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**NOTIONS OF AFTERLIFE CONCEPT IN MODERN  
PHILOSOPHICAL WORLDVIEW**

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*Abstract*

This paper aims at developing and introducing an onto-epistemological concept of afterlife in a modern philosophical worldview. In particular, it leads to expanding the scientific instrumentation in knowledge of being. The authors define three relational models, which form the concept of afterlife in accordance with axiological social communities' constants: the mortal, the future, and the middle models. Social-worldview models are based on philosophical notions "purpose of life" and "purpose of death". The main aspect of the mortal model of the afterlife concept is ignorance of religious sense, confirmation of creature comforts and death inevitability. The future model has the priority of spiritual values and the total denying of material ones. The middle model comprises the spiritual and material balance of values. The authors construct the Afterlife worldviews (ALW) concept and classify it into anthropocentric ALW, theocentric ALW and anthropotheocentric ALW. These notions give the possibility to see the historical Afterlife worldviews development as dialectic conformity of ALW opposite's abrogation in the diachronic structure of the social-historic process. The paper uncovers theoretical categories such as a category of binarity and a category of ternarity in an evolution of the notions of afterlife. Furthermore, evidences of dialectic change of these three models are studied from the perspective of ontology and epistemology.

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**Keywords:** Afterlife concept; the mortal model; the future model; the middle model; binarity; ternarity.



## 1. Introduction

The post-mortem existence is an important component of any religious and philosophical teachings. Since prehistoric times, people began to create and explore the areas of the region beyond the grave. One of the objective reasons for this was an attempt to explain the world around them, and the organization of human being. The phenomenon of death is the starting point of religious and philosophical discussions concerning the notions of afterlife. Development of these notions is carried out gradually - from simple forms to more complex systems. Afterlife worldviews (ALW) were created on the basis of modelling. The primitive man modelled the future life according to mortal life. The man of the Middle Ages and the man of the early modern period complicated the already existing systems of afterworld realms. The man of the twentieth century had destroyed these systems, but returned to it again in the new century. The evolution of ideas about the post-mortem existence intervened under the influence of philosophical and religious thoughts, which led to a complication of already existing ontological components of the afterworld (Antonenko, 1986; Hick, 1994).

At first sight, a philosophical worldview differentiates the being of the mortal life completely and gives consideration to the social realm as a stable system of essential elements in its interconnection with the person. However, only the mortal life is determined in an ontological perspective, while the problem of post-mortem existence does not have necessary scientific reviewing. As a result, the modern philosophical worldview seems incomplete.

ALW is a central and important element of the philosophical worldview, which is inseparable from human existence. The individual models of the afterworld are consciously (not accidentally) as a reflection of mortal life in particular variations. The practical result of such activities is regulation (and in some cases, self-regulation) of human moral standards; his capacity for collective life and inner reflection of reality. Since the person is in strictly defined boundaries of mortal existence, cognizability of the being is possible on a tract between two diametric poles: the pole of life and the pole of death. Understanding life is impossible without understanding death, and vice versa. They are dialectically interdependent. Thus, the ALW defining elements and, consequently, a philosophical worldview are the terms of “the meaning of life” and “the meaning of death”. These terms throughout a history have not formally changed, but their basic and substantial constituent is varying evolutionarily. This process is reflected in the diversity of the ALW models, their types and kinds. To identify these changes means to trace the dynamics of the development of the philosophical worldview.

In the modern era of falling axiological imperatives, an understanding of life is one of the most significant problems in scientific, philosophical and religious perspectives. Human life as the highest value is most fully concentrated in the philosophical and religious worldviews. In a non-religious worldview, life as an axiological substrate has value by selfhood. Outside the correlation with the post-mortem existence, life is considered within the strict boundaries of mortal existence, thus, it appears only in a narrow range of lifetime events and phenomena - life ceases existing with death coming. The philosophical (as of religious) worldview defines life by its objective existence in a dialectical connection with the death. The latter is not a prerequisite for the breakdown of existence of life. Its existence is determined by the existence of free boundaries. The notion of "the meaning of life" is the formative unit of the philosophical worldview. To create an ontologically full and meaningful model of the world, it is

