

Philosophical analysis of procreation in the value dimension

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Abstract

Scientific discourses recognize the influence of the value factor on human reproduction. Despite this, an objectifying approach prevails in explaining demographic determination and values are seen as subjects isolated from the person. The article proposes development of the axiological approach in understanding procreation. In philosophical and axiological discourse, procreation can be seen as human reproduction in the culture and persona genesis. Basing on the axiological concept of Max Scheler and personalist philosophy of Vasily Rozanov, the author proposes an interpretation of procreation as an intentional value attitude that manifests a positive aspiration of a person for the future.

Keywords

procreation; value; intentional setting; discourse; axiology of M. Scheler; personology of V. Rozanov

JEL codes: J13

Introduction

Human reproduction as population reproduction has been successfully studied by social, biomedical and exact sciences using appropriate techniques that are being improved and expanded through interdisciplinary synthesis focused mainly on the methods of natural and exact sciences. Humanitarian accents in scientific discourses focusing on procreation are fragmented within their own epistemological boundaries. In the 20th century, numerous cultural and anthropological studies of issues related to childbearing, reproductive behaviour, sexuality and reproductive health were named *anthropology of reproduction*. This research direction is illustrated by the works of Margaret Mead, Bronislaw Malinowski, Clellan Ford, Ashley Montagu et al. (Litovka 2012). Philosophical discourse on procreation has in recent decades become actively developed in connection with the actualization of bioethical

issues when the discussion of ethical and legal questions arising in the context of assisted reproduction, the use of genetic and other advanced technologies formed a notable cluster in modern science and public debate. At the same time, bioethics became an ideological extension of the broader ethical problematization of the influence of scientific, technological and social progress on various aspects of human life. Outstanding ideas in the critical understanding of this influence were expressed by Albert Schweitzer, Hans Jonas, and Nikolai Berdyaev. However, even in the 21st century philosophical interest in the concept of life contributed to the creation of the direction of philosophy of life, which united the doctrines of Friedrich Nietzsche, Wilhelm Dilthey, Georg Simmel, Henri Bergson, and other thinkers. They understood life as a primary active reality, a holistic, organic, irrational process of continuous formation and creative implementation, preceding the separation of matter and spirit, being and consciousness. The human form of life is peculiar not so much because of rational ability but is rather based on the completeness of the “experience” of life given in the complex and holistic relationship of spiritual and bodily experience, which cannot be fully expressed in the language of science. These ideas will later be learned and processed in philosophical anthropology and personology with emphasis on the uniqueness of the phenomenon of *human genesis* and personality. As stated by the leading representative of philosophical anthropology Max Scheler, life is a genuine essence, not an empirical generic concept that unites the common features of all terrestrial organisms (Scheler 1994). The very perception of life treats it not simply as a value, but as a source of value to its manifestations, one of which – procreation – we shall further discuss.

Reproduction and procreation

It should be noted that population reproduction has become an object of cognition, separated from the truly human meanings of procreation, despite the fact that in modern *reflexive* society there is an acute request for clarification of values and creation of meanings. In scientific discourses related to demographics, prevails an *objectifying* approach to understanding procreation, and it eliminates human attitudes. *Objective logic* of natural and cultural determinations, external to individual, loses personality as a subject of life reproduction. Objective understanding of the nature of a human somehow assumes detachment from the value components of this concept (Yudin 2005). This situation is reflected by the terminological reduction of re-creation to the concept of *reproduction* and its derivatives, as can be traced in the Demographic Encyclopedic Dictionary (1985) and Demographic Conceptual Dictionary (2003). In the scientific interpretation of both natural biological and socio-humanitarian profile (sociology, demography, in large part psychology, cultural anthropology) procreation is considered either as a synonym for reproduction, or in the narrower meaning as a synonym for childbearing. The concept of reproduction, used in demography and sociology, includes reproduction of offsprings as a set of several components, including procreation, generation, etc. Reproduction from this point of view is considered as a material process in a sociobiological system, of which human is an element. Therefore, in the philosophical approach, considering human reproduction through the lens of humanitarian connotations, we adhere to the concept of *procreation*, because we see a wider meaning in it. We also recognize guidance to ways of understanding human reproduction (descriptions, cognition, designations in language and discourse) as constituent elements in the *creative* process of making a human (and not producing) as a cultural being in ontogenesis and as a

