

FOUNDATIONS OF THE FAVORABLE HUMAN LIFE PATH

^aSERGEY A. ERMAKOV, ^bTATIANA V. SVADBINA,
^cOLGA A. NEMOVA, ^dVERONIKA A. KARNAUKHOVA,
^eGALINA A. KAZANTSEVA, ^fALBINA A. KARPUKOVA

^a*Lobachevsky State University of Nizhny Novgorod, Gagarin avenue, 23, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia*

^b*Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University, Ulyanova str., 1, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia*

^c*Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University, Ulyanova str., 1, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia*

^d*Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University, Ulyanova str., 1, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia*

^e*Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University, Ulyanova str., 1, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia*

^f*Minin Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University, Ulyanova str., 1, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia*

email: ^aermacow1958@mail.ru, ^btsvadbina@mail.ru,

^c403485@mail.ru, ^dkevs@mts-nn.ru, ^ekazantsga@yandex.ru,

^falikota@ya.ru

Abstract: In the paper, theoretical and practical foundations of the favorable human life path are considered. With regard to this, it is pointed out that human life path is an objective and subjective reality incorporating bio-socio-spiritual principles that are in the continuous dynamics (change and development). The paper aims at searching for theoretical foundations to build one's favorable life path that is directly associated with a positive focus of one's individual being. In the paper, the authors study potential capacities for preserving and sustaining the physiological, social and spiritual performance ensuring the human existence aimed at being in the good that acts as a pillar of gaining well-being in life.

Keywords: human, life path, favorable path, virtue, dynamics of life, reality, objectivity, subjectivity.

1 Introduction

Sooner or later, everyone starts thinking over the question how to make their life favorable. This mainly happens at a mature age (30 – 50 years old) when one approaches one's life consciously (Ermakov, 2014, p. 73). Interestingly, with centuries having passed, the question has remained as important for people as it used to be. Moreover, the problems range of the meaning of life gains especial relevance, importance and topicality in the age of secularization of church, the rising philosophy of rationalism, pragmatism, and the psychology of mass consumerist society.

The escalation of suicidal behavior among adolescents is quite alarming for the public and makes them study this range of problems especially closely. What is the reason behind suicide as the top extent of self-criticism? According to the official data, since the beginning of 2019, in Russia, the quantity of suicides has amounted to some 2000 people, children and teenagers being over one third of them. This is quite a large quantity for the world of today, and a truly enormous one for the country (Nemova & Svadbina, 2013). Incredible load at school, not knowing how to solve any problems encountered, lack of understanding and psychological support on the part of adults, the increase of the Internet activity of suicidal groups (the "Blue whale") – these are but few of the causes pushing the children's fragile personalities to the decision to take their own lives (Statistics of suicides in Russia, 2019). Meanwhile, there is one reason which the authors believe to be the pivot one explaining this kind of behavior – and this is the lack of meaning of life.

In the contemporary school education, it is on the quantitative indicators that the focus is to a greater extent – i.e. children's successfulness is evaluated by their marks and any certificates of merit and ones of good conduct and progress they have. The problems of upbringing and spiritual establishment of personality landed at the periphery of the educational process. The children get overloaded intellectually but they are not taught mutual aid, mutual supportiveness, collective spirit and knowing how to be friends. As a result, what the public gets is an intellectually boosted, educated person yet completely immature in terms of emotion and prone to stresses, emotional breakdowns

and depression. Thus, the paragon of external successfulness as a life-purpose value is planted so early as in childhood, in the years of schooling (Svadbina & Nemova, 2015).

The same paragon, model to be imitated is reinforced by the present-day mass communications. Advertising, movies, ostentatious and outrageous behavior of popular media stars and politicians – all these work as a well-coordinated mechanism for sustaining the outside visual indicators of the successfulness cult. Psychology of the mass consumerist society imposes pseudo-ideals and pseudo-values for the youth the flip side of which is the feeling of continuous dissatisfaction, boredom and lack of the true meaning of life.

