



Existential-Personalist Understanding of the Philosophy of History

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the analyses of theoretical models of historical development, evaluation of them and coming to the best one. Thus the authors generalize, summarize and mark out six of them: 1) Cyclical (the old one: Herodotus, Aristotle, etc.), 2) Eschatological (A. Augustine), 3) Progressive (Hegel, K. Marks), 4) Theory of historical-cultural types (N. Danilevsky, O. Spengler, etc.), 5) postmodernist (J. Lyotard, J. Derrida) and 6) “Axial age” (K. Jaspers). Through analyses, we can conclude that the only last one is completely free from any kind of determinism, anarchism and impersonalism and has universal and personal sense. At the end, it analyzes the latest ideas of socio-political development (F. Fukuyama, S. Huntington, etc.). The idea of an alternative post-industrial path of development and the need to build a personalistic society is also expressed (N. Berdyaev, E. Fromm and A. Panarin). Based on the concept of the “Axial Age” the authors suggest existential-personal understanding philosophy of history, which was supported by humanism of the Kyrgyz and Russian writer Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008) and “philosophy of existential event” Merab Mamardashvili (1930–1990), that depends on moral decision of each person, — only in this way can we obtain social progress.

Keywords: Axial Age · Cyclical history · Theory of historical-cultural types · Existential-personalist philosophy of history · Eschatology · Progress · Person

1 Introduction

In society and human life, there is a phenomenon of freedom, due to which an alternative appears, the possibility of choice. In connection with the alternativeness of social development, we can formulate six logical variants of them. Let us discuss their reasons.

2 Concepts of Historical Development

2.1 Cyclical Concept

Cyclical — is inherent to the views of the ancients on development of the society (in antiquity: Herodotus, etc.). It realizes the myth of eternal returning. However the history

as such here is not presented yet, for there is no idea of development as creation of new social connections, the human society is considered by analogy to the nature and basic differences are not found out. We shall cite Aristotle's statement as an example in this occasion: "...if the genesis of something is certainly necessary, it is going on a circle and returns [to the starting point]..." [1].

Here is how Georges Florovsky describes this model:

«The Antique thought did not know the problem of a history. In Greece, there were great historians. Nevertheless, great Greek metaphysics never were engaged in philosophy of a history. The history was not for them a problem, here there is nothing was to ask ... And farther the idea of historical cycles, idea of eternal circular motion an antique thought has not gone. The metaphysical feeling of a history has woken up only in the Christian world» [2].

2.2 Eschatological Concept

It is religious-philosophical and Christian one, which was developed by St. Augustine Aurelius (the creator of the first philosophy of a history) and Nikolay Berdyaev. According to this point of view, history only makes sense, when it ends, that is, ends with the Last Judgment. A history going to infinity — is senseless and devalues everything. The original sense of history consists in necessity to go beyond its limits into the realm of transcendent. So N. Berdyaev wrote:

"History has positive meaning only if it ends. All metaphysics of history leads to the realization of the inevitability of the end of history. If history were an endless process, bad infinity, history would not make sense. The tragedy of time would be unsolvable and the task of a history would be unfulfilled" [3].

2.3 Progressive Concept

Progressive and single-line, Eurocentric, is gaining ground in modern times. Its meaning can be conveyed in the words of Leibnitz: «all for the best in this best of the worlds». The idea of progress was development in the 18th century in the works of French thinkers Denis Diderot, d' Alembert and, especially, Marquis of Condorcet (1743–1794). Progress, according to Condorcet, may have different speeds, but "development will never go backward". In the XIX century, the most conspicuous figures in elaboration the theories of progress were Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. For Comte progress is «a fundamental principle of a human society».

Hegel developed the philosophy of this model (progress in the form of a dialectical spiral), and K. Marx followed this tradition, transferring the idea of progress from metaphysical to socioeconomic level, highlighting five socio-economic formations, each of which is more perfect than the previous one. The historical process enters the final stage when one part of humanity (exploited) must destroy the other part (exploiters), after which the survivors will build a society of universal equality and prosperity. However, past eras and existing generations here turn out to be only building material for a "bright future". A single human person seems to be "fertilizer" for the utopian revolutionaries.

