

# Person in modern society: interdisciplinary problematic analysis

*L. Belas, E. Andreanský, S. Zákutná\**

**Аннотация.** Авторы статьи вскрывают некоторые характеристики положения человека в современном обществе, проводя анализ в форме междисциплинарного проблемного исследования во всей его сложности и запутанности. Они стремятся дать анализ этой специфической проблемы на основе социальных, исторических и культурных, политических и юридических, моральных и этических, эстетических и коммуникационных сфер многомерной человеческой деятельности, проясняя исторический путь к современности. Авторы приходят к заключению, что процесс идет от природы к культуре, от индивидуума к массе, от иерархии к свободе эгоизма, от самоограничения к гедонизму, от божественного к человеческому и т. д. Они также показывают (опираясь на Н. Бердяева, Э. Фромма и др.), что этот процесс обладает саморазрушающей диалектикой для человека.

**Ключевые слова:** гуманизм; Западная Европа; индивидуум; личность; саморазрушительная диалектика; свобода; сложность; философский синтез; экзистенция.

There is no proper monograph or study yet which would offer overall characteristics of the problem of a person in modern society in the form of interdisciplinary problematic analysis. On the other hand, it is necessary to say that it is, philosophically and theoretically, very demanding task. The complexity and complicity is conditioned by certain criteria and parameters of constructively oriented intellectual work. What we require are philosophical preconditions, being in the position of a starting point, that subsequently allow us to unite the specific problem of *a person in modern society* with general social, historical and cultural, political and legal, moral and ethical, aesthetical and, in particular, communicational scopes of multi-dimensional human activity. Of course, there can be different philosophical lines

of thinking, with different forms and methods of treatment. One of them, which we offer, is to judge the subject matter of the human being in modern society in the form of indicating his historical way to the present day on the level of a genesis and diagnosis of modern person. This methodological procedure appears to be philosophically legitimate from the point of view of defining the essence of this term as well as its detailed elaboration.

In this situation it is necessary to raise the question: Which philosophical orientation can present this productive-inspirational precondition? We can answer it in the following way: There arouse a unique historical and philosophical phenomenon, represented by the group of thinkers as M. Scheler, K. Jaspers, M. Buber, N. A. Berdyaev and R. Guardini, in the environment of the twentieth century

\* **Belas Lyubomir** — Ph. D. (Philos), Department of Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy and Ethics University of Presov in Presov (Slovakia).

**Andreanský Evgen** — Ph. D. (Philos), Department of Philosophy University of Joseph Safarik in Koshitsa (Slovakia)

**Zákutná Sandra** — Ph. D. (Philos), Philosophical faculty, Institute of studying of England and America, University of Presov in Presov (Slovakia)

philosophy. Their distinguished philosophical considerations reflected fundamental problems and challenges of the era they worked in. On the first place it was the *changed situation of the person*. M. Černý wrote that, in their reflections, they described their own presence in its contracts, conflicts and dramas which led them to “the revision of modern ideas of the world, man, autonomous development of culture and at the same time search for other, more truthful ways of reflecting ideas. Phenomenology, philosophy of existence, personalism and responsible, but historically not relativizing, consciousness of life’s historicity — in the broadest sense we could say Augustinian tradition of methodical enlightening of internal experience — was a typical orientation of these thinkers. However different their denomination was — Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant or liberal — they were the pioneers in the effort to find a real self-understanding of man, understanding of the being and sense of our stay in the world and an orientation in the structures of the oncoming era”<sup>1</sup>. Although these words are uttered from an evaluative post-position, they express significant problem determinants through which it is possible to formulate *preliminary* characteristics of the term or notion of *modern person*. We mean the **new person of the European West**<sup>2</sup> who, in historical space and time, gradually liberates himself from authority and tradition — in different areas and spheres — and builds his own *human world* on the basis of his own freedom and autonomy, forming the norms and principles for a judgement of his creative *civil activity* (economic, theoretical and practical, social and political, cultural and educational, moral and ethical, aesthetical). These preconditions will later become an important part of the dynamics of, in many examples from a critical and polemical up to negatively oriented, philosophizing of the present day.

