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Original Theoretical Research



Axiology of Disease in Religious Philosophy of the 20th Century

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Abstract

Introduction. The article is devoted to the study of the value of disease in religious philosophy of the 20th century. Of particular scientific interest is the study of a number of works by several domestic and foreign philosophers and theologians who worked on health and disease in the last century: Luka Voino-Yasenetsky, P. Kalinovsky, K.S. Lewis and Metropolitan Anthony Surozhsky. The purpose of this study is to search the works of religious philosophers for a positive aspect of disease. Achieving this goal requires solving several research problems: identifying philosophical works containing a positive view of the problem of disease existence in domestic and foreign philosophy of the 20th century; searching in these works for the reasons why disease can be considered as a blessing in relation to a person suffering from it, as well as determining the role of disease in the society of the last century.

Materials and Methods. Descriptive, historical and comparative methods of scientific research are used as general scientific methods of scientific research. Deductive and inductive methods, as well as methods of analysis and synthesis of data, are used separately. A special role belongs to the dialectical method.


Results. The religious thinker and doctor Archbishop Luka Voino-Yasenetsky believed that the positive aspect of disease is revealed in the spiritual strengthening of a person due to the idea of unity with God, another domestic thinker and doctor P. Kalinovsky believed that disease contributes to the conversion of an unbeliever to faith, their awareness of the life value, and also physically strengthens the human body. The British religious philosopher and writer K.S. Lewis believed that the positive aspect of disease manifests itself in the spiritual and physical strengthening of a person, the development of empathy. The British religious thinker of Russian origin Metropolitan Anthony Surozhsky believed that the value aspect of disease lies in the positive dynamics in the behavior of a sick person.

Discussion and Conclusion. It was concluded that the axiological aspect of disease, present in the works of domestic and foreign thinkers such as Archbishop Luke Voino-Yasenetsky, P. Kalinovsky, K.S. Lewis, Metropolitan Anthony Surozhsky, is revealed in the statement that disease mobilizes physical and spiritual potential of a person, helps them realize the value of life, contributes to the development of empathy and awakens religious feelings. At the same time, the article does not deny the presence of a negative component of disease and its large-scale social consequences, however, a special view characteristic of Christianity on the deep meaning of the suffering caused by it is demonstrated.

Keywords: disease, Christianity, suffering, health, Russian religious philosophy, doctor

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Аксиология болезни в религиозной философии XX века

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Аннотация

Введение. Статья посвящена исследованию ценности болезни в религиозной философии XX в. Особый научный интерес представляет изучение ряда трудов нескольких отечественных и зарубежных философов и богословов, работавших в прошлом столетии над проблемами здоровья и болезни: Лука (Войно-Ясенецкий), П. Калиновский, К.С. Льюис и митрополит Антоний Сурожский. Целью данного исследования является поиск в работах религиозных философов положительного аспекта болезни. Достижение поставленной цели требует решения нескольких исследовательских задач: выявление философских работ, содержащих положительный взгляд на проблему существования болезни в отечественной и зарубежной философии XX в.; поиск в установленных работах причин, по которым болезнь может рассматриваться как благо по отношению к страдающему ею человеку, а также определение роли болезни в обществе прошлого века.

Материалы и методы. В качестве общенаучных методов научного исследования применяются описательный, исторический и сравнительный методы исследования, отдельное использование получают дедуктивный и индуктивный методы, а также методы анализа и синтеза данных. Особая роль принадлежит применению диалектического метода.

Результаты исследования. Религиозный мыслитель и врач архиепископ Лука (Войно-Ясенецкий) считал, что положительный аспект болезни раскрывается в духовном укреплении человека благодаря формирующемуся во время нее представлению о единстве с Богом, ещё один отечественный мыслитель и врач – П. Калиновский полагал, что болезнь способствует обращению неверующего человека в веру, осознанию им ценности жизни, а также физически укрепляет организм человека. Британский религиозный философ и писатель К.С. Льюис считал, что положительный аспект болезни проявляется в духовном и физическом укреплении человека, развитии у заболевшего сопереживания. Британский религиозный мыслитель русского происхождения митрополит Антоний Сурожский считал, что ценностный аспект болезни заключается в положительной динамике в поведении заболевшего человека.

