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Ontological and axiological peculiarities of mental structures and processes in children and adolescents in the conditions of virtualization of main activities

Aleksandr M. Prilutskii

Doctor of Philosophy, Professor,
Head of the Department of the History of Religion and Theology,
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia,
191186, 48, Moika emb., Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation;
e-mail: alpril@mail.ru

Aleksei M. Bogachev

Head of the Laboratory of Religious Studies,
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia,
191186, 48, Moika emb., Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation;
e-mail: amb@mail.ru

Aleksandra O. Blinkova

Consultant of the Laboratory of Religious Studies,
Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia,
191186, 48, Moika emb., Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation;
e-mail: studiesalexandrablinkova@gmail.com

Abstract

In the modern world and particularly in Russia, the problem of a split personality of adolescents and youth arising under the influence of virtualization of main activities, along with the relativization of personal values and value attitudes in the information society, is becoming increasingly relevant. The article analyzes some features of value orientations and identity (as well as their interrelationships) of children and adolescents living in the information society. The research focuses on the study of scientific sources through the methods of analysis and synthesis, as well as interpretation by means of depth psychology. An attempt is made to give a psychological and philosophical interpretation of mental and socio-psychological processes and phenomena associated with the ontological status of youth in the modern world. Also some philosophical and psychological analysis of some features of the modern information society in the context of the emergence of a special type of "self-concept", which is described by a number of authors in the context of the theory of a "network personality", is presented. Particular emphasis is placed on the comparative analysis of mental reality of individuals whose self-concept is substantially virtualized and personalities whose "core" of the self-concept is rooted in the traditional lifestyle. Based on the results of the study, some general conclusions are made and some psychological and pedagogical recommendations are given.

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Keywords

Virtual reality, value orientation, identity, psychology, pedagogy.

Introduction

In the modern world and particularly in Russia, the problem of a split personality of adolescents and youth arising under the influence of virtualization of main activities, along with the relativization of personal values and value attitudes in the information society, is becoming increasingly relevant. This problem manifests itself both in mental reality and in behavior patterns in the form of various psychological disorders, personality deformations, distortions in the area of activity and actions.

Among such manifestations, we can distinguish the actions of a malignantly destructive and autodestructive nature, an asocial lifestyle, phenomena of actual depersonalization and 'falling out' from the sphere of full-fledged communication with the Other.

At the same time, there is a great theoretical and practical interest in the form of psychological and socio-psychological resistance to the destructive processes of this kind; resistance, which can often take the form of neurosis or neurotic states.

This paper is an attempt to study the above-mentioned phenomena.

Socio-psychological specificity of virtualization as a characteristic of the information society

Generally speaking, the information society is the result of the information revolution, which has made information, knowledge one of the basic values. According to one of the generally accepted definitions, the information society is "a term used to designate the current state of industrialized countries, associated with the new role of information in all aspects of their life, the qualitatively new level (scope) of production, processing and dissemination of information" [Konovalov, 2010]. Today production and processing of information, in fact, take the form of 'conveyor production'. Since the influence of information on human reality is becoming more and more powerful, fiction and simulation become more real than reality itself, and reality is getting eroded by so-called hyper-reality.

The transformation of information into a commodity inevitably turned it into the object, which can be bought and sold. Thus, the laws of commodity-money circulation and of supply and demand started to dominate in the sphere of information flows. As a result, the consumer demand for the information product comes out on top, whereas the criteria for reliability cease to be decisive: therefore, in the information society, technologies of fabrication of fake information are becoming too relevant [Vorontsov, Golovushkin, Prilutskii, 2017, 13]. Mythological constructs, submitted in the format of a quasi-scientific discourse, strengthen their illocutionary potential and become capable of influencing the social behavior of people [ibid., 124]. There is nothing surprising in the fact that in the conditions of the information society the recipients (consumers) receive extremely destructive and in fact uncensored information.

