer (Son of the) God of the New Testament, tallied with the necessity to handle peacefully within the increasing of interpersonal relations and dependence, and finally, the irrational (impossible to be understand by men) God of the Reform which decreed "before the foundation of the world was laid" that some men "are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others foreordained to everlasting death."⁴² As it results from

³⁹ Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Houghton-Mifflin, New York, 1946.

⁴⁰ N. Elias, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ The rationalization process ("Zweckrationalität") is the practical application of knowledge to achieve a desired end. An end depleted by any kind of values other than domination and control. Product of "scientific specialization and technical differentiation" it leads to efficiency, coordination, and control over both the physical and the social environment, to the prejudice of depersonalization, oppressive routine, rising secularism, as well as being destructive of individual freedom. (See Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber*, Vintage Books, New York, 1968). On individual level, it set up super-structural norms and values such as individualism, efficiency, self-discipline, materialism, and calculability. To not talk about hyper-rationality which fusions the rationality of company with what people want in life, e.g. their own goals, their personal stance towards work and living, etc.

⁴² The Westminster Confession of 1647, in Max Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Brentano –Weber polemics, it was “a rationalization toward an irrational mode of life,”⁴³ and it represented the birth of ultimate European individualism. It was written that people are doomed to loneliness and have to handle by themselves in the “salvation of the soul” affair.⁴⁴ This sentence represents the religious-ethical legitimacy of the private interest and personal goals to the prejudice of the others; the astonishing overturn of the meaning and an unforeseen conception over the common good which, from now on, will not be necessary based on the common conscious efforts toward it, but it will result “naturally” from the balanced of opposite individual actions. “What justifies the belated moment when the consequences of Reform’s doctrines surfaced is the capitalism’s character itself, (and is) difficult to defend *from the beginning*.⁴⁵ And so, in the modern societies, the nature of interdependence and of shame, are both denied and repressed. “The cult of individualism in Western societies suppresses the reality of human interdependence, as Elias argued with his idea of *homo clausus*, and his findings on the advance of the shame threshold and the decreasing awareness of shame suggests, modern societies repress the emotion of shame.”⁴⁶ But, the lack of awareness, even it is unacknowledged, undifferentiated or bypassed shame⁴⁷ is not an evidence of its being missing in modern European society, as it has been camouflaged behind the so eulogized responsibility feeling of guilt. How could guilt put to silence the obvious function of shame in social control? As a tool for discipline the workers used by management⁴⁸ or it is intimately intertwining with the social-economic dependence?⁴⁹ Or maybe only for defending our purely professed responsible guilt-culture, in order to conceal the real social mechanism of political and economical domination and our purposeless modern lives.

Nevertheless, the prevalence of shame is proved by the present turning point in social sciences. After a long period of resistance to all sorts of official

⁴³ Of course, with respect to its particular basic values any way of ordering the things or lives is a rationalization. Because, “a thing is never irrational in itself, but only from a particular rational point of view.” (*Ibidem*, note 9).

⁴⁴ “He [the knowing man] is blind in no man’s cause, but best sighted in his own. He confines himself to the circle of his own affairs and thrusts not his fingers into needless fires. He sees the falseness of it [the world] and therefore learns to trust himself ever, others so far as not to be damaged by their disappointment” is the philosophy of Thomas Adams (*Works of the Puritan Divines*, p. 11) (quoted in *ibidem*, note 25).

⁴⁵ George Bataille, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

⁴⁶ Thomas J. Scheff, “Unpacking the Civilizing Process: Interdependence and Shame,” in Thomas Salumets, *Norbert Elias and human interdependencies*, McGill-Queen’s Press - MQUP, 2001, p. 114.

⁴⁷ See Helen B. Lewis, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Richard Sennett, *Authority*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1980, pp. 92-97.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 45-49.