necessary to examine not only the existence of a man on earth, but afterlife existence simulated by him/her, which, in turn, is a reflection of the mortal life. Most scientific philosophical papers are considering the concept of “death” as an opposition to the concept of “life”. The aforementioned linking element of notions is lost under this approach and it leads to the problem of introduction of “life” and “death” concepts into the modern philosophical worldview. Mortal life must be seen in connection with the future life (Moltmann, 1993; Rose, 2010).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Currently, a philosophical worldview is pluralistic. It has some elements and concepts. ALW is an essential concept of the modern philosophical worldview. ALW is not represented in science and, therefore, it requires a theoretical elaboration and implementation. There are such notions as the meaning of life and the meaning of death which form ALW. In this meaning, the philosophical worldview appears as a unity of three composite notions (the meaning of life, the meaning of death and ALW). ALW should be integrated into the modern philosophical worldview as a necessary concept of ontology. The implementation of the concept will allow us to trace human thought cyclicity from binarity to ternarity, from ternarity to binarity, etc., based on the ontology of existence after death.

The aim of the paper is to determine the onto-epistemological patterns of development of ALW models in the process of dialectical evolution.

## **3. Research Questions**

### **3.1. Three models of afterlife concept: the mortal, the future, and the middle**

Type of the social and philosophical meaning of the life model theoretically defines the ontology of ALW. The meaning of life in unity with the meaning of death is important not only philosophically, anthropologically, culturally, ethically, but also onto-epistemologically.

The meaning of life is the highest and the ultimate value of regulating person's life; it is something meaningful for him or her. It makes a person put and perform specific and pragmatic life goals. The meaning of life is the spiritual core element of the individual that can be formulated by a person independently of the prevailing social axiological systems. There is a problem to proclaim conformably the general meaning of life for everyone. In each case, the meaning of life is the result of deep human thought, built on experience. The hierarchy of values that a person defines for himself leads to life approaches. However, these approaches are not exclusively derived from a personal choice, but also depend on the social, interpersonal, intercultural and other circumstances.

The process of understanding the meaning of life is a continuous search of life-forming goal. The search process takes place simultaneously with its implementation. Search for the meaning of life has been one of the main problems of Russian religious philosophy, and to this effect, Russian philosophy can be named as the philosophy of the meaning of life (Osipov, 2008; Rubinstein, 2008). According to this fact, human life can be reflected through the incarnation of the divine in a man; through contemplation, the pursuit of truth, faith, and welfare. Russian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov wrote that it is impossible

to equate the meaning of life and “the arbitrary and changeable needs of each of the countless individuals of the human race”. This way Solovyov conceptually leads to the types and models of the meaning of life. Arguing about the meaning of life and death, he noted that the moral person is not ready to follow the “law of eternal death”. He is not ready to be “dismissing or dismissed” but able to “contain a fullness of eternal life”. Solovyov points to a connection with the meaning of life and post-mortem existence .

J.-P. Sartre found a connection between the meaning of life and death in a negative way (Sartre, 2000). He concluded that “death never gives life its meaning; it is, on the contrary, death that removes all meaning from life. If we must die, then our life has no meaning because its problems receive no solution and because the very meaning of the problems remains undetermined. Every existing thing is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance” (Hick, 1994, p. 103). Camus continued absurd idea expressed by Sartre. According to Camus, a life is too full of absurdity; it does not make much sense. And suicide is presented as a way out of the absurdity of existence. Consequently, the post-mortem existence is absurd too.

The Christian philosophy defines life diametrically opposed, anti-absurdly. According to Christianity the meaning of life lies in deification of a man of Christian faith, i.e. living in God. This idea was expressed by the words: “The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. But <...> every good deed done for the sake of Christ is a means to the attainment of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 12:30). Therefore, death does not play a daunting role in the absurdism and Christian philosophy, but it is reflected in the different semantic contexts.