person on the individual trajectory of development. In a dictionary published by Cambridge University, procreation is associated with childbearing, generation, reproduction of genus, lineage, continuation of genus, offspring, reproduction (Cambridge Dictionary 2020). Procreative culture genesis and personogenesis is reflected in mental elements – values, meanings, norms, attitudes, notions of procreation – and it is expressed in various discourses which, in turn, can be characterized as procreative, i.e. literally generating, containing an attitude towards pronatality, reproduction of the human race within them. It is no coincidence that mental predictions of reproduction use *procreative* epithets in demographic terminology: procreative choice, procreative setting, procreative behaviour, procreative education (Belyaeva 2013), and others. Thus, by presenting reproduction through the concept of *procreation*, we strive to avoid the predominance of objective (sociobiological, socio-economic, constructive and technological) interpretation and emphasize the understanding of procreation as a process of human reproduction in culture in the context of creating values and meanings of procreation. Culture, unlike sociality, is a strictly human phenomenon: it is created specifically in a human way of being and reproduced through human transcendation and self-reliance capacity, transforming the biological in humans. Cultivated biological needs are funded on the human ability to target and generate meaning. Accordingly, the concept of *procreative culture* is in some sense tautological. In a narrow meaning, it is the reproduction of human meanings of procreation. Such meanings crystallize into higher (terminal or spiritual) values and are implemented in activities through auxiliary (instrumental) values (Rokeach 1973). Culture generally arises when the categories created in life and for the sake of life become independent creators of intrinsically valuable formations objectified towards life (Simmel 2017). For Simmel such categories are ideal significances or values. Therefore, the concepts we apply to describe life processes define the connotations given to human procreation and reproduction.

We believe that the modern stage of mutual interdisciplinary interest between demography and philosophy brings back the question of the role of values and meanings in the field of procreation and reproduction (Shestakov 2008). Values also find their application in theories where socio-economic determinants are at the heart of the study of demographic processes, and in those where the highest priority is given to social and psychological factors, for example, as Anatoly Vishnevsky sees it, arguing that “the determination of procreative behaviour is always of a value nature” (Vishnevsky 2019: 190).

Since for individual sciences in the area of demography interest in values is of an applied nature, values are concretized to objectivity, which is sought to be measured by qualitative and quantitative methods. However, cultural regulation, expressed in the value determination of procreation, has a complex and differentiated character (Vishnevsky 2011a). One can bring up procreative values, or values of procreation, in the instrumental meaning, and such studies exist in sociology, demography and cultural anthropology. From a philosophical point of view, the focus changes to a broader one and presents procreation itself as a value intention, i.e. the direction of consciousness in the process of reproduction of human life into the future, which is unconditional positive value. This focus causes instrumental values to be interpreted in the paradigm of spiritual meanings of procreation. Terminal (spiritual) values remain beyond the scope of scientific discourse and are more often the subject of more arbitrary speculative reasoning in philosophy. The author of this paper assumes that the philosophical view will help to expand the axiological apparatus necessary for understanding procreative processes and for taking into account drivers of individual choices on procreation issues – those different from empirically registerable factors. Appealing to val-

ues in particular sciences often looks like appealing to a priori basis, which is enclosed in the use of a logically consistent definition of value. In the same way, the statement about the profound relativity of the nature of values is recognized by axiomatics, which needs to be clarified to understand modern human reproduction processes. Such a view requires a broader categorical and methodological description not only of the value itself, as a concept, but also the definition of systemic, procedural aspects of the existence of values, such as their transformation, the emergence of values, their relationship to psychological motivation and social normalization.

