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V. Stojanovich | **Human understanding (toward a hermeneutic of the norm)**

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Abstract. Human understanding of many phenomena and appearances depends, first of all, on experience of the self and understanding of the self. Through this starting point we lay the foundations of our attitudes towards the environment. Insufficient analysis of experience (presented in this article as platform perception) can call into question the correctness (by correctness I understand everything that is in tune with objective logic, but also something that is useful in a positive (good) sense – a good intention followed by a good process and a good result) of one's understanding of normality. However, the thing that can be confusing in trying to understand the modern concept of normality is the well-known fact that it covers two different categories – what is usual and what is correct. The usual is not necessarily correct, and the correct is not necessarily usual. The relativizer of normality is the ever-present possibility of its change. Normality and non-normality not only influence each other, but are also conditioned by each other. Together they essentially constitute an understood and evaluated known physical reality. The changeability of human understanding, needs, attitudes, assessments, as well as change of circumstances affect the transformation of normality. The article discusses, among other things, the difference between the normal as a subject and an object. The consideration of these problems was approached from a multidisciplinary aspect, mainly relying on sociological, philosophical and psychological sources.

Keywords: understanding; norm; normality; normal; non-normal; transformation of the normal

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Стойнович В. | **Человеческое понимание (к герменевтике нормы)**

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Аннотация. Человеческое понимание многих феноменов и явлений зависит, прежде всего, от собственного опыта человека и понимания им себя. Через эту отправную точку мы закладываем основы наших отношений к окружающей среде.

Недостаточный анализ опыта (представленного в данной статье как платформальная перцепция) может поставить под вопрос правильность понимаемой человеком нормальности. Однако современную концепцию нормальности мешает понять общеизвестный факт, что она охватывает две разные категории – то, что является обычным, и то, что является правильным. Обычное не обязательно правильно, а правильное не обязательно обычно. Релятивизатором нормальности является всегда присутствующая возможность ее изменения. Нормальность и ненормальность не только влияют друг на друга, но и обуславливаются друг другом. Вместе они, по существу, представляют собой понятую и оцененную известную физическую реальность. Изменчивость человеческого понимания, потребностей, отношений, оценок, а также изменение обстоятельств влияют на трансформацию нормальности. В статье, среди прочего, обсуждается различие между нормальным как субъектом и объектом. Рассмотрение перечисленных проблем осуществляется в мультидисциплинарном аспекте, в основном, с опорой на социологические, философские и психологические источники.

Ключевые слова: понимание; норма; нормальность; нормальное; ненормальное; трансформация нормального

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Introduction

“To talk behind one’s back” is one of the expressions that is not in accordance with the message it carries. Physically talking behind someone’s back is talking to their face, and talking to a person’s back is talking behind their face. This illuminates the incorrectness of the usual expression which many unconditionally accept as something normal. Why would anyone accept something incorrect as an unwritten rule? It is of great importance to emphasize that this expression is not characteristic of the linguistic philosophy of only one group of people or its one part, but of a series of languages belonging to the same or different language groups¹. This makes it more probable that the form of this expression in languages was not formed and accepted under influence from the outside, that is, under the influence of the understanding of another person or one group of people, but from inside, by one’s own understanding. So, we most likely

accept it unconditionally because we understand it that way. The linguistic relativity hypothesis could be an explanation of this, but if we thoroughly analyzed this expression, it would be clear that it is not the result of the influence of language structure on thought, it is the result of the influence of human understanding of the self on an expression’s structure. The very expression (behind one’s back) was created within the limits of insufficient analysis of experience². Human perception through the field of these limits could be simply termed *platformal perception*. “Platformed” (what) should be distinguished from “platformal” (from whom), and platformal perception should not be considered a limitation, but as understanding a possible fact through limits of insufficient analysis of experience (understanding that can be both logically correct and logically incorrect). Expression is limited and has form, but it is not a limitation in itself.

¹ In French “parler derrière le dos”, Russian “говорить за спиной”, German “hinter dem Rücken reden“, Serbian “причати иза леђа”...

² Senses are our physical platform, but insufficient analysis limits our limitations. Logically, “what we can” platform and “what we do” platform is not the same.

