



2013, Vol. 12,  
No. 23

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## ***Loneliness, Creativity and a Sense of Human Life in the 3rd Millennium***

### **SUMMARY**

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The contribution accentuates the issue of loneliness and solitude in a positive social context of a person's life in the post-modern era. It is also a reflection of the meaningfulness of existence through experiencing difficult life situations, resulting in post-traumatic stress. The experience of related stress offers to an individual a higher quality of life with greater resilience. Thus, his life becomes revamped to a meaningful being, obtaining a new sense. However, overcoming difficult life situations as well as coping with them requires manifold creativity.

→ **KEYWORDS** – LONELINESS, SOLITUDE, CREATIVITY, SENSE OF LIFE, STRESS

### **STRESZCZENIE**

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*Samotność, kreatywność i poczucie sensu życia człowieka w trzecim tysiącleciu*

Artykuł porusza problematykę samotności w pozytywnym kontekście życia społecznego człowieka współczesnej doby. Równocześnie jest refleksją nad sensownością egzystencji, analizując przeżywanie trudnych życiowych sytuacji, których skutkiem jest posttraumatyczny stres. Przeżycie tego stresu dostarcza jednostce wyższej jakości życia, z wyższą miarą wytrzymałości. Tym samym jej życie otrzymuje nową postać znaczenia codziennej egzystencji, nabiera sensu. Jednakże przezwyciężanie życiowych doświadczeń, poziom zdolności w pokonywaniu trudności wymaga różnorodnej kreatywności.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** – SAMOTNOŚĆ, ODOŚOBNIENIE, KREATYWNOŚĆ, SENS ŻYCIA, STRES

## Loneliness and its dimensions

The object of our analysis is the issue of loneliness in the dichotomous context – from a negative to positive perception of this phenomenon. Loneliness as a multidimensional concept can be categorized in many ways. We distinguish the following most common types of loneliness: pathological (morbid) loneliness – this means an escape into solitude because of fear of failure in the social environment, an avoidance of social contact, so that the individual conceals the undesirable features of his behavior, pathological changes of personality or various mental illnesses. Voluntary loneliness – this is a targeted search for solitude in a cleansing, relaxing, philosophical and religious sense. Involuntary loneliness is felt by those people who have stayed alone due to the loss or death of someone close, isolation, alienation.

T. Matulayová<sup>1</sup> understands loneliness in terms of subjective experiencing as a life feeling or as an oppressive life situation. Another classification of loneliness has been presented by F.J. Bruno<sup>2</sup>, who from the perspective of time distinguishes between short-term, intermediate loneliness, which is a response to a certain situation (such as when we browse the new foreign community), or long-term loneliness, which has a permanent nature and consequences, a negative effect on quality of life. The author goes on in his reflections to distinguish between the loneliness we are inflicted by irrational thoughts, when we feel like a victim less able to assimilate, with the desire to evoke compassion in other people. Another case is the loneliness that we did not cause ourselves, but which has been caused by adverse life events, such as loss of a life partner, and so on.

When defining loneliness according to L.A. Peplau and D. Perlman<sup>3</sup>, it is necessary to emphasize subjective experience and experiencing loneliness, because loneliness is a result of the perception of some deficiency in interpersonal relationships and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. E. Aaland, T. Matulayová, *Etické reflexie v pomáhajících profesích*, Prešov 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. F.J. Bruno, *Nebud'ťe sami aneb Jak získat přítele*, Praha 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměník, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 2*, Praha 2001.

is uncomfortable. Weiss<sup>4</sup> (in: Výrost, Slaměník, 1998, p. 291) distinguishes between social and emotional loneliness. Social loneliness is understood as a condition where a person has severed nearly all social contact with other people, and is isolated from the outside world, or the frequency of a person's social contact is not satisfactory. Emotional loneliness is when a person lacks an intimate relationship with another human, which would yield emotional satisfaction for him, even though he is surrounded by many friends. It is also important to distinguish between loneliness as a feature and loneliness as a state.<sup>5</sup> A feature of loneliness is a relatively stable pattern of experiencing loneliness that changes only slightly because of the situation. A state of loneliness is a time-limited experience, associated with dramatic and significant changes in life. In this context we consider loneliness as a phenomenon that occurs especially in a certain period of person's lifecycle. Z. Eis<sup>6</sup> refers to the negative feeling of loneliness (but having a positive effect), and suggests that the most demanding life stages where loneliness manifests itself are puberty and old age.