Обсуждение и заключение. Сделан вывод, что аксиологический аспект болезни, присутствующий в работах отечественных и зарубежных мыслителей – архиепископа Луки (Войно-Ясенецкого), П. Калиновского, К.С. Льюиса, митрополита Антония Сурожского, получает свое раскрытие в утверждении, что болезнь мобилизует физический и духовный потенциал человека, помогает ему осознать ценность жизни, способствует развитию у заболевшего человека эмпатии и пробуждает религиозные чувства. При этом в статье не отрицается наличие негативной составляющей болезни и ее масштабных социальных последствий, однако демонстрируется характерный для христианства особый взгляд на глубинный смысл вызываемых ею страданий.

Ключевые слова: болезнь, христианство, страдание, здоровье, русская религиозная философия, врач

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Introduction. The justification of disease and suffering causes negativity among most of the modern society. Disease, especially if it occurs in a severe form, deprives a person of strength, and the ability to perform even the most basic daily activities, causes a bad mood, leads to various forms of depression. Reasoning about the role and significance of disease in a person's life depends on the nature of their worldview, whether the person reflecting on it is religious or not. From the point of view of Christian doctrine, disease has not only an obvious negative aspect but also surprisingly enough, a deep positive meaning, which can be interpreted in different ways by religious thinkers. The purpose of this study is to explore the positive aspects of disease in the works of religious philosophers of the 20th century.

The discussion of the problem of disease in the history of philosophical thought is rooted in the philosophy of ancient Greece. In the writings of Hippocrates, Empedocles, Plato, and Aristotle, we find numerous discussions about disease and health. Each of these philosophers in their own way understood disease and acknowledged the meaningfulness of suffering in the world. Thus, Plato, in the dialogue *Sophist*, defined it as discord, a certain vice of the soul, and Aristotle, in *Metaphysics*, defined it as a change affecting the human body.

Along with the spread of Christianity in Europe, a distinctive view of disease and suffering emerged, which implies the presence of a hidden positive meaning, which is associated with a detailed description in the Bible of the suffering of

Jesus Christ himself, his disciples, as well as diseases and sufferings of the heroes of biblical parables and legends. The description of the reward that awaits those who endure trials and pains plays an important role keeping faith in their souls and doing their utmost to help others.

In one passage of the Old Testament, we find a story of the origin of suffering: “The earth will be cursed because of you; with pain you will eat from it, all the days of your life; it will grow thorns and thistles to you; and you will eat grass. By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your bread, until you return to the land from which you were taken; for you are dust, and you will return to dust” (Gen. 3, 17–19). At first glance, it seems that the source of suffering and diseases that necessarily accompany it in the Holy Scriptures is divine will, but the explanations made by theologians of the past and present shed light on the nature of suffering. Conversations of St. John Chrysostom speak of a person as the source of disease and suffering in the world and thereby explains the hidden meaning of this biblical passage: “All this is full of logical inconsistencies: God did not create a disease, but a person could get sick; God did not create death, but told Adam that he could die” [1].

As a result of the choice made by the first man, his spirit was damaged, which led to improper functioning of the body, resulting in disease and physical suffering. The same is asserted by modern Russian theologians Archimandrite, Alipiy Kostalsky-Borozdin, and Archimandrite, Isaiah Belov [2]. According to these theologians, the culprit of the existence of diseases and suffering is none other than humanity itself, since as a result of free choice they committed the fall. Created initially to reign over the world, people allowed the world to rule over them. The first people began to endure suffering caused by cold, heat, and aggression of animals on earth. God informed them that from then on, diseases and suffering would become an integral part of their lives.

Materials and Methods. The study employed both general scientific methods and methods from philosophical and historical sciences. Thanks to the use of descriptive, historical and comparative methods of scientific research, the search, description and comparison of the works of Russian and foreign religious thinkers on the problem of the disease were carried out. Deductive and inductive methods were applied to analyze the statements of individual thinkers. By analyzing and synthesizing the data obtained, conclusions were drawn about the presence of a positive aspect of disease in their works.