After this definition of modern person, we will suggest some historical and philosophical foundations for examination of the beginnings of the way of modern person from nature to culture or, said

from the perspective of consequences, from individual to mass, the next important epoch of this historical process will be introduced from the perspective of J. J. Rousseau and his follower I. Kant.

The fundamental preconditions, enabling us to consider the subject matter, are connected with the Renaissance and its innovative philosophical and theoretical initiative controlling the world (nature), man and, at last, state. The key figure is, as emphasized by renowned authors<sup>3</sup>, Niccolò Machiavelli. His work connects all the dimensions of leitmotifs in this period’s thinking in an original, interesting and very unique form. Machiavelli is considered to be the first Renaissance thinker who liberated himself from the previous scholastic tradition. The experience of newly formed (political) world evidently conditioned the basic direction of his reasoning — to search for the effectual truth<sup>4</sup>. The careful observation of activities of the founder of new states strengthened the orientation towards the nature of things. It finally led him to the same position as the initiator of modern scientific thinking — G. Galilei. They both stopped the hierarchical system of the Middle Ages. Machiavelli’s political world is presented mainly by the *new political bodies*, the way of their creation liberated from supranatural determination and new social and political structure. This world is autonomous with its own criteria. Renaissance philosophical project has an explicit humanistic orientation. *New anthropology* proclaims noble requirements for human greatness and dignity.

Machiavelli also dealt with the **great topic of person**. But he did it in fundamentally different way. His political conception is based on the *knowledge of person* but a constitutive part of his *political wisdom* is a firm conviction about person’s deep moral corruption. His understanding of person is interesting by the discovery and emphasis on human attributes which can be used or, better said, misused in political activities in the form of realizing certain power intention and a determined aim. In this connection, Machiavelli draws up a model of political man<sup>5</sup> and requires that ruling a country

<sup>1</sup> Černý M. O autorovi. In: GUARDINI, R.: Konec novověku. Pokus o orientaci. Vyšehrad. Praha 1992. P. 92.

<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer D. Dedičstvo a rozklad. In: FILOZOFIA. 56. 2001, iss. 4. P. 103.

<sup>3</sup> Cassirer E. Der Mythos des Staates. Philosophischen Grundlagen politischen Verhaltens. Frankfurt am Main 1988. P. 179; Strauss L. Politické eseje. Praha 1995. P. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Machiavelli N. The Prince. Oxford University Press. Oxford 2005. P. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Jodl M. Teorie elity a problém elity. Praha 1994. P. 11.

should be based on a methodical assumption that person is bad. This is a significant shift when compared to starting points of anthropology and *quattrocenta et cinquecenta* program theses.

Generally, it is possible to say — when dealing with the genesis of a modern person — that the beginning of his creation is connected with the Renaissance. This is the crucial moment and contemporary philosophical literature comes out from it. One of the major representatives of the anthropological philosophical orientation, N. Berdyaev, wrote that the Renaissance signifies the arrival of *new European person*<sup>6</sup>. Simply said, it is the shift from divinity to humanity.

The basic spiritual content of the Renaissance is **humanism**. It means “an uplift of man, his movement to the middle of all events, his revolt and his self-acknowledgement and self-discovery” (Berdyaev, 1995, P. 102). As Berdyaev stresses, human self-confidence without a link to a *higher source of being* led to human destruction. According to his opinion, this kind of humanism develops human *self-destructing dialectics* that is based on the fact that “human self-confidence leads to his destruction, the discovery of a free play of human powers, unbound to any higher end, leads to exhaustion”<sup>7</sup>. The crisis of humanism came gradually and its decay was radically proved in the nineteenth century. The introduction of machines to human life has meant a revolutionary event. Emerging technical civilization — writes the Russian philosopher — “is in its essence impersonal”<sup>8</sup>. Berdyaev predicted that there would be time with perfect machines, but no people...