It is no mere chance that for centuries the research into looking for a meaning of life makes representatives of religious thought contemplate and give their answers to the question. The analysis of their works helps staking out the approaches to solving the relevant task – how can one build the favorable life path? How can one gain the meaning of one's existence? How can one find a way out of the most difficult life situation and know exactly for what life is worth living?

2 Literature Review

The interest in the topic of the human life path can be traced down starting from the remote ages. So, in the Old Indian philosophy represented first of all by Vedas and Upanishads, the doctrine of two paths was developed: "path of the gods" and "path of the ancestors". The Old Chinese thought made its contribution to the development of the life path doctrine too, first of all, owing to the efforts of Lao-tzu and Confucius. The Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy also gave an eye to the question of human life path. The problem was touched on by Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius et al. Their achievements are so impressive that after many centuries thinkers have been addressing the heritage of the antiquity (Aristotle. Ethics, 2002).

However, it was philosophia patrum that left arguably the most pronounced imprint on studying the human life path problems. Its bright representatives – Anthony the Great, Athanasius the Great (1994), Macarius the Great (1998), Ephrem the Syrian, Gregory the Theologian, Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom and others – developed an original doctrine on the human life path. It was creatively conceptualized in the works of the Russian ascetics of the Orthodox faith – Ignatius Brianchaninov, Nilus of Sora, Theophan the Recluse, Seraphim of Sarov, Ambrose of Optina (Agapit (Belovidov), archimandrite (The life of Saint Ambrose, an Optina Elder, 2012), John of Kronstadt and others. The authors believe the potential of Christian anthropology goes far beyond the boundaries of a purely religious understanding of human life and has a great humanist importance.

A noteworthy contribution to studying the problem of looking for the meaning of life was made by Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, psychologist and neurologist, a former prisoner of Nazi concentration camp, and the founder of logotherapy as a method of existential psychoanalysis (Frankl, 1990). In his work "Man's search for meaning" Viktor Frankl gives an illustrative example of his own experience of individual's survival in inhuman conditions, testing out as a doctor and a scientist his own psychotherapeutic method of finding a meaning in the most difficult life situations. According to V. Frankl, one of the major life-purpose values is the value of love. Love can manifest itself in various qualities: love for God, for one's work, for the cause of one's life, for the close ones and relatives, for one's Motherland and so on. As the Socrates of the modern times, Viktor Frankl helped his fellows, prisoners like himself, to find the meaning of existence, i.e. for what it is worth struggling for life. The concepts and theories of the above authors are the methodological basis for this paper.

3 Research Methodological Framework

The objective of this paper is to find theoretical foundations for one to build one's favorable life path. In order to achieve the set objective, the following tasks have to be completed: understanding what is the individual life path of a human as a bio-socio-spiritual creature, what the favorable variant of the life path involves and how one can gain it.

Proceeding from the said, the novelty of the work consists in its making an attempt, with preliminary studies accomplished in the philosophical, religious and psychological literature borne in mind, to view the favorable human life path as a result of day-to-day action of virtuous principles on bio-socio-spiritual points of a subject's individual being.

In the work, the method of dialectics is used extensively that aims at viewing the subject in development, in interaction of all its parts and in the unity of the opposites existing. In this way, dialectics ensures unity of the historical and the logical, analysis and synthesis in studying the particularities of the human life path.

Thus, the actualization method puts "on the agenda" certain problems of the past and ways of solving them while also showing their heuristicity as applied to the present days. The said methods in their total allow comprehensively investigating the question of one building one's favorable life path.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 What is the Individual Life Path of a Human as a Bio-Socio-Spiritual Creature?

According to the authors' understanding, the life path of a human is a reality inherent in and given to the subject, shaped by the human (and/or others) under the action of the natural, social and spiritual environment and incorporated into being (Ermakov, 2005, p. 65). It follows from this definition that the human life path is a variety of reality that is given to a human and inherent in the human only. It is this reality that one has to shape throughout the entire one's life, i.e. to change something in it according to one's mind or others' discretion, to keep or improve something. In particular, this occurs necessarily under the action of the natural, social and spiritual environment in which the human exists. With regard to this, it should be emphasized that it is far not everything one wants to change that one can change in one's life but only which is granted to one, which the conditions where one's existence takes place allow and which the opportunities open up to one. This is why, speaking about the human life path as a reality, it should be realized that it is actually a combination of objective and subjective points.