F.M. Dostoevsky deeply and convincingly criticized the given model (we are talking about the "tear of a child", that is necessary for a perfect society, "train ticket" to which

Ivan Karamazov refused in the famous novel). The idea of progress can lull a person's consciousness when life becomes like a tourist trip. The history is thought as "an artificial limb of freedom" where tasks of the person are already solved for him. "The Theory of progress insures ...». — G. Florovsky wrote. — But "together with risk the feeling of "the personal responsibility", completely superfluous for a wheel in a well-wound mechanism of "system of a nature" is abolished also [4]. In reality the history is a drama, the tragedy of human freedom which end is beforehand not known and entirely depends on efforts of the person (José Ortega y Gasset). Late Aleksandr Herzen (1812–1870) criticized the determinist concept: he from Hegelian philosophy as "algebras of revolution" has passed to criticism of revolutionary violence, to comprehension of that "the history is not the Neva prospectus", that in it there are both accidents, and failures, and even regress.

2.4 The Theory of Historical-Cultural Types

The Theory of historical-cultural types, original analogue of cyclic model, but developed already in XIX-XX cent. First, consider Russian thinkers, founders of the given concept.

Nikolay Jakovlevich Danilevsky (1822–1885) was the master of botany, the director of a botanical garden. He has written "Darvinism. Critical research" (1885). His main work is "Russia and Europe" (1871). He is the founder of the *Theory of historical-cultural types*. According to this conception everything in the world develops, passing three stages: origination, blossoming and withering. He borrowed this point of view from biology, observing life cycles of plants and animals. He considered a history as alternation of original, equivalent cultures on the value. Danilevsky criticized the progressive model of historical development, for him "Progress does not mean that everyone should go in one direction, but that the entire field that makes up the land of the historical activity of mankind should proceed in different directions..." There are no and should not be privileged cultural and historical types in the world. The global (panhuman) in his understanding, as also for Dostoevsky, is something amorphous, colorless, unoriginal, in a word, what is usually called a common place. Real life is only in the universal (all-human). It, according to Danilevsky, stands "above any individual human or national", but at the same time constitutes "the totality of everything national, existing in all places and times and having to exist" [5]. At the same time, he believed that at the heart of each of the cultures lies a divine energy principle. He selected several cultural-historical types (Chinese, Egyptian, Assyro-Babylonian-Phoenician, Chaldean or Ancient Semitic, Iranian, Jewish, Greek, Roman, new-Semitic or Arabian, Roman-Germanic or European; with reservations, he also includes among the world Mexican and Peruvian civilizations).

Between peoples, relations of "transplantation", "vaccination" and "fertilizer" are possible, but only the last form deserves attention, since it does not deprive peoples of their original development. The European type, which began in the middle of 19th century, is experiencing the beginning of decline and should be replaced by the Eastern Slavic civilization, whose center is Russia. Future East Slavic civilization should become the four-basic cultural-historical type (the previous ones were single-basic, with the exception of the "two-basic" Europe, which could develop the economy and artistic-aesthetic creativity), that is, combining economic, artistic-aesthetic, religious and moral principles.

Relying in his theory on the national factor (“all phenomena of the social world are national phenomena”), someone considers that Danilevsky’s theory contradicts to such universal human phenomena as world religions. That the main contradiction of his theory consists in an attempt to combine two mutually exclusive understandings of history: the religious-providential and the positivist-naturalistic.

Konstantin Nikolayevich Leontiev (1831–1891) graduated from the medical faculty, worked as a military doctor, then ten-year diplomatic work on the Crete Island and resignation, which led to a radical change in lifestyle, down to monasticism. His most significant work is: “Byzantism and Slavism” (1891).

He called his doctrine the “*method of real life*” and recognized beauty as a criterion for evaluating the phenomena of the world around him. The closer to beauty, the closer to the truth of being, vitality and strength. The main characteristic of beauty is the diversity of forms, hence the recognition in the socio-cultural sphere of the need for the diversity of national cultures, the unity of their dissimilarity, due to which can be achieved the highest flowering. Humanity is alive as long as the original national cultures are alive. The unification of human existence inevitably leads culture to degradation and destructions. From this point of view, Leontiev thought of Europe as a “decomposing organism”, where people are dazzled by the idea of “progress”. He became disillusioned with Danilevsky’s idea of Slavism and believed that Russia could survive only by isolating itself from the “noxious” influence of Europe, to which the East European Slavic peoples had already succumbed. Therefore, Russia needs to be “frozen” – not to follow the Europe development.

Leontiev formulated the law of the “triune process of development” of each nation, consisting of three stages:

- “*Simplicity*” (amorphous, a rudimentary condition of all social structures),
- «*Blossoming complexity*» (it is the greatest differentiation, described by cultural productivity and the state stability) and
- “*Secondary mixing simplification*” (regressive stage characterized by “mixing and greater equality of estates”, the replacement of monarchy with democracy, the fall of the influence of religion) [6].