As A. Yu. Efremov and R.S. Kazartsev note, “The Internet has become a worldwide repository of a wealth of information. It has a huge potential for the free exchange of information <...>, including that which is defined by law as threatening such as some propaganda of violence, methods of obtaining prohibited goods and so on” [Efremov, Kazartsev, 2016, 56]. Undoubtedly in the 21st century the socio-psychological reality of a personality is constituted on the basis of qualitatively new possibilities in the field of self-identification and self-presentation in the virtual field of network communication and cybertechnologies, as well as on the basis of corresponding dangers caused by multiplicity, fragmentation and psychological ‘toxicity’ of information flows.

In her dissertation research E.A. Ignat’eva, summarizing the positions of a whole range of researchers, indicates the emergence of a new type of reality: “virtual communication will be understood as the communicative interaction of subjects carried out by means of a computer, which creates a special model of reality characterized by the effect of the presence of a person in it and allowing you to act with imaginary and real objects” [Ignat’eva, 2012]. E. Toffler rightly points to the fact that due to the ‘jump’ in the field of cybertechnology, people as subjects and objects of communication were included in large-scale network of matrices of the information plan, opening almost instant access to virtually any theoretical knowledge [Toffler, 1980].

Moreover, it applies not only to acquiring information, but also to communication as such, that is, to turning personal interaction between people into the phenomenon of virtual reality, where a particular person presents himself in the form of some self-representations, often contradicting the basic properties of his individuality in the condition of face-to-face communication. Thus, in the space of «many-multiple» ideas about partners the possibility arises to present to them an almost unlimited number of «personas» and to produce plenty of projections. “A persona is a mental ‘skin’ of the Ego, and this is not only a product of relationships with objects, but also personal projections onto these objects. We adapt to how we see other people and what they want. This can be very different from how others see them and how they perceive themselves. The persona wrapped in the tissue, reflects projections that originate in complexes (for example, in the parent’s complexes) and which are returned to the subject through introjection and are included in the Persona,” as writes M. Stein [Stein, 2010].

Obviously, on the socio-psychological level, the phenomenon of pluralism of ‘personas’ detached from the real possibilities of the Self-real, (as an analogy, the meaning of alienation of the signified from the signifier in semiotics can be brought about here), leads to the formation of interaction with others within the framework of irresponsible gaming relativistic models and the actualization of a number of protective mechanisms, including the protective mechanism of projective identification on a mass scale. Evidence of this are examples of mental contamination in cases of social upheavals in the Arab world, in Ukraine, in former Yugoslavia, etc. However, these processes can proceed in a latent, unconscious mode, manifesting themselves in atomization and, at the same time, unification of the information society, which, with a seemingly high level of development, is the characteristic of the immersion into archaization.

According to Castells, this kind of society “is created by the networks of production, power and experience that form a culture of virtuality in global flows that cross time and space” [Castells, 1996, 81]. As a matter of fact, we are talking about a certain «superorganic matrix», which, again, atomizes society and at the same time turns it into a kind of «eusocial» community characterized by the new archaic phenomena. “The collective idea perceived by the individual (as belonging to the collective consciousness), in particular, the idea of social structure, contributes to the identification of the individual consciousness with the collective consciousness, and further, the group identification with the power of the collective unconscious intensifies” [Ignat’eva, Sofronova, 2014, 101]. Separated from the immediate reality of interaction with other individuals, a human being often starts to control and manipulate, since the need for genuine intimacy is deprived, and communication is broken into fragments, while thinking takes on the characteristics of a ‘clip’.

The dangers, opportunities and contradictions of involvement in virtual reality

On the other hand, the huge number of ‘roles’ that an individual can ‘try on’ gives him the opportunity to actualize many of his ‘potentialities’ (subpersonalities), which in the context of traditional communication, most likely, would have remained unclaimed.