The creation of *modern person* is, in an intensified form, *realized* in modern times. New thinking characterizes person mainly through two, for this period so significant, determinants — reason and freedom. Modern person feels that he has freed himself from the bonds of the Middle Ages and become a master of himself that eventually leads to the position of individual autonomy. The culminating moment of modern depiction of the

theme of *modern person* is philosophical initiative of J. J. Rousseau and I. Kant. The views of the *citizen of Geneva* contain fundamental ideas that express important determination of the *new person* concerning his changing position in society. The renowned critic of culture and civilization wrote: “No more sincere friendships; no more real esteem; no more well-founded trust. Suspicions, offences, fears, coolness, reserve, hatred, betrayal, will constantly hide beneath this even and deceitful veil of politeness, beneath this so much vaunted urbanity which we owe to the enlightenment of our century” (Rousseau, 1997, P. 8). Words like greatheartedness, honesty, moderation or humanity have lost their meaning. With the necessity of *making money at any cost*, virtue necessarily fades away out of the life of society. It was used to talk about *manners and virtues* long ago; in Rousseau’s times the characteristic topics were *business and money*. In this way, he always lives for the world and he can feel his existence only through the judgement of others. These words of the French philosopher present a constitutive moment in the change of rhythm and process of human life and, after a certain time, manifest as a determining element not only of a *way* but also of a *diagnosis of modern person*. What we mean by this is a *social structure* of human existence presented in a fundamental way. Thus did Rousseau describe what we today politely call *capitalistic modernization*.

Freedom becomes an *index of his modernity*. Freedom, as the highest determinant of modern person being, is of fundamental importance in Kant’s interpretation<sup>9</sup>. We may say that freedom is a result of own self-determination, self-formation<sup>10</sup>. According to Kant, fundamental, moral and practical determination of person bound to moral law and obligation is expressed in the way that person is an *end in itself*. The status of self-purposefulness is an authentic manifestation of his best dispositions which are autonomy, freedom, unconditionality, self-legislation, self-determination.

<sup>6</sup> Berdajev N. Smysl dějin. Praha 1995. Pp. 96–97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pp. 103–104.

<sup>8</sup> Berdajev N. A. Člověk a stroj (Problém sociologie a metafyziky techniky). In: FILOZOFIA. 45. 1990, iss. 4, Pp. 430–445). P. 441.

<sup>9</sup> Znoj M. Svoboda, sebavědomí a identita. Filosofický časopis, 50, 2000, iss. 1, pp. 23–45. P. 28.

<sup>10</sup> Kant I. Political Writings (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). Cambridge university Press. Cambridge 2003. Pp. 43–44.

The development of modern world and formation of modern person acquired totally different character than Kant's concept was. The fundamental transformation touched mainly person's value. The very important *internal value* of person is gradually disappearing and human value is based on his *external price*. This fact is also reflected in the position of person in society. Decisive arrival of the machines to the life of human community and accompanying technicization significantly changed the social structure and thus the way of man's being. Human position can be then characterized through a *new form of life* — **mass**. In this context, it is possible to say that even culture — as an original piece of human work — has an industrial, mass character<sup>11</sup>.

A precise and fitting characteristic of a **modern person** can be found in the work of E. Fromm. Originating from person's failure to aspire for something new, he notes: "Man became collector and user. More and more, the central experience of his life became *I have* and *I use*, and less and less *I am*. [...] Modern man hoped to become an individual; in reality, he became an anxious atom, tossed to and fro. What happened is the loss of individuality, the *end of individual*. The categories of industrial system were transferred onto person. He has become "an enterprise... He himself thus becomes a thing, an object"<sup>12</sup>. The sense of human existence is being lost...

Modern person is dominated by poor health. Fromm's diagnosis is: the illness of modern person is **alienation**. This category has its own philosophical history. In a blurred form it appeared at the beginning of modern times and authors who worked with this term were Hobbes, Helvetius, Rousseau, Hegel, Feuerbach or Marx. We may say that even the philosophy of existentialism is an expression of disagreement with alienation of person in modern technocratic society. Fromm concludes his ideas about alienation as a manifestation of the situation in which man loses himself.

Money also represents a manifestation of modern person's alienation. Its fetish — so typical for our contemporary democratic society full

of freedom — was once criticised by K. Marx as a sort of "highest practical expression of human alienation". Modern man has been overcome by a human product — money. In his history it has never been as aggressive as it is today. Modern man values his feet, hair and breasts. Money rules him because an image of successful man is created through and for money; the *value of a human* is represented by money and assets. Modern society creates social, political, economic, moral and other preconditions for an acceptance of the view: the one who is financially successful is a personality regardless his human qualities.

