

Premises of a Socioevolutionary Concept of the Personality

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Premises of a Socioevolutionary Concept of the Personality

In investigating man from the standpoint of a systemic-activity approach, study of the personality must be based on the following questions: Wherein lies the necessity of the genesis of the individual personality as an active component of evolving social collectives? For what is a personality necessary? Answering these questions is the main task of the socioevolutionary concept of the personality. Two tendencies in studying the personality in psychology may be distinguished in the very way these questions are asked: one that describes phenomena, and another that may be called a socioevolutionary tendency.

The first limits itself to an enumeration of different traits, types of higher nervous activity, proclivities, subjective experiences, aptitudes, and motives that make one person different from another. Such representatives of different currents in differential psychology as R. Cattell, H. J. Eysenck, and J. Guilford have entered the guessing game of "What more?," making lists of "descriptive variables," "factors," and "parameters" of the personality in which cyclothymia, Bohemianism, practicality, conformity, emotionality, communicability, seriousness, etc., en-

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From A. V. Petrovskii & V. A. Petrovskii (Eds.), *Eksperimental'nye metody issledovaniia lichnosti v kolektive. Tezisy Vsesoyuznoi nauchno—metodicheskoi konferentsii* [Experimental methods for studying the personality in a collective. Papers from an All-Union Scientific-Methodological Conference]. The Conference was sponsored by the Ministry of Higher and Secondary Specialized Education of the Latvian SSR, the Institute of General and Pedagogical Psychology of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, and the Daugavpils Pedagogical Institute, and was held in Daugavpils, Latvia, in 1985.

joy equal status—up to 171 “descriptive variables” all told (R. Cattell). It is easy to perceive, behind such studies of individual differences in the personality, an objective paradigm, borrowed from the natural sciences, for analyzing man: man is described in terms of psychological characteristics exactly as though these were physical characteristics. This objective paradigm, which makes of man an isolated “object with varying properties,” becomes substantially transformed when psychologists switch to a subjective paradigm for analyzing individual differences and attempt to devise methodological procedures that take into account the active engagement of the personality and the activity-rooted nature of man (see A. G. Shmelev, 1982). However, the common denominator of both an “objective” and a “subjective” paradigm for analyzing individual differences is that neither of them poses the question of the origins of this astonishing variation in the personality and the diversity of its features. In other words, within the context of the descriptive tendency in studying the personality (which we shall refer to here as a “phenomenographic” tendency) and its individual differences, investigators limit themselves to questions such as how or why a phenomenon occurs. The overriding psychological concern in dealing with the first question becomes an assiduous description and compilation of individual differences. In [dealing with] the second question, investigators concentrate their attention on mechanisms governing the functioning of the personality that underlie the described phenomenon. The question of why a phenomenon occurs (N. A. Bernshtein, 1966), i.e., what its evolutionary meaning is, for all practical purposes, is neglected in contemporary psychology of the personality.

By viewing the personality as a component of large evolving systems, one can outline a socioevolutionary concept of the personality and suggest an answer to the question of why it was necessary for the phenomenon of the personality to emerge and develop in the history of society. In the following discussion, the premises of a socioevolutionary concept of the personality are presented.

Premise 1. The evolution of biological and social systems requires the interaction of two conflicting tendencies: heredity and variability.

Heredity reflects the general tendency of an evolving system to conserve itself and to transmit without distortions, from generation to generation, the typical forms of culture and social organization that guarantee the adaptation of that system to situations already encountered in the course of its evolution. Variability is manifested in an adaptation to unpredictable changes in a situation, in the search for new information about the environment, and in the construction of purposeful behavior within this environment. The individual variability of particular elements in the system is the basis for historical change in the system as a whole. The idea that the individual variability of the elements of a system is the basis for the historical change of populations, stated in its most explicit form in the biology of I. I. Shmal'gauzen, reflects the universal law of development of any system. The elements that have this individual variability are the individual, in the system represented by biological species; the member of the tribe, in the system of an ethnic collective; the member of a class, in the system of a socioeconomic formation; the disciple of a scientific school, in the system of a professional scientific community, etc. A person who is part of any of these systems inherits the systemic qualities typical of them (see V. P. Kuz'min, 1980) and, at the same time, is a potential vehicle for historical change of these systems as a whole. To designate the socially typical in a person's behavior, the social roles, norms, and values he assimilates in the course of socialization, i.e., the qualities that characterize man as a typical representative of a particular social community, we shall henceforth use the term *personality*. But when we speak of the characteristics of a human being as a subject of activity in various unpredictable problem-conflict situations, which he cannot overcome with the aid of a previously assimilated normative role and stereotyped behavior, we shall use the term *individuality*. We introduce this distinction to account for the fact