Under the influence of globalization processes and the existing worldviews that go back to postmodernism, a type of culture is being formed, which can be defined as laminar. Its distinguishing feature is the disintegration of once stable cultural systems (aesthetics, ethics, style, art, religious traditions, etc.), abundant division into strata, which entails a variety of discourses and the complication of the semiosphere.

Laminar culture is a space in which the boundaries between the cultural mainstream, subcultures and countercultures are conditional; traditional cultural identity ceases to be a significant and informative social factor, and the individual’s belonging to mutually exclusive cultural strata ceases to amaze anyone and is perceived as something quite permissible and even positive. Orthodox atheists, Catholic anarchists, unions of ‘wives’ of Catholic priests of the Latin rite, and other phenomena of this kind are precisely the product of laminar culture.

Laminar culture, if it cannot be regarded as a recurrence of the Middle Ages, since the culture of the Middle Ages was distinguished by a certain integrity, can certainly be interpreted as ‘neomythology’, replacing the rationalistic scientist paradigms of the XIX – early XX centuries. Just as ‘classical mythology’ does not contribute to the formation of a systematized and orderly cultural and ideological space, the new mythology of laminar culture creates a special discursive environment in which contradictions can coexist without engaging in obvious ontological and cognitive conflicts, often interacting in a gaming format.

The postmodern game has the advantages of the game itself, that is, the variable use of imagination and relatively safe actions for the manifestation of previously hidden resources in the unconscious. T.A. Kirik in her monograph “Virtual reality and its ontological prototypes” writes: “Analyzing the definitions given in the dictionaries of modern English, one can point to two main contradictory value systems of the word ‘virtual’: 1) possible, imaginary; 2) actual, not nominal, real, therefore, when the concept of ‘virtual reality’ is revealed, different meanings can be used” [Kirik, 2007, 23]. In addition, Usacheva A.V. in “Psychological Features of Internet Communications” notes: “We assume that the desire to construct virtual personalities can also exist due to the fact that reality does not provide opportunities for the implementation of various aspects of the ‘Self’, or that reality may be too socially regulated. This gives a person a desire to change the normative, which leads to the construction of virtual personalities.” [Usacheva, 2014, 279]. Belinskaya E.P. emphasizes that “the communication process in the world of electronic technologies is highly modified. The latter, with its predominance of off-the-shelf software and the corresponding demand for less and less specialized knowledge, elevates a certain type of people to the leading social positions – with a variety and flexibility of cognitive styles” [Belinskaya, 2013, 62]. In other words, the virtuality of the information society and the socio-psychological and psychological positions bring with them both dangers and opportunities.

Let us take a closer look at what they are. From the point of view of E.P. Belinskaya, one should highlight the following contradictions of the information age: “The activity/passivity of the social subject of the information world <...>; “Discontinuity”/harmonious social being of a person in the information society <...>; Inconsistency/consistency of the content of social influence in the information world” [ibid., 73]. Furthermore, when speaking about the ‘shadow’ sides of the information society, she stresses “the repeatedly proven socio-psychological fact of de-individualization of a person’s behavior (and, consequently, a decrease in his subjectivity) under conditions of anonymous interaction” [ibid., 74], manifested in identification with the mass (social identification). In fact, in the

absence of direct contact (including bodily contact) with another person, the psyche seeks to adapt to the world around, focusing on certain stereotypes (group norms) and receiving through them a confirmation of his/her individual reality. This, in turn, leads to an ever-greater splitting of the self-concept of the individual into 'Self-real' and 'Self-virtual', with the help of which the 'Self-ideal' temporarily acquires a surrogate reality, which must be artificially maintained all the time, because falling out of virtual reality can lead to a sharp drop in self-esteem and the destruction of the comfortable self-image, as well as awareness and experience of isolation from full communication with the Other (including the body and the mental function of autonomous imagination).