Procreation in the focus of personology and axiology

The specifics of philosophical thought are that it not only reflects significant aspects of human being and society in its generalizations, but also tries to find their contradictory origins, to understand human life as the unity of the accomplished and the ongoing, *present* in the modus of *here-being* and *lasting* that cannot be fully grasped by thought. Turning to the tasks of explaining and understanding the actual processes of procreation, various phenomena of human consciousness become subjects to philosophical view: values and perceptions, norms, language and discourse, semantic content in actions and events related to the reproduction of human life. The abstract and the concrete are interconnected in philosophical analysis in different configurations. Sometimes from the perspective of exact sciences, these configurations are too arbitrary, they do not correspond to the strict rules of scientific coherence, but the result is the ability to consistently operate in abstract entities, bearing in mind the specific and, speaking of the specific, to imply abstract content in them. In addition to terminological “service” related to the explication and refinement of the meaning of working concepts, philosophical analysis has its own heuristic potential in explaining and seeing problems in modern human reproduction, which are reflected in the demographic indicators of fertility and mortality, as well as in the social effects of crisis in the field of family and childbearing institutions, in the attempts to predict demographic processes and address the pressing ethical dilemmas that follow the proliferation of ambivalent practices of reproduction – on the one hand, medicalized, while on the other – oriented towards a return to natural births and childbearing practices in general. Studying the values of procreation, we find objectivities and phenomena, incommensurate at first glance, in the generalizing focus of philosophy. These objectivities and phenomena are individual and collective aspirations, ancestral and personal meanings, discourses of power and everyday life, ethical and aesthetic norms, scientific regulations, contradictions of natural and technologically prosthetic in procreation.

Within this paper, we shall methodologically base ourselves on the personalistic philosophy of Vasily Rozanov and axiology of Max Scheler. Procreativity as a mindset is peculiar to the Russian philosophy of the turn of the 19-20s centuries, especially evident it is in the versions of personalist ontology of Vasily Rozanov, Nikolai Berdyaev, Lev Shestov, Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Semyon Frank and Lev Karsavin. It should be noted that social sciences in the field of demography, when exploring values, widely operate the concepts of individualism, individualistic values, etc. Individualism has its own philosophical support in utilitarianism, hedonism, and pragmatism with their rather narrow and lopsided interpretation of human. At the same time, a rich and versatile personalist philosophy, which, in our view, is more relevant to the study of procreative processes, is obliterated. If individual-

ism brings procreative choice to Ego, makes it the motif of an isolated autonomous entity, personalism at the forefront puts the personality, self-identity, which relies on "multifacility" in the organization of one's Self, combining rational and irrational, spiritual and physical, willed and emotional, selfhood and presence of the Other in the inner world, individual motivation and social duty. Personalist philosophy paves the way for the ontologization of responsibility in understanding the individual and its interactions with the Other. As Emmanuel Levinas considered, a person becomes a person as he or she realizes responsibility to the Other, lives for Others (Levinas 2006). Individualistic discourses, whether discourses of desire in art or scientific approaches that take individualism as a priori condition in understanding human and social connections, suffer from paradigmatic incompleteness.

A mature personality overcomes selfish motivation, grows to the realization of one's own identity and the need for one's continuation. Therefore, in personalism, the topic of human birth is reflected not simply as an act of individual self-implementation, which is usual for individualistic interpretations of procreation, but as the creation of the future personality foreseen in the unity of individual and ancestral existence. For example, famous Russian philosopher Georgy Fedotov gives the following characteristic to the personalist philosophy of Rozanov: "It is important to see behind the extraordinary diversity of topics <...> devotion to the most important, single, supreme, what fertilizes, fills all Rozanov creativity with meaning. Only childbirth, that is, motherhood, i.e. pitiful, lactating love, inspires it" (Varava 2009: 70). Rozanov gives a vivid and unsurpassed example of a genuine metaphysics of childhood (Rozanov 1990b: 215). Childbirth, according to the philosopher, is both holy and saving. He considers the birth of a new life the most innermost, intimate and concealed act. The sense of contact with the world through the baby is very precisely and deeply defined as transcendental excitement (Rozanov 1990a: 302). Rozanov's observations reveal the futility of technocratic claims of science, which are essentially technocratic utopias, to understand and explain the entire process of inception, birth and development of life (Varava 2009: 71).