Humanistically oriented psychologists such as Maslow and Rogers have associated the phenomenon of loneliness with the development of society, which especially in Western countries is characterized by an increase of alienation and dehumanization. It is a reaction to the confusion in shared ideals, which is now presented in the form of the most varied ideologies. Anyone can create his own philosophy and become a victim of confusion, resulting in loneliness in a world crowded by people. In this regard, based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we believe that the problem of loneliness is one of the consequences of a postmodern "de-fixation from institutions." If people meet their biological needs, the needs hierarchically based above acquire a stronger impact, which includes meaningful relationships with close people. Within this context A. Gehlen notes that weathered institutions in postmodern culture largely lose their stabilizing effect. Their function of counterbalancing the chaos is

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměník, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 1*, Praha 1998, p. 291.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměník, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 3*, Praha 2002, p. 123.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Z. Eis, *Krize všedního dne*, Praha 1994.

weakened – especially the value sphere, which is characterized by previously unknown uncertainty and ambiguity. While the deeper symbolic meanings disappear from public life and institutions erode laws, the private sphere stands somehow beyond. In doing so, however, even she falls back to the immediacy; the individuals are touching each other by the entire surface of their inherent superiority or weakness and these conflicts, compounded by a lack of distance, must be addressed by modest reserves of their random properties.<sup>7</sup> According to other authors, the experience of loneliness may also be a reflection of a deeper interest in existential questions and the search for the meaning of life, which we will discuss in the next part.<sup>8</sup>

Loneliness is a word that elicits emotions of all kinds – emotions, which may cause difficulties in experiencing and in interacting with other people, just because some emotions often negatively affect a person's life. The English philosopher David Hume once described the human mind as a maid of emotions. Agreeing with the mentioned authors, we can say that despite the fact that the human mind evolved to unprecedented proportions and created a complex technological civilization, it has not changed at all with regard to the matter of human emotions. Just like thousands of years ago, today we are also equipped with the same outfit to live in groups, where our ancestors were dependent upon one another. Even today one needs to identify himself with any social group. Man is a social being, and therefore his natural needs include living with other people as well as the social-networking. Currently, however, closeness and the high level of the individualization of man have become the characteristic features of society, resulting in loneliness. In this context M. Dessaint<sup>9</sup> shows that we are alone often in the most important moments of our lives, wherever we are. We are alone at birth, alone in dying; alone we are faced with our ideas, our conscience, fear and anxiety. We are facing alone the pain, suffering, grief, personal problems, aging, rejection, and so on. The results of many surveys suggest that loneliness (in its positive as well as negative form) is far from any low-frequency phenomena.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. A. Gehlen, *Duch ve světě techniky*, Praha 1972, p. 88-89.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměnik, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 2*, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. M.P. Dessaintová, *Nezačínajte stárnout*, Praha 1999.



Conversely, many people report experiencing it. Many authors find it also in the Bible where Jesus goes into the desert for forty days to experience solitude, and see the possibility of self-introspection and self-affirmation.

There are several perspectives on loneliness. Some definitions describe solitude and loneliness as positive elements in the life of an individual; others perceive loneliness as a negative experience. In this context, we should be more specific regarding the difference in terminology, as some authors propose to distinguish between the term *loneliness* (as a negative emotion) and *solitude* (as a positive emotion). An example of the perception of solitude as a positive phenomenon is the view of Moustakas<sup>10</sup>, which argues that solitude brings sensitivity and where there is sensitivity, there is awareness, understanding, hope – and therefore he advises all to become solitary. Most authors concerned with the issue of loneliness<sup>11</sup>, however, present an opposite view of loneliness. According to Bruno.<sup>12</sup>

loneliness is a negative mental and emotional state, for which the feelings of isolation and lack of significant relationships with other people are typical.