that during the course of ontogeny, socially typical species qualities of human beings are continually being transformed into personally meaningful expressions of individuality (A. G. Asmolov, 1984). The introduction of such a distinction is necessary for a number of reasons. First, it reflects more broadly the tendencies toward preservation and change that exist in an unbroken unity in man's vital activity as an element of various evolving systems. This use of the terms *personality* and *individuality* also enables us to link certain expressions of the individual with realization of the typical, socially inherited species program of a given community and, at the same time, to single out those personally meaningful characteristics of the human being that are ultimately responsible for historical change in that community. Most importantly, it enables us to understand the evolutionary sense of individuality and to perceive behind the expressions of individuality some rudimentary traces of the infinite lines of creative evolution. Analysis of the nature of individuality and of its functional significance in the evolutionary process brings us to a definition of the premises of the socioevolutionary concept of the personality; these premises concern the self-development of different biological and social systems and the relationship between the species adaptive strategy of development of these systems and a nonadaptive strategy of development of the elements in them that are responsible for individual variability.

Premise 2. In any evolutionary system, superfluous, nonadaptive elements that are relatively independent of the regulatory influence of the various forms of control (natural selection, social control) and are responsible for the self-development of the system begin to function whenever unforeseen changes take place in the conditions of its existence.

Any evolving biological and social system contains various types of activity on the part of the elements that make up that system. These types of activity do not directly lead to such pragmatic

adaptive effects as, for example, the satisfaction of vital needs of animals or of the social needs of a particular community.

Animal play is a clear example of this type of nonadaptive activity. Certain biologists and ethologists vie with one another in their efforts to use the characteristics of play to demonstrate that this type of animal behavior is unnecessary for biological adaptation. The play behavior of animals is called "superfluous," "specious," "idle actions," "vacuous activity," etc. Indeed, play activity does not have a directly adaptive effect. But this very quality of play activity refines inherited forms of behavior until it is time for them to take their stand before the court of natural selection (see K. E. Fabri, 1976). Thus, animal play provides the greatest opportunities for individual variability to be expressed "with impunity," and thus for the accumulation of practical experience in confronting changes in the conditions of existence of a particular biological species.

The classic works by M. M. Bakhtin on carnival culture, the studies of the culture of humor of ancient Rus' by D. S. Likhachev, and Yu. M. Lotman's series of works on the typology of culture represent original material for understanding the evolutionary meaning of nonadaptive social actions in the history of different cultures. In all these cases, two features of nonadaptive carnival or humorous social acts are displayed with maximum clarity:

1. Humorous social acts, the acts of a jester or a fool, are permitted in an evolving system of a particular culture and are relatively independent of social control, which corrects for any deviance from the social norms inherent in this culture.

2. Humorous social acts cast doubt on socially inherited forms of relations typical of the particular culture and implicitly contain a quest for other ways for the culture to develop, suggesting another desirable, alternative reality. Humorous social acts made it possible for medieval culture to engage in behavior regarded simultaneously as sinful and forbidden and as permissible (Yu. M. Lotman, 1970). The varying nature and evolutionary meanings of adaptive and nonadaptive social acts in the evolving

culture of the Middle Ages are graphically demonstrated in M. M. Bakhtin's comparison of an official holiday and a carnival:

The official holiday essentially looked only backward, into the past, and with this past consecrated the currently existing system. The official holiday affirmed the stability, permanence, and persistence of the entire existing world order, the existing hierarchy, the existing religious, political, and moral values, norms and prohibitions, sometimes even despite the idea inherent in them. The holiday was a celebration of the prevailing truth, full-blown and victorious, which was an eternal, unchanging, and irrefutable truth. . . . In contrast to the official holiday, the carnival celebrated a kind of temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the existing order, a temporary suspension of all hierarchic relations, norms, and prohibitions. This was a true celebration of time, of becoming, of change and renewal. It was hostile to any eternalization, consummation, and end. It looked to a future without end. (M. M. Bakhtin, 1965. P. 13)

Later, these ideas of Bakhtin's were incorporated into Yu. M. Lotman's semiotic conception of culture, which, in particular, underscored that every culture is a self-developing system and as such should have mechanisms for developing indeterminacy. The introduction of indeterminacy into a strictly determinable cultural system enables a particular culture to acquire a needed reserve of internal variation, to become more sensitive and amenable to change in situations involving social carnival or humorous acts, the acts of heretics of all times and all peoples, the phenomenon of peculiar, "superfluous people." Thus, we see that this type of nonadaptive act, which seems superfluous insofar as the adaptive functioning of a social community is concerned, is a necessary condition for the historical change and evolution of the particular community. D. S. Likhachev described the evolutionary meaning of humorous social acts as follows:

Laughter creates a world of anticulture. But the world of anticulture is counterposed not to any culture, but only to a particular culture, the one being subjected to derision. It thus prepares the foundations for new culture. . . . Herein lies the great creative principle of the world of humor. (D. S. Likhachev, 1985. P. 3).