The section of philosophy devoted to theory of values is called axiology. Axiological problems have taken place in various philosophical doctrines since ancient times, the ethical and aesthetic concepts developed in them laid the foundations of axiology. By and large, axiology was formed as an independent direction in the late 19th – early 20th centuries within the framework of philosophy of life, philosophical anthropology, Neo-Kantianism. Scheler spoke of value perception as a presentation of human being in his spiritual form. The concepts of spirit and soul today are almost emanated from scientific discourse as not amenable to strict logical definition. However, the conversation about values cannot exist without a reference to the realm of spirit. The Scheler came most closely to not excluding but using derivatives of spirit in scientific terminology. By developing a phenomenological approach in philosophy, Scheler creates *applied phenomenology* using a method to actualize the ethical, and, broader, value area in explaining contradictions of modern life. Phenomenology and axiology in his teaching provide the key to exploring what connects the pragmatics of life and the irrational in human. Thus, Scheler's philosophy is quite "practical" because it has deep epiphanies on the nature of social processes, it is a theory in which ideas can be drawn to explain the value transformations of our time, including those occurring in demographics. Concurrently, Scheler, criticizing the ideas from Kant and Hegel's philosophy, dogmatically accepted in Germany at the time, shows how far the power of discourse extends (Malinkin 2016). This parallel can partly be drawn with dogmatism in scientific approaches and schools, with its impact on minds through education, public media and how often hypothesised knowledge takes on the meaning of truth in practice not because it

reflects real processes, but because it is a consequence of the power of discourse. Developing a procreative component in discourses that study human and population reproduction, one must remember that our notion of good (value) permeates our perception (Joas 2013).

Procreation as value intention

Life processes as a natural being of human, a part of which is procreation, according to Scheler, gain significance only in the context of their spiritual living, spirituality. “Only to the extent to which there are spiritual values and spiritual acts in which they are comprehended, life as such <...> has some value” (Scheler 1994: 314). In this statement, Scheler raises the vital processes in the naturalistic variant of understanding and perception of life to an axiological level. In the focus of these ideas we should, first of all, identify the meaning and purpose of human reproduction, procreation.

Value-based feeling, in turn, is understood by Scheler dually: firstly, as an intention, i.e., a pre-reflexive intuitive emotional and volitional act, directedness towards something; secondly, as a value relation, the act of preferring one to another. The philosopher strongly rejects the view that value is only a general concept, meaning or sense (Malinkin 2016). Values are not formal facts, they do not exist anywhere separate from the world and their carriers, but they are simultaneously independent of it (Alkhasov 2015). Value is originally embedded in the consciously volitional activity of human, it is not mediated and is therefore absolute, i.e., beyond the value relationship a person can exist as an animal, located «within» objectified life processes, and only a priori presence of the value orientation of human consciousness and will make it unique in the natural world. Values play the role of a mechanism of “higher orienteering”, balancing the world of nature and culture. Thanks to the development of an estimating ability (albeit growing out of adaptive reaction), a person comes to the opportunity to choose an “energy-saving” technology of life support and provision of growth or stability in the population. In demographic science there is a concept of demographic equilibrium, which Vishnevsky (Vishnevsky 2011b) characterizes as a “more complex mechanism” rather than natural and ecological equilibrium. In our opinion, this complexity lies in the intentional nature of human procreation, its manifestation is positive perception of the future.