In the frame of the Christian philosophy, death is a door wherethrough a man enters into a fundamentally different life. It does not look like the kind of life which the person lives on the earth, but they are connected. The post-mortem existence is a logical extension of the mortal life journey: the Christian passes into the afterworld realms with the same semantic values he lived on the earth.

“... removing death terror can fill life with meaning until the moment of death” (Yalom, 1990, p. 433).

These words, spoken by Irvin D. Yalom, a representative of existential psychotherapy, indicate the dialectic of life and death.

Onto-epistemologically, the afterlife concept is based on principles of dialectic. The categories “life” and “death” are considered not in opposition but in the unity of opposites. This bound is projected in concepts “purpose of life” and “purpose of death” being considered as Afterlife worldviews (ALW). It includes three models of afterlife existence that reflect three “purpose of life” models and that are in dialectic contradiction to each other: the earthy model of “purpose of life” is denied with the heavenly model. Interaction of these two models leads to origin of the third, the middle model.

### **3.2. The mortal model of afterlife concept**

The model where any actions of an individual are directed at confirmation of creature comforts and at negotiation of death only, but the religious sense is ignored, this can be defined as the mortal model of afterlife concept.

Ancient civilizations in their cultural base were the first to introduce this model. For example, Sumerian-Accud eudaemonism (desire for creature comforts) was widely spread in the ancient

Mesopotamia that was developed with the idea of joyless Kingdom of Deaths. Egyptian ideas about afterlife fate were defined by desire for the same creature comforts after resurrection in “Ialu fields” (Rak, 2000). In general, nearly the whole culture of the Ancient World (Mesopotamia, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and others) before the origin of ethic norms had a sense of life for mortal needs.

The mortal model of the afterlife concept has immortality on Earth as the ideal. It includes different kinds of immortality. One of them is relative immortality acquired by a man in his human reproduction. Man knows that he will die, but psychologically he realizes that he left his mark in life. The psychological form of immortality is considerably shown in oriental patriarchal cultures where an individual realizes himself not as a separate personality but as a representative of his tribe or family. Identifying himself with the community he reaches immortality as he believes in ceaselessness of his family.

Creative immortality is one of the ways of symbolic life conservation. Creation of things and masterpieces of art, literature, painting and others, all of them are forms of symbolic immortality where continuation of his I is in collective memory by means of individual creativity. “Way of death” in the samurai ideology is the form of symbolic immortality through destruction.

The mortal model of the afterlife concept is developed in Russian philosophy. V. Rozanov denied the interpretation of the idea about human resurrection that means superiority over the mortal life. He maintained that such superiority misrepresented and even reduced the sense of life itself: a man brought up in Christian environment a thought about afterlife more often than about mortal life. In this case, all his creative intentions were devalued. “It seems to me, - he writes, - our task on Earth is simple: do your business well” (Rozanov, 1999, p. 361). He defines resurrection by kind of the mortal model and compares it with every single minute of life: “To resurrect means to have known much life in a second of being, to derive the depth of being, to sparkle with spirituality, reviving, effort of all his abilities, that years and centuries of slow life “so-so” cannot compare with it” (Rozanov, 1999, p. 383). In Rozanov’s study human immortality is in constant immersion into the depth of being.

The Chaadayev’s key thesis is point, that immortality is life, where there is no death, but not habitual formula of “afterlife” (Chaadayev, 1991, p. 466). “Life without death” does not mean literal absence in the world. “Life without death is a constant continuation of mortal life, where death lost its foreignness of life, where it got proper meaning as a subordinate and secondary element of the mortal life itself” (Evlampiev, 2000, p. 58).

In modern philosophy, the mortal model of the afterlife concept is represented as a problem of “electronic immortality” at the level of transhumanism that has electronic movement of individual’s personality as a main purpose. Another trend is called immortalism. It is based on the results of the modern sciences’ system and its main purpose is victory over death or maximal moving away from death. From the philosophical understanding of personality, this theory is more adequate in comparison to the theory of electronic-digital immortality.

The process of struggle against death for man is irreversible. Scientists will develop and search for new ways of solvation for problem of biologic death trying to prolong the human mortem existence. It is important for us to state the progressing development of the mortal model of the afterlife concept because this trend predetermines ontologically the direction of ALW development.