Alongside with that, it should be borne in mind that the human life does not stand still. It is always in motion, which means, changing. In other words, this is not merely a condition. This is a process, too, always. One's life is a dynamic formation (Bogatyreva, 2018, p. 151). One may know about it or not, but one's life path will always be changing. To what side and in what direction will it be changing? To a certain extent, this will depend on the very person, the person's understanding of life questions and knowing how to find solutions to any problems arising.

Meanwhile, it is especially important to keep in mind that a human is a bio-socio-spiritual creature (Berdyayev, 1995, p. 305). The human has a body which lives according to the laws of nature. The human is also born in a society which incorporates the human into its system of social relations influencing the way the human forms as a personality. Moreover, the human has consciousness ensuring the personality's spiritual development. Given all this, the human is a triune (bio-socio-spiritual) formation. Being the "measure of all things", the human adds bio-socio-spiritual points into the human's life path. Hence, in studying a person's life path, the three aspects of the person's being – bio-socio-spiritual ones – always have to be taken into

account. It is they that create a sort of the "body" of the life path. Proceeding from the above, the human life path is an objective and subjective reality incorporating the bio-socio-spiritual principles that are in dynamics at any time point.

Therefore, the human life path as a reality is a quite complicated formation. In particular, the human life path as a reality is not visible to the eye in all its manifestations. At times, all that one can see is some "markers" that "signal" any actions done by a person and that in their turn give grounds to believe that the certain person's life path has a certain focus in its flow. This is where one of the difficulties of comprehending the human life path is hidden.

4.2 The Favorable Life Path and How to Gain it

Proceeding from the above, it can be seen that the favorable life path is associated with a positive focus of a person's individual being. As much one will be able to keep one's body in a healthy condition, to maintain its vitality, as much one will be able to get included into the system of social relations with a possibility of reproducing them and improving one's social status oriented to being in the good – where such values as the good, beauty, faith and love are prevailing in the human feeling of the world – so much one will be able to be successful and happy (Ermakov, 2015, p. 1353). This is so-called "matrix" of the favorable human life. Yet, how to gain it? Here, much depends on the human as a subject, an active principle.

First of all, it is essential to have the knowledge of the human life path being an objective and subjective reality incorporating bio-socio-spiritual principles that are always in dynamics. This knowledge helps one pay attention exactly to the bio-socio-spiritual points of one's being taken in their unity and integrity. One must not think about one's body only, shopping for exquisite food and clothes while ignoring the social and spiritual aspects. Similarly, it is not sufficient to focus the attention on social characteristics of one's being, counting on extension of social links and neglecting the corporeal and spiritual aspects. Aspiring to spiritual values only, placing them as the objective of cognition and overlooking the corporeal and social aspects is just as unproductive. It is in paying attention to the entire total of bio-socio-spiritual aspects involved in the individual being of the human that is the fact of the matter. However, this is not sufficient, either. What is necessary is to make this knowledge "living" (Mamardashvili, 1997, p. 4), i.e. focused on its being carried out throughout the life. It is only the knowledge rooted in life that promotes improvement of the human life path.

In its turn, the "improvement" itself is impossible without relying on the positive stratum of being. And the first one needs to do is to "go away" from the negative aspects of the human life. Until people start taking care of their bodies properly (by means of nutrition, movement, sleep etc.) (Nemova et al., 2016a), until they repeatedly overcome negative trends of their social being (unsettled state of family life, problems at work and the like) (Nemova et al., 2016b), until they start taking care about their imperfection (selfishness, lack of faith, irritableness etc.) – no improvement will occur in their life path. This is why one should develop "critical thinking" (Zykova et al., 2013, p. 95). Moreover, one should fight harmful habits. For this, it is recommended to use "extinguishing" them. Unfolding this statement, Yu. M. Orlov notes that "for a habit to disappear *the scheme of extinguishing* has to be created, i.e. the situation of acquisition has to be reproduced without its essential element – the corresponding feeling" (Orlov, 1991, p. 183). It is only this kind of work done by a person that can help the person overcome the negative habits, and, therefore, create conditions for gaining the favorable life path.