In this context, virtual reality can be compared with the 'paranoid-schizoid position', according to M. Klein, and the return to the 'real self' (sometimes culminating in suicidal behavior), with the 'depressive position'. Indeed, in the network world of the information society, an individual begins to consider himself as some 'демиург' and is thus characterized by "splitting, omnipotence, idealization, denial and control over external and internal objects" [Klein et al., 1952, 117]. It is not surprising that the majority of people of the 'network age' are fixed on illusions created in the virtual world (whereas in order to actualize the potentialities manifested in the game, it is necessary to return to the area of traditional contacts and traditional self-concept).

Naumova T.A. writes in her dissertation research that "at the present stage of total computerization, as we have already said, the formation of a new social reality, a virtual community, is taking place, where the initial approach to self-identity is shifting towards self-presentation. And the ability to experiment with identity, to live several lives at the same time, leads some users of the Internet community to depend on this process" [Naumova, 2007]. It should be noted that this kind of dependence in the modern world includes representatives of all new generations who, from childhood, lose the ability to fully imagine, perceive archetypal images, and carry out real activities based on mature, holistic identity.

Russian scientist N.N. Koroleva states: "The development of a modern child is internally contradictory. Along with the rapid development of <...>, the actualization of the need for new information, infantilization, a slowdown in the level of development of the motivational and volitional sphere <...> an increase in neuropsychic tension, difficulties in the formation of communicative competence, etc. are traced" [Koroleva, 2014]. It is obvious that the above-mentioned factors also lead to difficulties in accepting mature value orientations. Moreover, the formation of the dependence of actual (and, in some sense, true) self-esteem from evaluating information (likes, number of views, reposts) can lead to behavioral problems, a willingness to sacrifice real values and value orientations for the sake of raising 'status' in the virtual space.

As a result, a special lifestyle is formed under the influence of the information society, which is characterized by the growing effect of the media and electronic communication methods. The transformation of information and communication into an impersonal commodity contributes to the fact that the widest strata of the population (schoolchildren and students, specialists and housekeepers, experts and amateurs) are somehow involved in this information exchange: The sufficiency of the minimum competence in the field of information technology leads to the fact that many actions that previously required recourse to specialists can now be performed independently at a completely satisfactory level, and labor productivity and its quality increase.

Let us introduce a short digression. In the field of creating artistic images, new opportunities contribute to the frightening growth of mediocre, impersonal visual and auditory texts; this is a product of the creativity of the 'artisan' who has mastered only the extremely simplified (thanks to digital technologies) technique of creativity and beyond this. Wide access to information that was previously available to a small circle of professionals, as well as an open platform in the form of the ability to quickly distribute texts on the Internet contribute to the active development of pseudoscience,

extravagant theories and teachings that instantly find adherents.

The democratic nature of the information society often takes an ugly turn: self-confident, ignorant, half-educated amateur can successfully create a respectable image of an inspired informal scientist, a prophet of new knowledge and a fighter against formalism and inertia that supposedly enslaved official science, and quite openly spread something that has nothing to do with real science

On ‘market’ relativism as the result and the factor of virtualization

Strictly speaking, the ideology of the information society is not much different from the principles of the Asian bazaar, where the consumer can buy both an expensive thing and a cheap fake. In any case, the success of the purchase depends only on himself/herself and the responsibility lies only on him/her.

The transformation of information and network communication into a commodity and ‘system of illusions’ affect the specific processes of the formation of the worldview. The notion of the existence in the modern metropolis of the ‘market of religious services’ is firmly rooted in the philistine consciousness. Such services are not at all a product of modernity, since they are a completely natural result of secularization, deconfessionalization [Prilutskii, 2016, 116] and the socio-religious process, which Max Weber defined as “disenchanted the world” [Bourdieu, 2002], which, however, ‘being disenchanted’, lost its direct connection with psychic reality (including perception of the archetypes of the collective unconscious ‘from the inside’). The main female character of the detective novel “Moonstone” by William Collins (the mid XIX century) claims that she enjoys the advantage of having a Protestant priest and a cheap market on hand at all times This intention can be considered as a kind of hermeneutic key to the problem posed in the title.