As possible causes of loneliness, researchers have identified certain characteristics of lonely people that point to possible reasons. It was found that loneliness is associated with higher levels of social anxiety and shyness and a lower level of self-esteem and assertiveness.<sup>13</sup> Lonely people are usually introverted, anxious and hypersensitive to rejection and more likely to suffer from depression.<sup>14</sup> They have difficulties in forming friendships and relationships, as well as problems with their involvement in social and group activities. As identified by B.P. Buunk and

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. P.F. Kinauer, *Už nechcete žít sami?*, Praha 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. F.J. Bruno, *Nebuďte sami aneb Jak získat přítele*, op. cit.; P.F. Kinauer, *Už nechcete žít sami?*, op. cit.; R. Nesnídalová, *Extrémní osamělost*, Praha 1994; P. Tournier, *Osamělost mezi lidmi*, Praha 1998; J. Výrost, I. Slaměník, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 2*, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. F.J. Bruno, *Nebuďte sami aneb Jak získat přítele*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměník, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 2*, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

W.B. Schaufeli,<sup>15</sup> the important determinant affecting the experiencing of loneliness is the lack of reciprocity in interpersonal relations. The cause of problems in the interpersonal sphere is for lonely people their negative, too critical assessment of themselves and other people. These negative expectations lead lonely people to the notion of any minor complaints as signs of neglect. An interesting finding is that to be introverted may mean a positive relationship to the experience of loneliness. Some empirical studies point to the fact that loneliness can be partly caused by a lack of social skills. One needs the other person not only because he is dependent on the assistance of others, but because he needs a human relationship, which facilitates contact with the world, provides emotional satisfaction and keeps a person's sense of their own social value and a sense of belonging to others.<sup>16</sup> Another cause of loneliness is the narrowing of social relations in some periods of the lifecycle, such as in old age. It is usually determined by reduced mobility, changes in personality in terms of increasing self-centeredness, selfishness and suspicion. A significant consequence is subsequent social isolation, loneliness and a sense of loneliness. Loneliness becomes very painful for elderly persons. A harrowing and distressing consciousness that they are alone can be very dangerous for them. The result is that lonely people are thus in a sort of a vicious circle of their problems, which also explains the reasons for the persistence of feelings of loneliness. They fail to create friendships because they enter into interpersonal relationships with negative expectations and underdeveloped social skills. Under these circumstances, interactions with other people is not a good source of pleasure and enjoyment for them, but rather a cause of various annoyances. As a result, it is difficult to create optimal social relations and the loneliness persists.<sup>17</sup> One can get into a state of social isolation as an expression of loneliness, according to J. Výrost and I. Slaměník,<sup>18</sup> either consciously by avoiding social contacts, which can reveal the unpleasant features of his

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměník, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 1*, Praha 1998 (1997).

behavior and personality, or because of external circumstances, e.g. relocation to an unfamiliar environment where he feels alone and fails to make new social contacts. Another factor of experiencing loneliness is a subjective self-attribution of weak skills as well as a higher rate of anxiety relating to these skills. More generally, factors that can cause such a condition of loneliness are low self-esteem and a reluctance to use social support.<sup>19</sup> Stress, such as a psychical burden, is another manifestation of loneliness. There can be several causes: divorce, the death of a spouse and retirement are included in the main sources of stress in the Holmes table of the psychical burden rate.<sup>20</sup> Stress is a double-edged sword for lonely people, as loneliness causes stress and stress causes loneliness. The decisive factor in the response to stress and loneliness is social support for a stressed lone individual.

