

PHILOSOPHICAL SYNERGETIC APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF OLD AGE PHENOMENON

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Abstract. Having emerged as a branch of physics, today synergetics is an interdisciplinary trend, exploring general patterns in various phenomena. Old age is a process that cannot be predicted, like any complex mechanism, prolonged by a multitude of circumstances, both individual and social. In this regard, the potential of synergetics allows us to approach the understanding of aging process and its problems. 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 person's life space is irreversibly curtailed in the old age period. As a result, the body is no longer able to fulfil 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: philosophical approach, synergetics, old age phenomenon, aging process, bifurcation transition, nonlinearity, attractor theory, concept of order parameters.

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 are assumed by a mature age. An evident manifestation of behaviour 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 a social tension.

The old age concept in Russia has always been associated with wisdom, period of comprehension of a 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.

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

We made an attempt to comprehend the ways and possibilities of 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 its turn should create all the conditions so that old age is blessed and respected.

The success of society 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 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 philosophical comprehension of the old age phenomenon in modern society.

The hypothesis of the research is stated as follows. 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".

In the end, if a person chooses the category of "having" the dominant stratum of which is the "empirical self", the preferential attention is given to the objects of the external world and possession as such.

If a person chooses the category of "being", the dominant stratum of which is the category of "Me" in a very deep sense, the spiritual, inner layer of being unfolds. What becomes the main thing for the person is not active absorbing of the new, but preserving, retaining the old, structuring and transferring it to other generations.

As it was stated before, old age is a bifurcation transition that allows people to learn new relationships and realize, and accept oneself in these relationships. Ideally, the bifurcation crisis has an ascending trajectory when an individual acquires wisdom, staidness, clarity of judgment and a greater ability to act effectively.

2 Methodology

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 oretical basis of the research: K. Jaspers (Jaspers, 1994), M. Heidegger, I.A. Ilin (Ilin, 1993), I.I. Mechnikov (Mechnikov, 1988; Folarin & Folarin, 2018), V. Frankl (Frankl, 1990), and E. Fromm (Fromm, 2008). 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 the studies of L.I. Ancyferov (Ancyferov, 1996; Villalobos Antúnez & Bello, 2014) 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, 1987), G. Khaken (Khaken, 1999), and E.N. Knyazeva (Knyazeva, 2000) also served as a bases for the current study.

3 Results and Discussion

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 modern general theory of self-organization suggested by G. Khaken. 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 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 on social arena is not relevant and does not correspond to reality, which means that this way of thinking must be abandoned.

When a person determines their identity, various forms of personal existence experienced before do not disappear without a trace, but remain in the inner world in form of drafts, "the sketches" of possible future states and manifestations. There is a reason to believe that in the future these "sketches" will help the person to find himself in a new capacity, to productively adapt to a new life.

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. Frankl: "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".

In our opinion, old age is a bifurcation transition which 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 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 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 succession in its destiny", in contrast to the infantile old age, the copies the face of youth, thereby undermining its authority among young generations.

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 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.

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, existentiality 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 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 him/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 as 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 a 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 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 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 less degree.

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.

The focus of this attractor guides the person to eternal, supernatural senses and values; a person lives metaphysically in the present tense "here and now", saturating the life with meaning; one can see there rethinking of life priorities. A man ceases the interests in worldly goods, realizing their transience and temporality. The soul is, as never before, "in the teeth of death", facing the need to address to the existential problem of the meaning of life.

The prime task of the elderly is to take the path of life as it was. This means accepting oneself in their new age, building their behavior, relying on the advantages of an old age, the main of which is the ability of a holistic perception of the world. Genuine old age differs with the person's orientation towards active work with his/her "Me" in a very deep sense. And this trend is formed long before the venerable age itself, during one's young and maturity years.

In this case, old age becomes the bearer of fertile fruits, as it evaluates the experience of lived years from the height of humility, abandoned passions and close breathing of eternity.

At the beginning of the 20th century, an outstanding biologist and philosopher I.I. Mechnikov (1988) 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" (1988, 223). 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 (1988, 209). Successful soul searching, assertion of one's own values, allows a person at the stages of youth and maturity to see an ideal (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" (Antsyferova, 1996). 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).

Creative activity leads a person into a timeless space, thus one can talk about metaphysical rejuvenation of a person. In this light, the growing interest of gerontosophy (philosophy of old age) to study social psychological well-being of older people, the needs of an individual person, the ability to implement a unique creative potential becomes understandable.

Russian philosopher I.A. Ilyin wrote: "A man has a healthy need by nature to reach 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 ..." (1993, 318). In this sense, the goal of old age is to achieve the integrity of "Me" concept: the acceptance that all the previous goals have been achieved and there are no debts to society and oneself.

4 Summary

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. 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 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.

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.

Aging is viewed as a result; the consequence of what a person was at the age of youth and adulthood. Old age is a bifurcation transition that allows us to learn new relationships realized and accept ourselves in these relations. If a person has accumulated various structural elements (like profession, sport, art, general creativity) during the lifetime, he or she has the opportunity to choose different adaptive strategies. Which of the possible strategies will work depends on randomness, which will help to update the dormant structure.

Bifurcation crisis is associated with the changes that occur to a person beginning to age, as well as how these changes are realized and how the individual reacts to these changes.

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.

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, transient is revealed mainly through 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.

5 Conclusions

The integrity of "Me" concept is usually reached by those people who successfully established themselves in life and resolved the conflicts that were associated with the search of themselves in the previous age periods.

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). 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.

The previous researches on the studied issue of an 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. Antsyferov who 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 demonstrate lack of ideas helpful for resolving the investigated issue.

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