Alongside with that, one should not only avoid all the negative things but also tend to all the virtuous. Touching on this side of the question, Athanasius the Great instructed: "Wherefore having already begun and set out in the way of virtue, let us strive the more that we may attain those things that are before. And let no one turn to the things behind" (Athanasius the Great, 1994,

p. 195-196). Here it is adherence to the path chosen that is important. Once a person has made for the favorable life, the person must not leave the intended path anymore. Clearly, the objective factors of negative nature will affect one's life in an undesirable way but one must continue to one's goal persistently, taking into account the situation having formed. For instance, if one decided to get the higher education but failed to enter the fulltime department, one can adjust one's plans and apply for part-time or evening studies, classroom or distance-learning. In this case, the most important is to study in order to attain the intended goal!

With regard to this, let it be emphasized as a point that one must never stop in one's movement on the path of virtue. The path of the good is a process demanding continuous inclusion of the human into the "tissue" of life. For as long one is destined to live, for so long one must make the good appear (Ermakov, 2017, p. 299). One must aspire to doing one's best of the possible. This was mentioned by Aristotle stressing that "the man who is truly good and wise, we think, bears all the chances of life becomingly and always makes the best of circumstances" (Aristotle. *Ethics*, 2002, p. 57-58). Concerning this, it is important to note that virtue is the basis of well-being. In particular, the good should be understood not only as a category of moral but also as a "tool" for building the favorable life.

Meanwhile, it has to be borne in mind at all times that "the heavenly way is forth as difficult and hilly, or rough with dreadful thorns, or entangled with stones jutting out; so that everyone must walk with the greatest labor and wearing of the feet, and with great precautions against falling" (Bychkov, 1995, p. 130). So, one has to force oneself to the good. And one cannot do without will in this question (Ermakov, 2013). Developing this statement, Macarius the Great wrote, "first he ought thus to force himself to that which is good; and though his heart be ever so much against it, to wait continually for mercy; to force himself to show compassion, to endure contempt with a courageous patience; and though he is set at nought, not to be moved with indignation" (Macarius the Great, 1998, p. 96-97). These Christian values are of the general humanist importance. Becoming the foundation of a person's behavior, they help the person overcome negative points and follow the beneficent path, and it is the latter that is the foundation of the favorable life. In this respect, the way Elder Ambrose of Optina answered the question "how should we live?" is interesting: "We should live without hypocrisy, conduct ourselves in an exemplary manner, and thus we will be on the right track, otherwise we will lose the game" (Agapit (Belovidov), archimandrite (The life of Saint Ambrose, an Optina Elder, 2012, p. 148-149).

Having the will power, confidence in one's strength and consistently bringing the intended into life – this is what one needs for improving one's life path (...) there is never a pure zero or a clean slate to start anything from" (Mamardashvili, 1997, p. 118). Developing this idea, M. Mamardashvili (1997) emphasized that people can start their movement to the best "from any point, because all points are equalized, and we can elevate ourselves from any dirt or any splendor. And, therefore, neither the dirt in itself has meaning, nor has the splendor" (p. 194). It is to start and go on moving in the direction opted for that is important (Ermakov et al., 2018).

5 Conclusion

The above allows concluding that the favorable life cannot be built without fulfilling the virtuous principles. With regard to this, virtue has to become the basis for bio-socio-spiritual points of the life path. Focusing on a single aspect only leads to deforming the entire life path. For instance, if a person shows the knowledge of etiquette in the professional sphere but ignores health and is indifferent to family matters, then, the person's life path is likely to not be favorable. It is only by intertwining virtue with all bio-socio-spiritual aspects of one's being that one can expect building the favorable life path. Meanwhile, it has to be realized that the favorable life path having been built will only remain such if the human is focused on avoiding the negative

and tending to the good, maintaining and enhancing it in all bio-socio-spiritual aspects from day to day. This is a great and difficult thing. Anyway, it is not beyond somebody wishing a better share for themselves and their close ones.

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