eradication from science and public discourse we are witnesses to their rehabilitation. On psychological level, this was translated as the conversion from the end of the nineteenth century authoritarian Superego-dominated personality type – with the main tension being the balance between external constraints and Superego-restraints – to the twentieth century “Ego”- dominated personality type – where the “Superego-Ego” balance prevails. “It is the twentieth-century phase in which the overall emancipation and integration of «lower» social groups in (western) society allows for, and soon demands, the emancipation and integration of «lower» impulses and emotions in personality.”⁵⁰ The individualist meta-value could not be accommodated too long within any superstructure, as the Super-Ego was (even if self-imposed). We now bear witness to a cyclical inversion from a guilt-culture to a shame-culture. “Guilt feelings came to be experienced more strongly as is indicative of a conscience-ridden personality make-up and, therefore, as an anxiety to be mastered. They came to be seen as a symbol and a symptom of an authoritative and rather automatic functioning conscience. In comparison, shame feelings refer more directly to other people, to external constraints, and in addition also to the fact that one’s conscience is at least partly in agreement with these others. From this perspective it becomes understandable why the shift from a Superego-dominated personality in the direction of an Ego-dominated personality coincided with a decline in the status of guilt, both as a feeling and as a concept, or, to use this shorthand expression, why it coincided with a shift from guilt to shame.”⁵¹

As we can see, this approach is limited by the bifurcated inside/outside dichotomy encountered by most sociological or psychological approaches. A more elastic conception of human being is necessary to get beyond it. As Nikolas Rose

⁵⁰ Cas Wouters, “On the Sociogenesis of a «Third Nature» in the Civilizing of Emotions: Developments in Dealing with Strangers and «Strangeness» and with Feelings of Superiority and Inferiority,” retrieved from <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/social/elias/confpap.html>, on June 18, 2009. See also from the same author “The Integration of Social Classes”, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 29, 1995, pp. 107-124, and “The Integration of the Sexes,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 29, 1995, pp. 325-34, Hans-Peter Waldhoff, “Strangers and Civilising Processes: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge on Overcoming Feelings of Foreignness” (*Fremde und Zivilisierung. Wissensoziologische Studien über der Verarbeiten von Gefühlen der Fremdheit*), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a/M, 1995. Obviously, there must be a difference between the two types of shame mechanism, the contemporary one being more autonomous and... individualistic.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*. Of course, the “evolutionary” creed couldn’t be avoided and this movement is not a proper reverse. The modern shame is an “updated” one. “It would be absurd, however, to equate the pattern of shame in what has been described as shame-cultures with the pattern of shame in informalized societies. Therefore, the term reversal is misleading.” (*Ibidem*) I think that this is the utmost wager of modern society’s individualism: it will be able to coin individuals with self-responsible Ego, which don’t require surveillance from a Supra-Ego, or it will disappear.

suggested researchers should think about the subject differently and not as a stable entity which develops and changes over time. We should reflect on “the practices within which, in our own times and in the past, human beings have been made up as subjects: the presuppositions about human beings that have underpinned them, the languages, techniques, procedures and forms of judgment through which human beings have come to understand and act upon themselves as «selves» of a certain type.”⁵² The human subjectivity (or *habitus* as sociologists prefer to name it) seems to be more “a site of a multiplicity of practices or labors”; it is not as a personality structure with a given form, but more a “discontinuous surface, a multiplicity of spaces, cavities, relations, divisions established through a kind of in-folding of exteriority.”⁵³ In this manner, following an extended version of *homo faber* conceptions, we could encompass its intellectual, practical – social and material – instruments used by him to foster and shape ways of “being human”, for defining itself in its proper three-fold environment. The humans did no change, they remained the same full potential beings: striving for an ideal (no matter what), fighting to the death for their values (no matter how), and following their shared aim (no matter where). Their environment is changing (and it is changed mostly by them!) This is an explanation for such incongruous human behaviors. How is possible for them to declare their adherence to the same values and act as if they would be opposed? Or contrary, how is possible for such sober-minded being to kill each other or let themselves to be killed in the name of such *flatus vocis*?

Let us move on now to the consequences of this situation on the individual level. In spite of the willing collective delusions about its value, individualism in Western culture may be understood as a personality disorder. We can realize this only if we give up to psychoanalysis’ filter fostered by Western culture. This is difficult because our understanding of reality is determined, at its fundamental level by this filter, as it was already pointed out. The psychoanalytic theory has obstructed this view for a long time for a very simple reason: it adopted the Western historical/cultural perspective. Psychoanalysis was one of the great scientific lies of modern times and an epistemological proof that a very popular approach could be biased from the beginning. This bias happens when in an analysis something which is naively empirical is believed that it can be totally objective, i.e. when “reality” (the appearance of the experience) is taken for granted. In Kantian terms, the phenomenon is taken as thing in itself. In that case it