Empirical cognition, without objective analysis, can lead to “deception” in making conclusions. Thus, limited observation can lead to the adoption of incomplete and even incorrect as the norm. Perhaps our subjective attitude would always be completely correct if our known physical reality were the complete reality of the physical universe, and our understanding was not limited by our limitations. In the mentioned paradox, central is the experience of the self as a subject of understanding. The way we understand ourselves in relation to the other affects the extent to which we formulate the expression of an already limited and determined language. Here, the “back” could be identified either with something that is between the person being talked about and the person talking, or with the person as a whole. In the first case, the back would be something that is ours (what we relate to) but not a part of us (something between ourselves and the other). The second option would be more logical if we used the expression behind *me* and not behind *my back*. Even then, we would not be completely precise, because “in front of” and “behind” is a matter of subjective feeling, understanding and attitude. It can be in front of one, while being behind another side of the face that we have, quite possibly, accepted as the main platform of expression of the self. After all, in the vacuum of the universe there is no front, behind, up or down... Everything is about the observer’s subjective experience (oneself in relation to the other and the other in relation to oneself).

Understanding the incorrectness of the expression “behind one’s back”, which is frequent, but does not correspond to the message it carries, can put us in a position to doubt our understanding of correctness and the correctness of our understanding, and thus the correctness of our correctness. Epistemic logic³ influences deontic one. If correctness of our understanding is questioned, then value, norm, normality... are automatically questioned as well. Therefore, it is important to point out the variability, and thus the instability

³ We are both physical and spiritual beings. However, this work refers only to physical perception. Spiritual

of the definition of some phenomena, the forms of which depend on the perception of human. Normality (as well as non-normality) is a phenomenon which value depends on our understanding. Now, is it normal that in front of the back is understood and unconditionally accepted as behind the back? Is it normal for an incorrectly formulated (wrongly worded) message to almost reach the status of a lingual axiom? It may be accepted as normal, but is it correct, exact (or at least accurate), precise...? What is normal, and do most or any of us understand it “the right way” all the way?

The “normal” is a phenomenon that is not examined within just one scientific field, or that concerns only one scientific branch. It is related to everything that is within the framework of human perception, precisely because it is an assessment of the understanding of experience and the environment. Understanding reality, one evaluates it at the same time. For example, the normal state of nitrogen at “normal” temperature is gaseous, and the normal state of nitrogen at low temperature is liquid. The gaseous state of nitrogen at low temperature would be considered not normal. Snowing is a normal occurrence, but not in summer time. A volcanic eruption is also normal, but the consequences it can cause for the living world are considered not normal. The person feels normal, but what exactly is meant by normal here? For a person who was healthy all their life, being ill is not a normal condition. For a person who had health problems all their life, being ill is, conditionally speaking, a normal condition. This article is not an attempt to explain the normal and the non-normal through the prism of one scientific field, but to point to its “other name” – the human assessment of physical reality.

1. Normal, majority, usual and correct

The typical prejudice of a human of conformist instincts, according to which the generally accepted and commonness are “the best and safest option”, is that “normal is

perception has other dimensions and is not discussed in this paper.

correct and positive, and non-normal – incorrect and negative”⁴. An implication of correctness, when we talk about norm and normality, calls into question the correctness of accepted correctness. Identifying the normal with the correct can lead to not understanding and to the indistinguishability of good and bad.

1.1 Defining the norm

In order to understand the contemporary concept of the “normal”, we should first mention some of the explanations of its mold, “norm”. In one of the Latin dictionaries, the norm (norma) is translated/explained as “a square, employed by carpenters, masons, etc., for making right angles”, but also as “a rule, pattern, precept” (Lewis, 1879: 1216, emphasis original). This translation shows that the norm is the basis by/through which something should be built, formed and shaped. Thus, a norm is a certain type of pattern, something that has its own frameworks, by which the normality of what is in accordance with those frameworks will be recognized and what is built, formed and shaped according to them.

Mentioning that the word “norm” means an authoritative standard, and the “normal” – something that abides by that standard, psychologist Gordon Allport pointed to two different types of standards that can separate the normal from the abnormal – statistical and ethical (Allport, 1958: 176). Peter Alexander indicates that the statistical concept of normality implies the description, that is, “to point to a matter of fact, without any value-judgement to the effect that the usual is the best” (Alexander, 1973: 139). In the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, the norm (norma) is translated as “a square” and “a right angle”, but also as “a standard, pattern (of practice or behavior)” (Glare, 1968: 1189), while in the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English* it is marked as “an accepted standard or a way of behaving or doing things that most people agree with” (Procter, 1995: 960). Here, the

standard (in terms of something accepted by the majority) is mentioned as one of the key terms that defines the norm. This shows that monitoring and analysis of the process of formation and acceptance of standards is an important moment for understanding the norm, and thus normality. It can be noticed that in the last of the above definitions, the standard is exclusively a question of quantity, i.e., the acceptance⁵ of a larger percentage of society.