The subsequent reaction to loneliness is that some people become passive and fall into sadness. Typical reactions are crying, sleep, aimlessly watching TV or even overeating, drinking alcohol or drug use. On the other hand, we want to emphasize the fact that there are also active forms of response which tend to be more suitable. In order to overcome loneliness some people devote themselves to their hobbies, studying, practicing, they go to the cinema, or shall endeavor to establish social contact.<sup>21</sup> Coping with and overcoming loneliness is largely dependent on how the individual perceives the reasons for his problems, to which factors he attributes his loneliness. Those who believe that the cause lies within themselves or in their psyche, in their personal deficits, are hardly able to resolve their problems. On the other hand, those people who perceive loneliness only as a transitory state, are usually more open to correct their deficiencies. One of the best ways how to prevent loneliness, or as a means of overcoming loneliness, is the establishment of meaningful and wholesome friendships. Another factor that may influence the process of dealing with loneliness is the preferred strategy of coping with social anxiety. The other-directed strategies are evaluated as less effective. These include reasoning according to the standards

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměnik, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 1*, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměnik, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 2*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. Výrost, I. Slaměnik, *Aplikovaná sociální psychologie 1*, op. cit.

of others, trying to carry out actions, as the others do, imitating the ways of decision-making, etc.<sup>22</sup> A more efficient approach is based on creating custom standards and the formulation of own affairs, which applies to “self-oriented” assertive strategies, involving a high level of creativity which is required to change custom behavior stereotypes. Acquiring the necessary skills, however, usually requires systematic social training.

As loneliness is interdisciplinary in nature, its solution also requires an interdisciplinary approach. Doctors have reported the negative effects of loneliness on not only on the individual and the family, but also on society. An examination of loneliness was therefore included in the Comprehensive geriatric assessment (CGA). It is a multidimensional interdisciplinary diagnostic process that is focused on determining the health, psychosocial and functional capabilities and problems of frail seniors in order to develop an overall plan for treatment and long-term follow-up. The CGA is able to identify the forgotten causes of the difficulties or disability, which may contribute to the maintenance or restoration of self-sufficiency and a desirable quality of life, and thereby to an improvement in prognosis. The basic component of this clinical examination is the anamnestic interview, which includes enhanced social history and assessment of social functioning. Enhanced social history – perignosis is designed to detect social relations with an emphasis on the degree of loneliness and to clarify who could be the patient’s primary social support. It is important to transfer the center of interest from the family (especially if it is dysfunctional) to the social network consisting of friends, neighbors, associations, guilds, relationships within various social and leisure activities. The next steps are the therapeutic process of an elderly person, which could be undertaken by social services, especially social counseling as a form of (primary, secondary or tertiary) social prevention. In such a case, it is a social network, its scope, or density and the level and quality of its functioning, which is crucial when it comes to coping with loneliness.

As we mentioned in the previous sections, negative perceived loneliness often brings to daily life a number of problems that need to be addressed, whether it’s health, mental state, or even social interaction. We believe that the best solution to the



individual's situation is social support directed to the search for a meaningful life. In the literature there is much less attention devoted to the concept of social health than to the issues of somatic or mental health. The adjective "social" indicates that this is not the characteristic of an individual, and thus it may not be entirely clear how an individual can be assessed from this perspective. Social health is certainly an attribute of a society that can be considered healthy, while providing equal opportunities for all, as a matter of access to the material and spiritual goods and services that are necessary for an individual to function as a citizen. Indicators of social well-being in this sense may include the distribution of economic wealth, access to positions that allow for the participation in decision-making processes and public scrutiny of public officials. An estimation of social health in terms of the individual is a more or less ambitious construct and it is generally defined as one of the dimensions of one's quality of life, which includes how an individual relates to others, as others react to him, and what is his relation to social institutions and social norms. The definition is very broad, including aspects of personality and social skills, as well as the standards of the society in which the individual lives. "In fact, most instruments that measure the social health of the individual do not use the word health, but talk about well-being, adjustment, behavior or performance, or social functioning".<sup>23</sup> These aspects have attracted the attention of researchers after the publication of the WHO definition of health, which emphasizes access to patients as social beings that exist in a complex social environment. Individuals who are well integrated into their community live longer, and are better able to recover faster from any disease and vice versa – in this regard, social isolation poses certain health risks. J. Mareš<sup>24</sup> has suggested that one of the solutions of negatively perceived loneliness is social support, divided on the basis of its functions: 1. Emotional support; 2. Instrumental support (tangible things, practical assistance); 3. Information support; 4. Social support provided by the community (sense of belonging); 5. Support of confirmation (feedback). In most cases it is possible to conclude that social support has a positive effect.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Kožený, J. Tišanská, *Dotazník sociální opory – MOS: Vnitřní struktura nástroje*, *W Československá psychologie*, (2003), roč. XLVII, č. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Mareš, *Posttraumatický rozvoj člověka*, Praha 2012.