⁵² Nikolas Rose, “Authority and the genealogy of subjectivity,” in P. Heelas, S. Lash and P. Morris (eds.), *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1996, p. 296.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 300.

borrows from the surrounding immediate reality some temporary constant traits and claims that they are definable for the subject. This is what happened with psychoanalysis. It takes the “times’ tendencies” of people caused by the deep changes in its (social) environment and considered them to be constitutive and defining for human being from any time and spaces. So it is not a surprise that it is impossible to isolate, among the dominant characteristics the individual self, any references to components of relationships or interdependency.⁵⁴ Within psychoanalytic theories the self is self-contained, self-reliant and independent, standing out of the group, egocentric, a centralized equilibrium structure, selfish and self-contained individualism and emptiness. The Western psychoanalysis scrutiny is right because *in cross-cultural comparison*, the Western self is characterized as individualistic, rationalistic, monotheistic, materialistic, and analytic.⁵⁵

In contemporary psychoanalytic theory individuality is the goal of personality development and the measure of health. Pathology is defined as developmental arrests in early childhood resulting in the *failure of individuation*. But, “healthy autonomy can become pathological individualism if the person does not progress toward healthy connectedness and interdependency.”⁵⁶ This fact becomes clear only in transpersonal psychology, where individuality, although not devalued, becomes one of the developmental stages of consciousness, and so it ceases to be the goal of personality development and the measure of adulthood/mental health because “it is followed by «higher» levels of consciousness and spirituality in the transpersonal realms.” Consequently, “individualism is the failure to develop beyond personal identity. It has the characteristics of a personality disorder in that it is arrested development. It takes many forms in our current culture ranging from individual narcissism to communal forms of narcissism, such as nationalism and fascism.

Interdependency, on the other hand, is the capacity to be a self in the context of another. It is the capacity for relatedness beyond individualism.”⁵⁷ How far is this profile from those required by economic and politic propaganda: the successful manager or politician. The experience of interconnectedness is crucial for the mental health of contemporary man (and for the future of the planet) while

⁵⁴ See Louis Schippers, “Individualism: a Personality Disorder,” *Re-vision*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 1994, pp. 24-28.

⁵⁵ See F. Johnson, “The western concept of the self,” in A. Marsella, G. DeVos and F. L. K. Hsu (eds.), *Culture and self: Asian and western perspectives*, Tavistock, London, 1985.

⁵⁶ Louis Schippers, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*. The author rightfully wonders whether we can say that a person who loves the world but cannot relate to his neighbor is the model of the most healthy, developed person.

the self-centered individual is just a dead-end in human development. Although, as it was already revealed, the striving for absolute individual freedom, the aim of totally self-created individuals, characteristic for the formalization process⁵⁸ was followed, in the twenty century, by the informalization process,⁵⁹ altogether with the discovery that all kinds of self-constraints could be, in fact, constraints imposed by others, or at least based upon something external.⁶⁰

In the end, let's see if this disequilibrium within the being of man, this "pathologic normality" of the modern people is not the materialization of a fundamental illness of Being, the symptoms of a more profound spiritual disorder. Individualism seems to be the irrefutable evidence of the precariousness of reality. The Being of the things or the Being of the beings in Heidegger's terms,⁶¹ the general Being can be ill in some of its versions. These maladies of the spirit are not accidental like somatic diseases, or contingently-necessary like psychical ones, but they are constitutional.⁶² And, unlike the former, they do not invalidate the being (whether it is the being of a thing, human or a social being), but sometimes they made possible the great works of human culture and civilization. As the Romanian philosopher C. Noica put it, the *fact of being* involves three hypostases: individual-determinations-general. Any entity that wants to become an *individual* being does this by means of *determinations* that are given to a *general* side from which it comes into being. The being is ill or phony when one of these terms is missing (or it is refused) or when, on the contrary, it is exacerbated in the detriment of the others. "The ontological triplet" is a constituent for any being that comes into existence. Any lack of balance, any discrepancy of the three moments determines a weakness of being. "From the perspective of a weak being, like the real one, the deficiency stems from the unsaturation of the ontological pattern, determined by

⁵⁸ The disciplinary phase, dominant until the end of nineteen century, that implies the removal of "dangerous" emotions and impulses from the social scene or from the individual conscious mind, through avoidance, repression and denial.

