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Philosophical synergetic approach to the study of old age phenomenon

Enfoque sinérgico filosófico para el estudio del fenómeno de la vejez

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ABSTRACT

Today synergetics is an interdisciplinary trend, exploring general patterns in various phenomena. Philosophical comprehension of old age as the final path of human development includes, first of all, the attitude of a person to the process of aging and to his/her own finiteness. The body is no longer able to fulfill all the functions and to meet the social requirements of mobility and general health due to the physiological changes, and the soul is "in the teeth of death" facing the necessity of addressing the existential problem of the meaning of life.

Keywords: Old Age Phenomenon, Philosophical Approach, Synergetics, The Aging Process.

RESUMEN

Hoy la sinérgica es una tendencia interdisciplinaria, que explora patrones generales en varios fenómenos. La comprensión filosófica de la vejez como el camino final del desarrollo humano incluye, en primer lugar, la actitud de una persona hacia el proceso de envejecimiento y hacia su propia finitud. El cuerpo ya no puede cumplir con todas las funciones y cumplir con los requisitos sociales de movilidad y salud general debido a los cambios fisiológicos, y el alma está "en los dientes de la muerte" ante la necesidad de abordar el problema existencial del significado de vida.

Palabras clave: El Proceso de Envejecimiento, Enfoque Filosófico, Fenómeno de la Vejez, Sinérgica.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the positive moments of well-groomed old age conditions (neat and tidy appearance), the visibility of youth demonstrates infantilism of a person, paternalistic expectations, reluctance to bear responsibility, which is assumed by a mature age. An evident manifestation of behavior patterns that are not characteristic of old age undermines the authority of anility in the eyes of the younger generation. Thus, there is a risk of increasing such problems like generation gap, destabilization of society and social tension.

The old-age concept in Russia has always been associated with wisdom, the period of comprehension of unique life experience and the highest stage of individualization, so the task of the society is to restore to the authority and respect for anility (Ermolaeva: 2017, pp. 203-207).

The establishment of modern society to oust old people as unfit for an active life on the social periphery is not relevant and does not correspond to reality, it must be abandoned.

We made an attempt to comprehend the ways and possibilities of the social-cultural existence of the phenomenon of old age at the present stage. It is obvious that adaptive strategies with respect to old people should be bilateral: people need to think about the quality of their old age in the process of their development and aging, and society, in turn, should create all the conditions so that old age is blessed and respected.

The success of social development in terms of its spiritual potential, preservation of common cultural traditions, interrelations, mutual understanding of generations directly depends on the position of old people in the community. The purpose of the study is to justify the potential of theoretical and methodological apparatus of social synergetics, mediating the philosophical discourse of the phenomenon of old age for constructing the basic models of old age.

The first *objective* of the study includes the grounding of heuristic productivity of the use of theoretical and methodological apparatus of social synergetics, mediating the philosophical discourse of the phenomenon of old age in the aspect of personal gerontological identification. The second objective is to identify models of old age as ways of personal gerontological identification, give their social and philosophical characteristics, as well as to analyze the process of these models formation in the light of social synergetics.

The object of the research is the philosophical comprehension of the old age phenomenon in modern society. The hypothesis of the research is stated as follows (Vincent: 2008, pp. 331-339). In young and mature ages, the individual determines his/ her preferential attitude to reality of existence and to him/herself in this reality in two ways: either through external self-determination (in this case the most important premise is the fundamental category of "having"), or via internal self-determination, which is realized through the fundamental category of "being".

2. METHODS

The methodology of the research is based on methods specific to sociological and philosophical studies: social, analytical, systemic, critical-reflective, and logical-semantic.

The object of the study is the phenomenon of old age. Being a complex, multifaceted, and transitional phenomenon in a qualitative meaningful plan, it is considered through universal methods of social synergetics. In particular, when constructing models of old age, the synergetic theory of attractors, the concept of order parameters, and other basic synergetic concepts (open system, bifurcation transition, etc.) are actively used.