Definitions with an ethical moment within them go further. In *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* the norm is described as “an ought-statement, a principle of correctness or standard” (Soniewicka, 2015: 728). Here, with the standard mentioned in several examples, correctness appears, which indicates that normality can imply something else, not just a number. So, not just as it is (factual situation), but also as it is supposed to be (imagined framework). Normal is the word that “also implies what is correct or good” (Cryle, 2017: 1). The fact that the norm implies two different categories raises the question of the coincidence of these two categories.

Fairly often (not to say almost always), researching the deviance of the minority, it seems as if it has already been determined that the majority is correct. We explore why the minority deviates, forgetting that the majority also deviates from the minority. The assumption that quantity is a measure of quality lays the foundations for the instability and relativity of that quality, because quantity, or the number (amount), is a variable category which can change. This causes the norm to be identified with correctness, and in fact, the norm is just something generally accepted, which is not a guarantee of correctness. Hence, it can be not correct. That is why a clear distinction should be made between the ordinary and the correct, the right, the righteous.

Let us imagine that a plant has a growth (excrecence), something that is not usual for

⁴Although the positive does not always have to be good, and the negative to be bad, in this article the positive refers exclusively to the good, and the negative to the bad.

⁵ Something “normal” may be completely unwanted, due to a natural aversion to it. Biological death is part of

the natural process, part of natural normality, part of the chains of the biological side of existence. Regardless of its “naturalness”, the human being has never accepted it as something desired. It is an unwanted normality.

that plant. Certainly, negative deviance is considered an aberration from something that is usual, so in this case, the growth would be a negative deviance. Over time, this growth spreads so much that it becomes physically larger than the basic part of the plant's body. Now, is a growth larger than a plant still a deviance, or is the plant a deviance of that growth? Probably, no matter how much it spreads, the growth will always be a deviance, because the plant is the one "attacked" by deviance, it comes "before the growth", it is the basis. In other words, if there is something that is useful (in terms of goodful), regardless of the quantity that opposes it, it will always remain useful. Thus, the majority that is not in tune with the useful is deviant, regardless of its abundance, because quality is not determined by the number, but by "positive usefulness". Only when the numerical value is separated from the value of utility, a clear boundary will be shown between what "is" and what "is the best". This boundary between the factual and "the best" state reveals the extent to which the normal, in the sense of the ordinary, is not necessarily correct. Accordingly, correctness is a basis from which one can deviate and which can be found outside the framework of the normal (just as the normal can be found outside the framework of the correctness, depending on the position from which it is observed).

1.2 *The power of the majority's norm*

Here we must emphasize that if something that is usual is not acceptable to the majority, then it is not normal and is not within the norm of society as a whole. Thus, it is not the usual what is exclusively normal, but accepted as such. However, if the accepted by the majority is not in accordance with the correct, the right, and the righteous, then a normal society in such circumstances is neither correct, nor right, nor righteous. That is why the legitimacy of both the accepted normality of human and the accepted normality of society is called into question. By comparing normality and justice, we can see the extent to which society is "sick" or "healthy", the way in which a person becomes alienated from another person, and how the underdevelopment of empathy affects

the formation of harsh (interpersonal) standards. Ronald David Laing criticizes society for its high evaluation of "its normal man", claiming that (society) "educates children to lose themselves and to become absurd, and thus to be normal" (Laing, 1967: 12). Society can not only make mistakes, but also be a role model as such. The intense influence of the group, as well as the tendency of the individual to become and remain part of that group, increase the possibility that a person identifies with the group's model of the normal self more than with the original self.

In the already mentioned *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, norm is represented as something that, "in a descriptive sense indicates a certain regularity or general average" (Soniewicka, 2015: 728). This "general average" shows that the norm is firmly bounded by conformism. The influence of the majority on the individual is as important as the propensity of the individual to belong to that majority. It is not uncommon for individuals not to express their different opinion for fear of gaining the status of not normal in a negative sense, of being rejected, or of bearing other types of consequences. Many of those who express different attitudes, under pressure "adapt" to the majority. Notable experiment of Solomon Asch discovered that a person often adjusts own opinion to a larger group of people, even knowing that the group is wrong (Asch, 1956). A situation in which individuals would find themselves (opposing the majority), "fostered an oppressive sense of loneliness" (Asch, 1956: 32). This example of conformism reveals the "power" of the majority and what emotional pressure it can exert on an individual. For a social being, loneliness is rejection by society and, adjustment to society, even against one's own logic, is an aspiration to remain in that society. Again, we come to the conclusion that the accepted form of normality and non-normality depends on quantity, i.e., the number of people who accept it as such. We also see that "majority pressure" has a significant impact on many individuals, whether that majority is wrong or right.