## Post-traumatic stress as a precursor of more meaningful being

In relation to the reliving of loneliness J. Mareš<sup>25</sup> points to the extraordinary events in human life associated with post-traumatic human development and their long-term positive consequences. This is important for three reasons: almost every adult has personal experience with more serious adverse events, people have known about this issue for centuries, and its experience has been incarnated into a number of proverbs and sayings, but it is an important topic of research as well. This topic has accompanied mankind since the ancient times; as early as the 67<sup>th</sup> Seneca's letter to his friend Lucilio writes: "In fact, there is some good which has a sad face." The life of every human being includes not only moments of comfort and happiness, but also some adverse events, such as serious diseases, injuries, death, as well as floods, earthquakes, storms, fires, etc. Human society itself does not have only its friendly side; since ancient times many people have experienced e.g. the adversity of the powerful, unjust imprisonment, or expulsion. Wars have raged throughout the centuries. To date, even at the threshold of the third Millennium in some parts of the world local conflicts are happening. This gloomy list of human incorrigibility has strangely enough one positive moment. In fact it seems that those who are persecuted by fate (and survive suffering) may, under certain conditions of heavy experiences emerge reinforced, changed for the better. A challenging life situation or the survival of trauma may paradoxically boost positive change, to bring to the individual a new way of life. It is a long and universal human experience by which we know that overcoming the obstacles may strengthen and elevate us. Ordinary human experience is condensed into statements such as: "What is harmful teaches" or "Everything bad is good for something." Even nowadays the famous statement of F. Nietzsche is commonly used: "What does not kill me will strengthen me."

Finding the positive impact of negative life events and situations is therefore in the history of mankind and is not a new phenomenon. This line of reasoning is found in a deepened form in all the major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism,

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibidem*, p. 9.

some strains of Islam). The named religions teach that the big trials show the nature of a man – he has to deserve his living, to overcome obstacles and succeed in the exams. Finally, the very essence of Christianity consists in the idea that the suffering of Christ opens the way to a new life. We believe that thousands of years of experience can be summed up with the phrase: people realize that a higher quality of life does not come alone, but that a person needs to obtain it by overcoming difficulties and even suffering. At the beginning of the scientific approaches to the positive impact of negative events and difficult situations stand the works of V.E. Frankl,<sup>26</sup> author of the logotherapy (therapy that teaches people to seek and find the meaning of life). Based on personal experience at several Nazi concentration camps, which he passed through, he came to the conclusion that man is currently in existential situations and is called upon to give evidence about his capabilities. The meaning of life in his opinion hides also in suffering, as in suffering one can live out all that is most human in himself. Where we cannot change our situation is where we are asked to change ourselves, so that we become more mature and eventually overgrow ourselves. Frankl himself found that people who had something to live for coped with unimaginably difficult life situations well.