In traditional spiritual culture, ‘temple’ and ‘market’ are contrasted by modalities: the Savior will expel the merchants from the temple, going to the market is not at all considered virtuous, the merchant appears in sermons as a negative character (the pious image of an ‘honest merchant’ is almost entirely a product of later Protestant culture), fairs are prohibited during church holidays. The crisis of traditional culture was partly due to the victory of ‘market’ over ‘temple’, which was largely symbolic, “the market attacked the temple and defeated it. This led to the transformation not only of the intellect, which became more formal and pragmatic, instrumental and operational, but also of the body, which became increasingly aggressive and at the same time perverse ... The result was not only the birth of autonomous and independent individuals, but also the appearance of impoverished and hungry crowd in the arena of history” [Markov, 1999, 20]

The secular paradigm of neoprostancy, taken as the example, does not oppose the temple and the market: a temple devoid of sacredness cannot compete with the market. Therefore, in secular culture, the temple is not contrasted, but correlates with the market (one might say it complements it), but this is a seeming compromise, since the semiotic market space inevitably captures and absorbs the desacralized space of the temple, transforms and adapts the corresponding religious discourses. As a result, both in the Neo-Protestant culture and in the ‘traditional Protestant’s’, the temple and the market form a certain conglomerate with a market domination, the synergistic effect of which is sometimes directed either to ‘survival’, i.e. maintaining the status quo, or «mission”, that is, reproducing similar religious-commercial structures in new landscapes.

Approaching the problem from the point of view of religious philosophical psychology, we have every reason to consider this process as a specific kerigmatic profanation, since by distorting traditional ideas of the sacred (numinous in the understanding of R. Otto [Otto, R.,1963, p.81]), it offers the consumer of its services some kind of quasi-religion of the type of ‘network matrix’. It is possible that at the level of the unconscious, the ‘Internet’ has already become some ‘pagan god’ of the modern age.

Some features of the Self-concept and value orientations in the conditions of virtualization of the main types of activities

Under these conditions, it is important to understand what happens to those who psychologically and spiritually stay in the traditional field of information and communication. A good example of such individuals is, for instance, students of Sunday Orthodox schools, who at least partially adhere to the traditional way of life, perception of information and communication, and accept fundamental values based on traditional identity. In our opinion, there are powerful conflicts in their mental reality.

First of all, the pictures of the world formed in their families and in the church and, accordingly, their self-concepts are constantly being attacked. These attacks are particularly effective because they take place in the informational society, where the cognitive component of the self-concept has particular importance.

In addition, according to the results of the research by Vorozheikina L.I., “The cognitive component is predominant in the self-concept of a religious person, reflecting rational and irrational aspects, where religiosity is manifested in the structures of knowledge, ways (patterns) of thinking” [Vorozheikina, 2014, 1102]. Because of this, the occurrence of cognitive dissonance is obvious in a situation when a young person in a Sunday school receives information, for example, that the world was created in 7 days (in the ‘hard’ version of the biblical story about the creation of the world), and then, in the state school learns about no less «radical» Darwin's theory.

Such contradictory ‘messages’, somewhat resembling the ‘double seizure’ described by G. Bateson [Bateson et al, 1965] in relations with the mother, come from the ‘parent figures’ (in both cases the information comes from the teachers) and are supplemented by contradictory information drawn from the network “Internet”.

If a child or a teenager growing up in a deeply religious family has a fairly free access to the Internet, then most likely his/her cognitive dissonance will only increase. At the same time, from our point of view, if the religious dominant is ‘nuclear’ in its image of ‘Self’, the information contradicting this ‘core’ can be rejected, being forced out into the unconscious and inducing one or another neurosis (for example, obsessive-compulsive neurosis) or neurotic condition.