The normal in nature and the normal in society often pass by each other, and could even be opposites. It may not be wrong to say that, due to this disharmony of the social in relation to the natural normal, personal and social defects appear as a reaction to erroneously set criteria. When we talk about normality in the social sense, we must also mention social values, the intensity of which depends exclusively on man, and thus on society. Social psychologist Muzaffer Sherif points out that “like any other common norm, social values come into existence as a consequence of the contact of individuals or groups of individuals” (Sherif, 1936: 113). When more individuals give significance to the “same”, then that “same” becomes commonly significant, that is, socially significant, important, valuable... Social values “may form or even standardize common attitudes, likes and dislikes, aversions, and preferences in the individual members of the group” (Sherif, 1936: 113). It is obvious here that the standardized common attitudes of one group are the norm to that group and that this norm can influence individuals in forming their own attitudes. Thus, the social norm is established by society and adapts to society, and the individual adapts or does not adapt to the social norm.

The norm of culture can sometimes be inconsistent with what is understood as naturally expected. Mentioning the example of the battle and sacrifice of one’s own life, for the sake of the comrades, communities or nations, sociologist Allan V. Horwitz explains that “cultural norms can be so significant that they override even the most deeply rooted natural instincts” (Horwitz, 2016: 204). Something that is culturally normal, that has reached the peak of humanness for one group of people, can simply contradict the law of innate instinct (although, it is questionable what society would look like if everything coincided with the innate instinct of each individual).

Due to its variability, the norm is relative. Normal today does not have to be normal tomorrow. If today’s norm, under various challenges, changed in future, and with

its new form be devalued, then good and evil, beautiful and ugly, modern and unmodern... can easily change their significance in the life of human and society. In other words, they can change their intensity to the point that they can become own opposite. The instability of the norm reveals that custom is not a measure of either correctness or incorrectness, but only the stability of decisions, deeds, activities, understanding... Therefore, the usual, standard, that is the norm, and thus normal, does not necessarily have to be correct, right and righteous. One should never ignore the fact that “useful” and “usual” are not synonyms.

2. Not (yet) normal

General normality does not imply an individual matrix, but a set of all individual matrixes with acceptable differences that are within the boundaries of a common matrix and that can, more or less, affect those boundaries. According to Michel Foucault, normalization does not nullify differences, but harmonizes them.

“In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialties and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. It is easy to understand how the power of the norm functions within a system of formal equality, since within a homogeneity that is the rule, the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences.” (Foucault, 1977: 184)

Thus, a norm can be considered a product of a certain kind of consensus of individual differences. But where is the limit, the border, an imaginary line, which leaves the difference on the “other side”? It is clear that the extremes, due to their noticeable opposite, differ, but it is not clear where the neutral point separating plus and minus is. Does this precise boundary point, which concerns non/normality, exist at all or is it a set of several points that reduce concreteness? Since this border depends on people, i.e., on a huge set of differences, it is increasingly certain that it is a

set of a large number of acceptable points which, due to their number, reduce the concreteness of the border. Leon Anderson has largely answered the questions outlined above by claiming that “one of the key features of deviance is its *blurred boundaries*” (Anderson, 2017: 4, emphasis original). The ambiguity of where exactly the deviance begins reveals the flexibility and changeability of normality. The standard that determines the normality of a person is not immutable, and, therefore, one of its forms does not have to be valid for every generation. It is not impossible that one generation can change the standard, and thus the form of normality, several times. Through changing the form of the normal, society naturally changes the form of the non-normal, which does not have to be exclusively negative and incorrect, even though it is out of the norm.

2.1. Deviance potential

“Not normal” or “abnormal” is usually associated with a deviance, especially a negative one. Negative deviant behavior is a frequent occurrence, to some extent usual, which is not accepted as normal. Such a deviance is not in accordance with the generally established ethical, legitimate, interhuman rules of conduct. It is clear that the “usualness” does not help to perceive negative deviant behavior as neither normal nor correct. On the other hand, the existence of a positive deviance reveals that “not normal” does not always have to be incorrect, not right and negatively evaluated. One of the typologies indicates four types of deviance:

“*Negative deviance*, the traditional focus of the sociology of deviance, refers to behaviors that involve underconformity or nonconformity to normative expectations and negative evaluations. *Rate-busting* refers to overconformity to normative expectations that is negatively evaluated. *Deviance admiration* denotes underconformity or nonconformity that is positively evaluated. Finally, *positive deviance* designates overconformity that is positively evaluated.” (Heckert, 2002: 451, emphasis original)

Each of these definitions emphasizes the fact that the deviance, due to its *under*, *non* and

over, is out of normal. Some of them are negatively, and some positively evaluated, but none of them is within the borders of the normal. If none of these types of deviance has caused the adaptation of either the whole or at least the majority of society to it, then it remains outside the boundaries of the normal and retains its status of the not normal.

