

Topic number: 4, Tetsuro Watsuji

Introduction

Tetsuro Watsuji claimed that “environment is the moment that objectifies human existence; but by so doing, the human understands him/herself. We can call it self-discovery through one’s environment.” By saying this, Watsuji emphasised the role that environment plays in a life of a human. In this essay we will discuss the significance of one’s environment to his or her existence and search of his or her true self. Is it necessary for all the people to feel connection with all the objects around him or her just in order to understand *themselves*? Maybe everything that one needs to discover oneself is only the values and attitude that one has laying deep within him/herself?

Part 1. What is environment?

Let’s start with the definition of environment. Naturally it seems as if we can split it in two different parts:

1. Humans we live and communicate with;
2. Other visual objects around us.

If we look at the first part, it is obvious that one has to agree that humans tend to live in larger groups that they call communities or societies. This has happened since the beginning of evolution – it became a lot more convenient to share food and shelter in order to be able to survive. Those who chose to separate themselves struggled and almost every time ended up in severe danger of losing their life quite soon.

In this way human got used to rely on each other. Most of the people accustomed themselves to living and spending their time with the smaller group of humans - their families. They get to see each other every day, know every little detail about each other, share their worries and doubts. An important close connection was made. As we can see, other people, especially our closest relatives, make up a huge part of the environment we live in.

Our surroundings are not only the people, but also the visual background that we live in. The geographical location or the country one is born in definitely are factors which can influence the way one is thinking or behaving. Such simple things as snow or never-ending summer, mountains and deserts form the way people see the things around them. That is why the natural conditions also contribute to creating customs and traditions in one or another part of the world.

The other very significant part of one's life that must be mentioned while talking about the environment is art. People have always felt the urge to create. The buildings people pass every day on their way to work or thousands of books written every year symbolize the background we prefer. Such works of art as the Great Wall in China or *Mona Lisa* by Leonardo da Vinci have been admired for centuries and are not going to be forgotten in the near future. Art, just as the other usual objects, form our perception of the world around us. Not only the people who live in China or next to Louvre are interested in seeing the creations that significantly changed the environment and inspired so many other works of art, therefore art must be valued as an important part of everyone's day-to-day life.

As it can already be seen, environment is a complex term that define not only the surroundings, but also other influential individuals of a human's life in the Earth. But are these components influential enough so that they can help one in the process of finding his or her true self?

Part 2. Environment is vital for self-discovery

At first, the arguments for the need and the importance of environment should be analysed. Without a doubt, the world around us plays a huge part in our every day life. Despite that,

there are some substantiations why the environment is also a crucial factor on the way of self-discovery.

Let's start with the influence that people have on each other. There are approximately seven billion people in Earth. Every day millions of people communicate with each other, conveying their thoughts and ideas. Usually it is done by using verbal communication as well as movements and/or glances with their eyes. Despite the new ways to pass the information, languages still remain the most important tool that humans use to speak and understand each other. One usually does not speak to him/herself as this would not be a proper conversation – by conversation I mean an exchange of ideas and thoughts between two different individuals. Therefore the environment, understood as the other humans we live and communicate with, must play a part in this process.

How can a language and speech influence a human so much? Well, to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life, as one can conclude from the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. The famous Austrian was deeply fascinated in the so-called *language games*. He was convinced that the whole problem and aim of the philosophy is to solve the puzzles we create by communicating with each other.

Such a simple, but yet a captivating example – a woman says to her husband: “You are so unreliable and you do not understand how I feel most of the time.” A man may understand this as “I am just stating the facts” game where the woman implies that it is “I need more of your support and help” game. When the both of the sides do not “play” the same set of game, usually one or both of them become dissapointed. If they succeed in finding the same game, it is expected that a lot of problems can be solved and talked through.

Therefore, if one was able to untangle all the misunderstandings human have while communicating, the problem of philosophy would take a huge step forward just as a person's search for true self. The reason of this is that the problems of philosophy strongly correlate with the human's knowledge of themselves as philosophy is a science of trying to get the answers to the difficult questions about life and its components.