⁵⁹ The acceptance and integration of "lower" or "animalistic" impulses and emotions within personality structures with a further integration of lower classes within the social structure.

⁶⁰ Cas Wouters, "Formalization and Informalization; Changing Tension Balances in Civilizing Processes," *Theory, Culture & Society* 3(2), 1986, pp. 1-18 and "On the Sociogenesis of a «Third Nature» in the Civilizing of Emotions: Developments in Dealing with Strangers and «Strangeness» and with Feelings of Superiority and Inferiority," retrieved from <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/social/elias/confpap.html>, on June 18, 2009. Here, I'm not intended to criticize the author's pertinent theses on European's psychology transformations, but only to show the possible influences of the individualist overwhelming reality over the cultural (and why not, scientific) (self-)perception.

⁶¹ For Heidegger the Being of beings, or simply the Being, constitutes the ground and the condition for the possibility of any "entity" or being.

⁶² See Constantin Noica, *op. cit.*

the transgression of a constituent on the territory of the another, since the state of being cannot be obtained without putting the three terms together and articulating them.”⁶³

Individualism seems to be a common symptom to several disorders of the Being. With its key position within the contemporary structure of Being⁶⁴ It could spring from the power to give its own determinations or if because it fails to find the proper ones, it can result from the rejection of the general, or inability to find a proper one, or it can unexpectedly arise from an over-amplification of the individual reality. Let's expand this.

The individualism may accompany *catholita* (from the Greek τ καθόλου [kathoulou] - *general*), which is a result of man's obsession of growing into a viable form of universality, which was altered, in an epoch flooded with alternatives among he/she can choose freely in relation to the general's narcosis.⁶⁵ It is impossible from one who does not find its proper general(ity), or one who refuses it to be little more than individualistic. In fact, the obsessive tendency “to do” replaced any reflection about the action: to see if it makes sense or not, if it has any purpose or not. As Goethe put it: *everything that expands me is true*. “We accumulate facts like we would gather riches, under the hidden belief that accumulation may bring-into-being.”⁶⁶ The preset day propensity for the accumulation, in every form of it, e.g. material or knowledge accretion, the gathering technical or not-technical products and even creations or facts is just a way to conceal this malady. “I am rich in facts and creation, therefore I am.” The contemporary individual is overwhelmed by the pathological fear caused by the danger of realizing the vanity of the *chosen* general and that is the reason why he comes to reject any form of general (as can be noticed in the case of ideological criticism). At times the hubris acquires such dimensions that not only does it suffer from the lack of the general, it even refuses it, as it the case with *acatholism*. “Acatholism is the malady of the human slave who forgot the existence of a master, even that of inner one.”⁶⁷ Freedom is impossible in the absence of others,

⁶³ Emilia Guliciuc, *Aporile gândirii nicasiene* (Aporias of the Nicasian thought), Didactică și Pedagogică Publishing House, Bucharest, 1999, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Sorin Lavric, “Reabilitarea individului în filozofia lui Constantin Noica” (Rehabilitation of the Individual in the Philosophy of Constantin Noica), in M. Diaconu, A. Rezuș and S. Vieru (eds.) *Equivalences*, Bucharest, 2. 2003, retrieved from <http://www.equivalences.org/periodiques/arguments-2/sl-ri.pdf>, on November 8, 2010.

⁶⁵ “If is not really about the lack of general, it is maybe the lack of *other* general.” C. Noica, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 16.

they are presumed by it! But, moreover, the freedom is a general. It makes sense only when totality (unity in multiplicity) is involved and not merely the multiplicity alone. “Since the phases of the ethical system are the conception of freedom, they are the substance or universal essence of individuals. In relation to it, individuals are merely accidental. Whether the individual exists or not is a matter of indifference to the objective ethical order, which alone is steadfast. It is the power by which the life of individuals is ruled. It has been represented by nations as eternal justice, or as deities who are absolute, in contrast with whom the striving of individuals is an empty game, like the tossing of the sea.”⁶⁸

