

Traccia 3

Us humans are always looking for the sense of life. Just living is not enough for us. We all long for satisfaction, but how could we find it?

The first point that Clifford Geertz touches upon in this text is the thought that us humans are incomplete or unfinished animals. With this first statement he already implies that we are not an exception among all the other species on our planet, but are still a part of the category "animals". This is an important point of view, because many people think that since we evolved in an extraordinary way we are above all other species and have to be treated differently compared to our fellow living beings. By calling humans animals, their position on the planet is made clear. But if we think about it, it is weird to place ourselves, who have thousands of years of history behind us, who work with electronic devices and harvest food, on the same level as simple animals, isn't it? Something must be different.

Geertz calls us incomplete or unfinished.

From an evolutionary perspective humans are indeed incomplete, just like everything else in our universe. A "rule" of the universe seems to be that everything constantly changes and develops. It is unclear if this change will ever find an end or if it is eternal. Humans have been changing drastically since their existence has happened. Their looks and behaviors have altered, but most importantly their cultures. The transformation of mankind's cultures can be explained with the desire that humans have to keep improving their current situation for they feel, as it was said before, incomplete.

What is remarkable is that apparently there has never been a point in human history where mankind felt at ease. Never have humans felt satisfaction with what they had and what they achieved. This is what discriminates us from other animals. We feel unfinished. We have the urge to fill this gap inside of us. According to Geertz we try to complete ourselves through culture. But we did not only create a single culture, no, we are masters of classification: For instance, as a part of culture you belong to a certain nation. Clifford Geertz implies how we define ourselves through words like "Italians" that seem simple but hold a lot of meaning. They give people who we meet a first impression and allow them to make assumptions about us already. Similar it is when it comes to our level of education or how wealthy we are. Even if this is not often admitted, a person's value and worthiness are determined by culture. Because without culture we sadly would be nothing in the public eye. We would be an empty shell that we long to fill.

But what are we looking for? What kind of gap do we even want to fill and with what exactly? Since Geertz claims that society looks like an appealing filler for this gap, what we are actually looking for might be our life's purpose. If you consider that in society a school formation and later a career path have to be followed, it seems like a game with a kind of goal. The goal obviously depends on the situation and the circumstances, but let us take any job as an example. Would a normal person go to work if they wouldn't get payment for it? Would they work harder and longer if they wouldn't get a promotion? There might be a few exceptions like voluntary workers, but even in that case there is a goal, to help people in need for example. If work, that we all dislike so much, didn't exist, what would we do with our lives? Society is like a game that we all play because otherwise we would be bored and feel this gap burning inside of us. However, if we come back to our comparison of humans and animals we notice that animals do not play this game with us. They are fine if they receive food and water. They do not feel a gap and therefore do not need to create cultures. As Geertz reminds us, "Man's great capacity for learning, his plasticity, has often been remarked" We have been praised for our inventions and discoveries, we ourselves are amazed by the kind of empire we have been able to build, we are shocked and perhaps even frightened by the power we can exercise on our planet. Sometimes it seems to me that many humans could have so much potential but perhaps it is wasted...

As good or bad this might sound, we cannot deny what Geertz continues the sentence with: “..but what is even more critical is his extreme dependence upon cultural learning”

The sad truth is that us humans are nothing without society. Our brains are like a formable mass and if nobody ever touches this mass it remains as it is: simple, boring, plain. Society is the one that comes in and shapes it: We have to learn how to follow rules and patterns, we are trained to behave in a certain way, we are expected to acquire knowledge. Eventually we get used to this and we start to depend on it. The individual starts relying on commands that most of the time it follows without hesitation. We don't have the strength to rebel against our own culture for it is what defines us.

To make clear how much culture and society influence our beliefs and actions I want to talk about a short story called: "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" To sum it up, Omelas is a fictional, utopia-like city that has one crucial characteristic: It's inhabitants are all happy. There is no such thing as sadness, guilt or hatred. No wars, no weapons, no slavery. Every reader is free to imagine it as they like it, the only condition is that it should be a place in which there is nothing more to wish for and there couldn't be any improvements. Yes, different from our world, in which we long for more and need to fill a gap, as discussed before. This gap does not exist in Omelas. But as always, there is a dark truth that is necessary for Omelas to be as it is. For the happiness of the thousands a single kid has to live in the worst conditions possible. It is isolated, deprived from sunlight and ill because of malnutrition and a dirty environment. It lives in an extremely small room and is constantly scared and desperate. All the inhabitants of Omelas are aware of this human being that has to be sacrificed for their happiness. They find out about it when they are able to understand. As the narrator describes, in the beginning they can't cope with the immense feeling of guilt that overcomes them. They cry and don't want to accept the unfair reality they live in. It is obvious that they have the desire to help the kid and want to set it free from the torture that it must undergo at first. But with the passing of time they start to realize that maybe they are not ready to give up the happiness of thousands of people and also their own to merely improve a single child's life. They eventually give up and adapt to their society. Only a few disappear quietly and walk away from Omelas, walk away from the fake happiness that someone has to pay an incredible high price for. Walk away from this false gap filler. The place they go to is unknown. I think this is a very impressive story that fits Clifford Geertz's and my own view of society. Omelas is a bit like the wrong impression that we get of our society growing up. We are surrounded by positivity and are not able to comprehend reality yet. When we finally understand what is actually going on in this world we refuse to accept it and want to break free, change something. That is the mindset of young people, which is sadly badmouthed by older people. The young people are seen as the ones who can't adapt, who don't fill their gap with culture. The thing is just that there is no warranty that filling our gap with culture is the right to do. "We live in an information gap" Yes, because the most important informations are missing. We have no answer to such questions as "Why are we here? What is our purpose? What is wrong and what is right?" "Between what our body tells us" what we think we should do, what our instincts and nature tell us "and what we have to know", what society wants us to know and do "there is a vacuum we must fill ourselves". This vacuum should be filled with whatever we think is right and not with what our culture expects us to fill it with. Maybe, instead of filling it with "misinformation" that society provides we should try not to be determined by our culture but to create a new path and walk away.

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