Philosophical comprehension of old age has passed a long history. The contribution to the development of this problem was made by the classicists of the world and national philosophy and served as the theoretical basis of the research: K. Jaspers (Jaspers: 1994, p. 214), M. Heidegger, I.A. Ilin (Ilin: 1993), I.I. Mechnikov (Mechnikov: 1988, p. 328), V. Frankl (Frankl: 1990, p. 368), and E. Fromm (Fromm: 2008, p. 304). They regarded old age not only as a phenomenon inherent in the being of an individual person but as the main being element of the organism called society. There are also studies of L.I. Ancyferov (Ancyferov: 2005) which

are popular in modern psychological gerontology.

The works of such foreign and domestic researchers in the field of social synergetics as I. Prigozhin (Prigozhin: 1986, pp. 45-75), G. Khaken (Khaken:1999, pp. 11-26), and E.N. Knyazeva (Knyazeva: 2000, pp. 161-178) also served as a base for the current study. The theoretical and practical significance of the study can be viewed in the following understanding. The provisions and conclusions of the work greatly expand theoretical understanding of the studied phenomenon. The results of the research may serve as a theoretical and methodological basis for improving the activities of state bodies and public organizations in implementing social policy with respect to elderly people. The results to which the author has come can be used in pedagogical practice for such courses as "Anthropology" (meaning and value of human life), "Culture Studies" (spirituality in the life of the old man, life and value orientations in the elderly and old ages, the concepts of old age and death), and "Social Philosophy" (old age as a social philosophical phenomenon).

3. RESULTS

Having emerged as a branch of physics, synergetics became a cross-disciplinary direction of science, exploring general patterns in various phenomena. Its arsenal includes such properties as integrity, nonlinearity, disequilibrium, instability, self-organization, temporality (high sensitivity to the passage of time), which have become universal tools in hands of a modern researcher in the spheres of social and humanitarian processes.

Proximate prerequisites for a synergetic interpretation of social processes come from the founders of the modern general theory of self-organization suggested by I. Prigozhin (Prigozhin: 1986, pp. 45-75) and G. Khaken (Khaken:1999, pp. 11-26). These researchers cautiously applied the ideas of nonequilibrium thermodynamics and synergetics to political science, economics and sociology, though originally these terms were developed within the framework of physics and chemistry.

Today the older generation of a small proportion in the population structure turns into a large part of the demos and this fact cannot be ignored, thus attracting the attention of researchers to the study of this complex phenomenon. The position of modern society to force out old people as those being unfit for activities in the social arena is not relevant and does not correspond to reality, which means that this way of thinking must be abandoned.

Traditionally, old age is associated with the growth of self-reflection, the desire to give an integrative assessment to the whole life path, the loss of illusions, the approach of some finale and, and at the same time, with the attempt to change or compensate something in the remaining time. Thus, according to the opinion of V. Frank: "A man leading a prolific life does not become a decrepit old man, on the contrary, mental and emotional qualities developed in the course of life remain the same, although the physical strength is weakening" (Frank: 1990, p. 368).

In our opinion, old age is a bifurcation transition that allows us to learn new relationships and realize accepting ourselves in these inevitable circumstances. Ideally, the crisis of bifurcation passes positively, when the individual acquires wisdom, staidness, clarity of judgments and a greater ability to act effectively, meaning that the crisis has an ascending trajectory. This crisis is associated with those changes that occur when an individual begins to grow old, as well as with the realization of these changes and the subsequent reaction to them. The opposite scenario of old age is associated with degradation, mental disorders, and loss of vital interests.

Prestigious and fashionable values are associated with youth, power, success, and progress. The representatives of the older generation do not always keep up for all these benefits of civilization. In any case, such aspirations are frequently perceived by society in an ambiguous way, being either condemned, causing a smile or assessed with a frank negative and aggression ("All in good time").

The theme of the life path in the individual scenario of man was repeatedly comprehended by the classics

of philosophical thought. In particular, K. Jaspers pointed out that “genuine old age seeks for forms and implementation, as well as successful in its destiny”, in contrast to the infantile old age, the copies the face of youth, thereby undermining its authority among young generations (Jaspers: 1994, p. 214).