Negative and positive deviance are two extremes of abnormality, the first of which violates the current shape, and the second – the current scope of the normal. Because of its positivity towards the normal, “positive deviance could be considered a deviant concept within the substantive area of deviance” (Heckert, 2002: 455). It threatens the boundaries of the normal (and in that way of the abnormal), but it also threatens the essence of the deviance because through its positivity, the deviation can turn into the norm. When a “positive deviance is analyzed as behavior or conditions that surpass normative expectations rather than violate norms” (Heckert, 2002: 456), we should not neglect the possibility that, in a certain sense, surpassing normative expectations is already a violation of the norm. Normative expectation is the norm’s limit. Positive deviance can violate the norm, retaining its essence, but threatening its scope. Negative deviance, on the other hand, can be an instrument in the process of fighting for realization of normality. For example, demonstrations in the streets often lead to disturbance of public order and peace, but their goal is achieving a higher standard of living, changing the dysfunctional system, equality of all citizens... Disturbance of public order and peace is not considered normal, but the pursuit of achieving a “higher standard” of living is. Therefore, negative deviant behavior is often the path to achieving a positive goal.

Georges Canguilhem notices that, according to a theory of the relations between the normal and the pathological, pathological phenomena are only “quantitative variations” (Canguilhem, 1978: 13). He states that “the pathological is designated as departing from the normal not so much by *a* or *dys* as by *hyper* or *hypo*” (Canguilhem, 1978: 13, emphasis

original). So, if something is just a “quantitative variation”, then there is a possibility that for a human being there is no complete abnormality, but only a more or less unbalanced equilibrium of currently accepted normality. Continuing Plato’s example of a craftsman who does not make mistakes, that is, he makes mistakes when he is not a craftsman (Plato, *The Republic*), Canguilhem concludes:

“No healthy man becomes sick, for he is sick only insofar as his health abandons him and in this he is not healthy. The so-called healthy man thus *is not* healthy.” (Canguilhem, 1978: 179, emphasis original)

If we use the logic of this statement to understand the relation normal-not normal, we can conclude that the growing absence of normality increases the presence of lack of normality, that is, the presence of non-normality. Therefore, the *absent-normality* is the measure made by normality and for normality.

The non-normal is not necessarily the opposite of the normal. It just has to be outside the frame of the accepted normal and that is what makes it out of the normal, that is, not normal. For example, the opposite of love is hatred. Non-love is not love, but it does not have to be hatred either. To some extent, any difference, which goes out the limits of differences accepted by the majority, is a potential non-normality. But why potential and not certain? The answer to this question can be obtained through the adaptation to deviance. A hyper version of the generally accepted and understood as useful can be a positive challenge. It can become something to strive for and can expand the limits of acceptance of deviance, change the standard and thus change the form of normality. In other words, positive deviance has the power to move the standard to a “more intense level” and thus the non-normal moves the boundary of the normal, becoming normal itself. This kind of deviance reveals that something does not have to be exclusively abnormal because of its essence, but also because of its intensity. Deviation potential is reflected in the ever-present possibility of human understanding of normality to change.

2.2. More potentials...

We will not focus much on the paranormal in this text but it should be emphasized that the frequent identification of “paranormal” and “not normal” (non-normal) is not entirely correct. The main difference between these two phenomena is that the non-normal is, in essence, outside the generally accepted norm, but it is most likely understandable, and the paranormal exceeds the limits of materialized human reason, the limits of our physical logic. It is outside the limits of both our normality and our non-normality. If the non-normal is outside the limits of the accepted normal, the paranormal is outside the limits of the logic of the human mind. Even though paranormal phenomena could be understood as “those supposedly due to powers of the mind that go beyond the normal” (Blackburn, 2005: 268), perhaps it can be added that those are more than that. Following the fact that “beyond something’s limits” is “outside something’s limits” we can claim that beyond the normal is outside the normal, which means that it is not normal, simultaneously being incomprehensible. But if the paranormal has become frequent, which due to its frequency (conditionally) has begun to be considered “normal occurrence” (in terms that it happens often and does not harm anyone), it still can remain incomprehensible. Thus, we can claim that something is *this* because it is not *that* and vice versa, without noticing that it is none of it. Therefore, it may be more precise to present it as “outside the understandable” or “outside the limited logical” rather than just “beyond the normal”. To a human of limited, materialistic logic, the paranormal is the paralogical. It is neither normal nor abnormal, but once understood (if it is possible to be understood through materialistic logic) it can become both.