Modern industrial society is full of conflicts; it survives only through great effectiveness of its control mechanisms which liberate us from the ability to understand the aims of the system and our role within it as a *scandal of reason and feelings*. The newly created *needs* are the most effective control. Therefore, education also becomes the *apology status quo*. In broader context, Bělohradský writes about *planetary neonormalization*<sup>13</sup> which is connected with the most powerful oligarchy conceived by the *West*.

Modern person lives in the world of calculation, things, profit, consumption effectiveness, manipulation, and in the words of the *teacher of the West* we may say that he *neglects himself*. There is a crucial shift in the sphere of mass communication — the word is changed to picture and sound. Slovak philosopher and writer, E. Farkašová, points it out in her *Essay on Silence*: "The contemporary society can be, without any exaggeration, called not only society of pictures — visualisation, but also society of voices, sounds and noises — acoustics. Old Berkeley's saying "Esse est percipi" (to be is to be perceived) is being newly updated and moves from the level of philosophical speculation to the level of practical experiencing and acting. Who is not perceived on the visual or acoustic level — reproduced by media — as if he did not exist; he disappears from socially significant space"<sup>14</sup>. The **press** provides us with similar trends. The news of the press agencies or the contributions of foreign correspondents

<sup>11</sup> Horkheimer M., Adorno Th. W. Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente. Leipzig 1989. P. 139.

<sup>12</sup> Fromm E. On Being Human. The Continuum International Publishing Group. New York 2005. Pp. 21–22.

<sup>13</sup> Belogradsky V. Společnost nevolnosti. Eseje z pozdější doby. Praha 2007. P. 68.

<sup>14</sup> Farcasova E. O hodnote ticha. In: Salón kumštu. Pravda. 28. apríla 2007. P. 2.

dominate the news; the process of thinking disappears. Information does not even have to be true. But it has to be interesting. What dominates the print news is a picture, not a text. It is evident in illustrated magazines, weekend press, cartoons, etc. Pictures hide the reality. A journalistic self-presentation of privileged self-interests, transformed by media into *general interest*, does not have anything in common with classical public opinion as final unanimity achieved by a lengthy process of *mutual enlightenment*. The *old base* of convergence of different views does not longer exist... The result of the decline of *reading public* is that the audience split into minorities of non-publicly thinking experts and a mass of *publicly* receptive **consumers**.

As for the assessment of media nowadays, we may say that it is mostly *negative*, concentrates mainly on the so-called *alarm-journalism*. It is the tendency to publish scandals and news about catastrophes in an alarming way with the effort to be the first. Media have failed because they have not been able to expose the lies. However, it is true that they produce lies and half-truths very quickly and smoothly. And there is certain intention in it — and it is not only the profit. It is something much more important... Media, with their inclination towards business, betray one of their *main functions*: They stop **guarding** the difference between the regime and *government*. This media civilization *cancelled the authorities* and *deprived the person of responsibility*. The symbol of this civilization is a fragment and person is losing his central position. As a result, media have escaped from culture and the culture has been absorbed by economics.

\* \* \*

Karel Kosík, a Czech critical philosopher, pointed out that *modern person of the West invaded* the area of Central Europe and said that, *also here*, the man has lost his relationship with the truth and being and changed it for the substitute, which is a *desire to manipulate* and own everything. Drama that determines the *character of modern*

*era* is performed in Central Europe as well. But this moment has not met with a large response in philosophical works in Slovakia so far. From the point of view of some intellectual circles, we miss a look into history, discussion and *modern person*. What to do with this situation? The life experience in the last two decades mainly has offered a new view to us.

Slovak transformation process is connected with the industry, and thus the boom of consumer industry as well. Social anthropologist and political scientist — J. Buzalka wrote that “for many economists and journalists the completion of modernity is a kind of Fukuyama’s end of history in Central Europe manner, cursed with the free market, the most general privatisation and import of production lines from the West. In these circles there is a view that when a Slovak man reveals the magic of supply, demand and profit, his rural nostalgia for the house on the hillside with summer kitchen appears only when relaxing after stock market business, looking at the personalized credit card with the picture of the peak Kriváň or supervising Ukrainian workers planning a log cabin in the mountains”<sup>15</sup>! The principal problem is the *ideology of consumption*, not the needs of people.