He is echoed by a well-known philosopher E. Fromm asserting that “a human nature possesses the features of both consumer and existential orientation”. It is not possible for a philosopher to neglect any of these two life needs as they are closely interrelated with each other. The first mode relates to the satisfaction of bodily needs; the second with the self-realization of the spiritual nature of a human being. When stated a question “What is the most important thing in life: to have or to be?” Fromm answers “To be”. In other words, a philosopher is for the person actively manifesting in various spheres of life, for the implementation of all the potentialities of a man, and not just for consuming (Fromm: 2008, p. 304).

Today’s reality is that old and elderly people are remembered at best in connection with the need to pay tribute and respect during some conventional events and anniversaries, and unfortunately, there is a strategy of forcing the old aged out beyond the limits of public consciousness, as being “inadequate for work”. A person is deprived of many social statuses and therefore falls into a situation of liminality, a qualitative transition. What was previously taken “for granted” now requires considerable effort; the old man is forced to ground social beings (the same necessity arises for the physiological way of existence and existential being) both for him/herself and for society as well.

We assume that this process can be described by means of two basic models: fictitious old age (when there is no real alignment of an adequate, qualitatively new social position of the old person) or genuine old age (when physiology, existentialism, and sociality are harmonized). We have defined the specific ethos of each of them.

Following the principles of synergy, any unstable system (personality is meant here) moves to certain attractors (in particular, gerontological ones). In the future, the system inevitably evolves to a stable state and can remain as such until it returns to an unstable state due to some reasons. This movement is primarily determined by the domination of one or another order parameter in the life activity of a person.

We will concentrate our attention on the study of invariant, general order parameters controlling the aging process. For this purpose, one must take into account the unique origin of the aging process for each individual person, which is determined by individual order parameters. We believe that both in young and mature ages an individual determines the attitude to reality and himself/herself either through external (where the fundamental category of “having” becomes the most important premise) or internal self-determination, which is implemented via the fundamental category of “being”.

When a man reveals the life double-natures phenomenon of “having” and “being”, one person chooses possession, the other becoming. In the first case, the order parameter governing the movement towards the gerontological attractor of fictitious aging is an empirical “Me”. This order parameter defines an empirically horizontal layer of human being, focuses on the data that is delivered by the outside world. In this case, the behavior of a person with a dominant empirical “Me” is subdued to the influence of other persons and things. The preference is given to the objects of the external world and to their possession.

In this case, the individual deliberately “runs away from old age”, competing with the younger generation and proving to both others and to him/herself that it is possible to escape from the aging process. The consciousness of a fictitious old man perceives this life stage as a tragic one because of all sorts of transformations that inevitably accompany it. It is difficult for a person to adapt to new circumstances like illnesses, custody, narrowing of living space, dependence on people around him/her. A person lives either in a chronological past, appealing to the fact that “it used to be good before” or lives by the future understanding it through the idea of a soon coming of death which will solve all the problems without any gain.

A small digression: we can assume that physical transformations are most acutely perceived by women due to the visual characteristics of change and maintaining the competitiveness of the body that is keeping fit becomes more and more difficult. In general, men experience the loss of attractiveness with fewer degrees. In the other case, the order parameter, which controls the movement towards the gerontological attractor of

an original aging is "Me" in a very deep sense.

At the beginning of the 20th century, an outstanding biologist and philosopher I.I. Mechnikov in his works, primarily in "Studies of Optimism" (Etyudy Optimizma), proclaimed an "optimistic philosophy", arguing that "the sense of life" can be developed. "... Therefore, young people who are prone to pessimism must always be persuaded that their state of mind is just temporary and that, according to the laws of human nature, there will come the times when this state will have to give way to a more lucid world outlook". The meaning of human life, according to the philosopher, is to discover and develop his natural abilities as fully as possible, thereby achieving a harmonious human existence (Mechnikov: 1988, p. 328). Successful soul searching, the assertion of one's own values, allows a person at the stages of youth and maturity to see an idea (goal) in his/her old age that he/she would like to correspond to, having reached a venerable age. Then a positive evolution of an elderly person is possible, ensuring the safety of their connections with society.