We have not fully explored and understood complete physical reality, so that we can rightly claim that our assessment of something is accurate. Our normality/non-normality is just a small segment in the total physical side of reality. That reality has a dual value for man (human) – known and unknown. The normal

changes through changing the value assessment, but also through the cognition of the unknown. Cognition increases the known, and decreases the abstract reality, which is our potential normality-abnormality. This cognitive transformation of human physical reality affects the transformation of both human normality and abnormality.

Moving from the potential form of normality – abnormality to our present one, I would like to propose that platformal perception is the reason why the result (what we notice) is often identified exclusively with the cause. For example, if a person has dysfunction, the majority (if not all) will consider⁶ him abnormal (not only as an unusual, but also a dysfunctional). However, what we understand as abnormal could be understood as a normal reaction to dysfunction. It may not be wrong to claim that a person's normality is reflected in the response to dysfunction. Therefore, what is perceived as not normal at the macro level can be presented as normal at the micro level, because it is in accordance with the relations of cause and effect. A person with dysfunction may deviate from the social average (formal non-normality), but reacts to the dysfunction as expected (essential normality). Our final assessment may be incomplete due to not taking into account every fact, that is, focusing only on dysfunction.

3. Transformation of the normal

The main feature of the normal is the standard, which is, in a sense, a limitation whose extent depends on society. In other words, the standard is the boundary of our need, understanding, adjustment, and adaptation, which we manage through own limitations⁷. It does not mean that we do not need and understand something what is not the standard, but we simply do not accept it as such. Thus, that boundary is managed by us and can be moved, sometimes to the level that what used to be normal is no longer, and, on the contrary,

what used to be not normal, is normal at that moment. Muzafer Sherif points to the potential of the abnormal to contribute to the formation of later respectable norms in the same society (Sherif, 1936: 15). This ability to contribute reveals the influential power of the deviation. There is also the statement that the same behavior or conditions can be first negatively and later positively evaluated (for example, the French Impressionists) (Heckert, 2002: 468; see also: Heckert, 1989). If we discuss the power of deviation and the power of the norm, we also discuss their weakness. The flexibility of the norm is reflected in the fact that the deviation is a potential norm and vice versa.

3.1 *The normal as a subject and an object*

Normality is constant but changeable. It is also constant in its changeability, which is reflected in flexibility and unstableness. It depends on whether the normal is observed as a subject or as an object. As a subject, it can change the form, and as an object, it can change the status. The transformation of the subject affects the understanding of the object. Ian Hacking compares normality with determinism, explaining it as “both timeless and dated”, taking into account its co-presence with us, but also its ability to “adopt a completely new form of life” (Hacking, 1990/2005: 160). The normal, and therefore the abnormal, coexist with us because they are our understanding and acceptance of reality. They are imaginary, but at the same time an evaluation that is inseparable from us.

We have already mentioned that a positive deviance can affect the change of standards becoming the standard itself. However, it is not only the positive deviance that affects the change of normality. Negative deviance also plays a part in this. Emile Durkheim writes about usefulness of crime:

“Crime implies not only that the way remains open to necessary changes but that in certain cases it directly prepares these changes.

⁶ Labeling by the society (Tannenbaum, 1938/1963; Lemert, 1951; Becker, 1963/1966) is very similar to this “considering” but it is not the same. By “considering” here I mean only understanding, not labeling.

⁷ A standard can be a limit to a need, but a need can also be a limit to a standard. We manage need, but need manages us as well.

Where crime exists, collective sentiments are sufficiently flexible to take on a new form, and crime sometimes helps to determine the form they will take” (Durkheim, 1938/1962: 71).

However, there are natural and social challenges that put society in a position of changing, not in terms of raising standard or changing laws, but adapting to harsher circumstances (for example climate change). Basically, anything that causes a change in nature and society affects the change of norms. This means that the norm is an inseparable element of society that changes along with, or even more precisely, through the adaptation of society. All changes, to a greater or lesser extent, lead to a changed form of reality, which for humans is a new form of normality-abnormality. Regardless of its scope and intensity, any change which society faces and adapts to (whether it is caused exclusively by nature or by society as well), may be better to understand as a part of the process of the *transformation of the normal*. Society lives in a constant change of the normal, which transforms as much as conditions and circumstances. Transformation of the normal has a direct impact on the change of the boundaries of the norm. The normal as a subject can never go out the boundaries of the norm, because it creates them from inside. The norm is, therefore, normal in the form of a subject and its variability is reflected in flexibility. The normal in the form of an object can be found outside the boundaries of the norm, as no longer being covered by the norm. In this sense, the normal as an object is unstable. A person can become not normal not only if that person changes and the majority does not, but also if the majority changes and that person does not. If a member of one society accepted the norm, he or she would logically be normal. If, during the transformation of the norm, a person kept the previous form of the norm as normal and did not accept the new form, that person would no longer be covered by the norm. Non-coverage with the norm makes a