This is a malady of civilization: people have lost any sense of the general and thus the meaning of community (of living together). Look how accurately is described this process in Chinese culture: “Therefore, when the Tao is lost, remember that there is still goodness. When goodness is lost, there is still kindness. When kindness is lost, there is still the law. When the law is lost, there is still politeness.”⁶⁹ Politeness is the last solution left in a world of histrionic individualism, when the people are estranged by the technology. *Techné* imposes, at the same time, that sort of “engineering mentality” that sees even people as objects that could be calculated, manipulated, controlled or even you can make experiments on them. In Heidegger’s conception this is the danger of technology, the fact that it is a class of revealing: the way in which truth reveals itself as standing-reserve.⁷⁰ He calls this forms of revealing enframing (*ge-stell*). “Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon that sets man upon man, i.e., challenges him to bring forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve.”⁷¹ In this way, ourselves become standing reserve, because we are challenged to set upon all things, including ourselves, that they may be ready to be ordered about by humans. And “as soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve,

⁶⁸ G. W. F Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, J. W. Dyde (trans.), London, 1896, p. 156, § 145.

⁶⁹ I used John R. Mabry translation from *God, As Nature Sees God: A Christian Reading of the Tao Te Ching*, Element Books, 1994. It is very gainful to see how are interpreted different “dwindling” determinations that this general Tao could have after different English language translators of Chinese text of the *Tao Teh Ching*. There is such project “Tao Teh Ching - Line-by-Line Comparisons” that allows you to browse this book, chapter by chapter, and see 29 different translations in line-by line comparisons. Retrieved from <http://www.wayist.org/ttc%20compared/index.htm>, on November 8, 2010.

⁷⁰ The linkage between technology and revealing become more clear if we take into account that revealing contains all bringing forth, which is the essence of causality, and causality and control instrumentality are the fundamental aspects of technology.

⁷¹ Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1977, p. 20.

and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.”⁷² And because the revealing means in addition to bringing forth and destining, “the supreme danger”⁷³ to the freedom of humankind arises. It lies in the fact that the revealing to us of Enframing destines us into the process of Enframing, and hinders us to realize that other revealings are possible. (“Freedom is the realm of the destining that at any given time starts a revealing upon its way.”)⁷⁴ Ultimately the man loses even the awareness of its own capacity for revelation. And this is its end.

The individualism could also go together with *horetita* (from the Greek ὁπός [horos] – *determination*). The latter consists in a failure to find the appropriate determinations that would correspond on the one side to individual being and, on the other, to its aimed general. “The malady expresses the torture and exasperation of not being able to make it according to the personal thought.”⁷⁵ At personal level this illness results from the impossibility to have, for something general that receives an individual embodiment, appropriates determination. In its acute form it “accuse(s) a genial self-blindness, a hastening of determinations, a substitution of the real ones by the ones who are just possible, imaginary, artificial, with false fullness...”⁷⁶ In the present days, because of never seen before technical and social development, this illness suffered a mutation and changed into *ahoretita*. “It is totally different that you *want* to have determinations, like in *horetita*, and to *not receive* the appropriate ones, and to *refuse* them.”⁷⁷ If the overwhelming force of the general that transformed determinations and crushed the individual determined the ancient tragedy, the modern tragedy stems from “the chaotic freedom of determinations and their pulverization in the end.”⁷⁸ Things made possible by the technical, scientific and social revolutions allows anything to happen, opened the possibility of attributing the variable identity, or easily trespassing the class barriers in the social hierarchy. *Ahoretia* is the contemporary absurdity of the ocean of alternatives where nothing has any sense because anything could mean

⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 26-27.

⁷³ “The destiny of revealing is in itself not just any danger, but *the* danger. Yet when destining resigns in the mode of reframing, it is the supreme danger.” *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁷⁵ C. Noica, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 85.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 88.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 23.

everything, is “the malady that sends the human being into the sands of the deserts, or the young people under bridges, that is nowhere.”⁷⁹

More than anything else, contemporary individualism is the manifestation of the individual’s crisis: *todetia* (τόδε τι [tode ti] – individual reality). “To not have, for the determinations caught in something general, an individual reality. Manifestations can be organized in all kinds of orders, but they don’t really *are*. ”⁸⁰ That happens because the rational being is fostered by the modern conditions – an already gained knowledge – and is unable to find any proper individual which will fit with the rich determinations that are possible. The pure and magnificent general is beyond any particular reality. This is the way “logicians and linguists dislike natural languages, sociologists dislike history, ideologists dislike the civil society, geneticists don’t always like the real genetic codes and think to change both wheat and human varieties, while the cosmonauts could dislike even the Earth in the end. On all of them the reason becomes «rationalization», as the general always tried to bring in the world realities adequate for its perfection. Under general meanings accredited by the gained knowledge, the world becomes today one of the laboratory, retort, transplant, or one of artificial satellites and human colonization in cosmos, it becomes one of the planning, guiding and shaping human destiny.”⁸¹