Classification in the hierarchy of Scheler values correspondingly relates to the allocation of more or less strong experiences. The first order of classification is mental, it distinguishes four hierarchical levels of *value modalities* (they are indicated in ascending order): sensory values; life values; spiritual values; sacred values (Alkhasov 2015). In addition, several types and levels of values are distinguished according to their mediation or absoluteness, durability or temporality, divisibility or wholeness. The philosopher also describes the “material” order of values, dividing them into personal and subject values, own and alien, values of acts, functions, reactions, beliefs, actions, successes, intentions, states, bases, forms and relations, individual and collective values, independent and derivative values. Most significant in the hierarchy of values is love as the strongest, aesthetically and morally-coloured form of value experience, it turns out to be the connecting link between human and his or her personality. If a personality is the subject of spiritual acts, then a person is the subject of love, creating the very possibility of implementing all these acts, putting them into practice. “Before man becomes *ens cogitans*, he is an *ens amans*,” Scheler writes. “Completeness, dimensionality, differentiation, power of his love establish the limits of fullness, functional specification, the

strength of his possible spirit and the range possible for him in contact with the universum” (Malinkin 2016: 112).

In the context of these ideas, procreation, understood as human reproduction as a being, creating culture and simultaneously making his own reproduction an element of a given process, enables considering the very life of human and life reproduction in the form of the value intention of the human spirit, which, in our opinion, corresponds to the modern understanding of the specifics of the living. “The living is a set of objects capable of performing purposeful actions, the ultimate goal of which is self-reproduction” (Borzenkov 2009: 694). In its content, value intention is the direction of the human spirit on what has an unconditionally positive meaning for the existence of human. We believe that the procreative direction of the spirit is associated with the positive (value-colored) perception of the future and of the length of life as the deployment and formation of personal potential. Ilya Mechnikov referred to this focus as a *sense of life*, noting that “the evolution of the sense of life in human development forms the real basis of the philosophy of optimism. It, this feeling, is of great importance and should therefore be studied as deep as possible” (Swordsmen 2017: 199).

In Rozanov’s ideas we find justification of another, modern understanding of value, which connects its emergence with the search for identity. Rozanov noted that with the birth of a person, a transcendental craving for “left worlds” – the worlds of infancy, childhood – arises in him or her. This gravitation to integrity and to personal identity become the source of true lively procreative power, which manifests itself in the desire of a human to touch again and again the world of infant perception and childlike view of life, which has an invariably possessive meaning that structures human life. Rozanov’s personalist philosophy is built on the ontology of potentiality and has a direct connection to the axiological dimension of life, as it claims that the meaning of human life reproduction is to deploy capabilities – that vast potential equal to existence as such – concealed in an emerging infant (Kozhurin 2017). These opportunities are given as the basis of the positive directedness of future life, i.e., they represent the beginning of all values and the very ability of a person to assess something, to place it on moral and aesthetic (as well as any other) scales and see what will have a greater or lesser value for him. In the future, existentialists developed this approach, arguing that a human is what he or she is potentially.

Love combines the highest moral and aesthetic evaluations in the procreative direction of the human spirit. As emotional and volitional desire, or the intention of the human spirit to reproduce life, love is manifested in the unity of the spirit of loving people in the name of creating a new life, in parental, maternal love, love of life, in the trust in its infinity, in which the finiteness of individual life dissolves. Simmel believed that a prerequisite for the emergence of values was to understand the extremity of our existence (Joas 2013: 119). The value essence of procreation is rooted in a person’s need to associate one’s own life with life of the clan, considering oneself in connection with generations, the unity of the past and the future. Love inspires, focusing on the morally and aesthetically high reference points, makes one see the best in human, design the future and dream. The procreative intention of the human spirit has a creative nature, because it is associated with the intention of procreation into the future. In this process, one must see culture genesis and persona genesis, since procreative intention is based on temporal unity of ancestral memory (the past) and future as creation of personality. And this means the personality not only of the person being born, but also those who participate in his persona genesis, becoming a parent, educator, etc. Simultaneously, the imaginary worlds of the future are created through the spiritualization of the natural process of reproduction. This value content of procreation in the historical movement of mankind

finds moral and aesthetic expression, thus forming the world of culture. In other words, human culture is procreative, it is created through spiritualized reproduction in connection with the past and future through the accumulation of ancestral experience, framed in moral and aesthetic categories and through creative imagination, in which aspirations for the future are manifested. Therefore, the means of expressing human aspirations, which can carry a procreative spirit or have opposite modality, are so important.