person not normal for society. This means that man is as much an object as he is a subject of the normal. To the extent that the individual, through society, establishes normality, to that extent the generally accepted normality influences the positioning of the individual within or outside the borders of the norm.

Each period ends with a slight or sudden transition to another period, rather than stopping for the other to begin (the human boundary in the form of dates is used to make it easier to understand the “time” which is life in a physical consequence of space). In each of them there is a connection with the past period and the potential of the next⁸. The normal is an inseparable element of every period understood and determined by man. Hence, it may not be wrong to conclude that as long as there is a society, there will be a general normal that is in constant transformation. Social transformation reveals that, so far, there has been no new society without members of the old. If it has, it would mean that the society, at one historical moment, ceased to exist, and that, then, appeared a society without any members of the previous one. The transformation of the normal is an indicator of the transformation of society and values, it shows that society is one, but that it is changing. We can be a “new generation”, but we are born in certain circumstances with already set norms that will, during our biological-social presence or later, suddenly or gradually, less or more change. So, another or the “new normal” (a term that is already widely used) is, in fact, a transformed form of the already existing normal.

3.2 Three types of the need for change

In the late sixties of the twentieth century, a conference was held in New Delhi, at which the main topic was Personnel Administration. Shri K. Hanumanthaiya (the Chairman of the Administrative Reforms Commission) noted that about two decades after gaining independence, India continued to face problems with how this functioned, as the necessary changes were not made after the

⁸ Periods may be logical wholes, but, actually, each of them is a transformed previous period. These wholes are

constituent parts of the continuous flow of the process of change.

British left (Hanumanthaiya, 1968: 62). The very title of the conference report reveals what was emphasized and what stood out as the conclusion: “*Personnel Administration – The Need for Change*”. This is one of the examples where the non-functioning of the same principle in different conditions requires a change of either the principle or the society, i.e., adjustment to each other. Some changes in circumstances, to a greater or lesser extent, can cause a person (or group of people) to need to change (to change the way of own functioning in nature and society). That need is, in fact, the accelerator of human adjustment and adaptation to circumstances.

Change is an inseparable element of life that makes it more or less dynamic. For example, biological change, which we termed “aging”, is a constant process. Nature and society within it are constantly changing due to various factors. Whether the change is noticeable or not, it is always present. Changes that affect man, logically affect the form of normality. One of the main factors in the intensity and velocity of transformation of the normal is the already mentioned need for change. The need is a basic prism through which a person sees normality, so is the need for change, the prism through which the reason for transforming normality is observed and understood. The need can be understood as an internal factor, and the circumstances in which the individual and society find themselves as external⁹. The need for change, depending on how it was provoked, could be possibly divided into three basic types: *creative*, *forced* and *consumer-conformist*. The need for change can also be a combination of these types.

Creative need is the product of a critical attitude¹⁰ and is critical of the standard. The constant need for something new, but also returning the old (which is potentially new to the current), or changing the intensity of the current, constantly changes the standard. This

type of need represents a society’s propensity to adjust the normal to its own needs, that is, the normal to comply with society.

Another type is a forced need, which is the response to the perceived deterioration of both non-social or social conditions. Then the human existential need for adaptation is activated. The way someone will adapt to the changed conditions is individual. The individual can adapt to the consequences, bear the consequences due to an inadaptation, but sometimes can both, not to adapt, and not to bear the consequences. Abraham Maslow indicates that “personality syndromes can sometimes maintain a relative constancy under the most surprising conditions of external change” (Maslow, 1954: 39). Anyway, for a large number of people, changed circumstances affect a certain adjustment, adaptation and acceptance. These changed circumstances are potential normality, and to what extent society has adapted to it, to that extent the normal will be transformed. Here we can notice that there is a need to change and a need to be adjusted to the change (in order to sustain the intensity of harmonious correlation between self and environment). Both cases, when normality adapts to society, or when society adapts to sudden or gradual changes, with great potential that the changed reality will be a new form of normality, uncover the characteristic of the changeability of the normal.

