

### **Fear of OLD Age in the belles-lettres: Philosophical-Cultural analysis**

It is well-known that there are issues of human existence that do not lose their topicality nowadays. The problem of relationships and mutual understanding in such an element of the society as the system "parents-children" is one of them. However, when it comes to the people of old age in the society it is often considered that in the past they received more respect and only recently the situation has changed for the worse.

Of course, the primitive society is not considered here as the people of old age and children were treated as the burden there. As an example such attitude the communities of Oceania and Australian aborigines in the XIX century can be drawn. Still the value of old person's wisdom, which is preeminently grounded on life experience, has been leveled before even in the civilized communities. One of the most integral evidences which shows the real position of senior citizens in the European communities and characterizes the old age during different times is the belles-lettres style. Socially adopted moral norms and the samples of behaviour of the time when the author lived are very often fixed in the insignificant details of the author's text.

Generally in the people's attitude towards the old age in Europe the following tendencies are traced. Firstly, almost in every epoch the human inextinguishable desire to find the elixir of "perennial youth" is found. For instance, in the well-known novel by Oscar Wilde "The Picture of Dorian Grey" the leading character wishes to preserve his youth by all means. As a result his portrait becomes the reflection of his moral descent, disfiguring the painting instead of his body. But the principle Grey's longing is the youth, the youth at whatever cost: "If only the portrait was getting on in years and I would stay always young! In return... I would give the entire world. Yes, I wouldn't regret anything! I would give up the spirit for that" [3, p. 26]. Youth is the beauty of body while the old age is ugly. Thus the leading character believes. It is worth mentioning the well-known statement "Beauty will save the world" (F. Dostoevsky). It is often followed by various explanations that the inner beauty, the beauty of the human spirit will save the world. At the same time this statement reveals the human longing for youth, first and foremost the outer one. The "body aesthetics" has become essential for the Europeans since the Modern Age. But the search for the "elixir of perennial youth" has failed so far.

Secondly, a human aspires to the immortality. Such is Orpheus' wish to return Eurydice. The expectation of death as a natural process causes the inner protest. It is really difficult to agree with the fatal finitude of our life. One of the reasons of the old age fear is the fear of death, as the old age becomes for many people the final stage of life, the end of which is well-known. Namely, it is hard for a person to overcome the fear of non-existence because the death in the physical sense is impossible to fight with. However, the belles-lettres of the XVIII century tries to give the answer to the question: "What would happen if I were immortal?" This answer is not idealistic and at the same time it is not always optimistic, which is very symptomatic.

Particularly Jonathan Swift in his "Gulliver's Travels" masterfully shows that the immortality can be a curse, and the escape from the fear of death doesn't save from the fear of old age as a period of senescence and weakness. The image of immortal people called struldbrugs, which is created by the author, shows the life of an immortal person rather pessimistically. It is not the eternal pleasure of life, but the endless sufferings of the old age. Swift describes that at a certain age (at 80) people suffer from the "civil death", that is they cannot dispose of their property (it is vested to their heirs) and are wholly dependant upon the society. The author admits that the daily allowance they get is rather small. This image is created by the writer, but reminds of the retirement of a modern person, their "social death" from the point of view of many contemporary people. The following quotation: "Everybody hate Struldbrugs and treat them with disdain" [2, p.184] shows that old age life is worthless and of no importance in the citizens' opinion. The author claims that

after the acquaintance with them "... my immortality longing substantially declined" [2, p.185]. Swift tries to prove that it is useless for a person to wish such unattainable "eternal youth" and this intention is subjected to the hostile criticism.

And, thirdly, many communities have treated and are likely to treat senior citizens as the social burden they should get rid of. Such a view of the community levels the value of human life. Naturally, the physical extermination, which has been wide-spread in the primitive societies, is not used now. However, the devaluation of senior citizens' life comparatively with the life of people of other ages is popularized. This is a sort of double standard concerning the idea of the human life value.

F. Dostoevsky writes on the same issue in his novel "Crime and Punishment" in the XIX century. In the conversation of the student with the officer, the first estimates the old woman's life as worthless, in his view, while the life of young strong people gets useless without the essential support on the part of the community. He believes that with the help of the community many young families can be saved from poverty: "For one life – thousands of lives saved from the putrefaction and decay. One death and hundreds lives instead ... what does the life of this hectic, small-minded ugly old woman mean on the scales? Less than the life of a louse, a cockroach, and isn't worth even that" [1, p. 34]. It is emphasized that the life of a human being of old age is useless, but gained property can be used for the profit of others – the young. (Dostoevsky apparently repeats pre-Columbian period Aztecs' suggestions). However, how better are the others? Their life can be even more miserable.

So, the belles-lettres fixes a variety of views on the life value of senior citizens. Generally it is found out that the attitude towards the senior citizens varies from leveling their interests or their physical annihilation to the usage of double values standard.

#### Література

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