### The meaning of life as a result of (positive) solitude

If we decide to talk about the meaning of life, it is not just some kind of pure hyperbolization of this phenomenon, but the effort to search for a more comprehensive view of human existence, because, as pointed out by F. Novosad,<sup>27</sup> the world in which we live is our creation. Every day we use words like meaningful, purposeful work, the meaning of life. The epistemology of language is closely related to our actions, and therefore if at any time we talk about the meaning or meaningful activity, we mean a certain objective and purpose of what is happening. What leads to an objective is meaningful. What is not intended in relation to any objective, or even prevents us achieving the

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<sup>26</sup> V.E. Frankl, 2006.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. F. Novosad, *Vysvetľovanie rukami*, Bratislava 1994.

desired objective, is meaningless.<sup>28</sup> One important question that the individual who is looking for the meaning of life must address is the definition, or redefinition of its meaning. Such a question is crucial from the perspective of an adolescent as well as from the point of view of an elderly person. For seniors this happens mostly when they retire, at the loss of a partner, when their children leave, or in the context of a disease. But there may come after positive events – the birth of a grandchild, heritage, which gives space for a change of lifestyle, a new, more lucrative job opportunity, combined with the opportunity of possibly staying in more developed countries, the possibility of studying at university (which at the time of a totalitarian regime could have been denied), and so on.

Experiencing the meaning of life is a complex phenomenon, and therefore we will consider some efforts to define its structure and components. S.B. Shapiro<sup>29</sup> presents a two-factor model of the meaning of life. K. Popielski<sup>30</sup> reported four components contained in the perceived sense of life: intellectual, emotional-affective, volitionally-aspirational and existentially-operational. As it is the most prevalent meaning of life structure concept, we will consider the multidimensional model of the three components by G.T. Reker and P.T.P. Wong.<sup>31</sup> This concept distinguishes a cognitive component, motivational component and an affective component, talking about feelings of satisfaction, happiness and fullness related to the achievement of goals, implementation of values, and knowledge of a meaningful life. The meaning of life is here considered to be a dynamic process, which evolves and adapts within the life cycle. Alfried Längle<sup>32</sup> has contributed to the issue of the meaning of life through his personal existential analysis. The meaning of life is understood by him as a way of life for a certain period of time, which changes with each changing situation. In terms of a life cycle, this process most dramatically

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. Křivohlavý, *Psychologie nemoci*, Praha 2002, J. Křivohlavý, *Psychologie zdraví*, Praha 2001.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. P. Halama, *Zmysel života z pohľadu psychológie*, Bratislava 2007.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. ibidem.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. P. Halama, *Zmysel života z pohľadu psychológie*, op. cit.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Längle, *Sinnspuren. Dem Leben Antwort geben*, St. Pölten-Wien 2005.



runs during adolescence and during aging. The author answers the question of the meaningfulness of life by suggesting that when we talk about the sense, we mean the direction that leads life to a particular, and even in certain circumstances, the highest value. The sense represents assistance in orientation, if life is viewed as a compass. As a result of this, the sense can show the direction of a full, successful life. Sense is just what with respect to a given situation should be performed and done. Who is then asking for the meaning of life, and who answers? Ever since the ancient philosophers, we have witnessed questions and answers on the meaning of life. Even in these times, we see that the search for the meaning of life is based upon principles and values such as truth, love and happiness – but it includes the desire for freedom, prosperity and justice as well. The meaning of life has always been solved – and we handle it also today in the individual and social context.

The social context of the search for the meaning of life is closely linked with nature, religion and history. We believe that an individual's connection to nature is the most fundamental in the context of meaningfulness. V.E. Frankl even claims that man as the first asks the nature: "...life, tell me what have you prepared for me as the meaning of life?" However, F. Novosad<sup>33</sup> points out that in the context of time we can see that man, liberated from the domination of nature, subordinates to the power of his own creations. So we may be witnessing the paradoxical consequences of how power will be transformed into powerlessness, activity to passivity, spontaneity to receptivity. The process of the search for changes in ourselves contains a constant "struggle" between the natural and the artificial. Here again we have to approach from the general to the particular, and vice versa, but neither one of the directions we must superorder (we cannot consider a "generic" man primarily as a particular person – as a model, because each of us is unique).