### **3.3. The future model of afterlife concept**

Diametrically opposite to the mortal model is the future model of the afterlife concept that can be characterized as totality of individual's deliberate actions leading to denying of material values (while spiritual values are priority) and also as totality deliberate actions leading to cleansing of spirit by mortal life. No fair of death is a special feature of the future model, because death is not the end of life.

In Christian theology and philosophy, death is a transition from one life to another as the human's purpose of life is eternal life in god. A.I. Osipov explains this thesis: "...the real (mortal) life is not a self-sufficient value, but it is a transient form of person's being, which is a necessary condition for self-knowledge, realization of one's own freedom in front of conscience in this changeable world. It is cognition of one's own non-originality, "nothing" without God and thanks to this acceptance of Christ's necessity" (Osipov, 2008, p. 86-87).

Physical delight, satisfaction of one's own wishes and desires are typical for the mortal model of the afterlife concept. But spiritual values: love, purity, generosity, joy etc. – everything in Christian culture that stays with man after death, are typical for the future model.

### **3.4. The middle model of the afterlife concept**

The middle model of the afterlife concept is a model where an individual combines material values with spiritual ones. The middle model is synthesis of polar oppositions of the mortal and the future models.

In historical communities, where lifestyle corresponds to the mortal model of the afterlife concept, ALW reflects the values of mortal being in social conscience. It can be called the mortal model of ALW. In those communities, where lifestyle corresponds to values of the future model of the afterlife concept, ALW reflects the value of future being. This is the future model of ALW. In those historical communities, where lifestyle corresponds to the middle model of the afterlife concept, ALW reflects equally focus on the future and the mortal being. Thus, this is the middle model of ALW; it reflects synthesis of the opposite focuses, the mixed lifestyle.

In other terms, ALW can be classified into:

1. anthropocentric ALW;
2. theocentric ALW;
3. anthropotheocentric ALW.

Isomorphism of a trinomial row of types of afterlife concepts and a trinomial row of ALW types gives the possibility to see the historical Afterlife worldviews development as dialectic conformity of ALW opposite's abrogation in the diachronic structure of the social-historic process.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The problem of the post-mortem existence is interdisciplinary; it is philosophical in its base. This issue can be studied from different points of view: religious studies, phenomenology, anthropology, history, sociology, culturology, theology etc. From philosophical point of view, the issue of the post-mortem existence is considered to be in common categories and notions, while some other sciences use

highly tailored terminology for study of one or another side of an object or a subject of research. In the network of ontology and epistemology, the post-mortem existence is actually important for the definition of the being structure and its cognition in categorical forms. Research promotes the enrichment of theoretical means for the philosophical worldview study, in particular, the human being. From the practical viewpoint, it promotes spiritual and moral development of an individual and society.

The aim of the paper is theoretical development of the ALW models in the dialectical field of categories “binarity” and “ternarity” and analysis of essential elements (purpose of life and purpose of death) inside the onto-epistemological category of ALW.

## **5. Research Methods**

General scientific methods of analysis and synthesis were widely used in this paper as well as the comparative method. The dialectical method was also used, which was expressed in the law of unity and a struggle of opposites, the law of double negation. The modelling method was also applied for creation and theoretical definition of the ALW models; the method of the historical analogy was used for finding common features in different historical eras. The evolutionistic approach was also used. According to it, all phenomena including notion of the post-mortem existence develop from the simple to the complex. To achieve the objectives of the scientific research, system and structure-functional approaches were applied.

## **6. Findings**

Terminological analysis of the notion “worldview” allows one to determine the existing problematic fields of ontology. The category “philosophical worldview” is defined as incomplete and demanding scientific improvement. Non-inclusion of the scientific category “Afterlife worldviews” (ALW) into the modern onto-epistemological framework is considered as a starting point of this statement. The ALW category substantially supplements the category “philosophical worldview” and completes it. As one of the most important onto-epistemological elements, ALW expands philosophical instrumentality of complete definition and cognition of being.

