

Freedom and Loneliness

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translated by Danai Roussou

[They said she came again/ Wandering in the city streets/ They said it's late, no one can see her/ Loneliness is her name].¹

When Pandora was careless enough to open the Pandora's Box in the well-known myth of Epimetheus, she perished all the goods but hope. Hope, the only good that was left to man, his source of power and consolation, has been praised by poets and philosophers at all times. However, during the course of time some thinkers surprised by interrelating paradoxically enough hope with fear and freedom. From Seneca's phrase "you will stop to be afraid, if you stop to hope"² and "there is only one salvation for the defeated, to hope for no salvation" by Virgil³ till the words engraved on Kazantzakis' tombstone "I hope for nothing, I fear nothing, I am free", thinkers have attempted to present a distinct viewpoint.

Nevertheless, nowadays, another awkward relation has been established between hope, freedom and loneliness; consequently, only a few decades after Kazantzakis' death, his words successfully depict modern people and their living drama. This is the case because there are so many people who no longer fear anything, hope for nothing and are free, but simultaneously this freedom means they are tragically alone too. For one of the most tragic cases of absence of hope and disappointment is the existential loneliness of modern people.

Undoubtedly, the hope of expectation is vital for our very own existence. It is vital as well for people who experience loneliness but hope they can escape from it. There are certainly those who for some reason know or better sense they will never abandon their loneliness.⁴

But how can freedom accentuate the modern man's existential loneliness and finally trap both of these types? Does freedom sabotage companionship? In other words, is loneliness the price we have to pay for our freedom? In the book "Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying man" by Marquis de Sade, the dying hero, despite his claim he lived a free life, longs for the company of six women that has "reserved" for the particular purpose of sharing with them his last moments.⁵ According to one interpretation, the "need-free" dying hero of De Sand is fighting to win his bigger fear, loneliness.

At the same time, another issue is risen, that of the type of modern freedom demanding this price. Kazantzakis refers to man's moral freedom, a freedom of spirit and thought from everything capable of enslaving man, i.e, a freedom from superstitions, obscurantism, social stereotypes etc. Nevertheless, this is quite different from the modern view everyone has regarding one's personal freedom which breaks the ties between our ideal social relations.

In Western societies, an individual is protected by the constitution. The constitutionally entrenched rights determine the extent of an individual's freedom. The private space is protected and despite the modern opposite tendency of lust for terror, personality and property are considered inalienable personal rights.

Individual freedom is sometimes identified as an unrestricted place of action by the holders of these rights. The common characteristics of human behaviour such as individuality, possessiveness, aggression etc. greatly contribute to the understanding of how we perceive now our individual freedom. In other words, modern man's freedom (moral and individual) is accompanied mostly by loneliness and inevitably leads to existential disappointment.

Disappointment as the opposite concept of hope is certainly the outcome of an image skillfully projected for the modern man today; a man who enjoys freedom in a particular way, savours the joys of life and fulfills his desires unconditionally at all times, without any restrictions because only in that way can he ensure and enshrine his freedom (cf. consuming standards). So it seems that freedom and loneliness have nowadays **forged a *sui generis* alliance**.

This alliance has greatly contributed in rendering loneliness one of the thorniest issues of modern society. The existential loneliness, which is experienced as an inability to please one's soul, is turning against freedom itself and using it as a vehicle for man's enslavement.

Modern loneliness is egoistic, narcissistic and characterized by lack of love and by indifference.

According to one Physics' theory, our world might possibly be merely one of many parallel worlds. Unfortunately, however, in our lives this is not simply a theory but has become a reality. It seems that every one of us has created for himself/herself a unique personal universe.

Milan Kundera describes such a characteristic scene. He writes: "I look at the rear view mirror; it's always the same car which cannot overtake me because of the incoming traffic. A woman seats beside the driver. Why doesn't he tell her a funny story? Why doesn't he rest his hand on her knee? On the contrary, he swears at the driver in front of him because he is not going fast enough, while the woman herself does not think either of touching the driver but mentally drives the car too and swears at the other driver as well.⁶ Every person in this scene has created a private space in which he/she chooses to move exclusively. Each one of them denies approaching each other.

We see our world this way as well, or better said, we structure it this way, egocentrically. We seek one another not out of love for the other person, but in order to cover our own needs. We are indifferent for anyone else and eventually our loneliness is the outcome of our egoistic stance/attitude.

A huge *ego* separates us from living happily together with someone else. For Kundera's driver, the other car, the other driver is nothing but an obstacle to his freedom, due to which companionship and the (other) person are sacrificed.

