

Elena BOLOTNIKOVA / БОЛОТНИКОВА Елена Николаевна

| The Perspective of Self-Care: Philosophy Versus Religion |

Elena BOLOTNIKOVA / БОЛОТНИКОВА Елена Николаевна

Russia. Samara.

Samara State Agricultural Academy (SSAA)

Assistant professor of humanities and social and political sciences. PhD.

Россия. Самара.

Самарская государственная сельскохозяйственная академия.

Кафедра гуманитарных и социально-политических дисциплин.

Кандидат философских наук, доцент.

[vlad\\_lena@mail.ru](mailto:vlad_lena@mail.ru)

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF SELF-CARE: PHILOSOPHY VERSUS RELIGION

According to the author, the discovery of the importance of non-existence is the focal point in the individual's search for the meaning of his own existence. Gaining a sense of being an individual is associated with the religion or philosophy of the future. The broad interpretation of philosophy — as a structured form of self-care, most relevant to a contemporary — is based upon M. Mamardashvili, M. Heidegger, J. P. Sartre, M. Foucault and the texts of other famous authors.

**Key words:** *the meaning of life, discursive / non-discursive mode of knowledge, self-care, telos, ascetic practices, the ethical substance, mode of subjection*

### В перспективе заботы о себе: религия vs философия

По мнению автора, обнаружение значимости небытия является узловым для индивида моментом в поиске смысла собственного существования. Обретение смысла индивидуального бытия человек осуществляет в перспективе или религии или философии. С опорой на тексты Мамардашвили М. К., Хайдеггера М., Сартра Ж. П., Фуко М. и др. эксплицируется широкое толкование философии как структурированной формы заботы о себе, наиболее актуальной для современника.

**Ключевые слова:** *смысл бытия, дискурсивные/недискурсивные формы знания, забота о себе, телос, аскетические практики, модус подчинения, этическая субстанция*

### Between Being and Non-being: in Search of Meaning

The study of philosophy requires a special intellectual inquiry, state and efforts. This occupation is called to life only in response to a detected as significant lack of meaning of human existence. This situation is described by Jean-Paul Sartre in «Being and Nothingness»<sup>1</sup> and can be called «the case with Pierre». According to this story, human existence is organized around the presence, the presence of something. An individual considers his existence as a set of resources which if particularly organized give an opportunity to derive practical benefit, for example to take up a position, to increase capital, to intensify emotions and pleasure. This peculiar economic approach to life is not related to objective reality, as it means only repetition, identity, staying in analogy with the others. The only meaningful, rather than mechanically repeated existence of an individual makes his being unique, free and unrepeatable. Recognition of lack of meaning in the habitual economically reasonable existence can serve as the starting point of understanding, the point of a fundamentally new organization of existentially meaningful be-

ing. «Being of meaning requires the preservation of non-being»<sup>2</sup> as V. A. Konev points out correctly.

Nothingness of Pierre changes objective reality of the individual, directing him at insistent need to fill in the emptiness opened. Thus was born a clear conscious desire to find something beyond the everyday worries and practical benefits, an attempt to traverse oneself beyond the limits of the dates mentioned on the monuments and pages of encyclopedias. Detection of the emptiness in place of meaning of life fills in everything, the mist of senselessness envelops all everyday issues showing objective reality as mere existence, and then the person inevitably and irrevocably is forced to enter into the space of genuine self-care. Authenticity is taken here in the sense of S. Kierkegaard and M. Heidegger, the latter is known for including self-care into the sphere of existentials along with fear, anxiety and terror. Exploring M. Heidegger's creative work thoroughly P. P. Gaidenko, a Russian researcher, mentions that care «takes the form of aspiration for the future on the one hand and turns to intraworld being on the other»<sup>3</sup> and acts as a continuous anxiety.

<sup>1</sup> Sartre Jean-Paul. Being and Nothingness. The principle text of modern existentialism. First Washington Square Press, 1993. P. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Конеv В. А. Онтологические особенности мира человека. Самара: Изд-во «Самарский университет», 2003. С. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Гайдeнко П. П. Прорыв к трансцендентному. Новая онтология XX века. — М.: Республика, 1997. С. 411.



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## The Meaning and Structure of Self-care

The fundamental importance of self-care for the human being could be seen only of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi. And, despite the fact, that it said, «Know thyself», the underlying meaning of this statement is precisely self-care as critics say<sup>4</sup>. Later the value of self-care and its content was one of the prevailing themes in Socrates' speeches, represented in Plato's dialogues and nowadays we are obliged to P. Hadot and his lectures «What is ancient philosophy»<sup>5</sup> for the revival of this issue. Structural analysis of self-care no doubt belongs to Michel Foucault, whose efforts helped us to realize self-care not as selfishness or as a relic of ancient philosophical constructions, but as a prevailing system of moving constitutive signifiers. According to him self-care in every era and culture consists of ascetic practices, telos, mode of submission and ethical substance<sup>6</sup>. Something that serves as a telos or how ascetic practices work varies from epoch to epoch. Also something that takes place of the ethical substance, and the way the mode of submission is fixed transform with time and circumstance. But these substantial things get, in fact, the same shapes whatever culture and time period of human history is in question, as self-care acts as fundamental originally human thing.