Considering procreation historically, the spiritual, terminal emphasis in human reproduction should increase as the human spirit is multidimensionally exempted from natural and material dependencies. In this, a fundamental role is played by those forms of culture in which the creative energy of imagination is drained. In the modern world, such channels are primarily different discourses. Following Habermas's thought of a radical transformation in human self-awareness, which occurs "as soon as the vertical axis of the prayer tips this into the horizontal axis of interhuman communication...", the symbolic embodiment of which is the phenomenon of the *Confessions* by Rousseau (Habermas 1991: 199–200), one can see a transition to modernity in culture. In linguistic forms of expression of the cultural meanings (discourses), words, texts and narratives become the means of expressing spiritual attitude towards the world. In communicative reality, in the space of discourses, ethical and aesthetic normalization become diverse. However, in this ontology, the procreative intentionality of the human spirit remains present, and it gets diversified in its ethical and aesthetic manifestations.

Conclusion

The application of axiological and personalist ideas to the study of procreation enables considering it, firstly, as a form of spiritual creativity of a person who forms culture and recreates him- or herself in this process, and secondly, as a value intention, that is, directedness of human consciousness and emotions in the process of reproduction for the future. Following the interpretation of Scheler, we note that value intention has absolute character, since it is a source of positively coloured moral and aesthetic attitude to life, the highest form of which, according to the philosopher, is love. Procreation as a value intention can also be represented as mastering of its absolute content through discourses on love, which truly do have a procreative character. Modern study of procreative processes is characterized by drainage of the value dimension and human meanings of procreation, the predominance of commodifying rhetoric and technologizing discourses. Scientific analysis suffers from dependence on positivist attitudes in the evaluation of procreative processes, reducing human reproduction to socio-economic or sociobiological determination.

The current processes of cultural genesis are strongly influenced by media discourses and communication in the virtual space. It is important that the value nature of procreation is stated in discourses. If discourse becomes an end in itself, i.e., text and narrative are created for self-presentation and information for profit, then it loses the creative function – to form and express meanings and values of life reproduction. Procreative discourses are aimed at revealing spiritual content in motherhood and child birth, parenthood, family and birth, and procreative values associated with future. The world of competition, rivalry, leadership, eventually gravitates towards a show of strength, and it is opposed to the positive values of procreation. Tatiana Shchepanskaya notes that "zones of violence often (if not systematically) arise in the a- or anti-creative areas of society <...> The zone of violence where they enter

is thus separated from the area of reproduction <...> Blocking life reproduction programmes is associated with unlocking programmes of its destruction (or bodily consumption, collecting life through violence). Pro-vital (procreative) and anti-vital (violent) strategies turn out to be separated. Apparently, power and love are the two main and, as it turns out, alternative mediators of interpersonal connections, motive and reinforcement of human interactions” (Shchepanskaya 2001). Russian society needs procreative discourses devoted to procreative values, literature and art, in which they speak about love and peace, ancestral connection denoting cultural affiliation and the co-presence of the past and the future. It shapes a productive experience of the imagination. The terminal spiritual values of procreation are associated with the meanings of the future, which is found in the inextricable connection of individual and ancestral existence. Such meaning of childbearing gives procreation very different meanings than the experience of practical life of individuals, when the need for the birth of children is at the forefront of economic stability of the family and caring for old age. If in archaic societies reproduction is based on a non-reflexive, unconscious perception of one’s own need for self-realization, personalization and love, modern man replaces this instinctive program of adaptation and survival by knowledge and information. However, knowledge is only a condition of understanding, it needs emotional experience, connection with values. Otherwise, procreative settings do not come to individual life, do not lead to projecting their own growth into the future. Personality is limited to the present, loses the capacity for imagination and creativity or imitates them without attuning love as a value and the highest type of connection with Others.

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