As a cultural and state-building enzyme, Leontyev puts forward a religion peculiar to this people. However overall evangelization, he considered, can have so fatal consequences, as well as the all-general Europeanization, which erases the cultural and historical characteristics of peoples and the unification of personalities. In Leontiev’s philosophy, two ideas opposed: religious oblivion of the empirical world and the exaltation of aesthetic values.

German philosopher and historian *Oswald Spengler* (1880–1936) became famous for his work “The Decline of the West” (1918), which made a lot of noise. In this work, Spengler opposed such postulates of Western historical science of the 19th century as Eurocentrism, panlogism, historicism, progressivism, etc. He opposed them with the doctrine of eight equivalent cultures: Egyptian, Indian, Babylonian, Chinese, “Apollo” (Greco-Roman), “Faustian” (Western European), Arabian and Mayan culture. He does not line them up in a linear sequence according to the degree of perfection, but considers them changing manifestations and expressions of a single one, which is at the center of

all life. Creating a cyclical theory of development, he tried to overcome the mechanism of one-dimensional evolutionary schemes of development, which makes it possible to see the individuality and exclusivity of each of the cultures. Spengler drew biological analogies: he considers culture as an organism with a definite destiny: birth, development and death.

Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889–1975), the British historian and the public figure, issued a 12-volume work “A Study of History” (1934–1961), which is an attempt to systematize historical factual material using scientific classifying procedures. His creativity, like O. Spengler, is characterized by an acute sense of the real possibility of the death of European civilization and all achievements of reason. He comes out from cultural pluralism, upholding of an originality of historical life. He tried to combine biological analogies with goal-setting human activity, freedom with necessity, considering that social development has natural-historical character. Nevertheless, he likens “civilization” to biological species, which have their own geographic “area”. Following Bergson, he considered that “emergence” and “growth” are the result of “vital impulse”, but “breakdown”, “decline” and “decay” are associated with “depletion of vitality.”

He attributed the “*law of challenge and response*” to the main factor of life progress as the ability of society to give an adequate “response” to the “challenge” of the time. It is associated with the activities of the “creative minority”, while the decline is associated with the deterioration of the content of the ruling elite — the “dominant minority”, in connection with which there is a “split in the spirit”, the “internal proletariat” is accumulating, requiring only “bread and shows”, and “external proletariat”- peoples who have not yet reached their blossoming. Salvation is from “unity in the spirit”, that is, from world religions. Toynbee sought to restore the idea of the unity of world history: while remaining a supporter of the idea of closed, local civilizations, in the future he considered it possible to combine them based on religious integration.

Opponents think that despite criticism of Eurocentrism and superficial progressivism, the Theory of historical-cultural types has a number of shortcomings, including biological analogies and destruction of the unity of the world-historical development process, substitution of Eurocentrism by some other “centrism”.

2.5 The Postmodernist Concept

It considers history as a narrative in which nothing is certain. The whole history consists of interpretive myths that people invent in order to endow it with one or another meaning (the narration of salvation created Christian history, the narration of emancipation is Marxism). Postmodernists (*Jean-François Lyotard* (1924–1998), *Jacques Derrida*, 1930–2004) opposed any concept of macrohistory, considering that they inevitably lead to violence. The privatization of historical truth leads to violence. History itself has no purpose, no meaning, no universality; there is no difference between truth and fiction, there exist only texts and nothing but texts. Karl Popper believed that it is impossible to write a unified world history, only the interpretation of individual events is possible. Any claim of a philosopher of history to determine the general direction of historical development can be both confirmed and refuted. So progress in the field of science and technology coexists with regression — global problems of modernity, threatening

mankind with total destruction. However, neither the person nor society can live without meaning.

2.6 The Concept of “Axial Age”

The concept of “Axial Age” (or “covariant model” [8]) tries to restore the unity of world history. Unlike the theory of cultural cycles, popular in Germany and throughout Europe in the first half of the 20th century, developed first by O. Spengler and later by A. Toynbee, *Karl Jaspers* (1883–1969) emphasizes that humankind has a single origin and a single path of development, despite the fact that many events seem to speak against it. Jaspers qualifies Spengler’s method as “physiognomic”: it can be used to interpret the phenomena of soul life, styles of art and types of “moods”, but it is impossible to establish any laws — a circumstance pointed out by many critics of Spengler, including the elder Jaspers’ contemporary — *Max Weber* (1864–1920). In addition, in Spengler’s concept of history, biological analogs are widely used, which are wrongfully transferred to historical reality, which due to this acquires a fatalistic character.