The way this mechanism works was successfully demonstrated by Michel Foucault taking as an example ethics of the first centuries of our era. After analyzing a considerable body of texts, he came to the conclusion that instead of telos of self-care there can be either purity, or immortality, or freedom, or self-discipline<sup>7</sup>. Desires, feelings or intentions can be recognized as ethical substance that is subject to change, improvement, turning into a kind of aesthetic work<sup>8</sup>. Modus of submission of varying degrees of rigor emerges as the way in which people can be encouraged to recognize certain moral obligations as their own. This may be a universal principle of rationality, or divine law or cosmological order, important to be followed as you are a human being. Finally, ascetic practices in the wide sense act as the content of an individual's activity localized in intellectual and perceptual spheres.

Embarked on the path of his own search for the meaning of life, the person finds himself playing the part of the hero of one of Russian fairy tales who should «go there, I don't know where and find something I don't know what». Culture offers two clues to help him — one represents a religious choice, the other — a way of philosophical research. Both, eventually, form a certain lifestyle.

## Religion as Self-care Space

Religion gives hope that might be considered as «the last drop out of the barrel of misfortunes that pours out on the person» according to Nietzsche. Religion focuses on eternal life or eternal return, and thus rescues the person from the rigid vice of material, final, tempo-

rary, mortal existence. Offering prayers to God, the believer in fact aspires to possibility of personal relationship with God, with hope to be heard personally. The believer finds connection with transcendental, with eternal, with absolute and therefore becomes involved in this timeless. And in this regard for whoever the believer prayed, he prays for himself and for the possibility of his own immortality. Praying for the world, a person actually cares about himself, about his own immortality. This is the telos of religious choice. Opening the texts of the Church authorities, deeply religious, such as Richard of St. Victor<sup>9</sup> and St. Augustine, we hear that a person is insignificant, he is a grain of sand, dust from the feet of God, but the words are obviously producing the opposite effect — even a grain of sand in the light of the Divine acquires meaning and significance. Discovering the meaning of life in religious systems requires certain ascetic practices, entrenched in all clerical institutions. In most cases, they are aimed primarily at the body, the suppression of which should consistently lead the person on the path of spiritual truth. As an ethical substance to be treated and improved, serves the human spirit, the soul, and the mode of submission is built in the local perspective of a particular church, usually in a fairly strict mode.

We do not consider religious choice in search for the meaning of life as an archaic heritage of the past centuries. The current political and economic situation shows that a huge number of people choose religious principles to understand themselves and design their relations with the world, make religion the foundation for their socially active position. Thus, it is early to «discount» religious choice as one of the possible directions of self-care.

## Philosophical Strategy in Taking Self-care

In turn, philosophy tries to get by without turning a man to transcendental in its religious version. In this context, we understand philosophy not as a strict science in which research is conducted using concepts and terms, theories and research programs are created, deduced arguments are put forward. It's about philosophy that is closer to F. Nietzsche's words: «merry science». Philosophy here is taken as desire to find answers to essential questions characteristic of all people regardless to their status or cultural differences. According to famous Russian philosopher M. K. Mamardashvili this register of existence of philosophy is called «real philosophy» which differs from the «philosophy of doctrines and systems»<sup>10</sup>. It is a unique combination of words and practices, thought and action, a common foundation of which will serve questioning of one's own existence and further opportunity to find oneself among self-evident facts, some deep internal knowledge, the ability to create oneself rather than practical benefit or achievement of the intended result.

In our opinion such a philosophical concept of self-study and one's own place in the world and the world itself presupposes a discursive mode of existence of the individual. Like P. Hadot under discourse we understand «discursive thought expressed through oral or written communication»<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Foucault M. Technologies of the Self / Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault, ed. by L. H. Martin, H. Gutman and P. H. Hutton, Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988. P. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Hadot Pierre. What Is Ancient Philosophy. Belknap press. 2004. P. 36–39.

<sup>6</sup> Foucault M. On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 — 1984, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997. P. 263–265.

<sup>7</sup> Foucault M. On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954 — 1984, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press, 1997. P. 265.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. P. 264.

<sup>9</sup> Richard of St Victor. On the four degrees of violent love. / On Love. A Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St Victor. Hugh Feiss OSB ed. Turnhout, 2011 BREPOLs. P. 283–286.

<sup>10</sup> Мамардашвили М. К. Мой опыт нетипичен. — СПб.: Азбука, 2000. С. 34.