Philosophical notions “purpose of life” and “purpose of death” are determinative elements of ALW. They are associated with each other coherently and they are considered not in opposition, but dialectically, in the unity of opposites. “Purpose of life” and “purpose of death” are integrated into the purpose of life social-worldview models. These models are in dialectic opposition (the mortal model is denied by the future model) and interacts with each other simultaneously (synthesis of two models leads to origin of the third one, the middle model). They are integrated into ALW as meaning making functional units that allow one to study ontological bases of afterlife, as well as individual’s mortem existence, in greater detail.

Philosophical categories “binarity” and “ternarity”, which are the basic elements of afterlife being cosmology, determine an evolutionary trend of human reflection development. Reflection evolution is a constant change of binary thinking with ternary, ternary thinking with binary and vice versa. The rate of thinking types change depends on social, religious, cultural, political and other factors that touch on the human being.

## 7. Conclusion

The afterlife worldviews concept is a part of the philosophical worldview. At present the philosophical worldview considers being from the perspective of individual's mortem existence without his afterlife being. The analysis of sources (philosophical, mythological, apocryphal, Talmudic, gnostic and other views) allows maintaining the inconsistency of this thesis. In the evolutionary profile, an ancient man and a modern man determine the spirit afterlife differently, but both of them note the influence of dead on existence of living. For example, ancient Slavs believed in necessity to soften their ancestor, otherwise misfortune could happen (the similar views can be found by other ancient folks). In the Middle Ages, a Christian prayed for dead on certain days and performed funeral rites in their honour. The modern man *dismythologizes* death, but continues performing funeral rites or rites of protection etc. Death cannot be considered as non-existing as it directly affects human mortem existence and regulates his life. In this meaning, death is otherness, an included element of ontological categories. The dialectical bond of life and death is reflected in synthesis of mortem and afterlife existence. As a result, afterlife being integrates into mortem existence. These two ontological systems are in the constant mutual correlation process. The philosophical worldview is the result of infinite correlation of the mortem and afterlife ontology.

ALW is a key category of afterlife ontology in particular and of the philosophical worldview in the whole. Structure-substantial keys of ALW are social-worldview models based on philosophical notions "purpose of life" and "purpose of death". Dialectical correlation of these categories leads to origin of social-worldview models variability of the purpose of life. Similar to mutual negation, there are the mortal and the future afterlife concepts. As a result of the synthesis of two opposite models, the middle model of afterlife concept arises. These models are involved into ALW as meaning making functional units that allow one to research ontological bases and structure changes of afterlife being through the direct bound with individual's mortem existence. The ALW models are divided into three kinds according to concepts: mortal, future and middle. Similar to individual's afterlife concepts, ALW models are divided into: anthropocentric, theocentric and anthropotheocentric. The mortal (anthropocentric) ALW model is formed by an individual as complete (or partial) equivalence to the mortem existence. According to this model, a man continues his life in the next world keeping all his mortem needs. His existence modus, deeply personal, is out of god. The future model of the afterlife concept is formed by an individual as negation of mortal life, as a new form of otherness. Personal modus of existence changes in co-existence with god. The middle model of ALW combines anthropocentrism of the mortal model and theocentrism of the future model in it. Depending on individual's mortem life, anthropocentrism of the middle model assumes both existence with god and existence out of divine modus.

Models change under the principle of dialectic evolution, dialectic struggle of two opposite types of thinking: binary and ternary. Evolution of thought is a constant change of binary types of thinking with ternary and vice versa. The change rate of these types depends on social, religious, cultural, political and other factors that directly touch on human existence. Based on the types of thinking, categories "binarity" and "ternarity" define social ontology and make up types of the ALW models. The binary definition of social ontology forms the binary ALW model: social stratification is determined as two-partial and includes two categories "a saint" and "a sinner". According to these categories, there are categories of developed afterlife ontology: "paradise" and "hell". The ternary definition of social ontology makes up

the ternary ALW model: social stratification is determined as a three-partial system of categories “a saint”, “a sinner” and “not-a-saint-nor-a-sinner”.

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