Eventually, I am scared that on our way to freedom we lose our individuality, our face. This fact emerges especially if we examine the definition of the Greek word *πρόσωπο* (face, individual), which is derived from the preposition *προς* (to) and the noun *όψη* (face), which in turn connotes that according to Greek language as individual is considered the person "who faces towards the other", who looks at another person. I look at another person and become a face as I see at the other person something from myself within him/her. This may be the everlasting message of the biblical story of man's creation: Then the-God said, "It is not right the man to be alone; I will make a companion exactly as him... he made a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said: "This is at last bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ⁷

The scene of the recognition of Eve by Adam may be one of the most representative scenes of escaping loneliness. Adam recognizes his very own elements reflected in Eve, and consequently “he becomes a face” liberated from his loneliness. This story from the Bible, although is not the only one in ancient traditions which attempted to explain the innate human need of facing the other, is undoubtedly succinct.⁸ The Homo Urbis is called to follow the same path.⁹

Nevertheless, it seems that nowadays from the very first erotic glance to the explanation of the relationship itself, the man demands the submission of the other. Our loneliness is evident even through the way we flirt. During the preliminary stage of flirting, the look is transformed into a vehicle of lust according to Sartre and “tries to conquer, to absorb the other and destroy his freedom, to neutralise him”.¹⁰ Sartre describes that the conscience is facing a big problem with the look of the other person and also that the moment subjectivity is submitted to the meticulous scrutiny of a different consciousness, we are led by embarrassment or shame either to an effort to overpower the other’s glance, or its confrontation as an object of observation-object of lust.¹¹

Unfortunately, the virus of egocentrism appears in the relationship itself though. Fatalism as a way to explain a love affair, that is to say, it was meant for two people to meet is but another aspect of our egoistic loneliness. We explain relationships as something belonging to us, something meant to happen to us, and not as a meeting and communication of two people.¹² With the same egocentric way, we approach our friendships or family relations.

In any case, being a *face* implies conquer, because only through effort can one become a *face*. Conversely, one only exists as an individual.

Our times are characterised by an obsession with the individual and individual rights. *Atomos* is the main Greek word used for individual means something that cannot be divided (the smallest particle), while its commonest synonym is the word *idiotis*, i.e, the simple citizen who does not participate at politics, a fool according to the original meaning of the word in Ancient Greek.¹³

This new approach of the man must happen through the experience of a certain personal existence and its position to the world. Its aim is to define the freedom of a certain human who currently lives within a specific society. However, it seems that the social reality promotes the individuality. This gradually leads to the individual’s fragmentation into multiple pieces, and consequently results to the modern person’s

feeling that “no one understands me”. But this is certainly not the case, because the world does not turn around every one of us!

The solution has to be dynamic; everyone must abandon one’s individuality and seek “the other *face*”. If, after all, social organisation accentuates our isolation and modern towns achieve the opposite of what they purportedly aim at, personal responsibility and social companionship are required so that our personal freedom does not denounce the *face* and our loneliness is not the price -for an egocentric freedom.

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¹ From «Miss Loneliness», of the album “Vasilis’ call”, by the music group Paremboli, (1992), words by Costas Lazaridis, music Albertos Deligiannides.

² “Desines timere si sperare desieris, Senec , Epistolae ad Lucilum, 5,7.

³ “Una salus victis nullam sperare salute”, Virgil, Aenied II, 354.

⁴ Theotokas’ heroin says: “ I am completely alone with no hope to truly abandon my loneliness”.

⁵ Marquise de Sante, “Dialogue Between a Priest and a Dying Man”, (1792).

⁶ Milan Kundera, *Slowness*, translation in Greek, Estia Publications, p.10.

⁷ Genesis 2.18, 22-23, etymologically the word *woman* in Hebrew derives from the word *man*, as in Ancient Greek the word *ανδρῖς ανήρ*. *The Holy Bible, translation from the original texts, Hellenic Biblical Company, Athens. 1997, footnotes of p. 11.*

⁸ See Plato’s Symposium where Aristophanes explains everyone’s wish to unite with someone else as a result of the human’s being parted in two, according to the legend men had four hands and legs and were very powerful, so the gods out of fear separated them in half. Since then every man seeks longingly for his other half.

⁹ The modern man living in the city; this term is proposed by the author

¹⁰ Simon Blackburn, “The seven deadly sins- lust”, Nefeli Publications, 2005, p. 158-159.

¹¹ Jean Paul Sartre, “Being and Nothingness”, translation by Hazel E. Barnes, London, 1958. P.259, cf. Simon Blackburn, “The seven deadly sins- lust”, greek translation, Nefeli Editions, 2005, p. 158-159.

¹² On lover’s Fatalism, cf Alain De Boton , “Small philosophy on Love”, p. 10.

¹³ Major Greek Dictionary, Tegopoulos- Fytrakis; see also the English definition of the word *idiot*.