<sup>11</sup> Hadot Pierre. What Is Ancient Philosophy. Belknap press. 2004. P. 4–5.



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According to Michel Foucault, any knowledge, including knowledge of the individual and of his being, is connected with two modes: discursive and non-discursive<sup>12</sup>. In the first mode something is realized, sounded, pronounced as a problem that needs to be solved, determined and named. In the second mode something is functioning that is not a problem, a question, a reason for a discussion for an individual. The question of the meaning of his own existence to a man puts all of his existence into question, transforms the very fabric of his being, and does not leave even the quietest nook of his life in shadow. Only philosophy, not in its strict, but expanded meaning, can talk so totally and globally of human life.

Having chosen the path of philosophical inquiry, in care of himself the individual fills its structural elements with the content different from that in religion. Ascetic practices relate primarily to the intellectual sphere of life, which then sequentially converts the corporeal sphere as well. Not immortality or purity but freedom or self-improvement acts as the telos of self-care. Ethical substance to be converted is not man's inner world, but its external manifestation, the embodiment of the sphere of senses in particular. Perceptual sphere acts as what is subject to transformation, expansion, aestheticizing, turning into a work of art, maximizing. Modus of submission is localized in the political sphere, in the space of public not private that's why, as it is possible to assume, the decline of a public person, registered by R. Sennett, takes place. Characterizing modern life, he writes: «Uniqueness of man has become a major burden of everyone, self-actualization, instead of being a means of understanding the world, has become the target. Only because we are too self-absorbed it is very difficult for us to understand the principle of private, clearly explain to ourselves and others what our personality is. The reason is that the deeper the soul is immersed in the private area, the less it develops, and the more difficult it is for a person to express his feelings»<sup>13</sup>.

Philosophical study of the meaning of life states the human being the only thing in the world aware of his existence and therefore bearing responsibility. Responsibility is the answer, and the answer requires the presence of a questioner. The questioner in this perspective is the one who answers. The circle is closed. The question of the meaning of life unites all people, constitutes the philosophy that M. K. Mamardashvili called vital, once peculiar to any person<sup>14</sup>. It seems that writing about the «silence of the Bavarian peasant», M.

Heidegger means such philosophizing, search for the meaning of his existence. The question of sense refers to the ontological features of the human world.

Professional philosophy or «philosophy of doctrines and systems» responsibly and consistently, logically and practically provable asks questions and answers them. Sometimes in history in order the answer was given and heard among the chatter of everyday life, philosophers such as Socrates, Boethius, Abelard, S. Kierkegaard or F. Nietzsche, had to pay an incredibly high price. In the works and the lives of these great thinkers existential, essential and scientific explications of philosophy are closed up. Not religious hope, but perhaps truly philosophical solace comes to those who are able to inspire others to their own search, irreversibly changing themselves irreversibly changing the world around and afterwards.

Philosophical quest, however, as well as religious choice, has never been a simple and easy thing to do, even Socrates emphasized this in his speech to the court, taking as his personal business, personal mission — to stick, like a gadfly to the Athenians with unpleasant questions and answers<sup>15</sup>. In culture understanding, comprehension, hermeneutics of existential stood out as pilgrims' and strangers' destiny — the people dismissed from the bustle of everyday life at least for a while.

The present level of development of science and technology, the level of comfort of life, its quality can help to ensure that people take the time and opportunity to really take care of themselves. But these same innovations carry with them a total power of popular culture, promote the substitution of deep and sincere relations between people with superficial «likes» on the net, create such a flow of information, which even professionals sometimes find difficult to handle. It is no coincidence that after the theorists of mass culture, J. Baudrillard notes, «They given meaning: they want spectacle»<sup>16</sup>.

Something appears to exist if and only if it is expressed, showed, demonstrated by any way transferred into the discursive mode. Technical progress gives us all the possible conditions for infinite speaking — for showing. That's why J. Baudrillard rightly describes his contemporaries as the «silent majority»<sup>17</sup> in the shadow of which, through the hum of everyday subjects through endless pictures in Instagram and topics in Youtube, it is even more difficult for the individual to stop and discover the «absence of Pierre» and begin his own search for the one the real concern is about.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault M. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Random House LLC, 2012. P. 64–71.

<sup>13</sup> Sennett Richard. *The Fall of Public Man*. Penguin Books. 2003. P. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Мамардашвили М. К. *Мой опыт нетипичен*. — СПб.: Азбука, 2000. С. 32.

<sup>15</sup> Plato. *The Apology of Socrates*. / *Plato's Apology, Crito and Phaedo of Socrates*. Worcester College, Oxford. 2004. P. 67–68.

<sup>16</sup> Baudrillard Jean. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities: Or, the End of the Social and Essays*. 2007. MIT Press. P. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. P. 21.