Not only other humans, but also the natural environment and art are significant in one's existence. So many people get inspired by leaving everything behind and just heading straight back to the place where the history of humanity begun millions of years ago – the nature. One may not even notice the hours spent wandering in the woods or laying on the beach.

If nature is not enough, as it had already been mentioned, people are always keen on art. But not every time creating a masterpiece is the only way to make a change in the environment around us. Just simply going to theatre or art exhibition makes a huge difference in the process of development.

Since the ancient Greek and Roman times all forms of art were considered as inseparable part of human's moral improvement. Sculptures, temples and other works of art have been praised as a way of transition and inspiration. Of course, the outside beauty of objects was valued just as much as their usage. Arthur Schopenhauer did also emphasise the beauty of art and its need in the life of a human. He claimed that one must enjoy art constantly in order to keep on trying to attain perfection.

That's why both interaction with other people and enjoying nature or art are needed for people to keep improving themselves, as it gets them closer to the true self.

Part 3. Although one can find him/herself without the need of the outside world

However, some philosophers claim that outside world is not a must in order to be able to go through the long road of self-discovery. Actually a lot of those who decline the necessity of other human beings turn to the religious side of the philosophy. God has played a huge part not only in the medieval, but also in some of the modern philosophy. The relationship between a human and some higher force that cannot be defined has given a lot of thoughts to contemplate for many famous philosophers.

One of them is Soren Kierkegaard. He was very interested in how one can find oneself purely by putting all his or her faith in God. Even though at some parts his philosophy may sound as theology, Kierkegaard in most of his works, including *Either/Or*, discusses the choices human has to make as it is one of the most difficult parts in one's life. Kierkegaard found it

extremely tempting to choose between various things. It seemed to him as if there was no difference between marrying and staying a bachelor, or killing and not killing himself. That is why the presence of others annoyed Kierkegaard. The Danish philosopher argued that the biggest and the most important step of one's life must be done in solitude.

He was convinced that the process of finding oneself is very long and difficult but should be the main goal of everyone's life. Kierkegaard called it *the leap of faith*. After passing the aesthetic and ethical phases one has to aim to do it. This action actually changes everything in one's life. This is the part where one can say that they have arrived at the condition of. The person does not longer rely on the others, he or she has complete faith in God and can live calmly and peacefully with no fear or uneasiness.

By stating all of this Kierkegaard shows that people should not search themselves among other people in their every day environment, rather than turn to God and not be afraid to take the final leap of faith.

The other philosopher who was deeply convinced that a human must find him/herself in him/herself is Emmanuel Levinas. The concept that he widely uses in his works to explain how one can reach self-discovery is *the Other*. It actually also is one of the most important parts of Levinas' work as this helps him prove that Ethics indeed is first and the most important philosophy.

Levinas sees the Other as an intruder everyone has inside of them. The most peculiar trait it has is its mortality and since a human has a power to kill the Other, that's why it asks you not to do it. According to Levinas, the moment where you have to find yourself is the moment you are looking at *the face of the Other*. Since the Other is mortal and at one point a human may decide to kill him, this is where the moral dilemma and the interaction begins.

Just take a look at the moment when a human is holding a gun and standing in front of an unarmed person. At one point the gunman must look in the victim's face. The choice must be made – to kill or not to kill. And as hard as it can be, this decision creates a transition. After having looked straight into the eyes of a defenceless person, one has changed the way his or her inner world exists. In the thoughts of Levinas, this moment of purest contact with

the face of the Other can convert the person and guide him to the completion of finding oneself.

It can be seen that contacts with God and other inexplicable higher powers strongly influence the life of a human and help to reach the true self. Just as Kierkegaard puts all of his faith in God and in this way can feel no more anxiety and doubts, Levinas sees this transition as an action of Ethics – which in his philosophy is the relationship between a human and the Other.

Conclusions

The importance of the environment is not the same to everyone. Even though some extremely appreciate the beauty of art and the language games that we play with each other, others may feel like the most important and life-changing events in their life can only be made in the solitude and silence.

All things considered, the problem of the role of the environment cannot be entirely answered just by stressing the impact it has on people's lives. It can be concluded that environment is very important, but it is still not clear whether that significance is enough and whether more could be done just by looking at the feelings and thoughts inside of one's soul.