Humorous social acts ensure, so to speak, that culture does not slip into a blind alley in its development, that it does not reach a state of equilibrium, balanced immobility, and death. They create a stable, absurd world of a "confused symbolic system" in which the fabulous and fantastic reign, in which the characters accomplish unexpected, unforeseen deeds. In explicating the historical, cultural, evolutionary meaning of the phenomenon of the "fool," D. S. Likhachev observes:

What was the old Russian fool? He was often a person who was very intelligent, but did unaccepted things, violating custom, decorum, the acceptable norms of behavior, divested himself and the world of all ceremonial forms . . . unmasking both himself and others, a violator of the symbolic system, a person who used it inappropriately. (D. S. Likhachev et al., 1984. P. 15)

The actions of heretics, like the humorous social actions of clowns, also introduce an element of indeterminacy into culture, detract from its stability, and thus encourage tendencies toward change in the social collective. But in contrast to humorous social acts, the deeds of heretics fall under the nugatory influence of social control. The alternatives they propose for the evolution of culture do not fit into the social system, and hence are cut short or rationalized by it. It is interesting that when the deeds of heretics are rationalized, people frequently attempt to classify them as humorous social acts, to characterize them as "unreal," clownish, and hence permissible. For example, having encroached on the rights and privileges of the educated nobility, Paul I, who

attempted to introduce changes into the existing system of government, was declared “mad,” a fool on the throne. The noble community’s rationalization of Paul’s behavior as “mad,” “peculiar,” and “extreme” enabled that community to consecrate the unshakability of the existing autocratic government as such. Similarly, the nobility declared the deeds of Chaadaev (a prototype of Chatskii) “insane” after he criticized the officially existing system of government. Despite the quite profound social difference in the acts of Paul I and Chaadaev, what unites them is that in each case their acts were directed against the established social order and were rationalized by the nobility as “unreal” and “buffoonery” (see N. Ya. Eide’lman, 1982). For the particular community it was a matter of indifference that behind the phenomenon of the “superfluous person” of Paul I as an individual lay a tendency for the evolutionary process to turn the wheel of history backward to pre-Peter times, whereas behind the phenomenon of the “superfluous person” Chaadaev as an individual lay the nucleus of a new line of development of culture, a harbinger of future revolutionary transformations. The evolutionary significance of the individuality of the “superfluous person” also consists in the fact that that individuality bears within it an alternative development for culture, an alternative that, at the time, is not accepted by the culture, and sometimes is even mercilessly extirpated by it.

In the mainstream of psychology, a key to understanding the nature of nonadaptive acts of human beings at the level of the biological individual as an element of the population, and at the level of individuality as an element of social groups, is the general views of D. N. Uznadze, who regarded “set” as the motor force of development of a subject’s behavior.

Uznadze’s ideas on set as the driving force of development of the individual and the personality are more than contemporary. They can serve as a theoretical foundation for recent studies in biology that have yielded notions of the nonadaptive nature of active search that is not directly related to the satisfaction of vital needs.

The uniqueness of the need for active search lies in the fact that it is fundamentally insatiable; it is a need for the process of constant change itself. This is the source of its biological role for man and animals. Active search is the biologically determined driving force of the self-development of each individual, and the progress of a population as a whole depends on how pronounced it is. (V. S. Rotenberg, 1982. P. 41)

In Soviet psychology, V. A. Petrovskii (1975) has explored the mechanisms of the self-development of activity at the level of individual behavior. Petrovskii (1975) made an empirical analysis of "unselfish risk" and introduced the notions of "suprasituational activity" as a source of any new activity of the personality. His studies have shown that there is an intrinsic tendency in man that is clearly nonadaptive in nature, and is displayed in the posing of various types of supertasks that may be called "suprasituational activity."

Thus, nonadaptive forms of activity are superfluous, for the evolving systems of which they are a part are manifested at man's different functional levels, e.g., at the level of man as an individual in a biological population, and at the level of man as an individual in a social community. Such forms of activity express the tendency for these systems to change, and hence are a necessary aspect of their evolution. At crucial periods in the life of evolving systems (biological cataclysms, social crises), the role of the nonadaptive activity of the elements constituting a part of the particular system grows, providing a glimpse of the evolutionary significance of this activity. For example, the seemingly superfluous, nonadaptive acts of heretics who went to the stake for their convictions were the price paid for the adaptation of the evolving social community as a whole, e.g., for its progress. This brings up the important question of the fate of nonadaptive acts and their products in the process of development of different systems. Can acts that represent the tendency of a system to change be transformed from nonadaptive acts into adaptive acts? Under what circumstances in the evolutionary process do such changes in the functional significance of any act for the development of biologi-

cal and social systems take place? To answer these questions we must go on to the third premise of the socioevolutionary concept of the personality.