The third, consumer-conformist need for change, is the conscious or unconscious propensity of the individual to adapt to the majority. It can both speed up and slow down the process of change, depending on what the general need of society is. Every expressed idea carries the risk of non-acceptance, but also the possibility of being accepted. An individual, through their own idea, can influence other individuals, and when a large number of people accept that idea, then it and its significance spread through the multitude

⁹ The external factor should be understood conditionally (in accordance with the subject). For society, everything outside society is an external factor, but for individual, everything outside society and society itself is an external factor.

¹⁰ Critical attitude affects a formation of a new idea, but also influences acceptance and rejection of something presented as normal. The majority, through acceptance or rejection, decides if what is presented as normal will be accepted as generally normal.

(crowd), or even the majority. Then society, in the role of a quantitative factor, can influence an individual who has not accepted the idea to accept it. Here, society is the “agent” of interpersonal influence, and person, by accepting the form of normality, accelerates the process of its implementation in society. In such a need for change two basic types of adaptation can be distinguished: *active passivity* and *passive activity*. Active passivity is expressed in the unconditional acceptance of something that is presented as a “new form of the modern”, not because it is presented as such, but because of the absence of independent critical thinking and attitude (self-initiated uncritical determination to be part of the majority). Another one, passive activity, is adaptation through not expressing critical thinking due to conscious avoidance of possible unwanted consequences (determination to be part of the majority extorted by an external factor). Accordingly, in this need for change, traces of uncreative self-initiative and traces of unexpressed creativity¹¹ can be noticed.

After all, the fact that a human in circumstances is the cause, and that the normal is the consequence, imposes itself. Through its needs, society adjusts the normal to itself, and circumstances can affect the form of need to the extent that society begins to adjust to circumstances. Society’s inconsistency in responding to changes causes a crisis, the resolution of which reduces the possibility of a significant transformation of the normal. If the problem is solved more thoroughly, then the normal will transform less. Not resolving the crisis puts the society in position to accept the circumstances either as normal, that is, to go through a significant transformation of the normal, or to accept the change as the abnormality. The increasing intensity of the abnormality conditions the increasing presence of feeling the crisis. So, the crisis is the result of not solving the problem, but also of not harmonized adaptation to the form of change.

¹¹ Unexpressed creativity is caused by “silent” or “loud” extortion. One does not express own opinion because a different opinion is implicitly or explicitly expected.

The way society understands and accepts the significance of change affects its positivity or negativity for that society. The positivity and negativity of a need, and thus the normality of a person, depends on the assessment of society. If a person’s need is within the boundaries of the acceptable needs of society, then it is accepted as generally normal. Accordingly, if one’s normality is within the boundaries of the consensus of majority diversities, then it is accepted as normal. The instability of norm and deviation is in fact the product of the variability of society’s assessment. The variability of their evaluation indicates the variability of the normal and the abnormal. Here it can be concluded that it is more precise to use the term “new form of the normal” than “new normal”, because the transformation of the normal is a continuous process, and the normal a moment (now) in that process.

Conclusion

Human perception obeys to the platform of the physical senses and in accordance with these limits one forms a notion of physical reality. Non-checking, neglecting, insufficient analysis and uncritical attitude (or critical attitude without courage to be expressed), give the incorrect the possibility to be generally accepted as correct, or as “it should be”. Consequently, the correctness of what is unconditionally accepted as normal is called into question. The normal covers different concepts that often do not match – the usual (including average) and the correct (including good). The generally accepted norm primarily depends on the quantitative factor, which is not a guarantee of its correctness.

Human is a being within the norm, but also a being outside the norm. A person with a certain dysfunction is often labeled as negatively not normal, but micro-level analysis reveals that such a person reacts to dysfunction as expected. Perhaps it is more correct to claim that dysfunction is not normal, in terms of that it is not the standard of the majority, but that a

person is normal in their reaction to it. The imprecision of classification into normal and abnormal is a product of generalization based on what is noticed and observed, and not based on the completeness of the whole.

The variability of a person's understanding, need and assessment, but also the circumstances, affect the transformation of the normal. Normality and abnormality are interrelated. They are simply one whole. The increasing absence of one increases the presence of the other, and the notion of one does not exist without the notion of the other. The general norm is a law whose boundaries depend on the needs of the society. The social being is prone to harmonize its opinions and attitudes to the majority due to the need to remain a harmonious part of that society. In order to be generally accepted, the normal of an individual does not have to be precise or correct, but it has to be in accordance with the majority. For this reason, if we say that someone is talking behind our backs while talking to our faces, the question is whether what we said, although more precise than the usual expression, will be understood as normal.

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