The individual context of the meaning of life is closely related to personality. M. Machovec<sup>34</sup> shows that by personality we do not mean only those who are recorded in history (or strictly the context of the theories of psychology), but this is about personality in a broader sense: the individual with a certain skill in a certain

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. F. Novosad, *Vysvetľovanie rukami*, op. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. M. Machovec, *Smysl lidské existence*, Praha 2006, p. 56.

field, with a general wisdom and passion for other people, especially with a strong desire to work on a long-term demanding task and also to mobilize others for that purpose. Nevertheless, even at the individual level, it is personality that is focused solely on herself, especially on her bodily functions, clamoring for – at once aggressive, and at once crying with self-pity – constant attention. How to change such an individual to the individual with a strong sense of activity and usefulness from the sharing of experience – the man of a “constructive type” with a positive “self-image” of good ties of friendship and family, interesting activities, with a healthy lifestyle? It is clear that we will not receive an unequivocal response to a question on how to search and find the authentic meaning of life, but we may offer a precedent that can be used to deal with analogous cases, which involve emergent consequences. The urgency of development consists of the existence of qualitatively new features in the background and personality with its satyrian characteristics, such as: emotions, emotions in emotions, expectations, desires and a self-concept. Nevertheless it is clear to us that desires govern our lives, particularly our inner world. Life convinces us that if we have some problem, if we are dealing with some difficult life situation, we often turn to dreaming. We dream usually when resting, but also if the reality is very difficult, and we start to worry that the solution is beyond our power.<sup>35</sup> Then, it is as if we pushed apart the reality and we resort to a “magic wand.” Some kind of a “magic wand” can be understood as individual daydreaming as well. Through daydreaming and the creativity of this dreaming we gain a release, we accept emotions that we do not experience in real life. We can think about the reasons that can motivate an individual to transform his dreams into reality. The answer is Adlerian therapy, which demonstrates the use of a private individual’s logic, which explains human desires in life. A dream – whether during the day or night, is here to remind us of what our lives are lacking. Our goal is to find a link between fantasy and real life, to bring our imagination into real life. An individual can thus be aware of his imperfections and errors. If we are aware of them and if we are struggling against them, against our own imperfections, we gain the strength. Because if we accept our imperfections, compensate for them through other activities, often the imperfection itself

expires. Thomas Campanella points out that the starting point and mainstay of human knowledge is the human consciousness of our own existence – self-perception. The meaning of human life is formed in the process of introspection and self-evaluation of man and his position in nature and society. It is therefore not given in any particular ontological or logical or axiological form. It is a part of the ongoing self-realization of man as a free, creative and unique creature. Self-assessment and self-understanding changes throughout the course of history, and so the meaning of life also changes.<sup>36</sup> Philosophy plays an important role in knowledge, self-knowledge and the self-assessment of a person who is looking for and fulfilling the meaning of his life. It gives reflection and self-reflection, the possibility to seek a holistic and complex truth of being, human existence and its place in nature and society. Understanding the meaning of human existence is the result of the introspection of man. It is associated with creating a picture of us through our image done by the others. Without an adequate philosophical platform on which self-reflection takes place, man cannot enter into a genuine dialogue with its interior, with other people or with nature. Without reflection and introspection the meaning of life either escapes, or is replaced by illusions and imaginations imposed by society, or mechanically adopted from other people. A man, who does not know the meaning of his life and its value, has no sense of his own personality and thus easily becomes the object of economic, political and ideological manipulation. The self-awareness and self-evaluation of human life is more about philosophy in its original sense as the love of wisdom, than the search for truth about human life, nature and society. We used to talk about life in moral terms and categories in every situation and we can consider this as an essential component of the human effort to understand life. Such an approach requires an evaluation and ethical reflection on the moral considerations and human behavior and action. Ethical reflection on morality then becomes a life strategy that helps the orientation in interpersonal relationships and in finding the meaning of life.