Premise 3. A necessary condition for the development of any type of system is the presence of a contradiction (conflict or harmonious interaction) between adaptive forms of the activity of that systems aimed at the realization of its genetic program and the expressions of the activity of the elements of that system that are the bearers of individual variability.

From this third general premise of the socioevolutionary concept of the personality emanate the following complementary postulates:

1. The contradiction between the motives of an individual's activity that is expressed as a conflict or as harmonious interaction with the principal ideals and norms of a social collective can be resolved either by means of the "contribution" made by the motives of the individual, his values and the products of his activity in the generic program of the system, or by means of various reorganizations of these motives of the individual in the process of interaction with the social collective. If a contradiction is a harmonious interaction, the "contribution" of the individual will promote the further progress of the particular social collective. But if the contradiction is a conflict, the "contribution" made by the individual may also bring about a reorganization of the generic program of the collective and give the evolutionary process of the system a different direction.

2. The struggle of an individual to make his "contributions" to the generic program of the collective, the individual's assertion of his motives and values, is a struggle that takes place in the activity of self-fulfillment. This activity leads to further development of the norms of the particular culture or to the generation, in the course of transforming reality, of new norms and cultural products.

3. An individual's nonadaptive activity becomes adaptive activity with relation to the particular collective when the norms and values created by that activity become the norms and values of the corresponding culture. The activism of the individual then ceases to be a motive force of change in the system and begins to fulfill the function of conserving and stabilizing it. For example, heretics and prophets proclaiming a new faith are initially persecuted for their deeds since they sow discord and bring indeterminacy into the culture of their time. However, if their faith, and thus their alternative for the evolution of the culture, prevails, the ideas they have espoused are sometimes elevated to the rank of unshakable canons and standards and transformed into stereotypes. Their function then becomes that of conserving the system, and they begin to eradicate or rationalize expressions of the activism of other individuals proposing different directions for the evolutionary process.

Let us dwell briefly on the first and second of these postulates. First let us clarify what underlies the notion of a harmonious interaction between a social collective and an individual as a member of that social collective. The idea that a harmony of opposites is the driving force in the development of the personality is not new. It was presented and analyzed in detail in the studies of L. I. Antsyferova (1978). In those studies, this idea was used to explain some of the forms of interaction (or cooperation) among the various components of the psychological organization of the personality as an independent system, for example, the harmonious contradiction between what is desired and what is achieved, between similar motives of the personality, etc. In the socioevolutionary concept of individuality, a harmonious interaction occurs as a result of a discrepancy between group ideals and values that are "only known" and ideals that have acquired personal meaning for some member of the group and have become "meaning for myself." The individual, motivated by the values that acquired this personal meaning, struggles to have them not only recognized outwardly by the group but become real incentives for collective activity. In defending these values, the

individual, as it were, urges the group more rapidly along the evolutionary path chosen by it, establishing a “zone of proximate development” for the group, as Vygotsky would have said. Sometimes people who display active engagement of this kind, going beyond the limits of conformist role activity, are told: “You need more than anyone else.” The concept of “supranormative activity,” used by A. V. Petrovskii and R. S. Nemov, seems to us appropriate for characterizing nonadaptive activity aimed at eliminating a harmonious contradiction. Supranormative activity is reflected in the behavior of members of the collective who conform to social expectations that cannot be represented by them as normative (which must necessarily be fulfilled), but who conform to the values and ideals of a society for the sake of which a particular activity is performed (R. S. Nemov, 1984. P. 189). Thus, for example, acts of heroism are clear examples of supranormative activity behind which lies harmonious interaction between the motives of the individual and the ideals of the social collective. Thanks to the “contribution” made to the generic program of the social collective as a result of supranormative activity, this program for the evolution of that particular culture is more quickly realized.

The original concept developed by A. V. Petrovskii (1982) and V. A. Petrovskii (1981) of “personal contributions” describes nonadaptive activity of the individual in which the individual extends himself “into” other people, acquiring in them a second life. To underscore the unpremeditated, undetermined nature of this activity, these authors speak of acts of an individual person. These acts reflect that function of a system inclining it toward change, at times creating new directions in the history of the particular culture.

To sum up the socioevolutionary concept of the personality, which I have only outlined in this paper, one might describe the relationship between the physical individual, the personality, and subjective individuality as follows: “We are born as physical individuals, develop as personalities, and assert ourselves as subjective individuality.”

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