In addition, with a certain degree of personal maturity, a collision with information ‘tabooing’ in the religious space can trigger the processes that M. Klein attributed to the ‘depressive position’ and which under certain circumstances can contribute to personality development. However, the latter should be provided with competent support from significant adults. Otherwise, a reversal from the ‘depressive position’ may lead to the actualization of acute ‘paranoid-schizoid’ processes, and, by no means, neurosis.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the foregoing, we consider it appropriate to formulate the following recommendations and conclusions:

1) While psycho-pedagogical and didactic working with the so-called ‘network personalities’ (using the term introduced by A.A. Ahayan [Akhayan, 2017]), it should focus on the return of ontological confidence [Laing, 1964] by means of both corrective, psychotherapeutic and developmental methods.

2) In addition, at the state level, programs should be developed and implemented to facilitate the return of ‘network personalities’ into the space of ‘intrapsychic’, that is, internally developing and functioning imagination; as well as in the sphere of bodily interactions and other types of real,

consistent, meaningful, holistic activity;

3) In other words, 'network personalities' need to develop the ability to question the absolute value of 'relativism' and 'game' in the real world and direct communication. The possibilities of the postmodernist culture should serve the fundamental value orientations as a characteristic of identity based on traditional culture;

4) On the contrary, it makes sense to help children and adolescents who follow the path of the traditional version of personal development (including representatives of the fundamental religious culture), to develop foster the ability to perceive information that contradict their basic attitudes and value orientations without psychological trauma;

5) In case of both 'network personalities' and traditional personalities, it is very important to help them develop the intrapsychic ability to withstand the 'depressive attitude of doubt' (in the second case, on the base of 'value core of the 'Self', and in the first case, on the basis of returning to the ontological confidence and integrity).

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Онтологические и аксиологические особенности психических структур и процессов у детей и подростков в условиях виртуализации основных видов деятельности

Прилуцкий Александр Михайлович

Доктор философских наук, профессор,
завкафедрой истории религии и теологии,
Российский государственный педагогический университет
им. А. И. Герцена,
191186, Российская Федерация, Санкт-Петербург, наб. р. Мойки, 48;
e-mail: alpril@mail.ru

Богачев Алексей Михайлович

Заведующий,
Лаборатория религиоведческих исследований,
Российский государственный педагогический университет
им. А. И. Герцена,
191186, Российская Федерация, Санкт-Петербург, наб. р. Мойки, 48;
e-mail: amb1976@mail.ru

Блинкова Александра Олеговна

Консультант,
Лаборатория религиоведческих исследований,
Российский государственный педагогический университет
им. А. И. Герцена,
191186, Российская Федерация, Санкт-Петербург, наб. р. Мойки, 48;
e-mail: alexandrablinkova@gmail.com

Аннотация

В статье анализируются некоторые особенности ценностных ориентаций и идентичности (а также их взаимосвязи) детей и подростков, проживающих в информационном обществе. С методологической точки зрения акцент сделан на изучении научных источников с помощью методов анализа и синтеза, а также на методе глубинно-психологической интерпретации.

Предпринята попытка дать психологическую и философскую интерпретацию психических и социально-психологических процессов и явлений, связанных с онтологическим статусом молодежи в современном мире. Также представлен философско-психологический анализ некоторых особенностей современного информационного общества в контексте появления особого типа «я-концепции», которая рядом авторов описывается в контексте теории «сетевой личности». Особое внимание уделяется сравнительному анализу психической реальности индивидов, «я-концепция» которых существенно виртуализирована, а также личностей, «ядро» «я-концепции» которых укоренено в традиционном образе жизни. По результатам исследования сделаны некоторые общие выводы и даны некоторые психолого-педагогические рекомендации.

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Ключевые слова

Виртуальная реальность, ценностные ориентации, идентичность, психология, педагогика.

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