### Conclusion.

In the connection with the preceding views and reflections it is possible to state the fact that a complete, systematic understanding of the great topic of *modern person* is conditioned by a lot of collective effort because, paraphrasing O. Sisáková<sup>16</sup>, the problem of **modern person** is not only the *matter of philosophy*, but also of other specific disciplines, dealing with diverse moments, dimensions or areas which present and support the *situation* of human being. It means that the philosophical and historical-philosophical research as a fundamental part of potential project necessarily makes intensive and productive contact with social and cultural anthropology, “spiritual cognition in different cultures”<sup>17</sup>, socio-historical knowledge, sociology, theory of

<sup>15</sup> Busalka J. O “koreňoch” a elite. In: Kumšt na celé leto. Mimoriadna príloha denníka Pravda, sobota 28. júna 2008. P. 52.

<sup>16</sup> Sisáková O. Reformulácie antropologickej otázky v súčasnej filozofii. In: O. Sisáková, M. Cehelník, D. Navrátilová (Eds.): Reformulácie antropologickej otázky v súčasnej filozofii. Filozofický zborník 28. Prešov 2007. P. 18.

<sup>17</sup> Nizhnikov S. A. Spiritual cognition in Philosophy of East and West. Saarbrücken, Germany, 2010.

culture, political sciences, social psychology, literary science, mass media studies, etc. In essence, it is a meaningful *philosophical-theoretical* tie between the fundamental connections associated with the phenomenon of person in his modern topical portrayal.

R. Musil's view could be one of possible starting points. He said: "The current condition of the European mind is in my view not a disintegration,

but an uncompleted transition, not overripeness but underripeness. [...] A sea of complaints have been poured out over our lack of a soul, our mechanization, calculability, and lack of religion, and the achievements of both science and art are regarded as excesses of these conditions"<sup>18</sup>. It means to understand the many of realities connected with **modern person** as a *new problem* and not as a *false step*.

## Литература

1. *Belogradsky V.* Společnost nevolnosti. Eseje z pozdější doby. Praha 2007.
2. *Berdajev N. A.* Človek a stroj (Problém sociologie a metafyziky techniky). In: FILOZOFIA. 45. 1990, iss. 4. Pp. 430–445
3. *Berdajev N.* Smysl dějin.— Praha, 1995.
4. *Bonhoeffer D.* Dedičstvo a rozklad. In: FILOZOFIA. 56. 2001, iss. 4.
5. *Busalka J.* O "koreňoch" a elite. In: Kumšt na celé leto. Mimoriadna príloha denníka Pravda, sobota 28.— júna 2008.— Pp. 51–53.
6. *Cassirer E.* Der Mythos des Staates. Philosophischen Grundlagen politischen Verhaltens.— Frankfurt am Main, 1988.
7. *Černý M.* O autorovi. In: GUARDINI, R.: Konec novověku. Pokus o orientaci.— Vyšehrad, Praha, 1992.
8. *Farcasova E.* O hodnote ticha. In: Salón kumštu. Pravda.— 28. apríla 2007.
9. *Fromm E.* On Being Human. The Continuum International Publishing Group.— New York, 2005.
10. *Horkheimer M., Adorno Th. W.* Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente.— Leipzig 1989.
11. *Kant I.* Political Writings (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought). Cambridge university Press.— Cambridge, 2003.
12. *Machiavelli N.* The Prince. Oxford University Press.— Oxford, 2005.
13. *Musil R.* Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften.— Hamburg, 1967.
14. *Nizhnikov S. A.* Spiritual cognition in Philosophy of East and West.— Saarbrücken, Germany. Publisher: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010.
15. *Sisakova O.* Reformulácie antropologickej otázky v súčasnej filozofii. In: O. Sisáková, M. Cehelník, D. Navrátilová (Eds.): Reformulácie antropologickej otázky v súčasnej filozofii. Filozofický zborník 28. Prešov 2007.— Pp. 4–21.
16. *Strauss L.* Politické eseje.— Praha, 1995.
17. *Znoj M.* Svoboda, sebavědomí a identita. Filosofický časopis, 50, 2000, iss. 1.— Pp. 23–45.

<sup>18</sup> Musil R. Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften. Hamburg 1967. P. 15.