Rationalist philosophy is based on the premise that man is essentially a rational being, who uses his sense on knowing himself and the world and the results of self-knowledge and knowledge

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. V. Bilasová, *Výzvy pre etiku v súčasnosti*, Prešov 2010.

is applied to his life in order to live wisely, freely, happily and contentedly. Staking out reasonable life goals and creating tools and resources to achieve them is actually a meaning of life for a wise man. Rational self-reflection of a man exploring himself, his own identity and his own ways of self-realization in the intentions of social development, measured by the progress of production, science, education, culture and democracy, became the key to finding the meaning of human life. Life orientation, derived from social, national, religious or universal human goals, on which man more or less consciously participated, made human life meaningful and purposeful. Self-reflection of a postmodern man searching for the meaning of his life is therefore focused in two directions – towards the knowledge of his individual needs and interests, and towards exploring the possibilities and means of their satisfaction, which would bring him feelings of satisfaction and happiness here and now. Therefore, one does not reflect on his life as a whole in the continuity of past, present and future, but currently focuses on experiencing within the boundaries of everyday consciousness. The aim of self-reflection consists in avoidance of inconveniences and disappointments which consumerism often brings. People (lacking the positive solitude) are still looking for newer and more intense positive life experiences and eliminate those that brought negative feelings and frustration. This kind of self-reflection brings a feeling that they live every day and every hour intensively and a faith that they will enjoy their life even more and more intensively. People use their individual freedom in the form of free love and freedom of consumerism. They apply the free use of their bodies and ultimately of their lives. The way of self-reflection of a postmodern man based on subjectivism, relativism and pragmatism convinces him that the rules, principles, beliefs and values of his life are determined by himself. One reflects on himself as a source, criterion and a purpose of his life. Thus perceived freedom as a key attribute of the meaning of human life, however, acquires the characters of arbitrariness in a sense of individual freedom without social responsibility. One exchanges immortality and eternity for temporality, which is very often being reduced to dailiness. His life may have sense for him because it brings various experiences, but among particular experiences he does not seek any continuity, nor any deeper meaning, ethos or transcendence. On behalf of his personal freedom, subjective happiness and self-love, the



postmodern man disclaims liability for future, social development, as well as salvation.

In this regard, the meaning of life is in the context of individual psychology contemplated by A. Adler,<sup>37</sup> who says that everyone within his lifestyle has to address three questions: their attitude towards the community (fellow men), profession and love. All three are intertwined. They arise from the bindings of people to human society. The fate and welfare of mankind depends on their solution. The individual is part of a whole, and his value depends on the individual addressing these issues. Reflecting the lifestyle, we believe that the fourth area over which the individual as a unique entity intends is the self-image issue. Based on the view of C. Taylor<sup>38</sup> on the human being as a self-interpreting being, we consider self-interpretation as a key personality characteristic. Sense of our self-interpretations, according to C. Taylor, helps us to shape our lives. These are not just ideas about us, but they are an essential part of who we are. Self-interpretation is how people see or interpret themselves; it is not all that they know about themselves, but it is a vitally important component of their identity, and is something that cannot be overlooked. Because it is not possible to describe the behavior, conduct and personality without reference to subject-dependent features, such as self-understanding and self-interpretation, which to some extent create identity. In order to understand humans, according to C. Taylor,<sup>39</sup> requires not only empirical information on their race, class, occupation, age, origin, etc., but also some idea of how they perceive themselves. To ask, what is man and yet to abstract from his self-interpretation is according to him a fundamentally misguided question, to which in principle there is no possible answer. The arguments of C. Taylor in support of the idea that a man should be seen as a self-interpreting creature is as follows: "... people perceive events as indifferent, but always in terms of their significance or meaning which they acquire as they relate to their desires, goals, aspirations or feelings, which

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. A. Adler, *Porozumnění životu*, Praha 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*, Harvard 1989.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

makes them seem meaningful and important.<sup>40</sup> In other words, meaning is not something that exists independently of human perception – it is something that people demand from their actions, intentions, or more generally, from their lives as a whole. Man simply wants to give his life sense or significance, he instinctively seeks to distinguish between the desirable and the undesirable, meaningful life, and life without meaning.

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## *Loneliness, Creativity and a Sense of Human Life in the 3rd Millennium*

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