Results. In the philosophy of the 20th century, the problem of the existence of disease and attitudes toward the suffering it causes has become a special focus due to advances in medicine and the impact of large-scale global military conflicts and their socio-cultural consequences. Most often, this problem was addressed by thinkers who encountered it regularly in life, as many of them were involved in medical practice or were members of the clergy in addition to their philosophical work. In the first half of the 20th century in Russia, religious and philosophical ideas about the essence and true significance of disease were expressed by Archbishop, Luka Voino-Yasenetsky. He devoted a separate work to this topic, titled *When I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong*. This thinker was not only a clergyman of the Russian Orthodox Church, but also a doctor. People suffering from various ailments came to him daily. He also performed surgeries during the war and treated wounded soldiers and civilians.

In this work, the theologian noted that disease is necessary for one to feel spiritual unity with God, to which every believer is able to come in different ways: “Why is it easy to follow him on a thorny path? Because you will not go alone, exhausted, but Christ Himself will accompany you, because his immense grace strengthens you when you languish under his yoke, under his burden; because he himself will support this burden, this cross” [3, p. 322].

Archbishop, Luka Voino-Yasenetsky, emphasized that, of course, disease is a test. the passage through which spiritually should strengthen a person. This test can consist both in the awareness of one’s own helplessness by a person suffering from a disease, and in endurance when healthy people accuse them of weakness during disease: “Think, isn’t it God’s power, performed in weakness? God does his glorious works through the hands of the weak” [3, p. 373].

According to the theologian, the bearer of disease does not endure it alone, at this time God is with them: “It was a heavy burden, but remember it as bright joy, as the great mercy of God, for the grace of God is poured out abundantly on everyone who bears the burden of Christ. Precisely because the burden of Christ is inseparable from the grace of Christ, precisely because Christ will not leave those who took the cross and went after him, God will not leave them without his help, but walks next to them, supports their cross, strengthens with his grace” [3, p. 322].

According to Archbishop Luka Voino-Yasenetsky, disease should be considered from the point of view of strength, and not from the point of view of weakness, as a spiritual strengthening of a person, through a test that one can pass: “We must thank God when we are in weakness, in resentment, in need, in oppression for Christ, for then we are truly strong. Let us seek not the forces of this world, but the weaknesses sent by God. Let us thank, let us rejoice when God sends us diseases, when we are sad at the death of our loved ones, when we endure need, hunger, cold, when they persecute us, when they mock us, when they abuse us” [3, p. 374].

Thus, this religious thinker saw in the existence of disease a deep positive meaning, which, in his opinion, was to strengthen the will of a person through the idea of spiritual unity with God.

In the second half of the 20th century another Russian religious thinker and doctor, P. Kalinovsky, also talked about the problem of the disease existence from the point of view of Christianity. This scientist, like Archbishop Luka Voino-Yasenetsky, believed that disease and suffering have not only a pronounced negative, but also positive meaning. A person's awareness of the presence of fatal disease can lead one to faith. In his work *Transition. The last disease, death and after*, P. Kalinovsky gave examples of unbelievers who, having learned about the presence of serious disease, gradually came to faith in God. This thinker believed that the positive side of disease could be called its ability to reveal the hidden potential of the human body. For example, a person who loses sight as a result of disease has better hearing ability.

The modern philosopher V.A. Kuvakin also adheres to a similar point of view on the value of disease and possibility of developing the organism's abilities obtained as a result of diseases: "Disease can induce a person not only to overcome it, but also to rise, to strengthen the will to live" [4, p. 191]. This philosopher considers a person to be a unique being with such qualities that allow to benefit from disease or disability. P. Kalinovsky also emphasized that the value of life in Christianity far exceeds many other values. Describing the case of a seriously wounded soldier between life and death, the thinker recalled what he said about the possibility of choice: "A soldier, seriously wounded on the battlefield, saw his truncated body and heard a voice. He thought Jesus Christ was talking to him. He was given the opportunity to return to the earthly world, where he will be a cripple, or to stay in the afterlife. The soldier decided to return to earth" [5, p. 82].