Todetita appears because modern individual life is crammed with surrogates of reality, that technique offers us, and deluded beliefs about the value and unique reality of the “economic wisdom” (i.e. the belief that we are what we consume and also in the pursuit of economic growth which the modern society is full of). The man is not longer himself but a sum of determinations attached to him in the process of consuming the economic goods. You are what you drink, eat, dress, drive, smoke, etc. “And yet, we, people, do not have these wishes instilled fundamentally. The clever choice that we make between one brand and another is the sheer invention of these determinations (products) with whose general (brand) we try to identify ourselves. The nostalgia of the paradise of lost values brings me now in the situation of asking myself: and still in Adam and Eve’s story it was the apple’s brand at fault? Or was the indifferent snake, whoever it may be it impersonated by nowadays?”⁸²

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

⁸² Răzvan Tudor, “Brandingul un tratament pentru todetie?” (Branding a Treatment for *todetia*?), in *Modern Solution for Continuous Education* (Soluții moderne pentru educația continuă), BRM Business Consulting, August 26, 2005, retrieved from http://www.brmconsulting.ro/index.php?obj=front&action=article_details&id=17, on June 10, 2010.

So, the individual is nowhere. It is missing from nature – because it considered itself above it, in society – because is different by anybody else, is not communitarian but unique, in knowledge – because the “true knowledge” is objective and have to apply for the each and every one. “In sciences, indeed, the man is or it must be an absence, like everything that is individual.”⁸³ The dismissal of the individual for the community (state or tribe) is not just the characteristic of antic societies. In modern societies this phenomenon appears as well, although from a paradoxical process. “The conscious exacerbation of individual (assertion of everyone with all liberties, up to the vanity of every affirmation and histrionically: (...) is equal with its conscious denial. There is other type of atodetita. When it counts so much, the individual doesn’t count at all.”⁸⁴ This seems to be the essential paradox of individualism.

Actually, our individualism seems to comprise a malady complex. “After all, the European man is maybe the only one who took on him *all* maladies of the spirit.”⁸⁵ Throughout its entire history, simultaneously or in different times, Europe suffer from these maladies and what we see today, the contemporary individualism, is both the scars and sequelae of its past diseases and the symptoms of its present illness.⁸⁶ The table of being’s maladies reveals us the ontological fallacy of modern individualism which was concealed by the modern “anthropological sleep”. The sociologization of the whole human reality conceals the true nature of freedom, which is *not* only a human value. There are degrees of liberty for the things as well. But both require always a general to rely on. That means the freedom cannot belong only to the individual or determinations. “So-called liberty of the individual to give any determinations does not represent the true liberty, but empty possibility; and the liberty of the determinations to not submitting to a general (liberties on plural) worth less this name, since is just the chaos of pure diversity. The liberty belongs to general and consists in the

⁸³ C. Noica, *op. cit.*, 55.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 111.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 96.

⁸⁶ Noica relates these maladies with one or other dimensions of the (human) Spirit. The impossibility to achieve the proper general – catholita – is felt on the level of the sensibility, it is related more with the sentiments, the denial of the suitability of any individual embodiment of a foreseen general – todetita – is tied connected with the intellect and knowledge, and the disorder of determinations – horetita – is undertaken by the will. Similar, acatholita is an illness of the civilization, as atodetita belongs to culture, or ahoretia to religion and mysticism (as its main types – asceticism and ecstasy – proves).

delimitations it could give to itself or could be given to it. You are or you can be free only when you are installed in general.”⁸⁷ But not surrendered to it.