The German philosopher also disagrees with the materialist interpretation of history proposed by Marxism (*Karl Marx*, 1818–1883), where economic factors play a decisive role in the development of society. Without rejecting the meaning of the latter, Jaspers, nevertheless, is convinced that history as a human reality is determined to the greatest extent by spiritual factors, among which the leading role is played by those associated with the existential, meaning-forming dominant — the interpretation of the transcendent. Thus, in the polemic with Spengler, Jaspers insists on the unity of the world historical process, and in the polemic with Marxism — on a priority of the spiritual component. Since, as he believes, the unity of the historical development of humankind cannot be scientifically proven, he calls the admission of this unity a postulate of faith (namely, philosophical faith). Putting the question in this way, Jaspers, in essence, returns from “paganism” in the interpretation of history to understanding it as a single line that has a beginning and an end, that is, its own semantic completion. This concept is aimed at building a unified world civilization as a “response” to the “challenge” inherent in the global problems of our time.

3 The Latest Projects of Socio-Political Development and Alternative Ideas

In the early nineties of the last century, *Francis Fukuyama* (1952), an American political scientist of Japanese descent, is known for his book “The End of History and the Last Man” (1992), came up with the idea of the “end of history” and the beginning of “post history”.

He proclaimed that we are witnessing “the end of history as such,” that is, completion of the “ideological evolution of mankind and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of government.” The end of the 20th century, he believed, was the triumph of the Western idea of liberalism, which now has “no viable alternatives.” Nothing fundamentally new can appear anymore. A “situation of accomplished progress”

arose, although “liberalism has so far won only in the sphere of ideas and consciousness; in the real, material world, victory is still far away”.

Post history is limited only to those whom Fukuyama considers to be “the vanguard of mankind”, considering the leaders of the modern world: the countries of Europe, North America, Japan, and other post industrially developed countries. Nevertheless, its victorious universalism does not suffer from this at all. “... At the end of history, — Fukuyama notes, — there is no necessity for all societies to be liberal, enough to forget about ideological claims for other, higher forms of sociality.” Liberalism in the 20th century, he believed, triumphed over fascism and communism and successfully coped with religious fundamentalism and nationalism. There is even some kind of boredom — after all, the world has already ideologically “taken place”, there remains only the desire for well-being [9].

Nevertheless, the concept of the “end of history” simplifies world development when the achievements and successes of Western civilization are given the status of universal, common to all humankind values. Along with universalization, there is also idealization. Real contradictions are spoken of only casually as the unfortunate costs of a bright present. The next development of the world showed all the illusion of this conception.

Another American scientist, *Samuel Huntington* (1927–2008), in the famous article “The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order” (1996) writes that the rivalry of superpowers (the USSR and the USA in the past) gives way to a clash of civilizations that grows from cultural and religious differences. The author honestly reveals its reason: the West is trying to maintain its leading position and defend its own interests, defining them as the interests of the “world community”.

The task is to “ensure global legitimacy of the activity that serves to achieve the interests of the United States and other Western powers. The West, for example, seeks to integrate the economy of non-Western societies into the global economic system in which it itself occupies a leading position. By means of intervention of IMF (International Monetary Fund) and other international economic institutes it advances its economic interests and imposes to other nations that economic policy which considers necessary”. The author admits that in the politics of leading countries there is a double morality and double standards [10].

The conclusion, it would seem, suggests itself: it is necessary to change the discriminatory policies of post neocolonialism, but instead, the author delves into the contradictions and incompatibility of Islamic and Christian civilizations. At the same time, Huntington admits that, nevertheless, the basis of the conflict is not religion, but civilization, because the West has long become secularized, and Islam cannot tolerate not Christianity, but Western secularism, its spiritual impoverishment.

As a result, after reading Huntington’s article, there is a dual impression: on the one hand, a clear vision of the problem, and on the other, avoiding ways to solve it. Actually, he gives all attention to the inevitability of a possible future conflict between the West and the Islamic world, the West and China, and does not say at all how to avoid this. N.S. Kirabaev notes that after the publication of the famous article by S. Huntington “The Clash of Civilizations”, “the entire Muslim civilization began to be perceived as a potential source of conflicts in the modern world” [11].

From this point of view, concept of the clash of civilizations looks anti-scientific and anti-human. Conflicts and wars are the product of a certain policy, and not the result of the natural interaction of cultures and civilizations that have a single spiritual source — “Axial Age”, a breakthrough into the sphere of the transcendent, to the absolute good, equality and justice.