According to O.A. Orlenko, Russian philosophers: "...could not help but write about death, nor could they consider it outside the religious context, since they lived during difficult events, when it was turbulent time in their home country, people died around, old social orders went into the past, and new ones were just beginning to form in their place, and only the presence of religious faith helped them overcome all the socio-political upheavals that befell their homeland" [6, p. 36]. For P. Kalinovsky, the positive meaning of disease was the possibility of awakening religious feelings in an unbelieving person, as well as the hidden abilities of their own body. The thinker considered one of the most important positive aspects of disease and the suffering it causes to be the awareness of the true value of life.

Among foreign religious thinkers of the 20th century, the presence of a positive aspect in disease and suffering was noted by the British philosopher and writer K.S. Lewis. In the work *Suffering* K.S. Lewis emphasized that disease is a serious test, the passage through which can reveal hidden potential of the human body, strengthen the individual functions of the body, for example, by helping to keep the nervous system in good shape when a person feels mild pain. Recognition of the commonality of suffering unites people, but objectively there is no common suffering, each has its own suffering, and therefore for each person there are different options for revealing the positive side of the suffering they have had.

In particular, K.S. Lewis believed that disease is able to awaken the best moral qualities in a person to make them more compassionate, empathic: "First, pain is only the center of the system, which also includes fear and compassion. Even if it had no spiritual value itself, it is also valuable that someone felt sorry for someone and someone was frightened by something" [7, p. 70]. Disease can also contribute to the awareness of the need for religious faith awakening religious feelings in an unbeliever. When a person commits an act that does not cause them suffering, they do not think that this act may be a divine expression of will, but when suffering from disease, a person begins to consider its onset as a consequence of divine pain. This religious thinker believed that a positive aspect of disease is its ability for spiritual and physical transformation of a person, which consists in the development of their empathy for other people and strengthening of their body.

The presence of a positive side in disease was also noticed by the Western Orthodox theologian Metropolitan Anthony Sourozhsky, who, like Archbishop Luka Voino-Yasenetsky and P. Kalinovsky, had a medical education and worked in a military hospital. The views of Metropolitan Anthony Sourozhsky on the positive side of disease were expressed in the work *Life. Disease. Death*. The theologian defined the disease as one of the crises awaiting a person during their life, called the disease "neurosis", because he believed that its onset keeps a person in a state of constant anxiety, reminds them that they are mortal and cannot control their own life and body. However, in addition to the negative component of disease, Metropolitan Anthony Sourozhsky emphasized how much it can change the spiritual world and human behavior in society in a positive direction. It is important not only how the sick person themselves will behave, but also how close people who are with them, as well as the doctor and clergyman visiting them, will behave.

Improper actions of a clergyman in relation to a sick person can cause confusion in them and even accelerate the onset of death. Proper communication between a clergyman and a person suffering from disease is a real art which the clergyman needs to constantly improve at. The priest can master this art either by gaining his own experience of disease or as a result of observing disease of other people: "...pastoral care of patients should begin when people are healthy, begin with the establishment of simple, friendly relations" [8]. The clergyman should not only be able to select the right words, but also remain silent, in those moments when the situation requires it: "Let the chatter be over, giving the place to deep, full of genuine human concern, silence" [ibid.]. Thus, the positive aspect of death was revealed in the work of Metropolitan Anthony Sourozhsky through the recognition of its positive impact on the behavior in society of both the sick and those around them during their disease.

Discussion and Conclusion. Thus, the study of the texts of several representatives of domestic and foreign religious philosophy of the 20th century, containing an analysis and subsequent comprehension of ideas about the value aspect of disease, allowed us to come to the following conclusions: the thinkers who created them believed that disease contributes to the disclosure of the hidden physical and spiritual potential of a person, contributes to their awareness of the true value of life, not only the value of the life of the sick person themselves, but also the value of the life of the people around them. Disease can convert an unbeliever, provide them with the opportunity to spiritually survive the suffering that the Lord, the apostles, saints experienced according to Christian sources. In addition, their own disease and suffering can make a person more empathic and attentive to other people. These provisions indicate the presence of a positive aspect in religious thought of the 20th century, which is of significant scientific interest in connection with the tense world spiritual situation, expressed in the increase in the number of suicides and depressive disorders in society, statements about the lack of meaning of life.

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