The inability to be for real (and not only in the form of owning, doing or imaging) stands for the exhaustion of the individual. The contemporary man awareness of its condition is magnificently represented by the cynical consciousness. It is the state of a being which ceased to hope, because it had no general (a utopia for fight for or an ideology for living for, as Mannheim already envisaged. “The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing.” The cynical consciousness is unique precisely because it is founded upon the supremacy of the individual. The solitary individual can only be cynical, uncertain about his goals, pragmatic about his means. *The enlightened false consciousness* comprises both the refusal of any so-called general that would suit all individuals (*acatholism*) and the disregard of any determinations (*ahoretia*) precisely because of the wide range of choices available. Both are maladies of lucidity. They are lack any ground. The lack of the general equals, in fact, with the lack of goal, and the liberty of determinations equals with the pragmatism of the means. “The circumstantial morale” for which the behavior and the moral act is a means of reaching a goal, the only one, self-preservation of the individual as an individual in times of crisis,⁸⁸ betrays even the existential realism of ancient *Kynicism* because it is “a job half-done”. Its realistic meaning refers to “the unscrupulous manipulation of all that can be considered means to a goal, *but not the goals themselves.*”⁸⁹ The cynical consciousness exposes the truth of contemporary people.⁹⁰ The only goal is to preserve its existence in society. Since the natural environment was tamed, the social one became the vital wild immediate medium.⁹¹ The efforts required for living and surviving in it, its social side, squeezes its entire energy and nothing left for understand the relation with its natural nature and ideative (cultural) nature, used only as means for handle with social tasks. There is a lack of balance within the heterogenous unity (the non-generalical one) of the human being. *Zoon politikon*

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 122.

⁸⁸ In this case the modern cynicism overlaps the Ancient cynicism in the respect that it is a “dirty, indecent realism” which is connected, regardless of any moral barriers, with “what is happening”. Peter Sloterdijk, *Criticism of the cynical reason*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2000, p. 230.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 230.

⁹⁰ I developed this idea in “Locul omului în lume” (The Man’s Place in the World), in Sorin-Tudor Maxim, Bogdan Popoveniuc (coord.), *Analele Universității “Ștefan cel Mare”, Seria Filosofie și Discipline Socio-Umane* (Annals of University “Ștefan cel Mare”, Section Philosophy and Social-Human Disciplines), “Ștefan cel Mare” University Press, Suceava, 2007, pp. 47-59.

⁹¹ Wild equal here with unknown (i.e. uncontrolled).

overwhelmed the other faces of the man. As I put it elsewhere: the men defeat the man.⁹²

In conclusion, the individualism proves to be the sign of a bad condition, a major disarray in the order of things equally on individual, human being, and Being level. On individual level, the encouraged purpose of closed personality contradicts the minimal conditions for an individual existence. The individual is nurtured by the others and depends on them for surviving. From the birth and until its death he/she is bound into a system of established relationships which, to a large extent, hamper his will. So, the individualistic “*homo clausus*” is an allogenic part for any social organism because its linkages with the others, the gauge for personal identity, are rickety and this leads to a pathological state. Moreover, society itself is broken in different autonomous systems which steal from individuals even the possibility to envision any wholeness.

On sociological level of the human being, its social existence is overloaded with all importance, values, and meanings and thereby his links with the other constituents (nature and culture) is lost. The human understanding is stuck in sociologism, in immediateness of social interactions, incapable to find a meaning from itself. The social reality hides the general reality from him. And “the complete elimination of reality-transcending elements from our world would lead us to a «matter-of-factness» which ultimately would mean the decay of the human will.”⁹³ So, its blind willing to be free forbids any submission to a general together with its never-ceasing hunger for determining itself as an individual self, dissolves any consciousness of the self as a standing subject. Its striving for liberty is doomed to failure in the absence of a proper general. “Freedom is inflexion of the general, and for man it is the *consciousness* of its inflexion, once the general is attained.”⁹⁴ So not only that personal freedom involves and makes sense because of the others, but it needs a general from which it can vindicates its meaning. It supposes not just the liberty *against* the natural, social and ideological dependence, but also a movement of integration within this three-sided human environment. The individualism is a performance with other things, other people and other ideas. The aim of individual freedom is not into the singularity of the human person, but into its integrality. And integrality means not only the human being, but also the

⁹² “Fețele alienării” (The Faces of Alienation), in Sorin Tudor Maxim and Bogdan Popoveniuc (coord.), *Mileniul III. Dialogul Umanismelor?* (Millennium III. Humanism Dialogues?), “Ştefan cel Mare” University Press, Suceava, 2006, pp. 368-384.

⁹³ Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia. An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, Harcourt, Brace, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1954, p. 236.

⁹⁴ C. Noica, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

being of the universe (either is it inanimate, social or ideative being).

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