The third American political scholar, the Polish descent, *Zbigniew Brzezinski*, is even more frank and concrete in the book «The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives» (1997). He does not want America as a state of “free people” to turn into a “garrison state” surrounded by hostile peoples and terrorists. Brzezinski even began to understand that globalization “in its essence means global interdependence” [12], and even overseas it is no longer possible to feel safe in a raging and chaotic world that cannot be put under proper control.

However, all these conceptions are only modifications of progressive and Europocentric one.

Now it is necessary to struggle for the establishment of peace on Earth, for the solution of ethnic and economic problems on a universal scale. Globalization should be understood not as the realization of the geopolitical interests of the most developed countries, but as a process of building an interdependent multipolar world in which a constant mutually beneficial dialogue between different peoples, nations and civilizations is carried out, leading to the prevention of conflicts and the next race of arms.

4 Conclusion

Many philosophers of humanitarian orientation criticized the concept of post industrial society and spoke about personalistic one. First of all it was Nikolay Berdyaev (1874–1948), who criticized in his work “A man and a technique” machine civilization from spiritual point of view [13]. Then Erich Fromm (1900–1980) strove to develop a positive version of a personalistic society, an alternative to the post industrial one. He emphasized the need not so much for a technological revolution as for a personalistic one, for a change in values and priorities. Nikolai Berdyaev has already expressed this tendency. Fromm asserted the need to replace the value attitude with possession (“have”), the mindset for being (“to be”), meaning and love, because a person cannot realize himself and find the meaning of life without love. The new civilization should be community-based, and it must embody the principles of freedom, creativity and non-violence. According to Alexander Panarin (1940–2003), “Today the fateful issue concerning the character of the post-industrial era is being solved in the world. Will it become a simple continuation of the industrial one (only on a more advanced technological basis) or will it be marked by a turn of the humanitarian type, concerning not so much the means of production as our values, meanings of life, priorities and ideals...”. He thought of “an alternative project for the post-industrial future, designed to end the ecological and moral nihilism of technology-consuming societies” [14].

The new civilization must be communal.

Based on the concept of the “Axial Age” we may say the following – for a man who lives only in time, only the anxiety and horror of empirical existence remain. A person can truly relate to this empirical being-in-time only based on the eternal, transcendent,

“other worlds” (Dostoevsky). The human consciousness should have the ability to keep a distance, the ability to look from the outside, the ability to correlate the heaven and earth (higher and lower) – then a spiritual and value, moral dimension of understanding historical and personal life appears, meaning and bliss are born. These requirements are met by the concept of “Axial age” by K. Jaspers, which has been developed in many historical and philosophical studies. It can be defined as an “*existential-personal philosophy of history*”.

The personal-existential understanding of the philosophy of history is also inherent in the Kyrgyz and Russian writer and thinker Chingiz Aitmatov (1928–2008). The humanist writer was sensitive to the fate of a particular person. In his works, he spoke out against abstract understanding, when history is put at the service of building an imaginary bright future, for the sake of which repressive methods are justified. As the Japanese philosopher Daisaku Ikeda, a friend of Aitmatov, wrote, a soulless, impersonal understanding of history is the product of “limited” enlightened rationalism “... Perhaps Bolshevism is one of its most painful and tragic manifestations” [15]. The writer in the story “White Clouds of Genghis Khan” shows the erroneousness of such a representation of the essence of history with amazing poignancy, where a person is given into the service of a utopian goal. Therefore, Aitmatov passionately writes, “now my heart, as before, bleeds at the sight of the humiliation and insult of a person...” [16]. In his opinion, great idea, if it preaches misanthropy, has no justification. It is necessary “above all to value and affirm justice”, the basis of which is “love for a person who is born and should be happy, free” [17].

About it speaks the “*philosophy of the existential event*” that was elaborated by Merab Mamardashvili (1930–1990), who noted that in the sphere of socio-political progress could only be carried out by events, i.e. when the personality has taken shape and the person takes responsibility. But if a person refuses risk and effort, then the “social machine” will not “give him happiness” and progress for society. History, therefore, “is executed only by events.” It is “tied up” by these “historical acts”: “History does not flow by itself.” [18] Otherwise, a “situation of insanity” and social regression arises. Only when a generation of sane people appears are they capable of real social action that keeps the world from chaos, barbarism and violence [19]. Social progress is possible only to the extent that a person performs a moral act, takes responsibility.

Acknowledgments. The reported study was funded by RFBR and MOST according to the research project N 20-511-S52002 “Philosophy of Being Human as the Core of Interdisciplinary Research”.

Authors’ Contributions. Sergei Nizhnikov gave comparative analysis of different theoretical models of historical development, and evaluated them. Argen Kadyrov illustrated them with examples.

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