This is the opinion of not only philosophers, but also of researchers in the field of psychology: "People whose life path is characterized by daring, creativity, and success constructively refer to the old age contributory factors like deterioration of the physical condition and appearance of various diseases" (Ancyferov: 2005). Science has proved that creative activity is the most important factor that opposes the involution of the individual.

History knows wonderful examples of creative longevity: "I.E. Repin worked to a very old age and only death at the age of 86 interrupted his service to art". "Verdi composer wrote one of his operas Falstaff at the age of 80". The great sculptor Michelangelo completed the decoration of St. Peter's church in Rome at the age of 80. French scientist Shevrel completed his scientific work in chemistry when he was 102 years old. Russian commander Alexander Suvorov carried out his famous cast across the Alps at the age of 70" (Barashnev:1976, p. 97).

something in life, to weigh something on the scales of being. To enjoy recognition and respect... Each of us should gain something in life; the person should be "acknowledged"; must acquire a calm self-confidence ..." (Lederer: 2015, pp. 25-42). In this sense, the goal of old age is to achieve the integrity of the "Me" concept: the acceptance that all the previous goals have been achieved and there are no debts to society and oneself.

How can one explain that one person achieves a substantial, wise old age, filled with special meanings, the other loses the old age form that he/she once had, but does not acquire a new one? In the opinion of the French philosopher and poet C. Peguy, "this happens under the condition that a being who experiences aging humbly accepts it". Adoption of aging inevitability, as the author writes, allows a person to reveal his "luminous possibilities". "A deep understanding of life must necessarily include this metaphysical (and physical) fatigue as a positive condition of human existence" (Vizigin: 2007, pp. 36-55). We agree with the philosopher as it is pointless to struggle with what is inevitable since anyway physical extinction will occur sooner or later. It is important to be ready for obvious transformations, so that old age does not become a tragedy but only a new full stage of life existence, filled with spiritual meaning (Myskin: 2018, pp. 89-95).

The previous researches on the studied issue of old age problems in terms of philosophical and sociological aspects were viewed by such scientists as K. Jaspers, M. Heidegger, I.A. Ilin, I.I. Mechnikov, V. Frankl, E. Fromm, and L.I. Ancyferov introduced a lot of ideas on anility and how to resolve the problems that people come across with while aging period. However, the analysis of scientific works devoted to the above-mentioned problem demonstrates a lack of ideas helpful for resolving the investigated issue.

4. CONCLUSION

Summarizing the philosophical study, we can say that the use of synergetics with regard to the phenomenon of old age is appropriate and counterproductive, in connection with the following circumstances. First, the reception of metaphorical borrowing allowed approaching to the understanding of a problem that rational means cannot be explored at the initial stage (Schiepek: 2016, pp. 181-208). Secondly, synergetics

allowed us to unite existence and becoming, owing to which we could trace the formation mechanisms of genuine and fictitious old age.

The above-mentioned models of old age i.e. fictitious and genuine old age do not exist in pure form, in reality, they are quite interrelated and intertwined. The elements of both models can be presented in one person at the same time. However, for a better understanding of the old age phenomenon in contemporary socio-cultural realities, it is important to have a general idea of choice spaces, the spaces of self-determination of a person who is in the final stage of life (Oseledchik et al.: 2016).

The model of anility is conditioned by the previous evolution of a man. Prerequisites and conditions that accompany and form a person during his life will certainly influence on the process of aging. Ideally, a person emerging from the crisis is enriched with a sense of inner unity, with clear judgments and a greater ability to act effectively. In this case, old age will be filled with essential meaning (Barton, & Levstik: 2004) .

In conclusion, it should be noted that the problem of old age is far from being resolved by now, and it is impossible to solve it to the end. The phenomenon of old age, as well as the phenomenon of a human, is refracted in its essence at least in two ways: through appeal to the eternal, on one hand, and to the transient, temporary, on the other. Perceiving the eternal is apophatic, the transient is revealed mainly through the cataphatic path of knowledge that is by means of society, culture, personality, etc. Therefore, the mere reference to all these moments makes the problem of old age actual, continuously actualized, turning it into a fertile research topic.

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