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To be and to become in the old age – andragogical perspective on development²

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Abstract

In this paper, the author focuses on issues related to the development of an older person. She presents development as a lifelong process that is also possible at old age and that is manifested through adaptation, transgression, and transcendence. She describes the development in five dimensions: biological, psychical, social, cultural and spiritual. She points to relationships between development and three models: deficit model of old age, active old age model, development model of old age. She points out to some chosen aspects of development at old age which are related to learning/education, shown from the perspective of andragogy and geragogy, and with the use of the conour concept of human development by Stefan Kunowski.

Introduction

We already know very much about old age, but it is still too little and not thorough enough, which is what makes a good life at old age so difficult (Dubas, 2013). And the old age is present in our life – it is inscribed in the very existence of human beings. It is an integral element of a long life that is also everyone's dream and it is hard to envisage a long life with no aging. The old age is included in the progress of our life that

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2 This article in Polish has been published elsewhere: *Być i stawać się w starości – o rozwoju z andragogicznej perspektywy* [w:] *Uczący się dorośli – inspiracje, wyzwania, trendy. Księga jubileuszowa poświęcona Profesorowi Tadeuszowi Aleksandrowi w 80. rocznicę urodzin i 55. rocznicę pracy naukowej*, A. Chabior (red.), Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski 2018, s. 167–196.

starts with childhood and ends with old age precisely. Thus, it “closes” our life circle, it complements it. It is vital to realize clearly that we also “close” our life with the old age and that our participation in this process is, in fact, the most significant. Then, what is worth knowing about older age to “close” our life beautifully? What should be known about it as a stage of human development? How to begin seeing development in old age so as to “close” life beautifully? Human development becomes a key cognitive category in these deliberations.

It should be stated that issues related to human development in old age are not unfamiliar to reflection and gerontological research, the psychology of human development in particular. It would be worth recall the studies carried out by Paul Baltes (in the 80s of the 20th century) or Robert Havighurst (beginning with the 50s of the 20th century), Erik Erikson (beginning with the 60s of the 20th century) and some contemporary Polish psychologists, such as Maria Straś-Romanowska (2000), Zbigniew Pietrasiński (1990), Stanisława Steuden (2011), Piotr Oleś (2011), Joanna Raniżewska – Rain (2005). The aspect of development in the old age is also highlighted in the studies and reflections of pedagogues – gerontologists (Dubas, 2004; Fabiś et al., 2015). It seems, however, that not only in common awareness but also among the researchers, the old age is not unequivocally related to the processes of development. Most frequently we read about the processes of aging in an elderly person and not about the processes of development in old age. Is this only the question of language? Most probably not. There are some socially settled meanings behind a language, which are attributed to old age. And to look into the development of an older person from the widest perspective possible, from a holistic approach, certain assumptions were applied that are part of the contour theory of human development, suggested by a pedagogue, Stefan Kunowski (1993).

The old age as a progressive stage of human life

In the light of the psychology of human development (2005), the old age is the last stage in human development. Development – meaning a chain of life-long changes that are also multi-dimensional (Fabiś et al., 2015), relatively long-lasting and irreversible, with a unidirectional character of quality transformations conditioned by an internal cause (Strelau, 2000), targeted and purposeful, “leading to a greater complexity and inner integrity” (see: Zamiera, following: Strelau, 2000)³, and the direction of these changes does not need to be evaluated positively⁴. In this understanding,

3 “a development change takes place when the observed changes are constant, gradual, unidirectional, irreversible or lead to greater complexity and inner integration” (Zamiera, following: Strelau, 2000, p. 232). *Zmiany rozwojowe – por.* Brzezińska (Brzezińska, 2010).

4 see. “development means a chain of changes (transformations, transitions) in general, regardless of the fact whether their direction is assessed positively” (Przetacznik-Gierowska & Tyszkowa, 2004).

the old age is an important nexus in this process, as are all other stages. Without the old age, the human life circle would be incomplete. Thus, the old age is a value because thanks to experiencing it, we may realize values important to us more fully and perhaps it allows us to understand better what human life is, what it was and what it could be.

The beginning of the old age is typically placed in the 60s of human life. A formal beginning of the old age is frequently associated with the retirement age, which is a variable defined differently in different countries⁵. The old age is a stage of life that is becoming more and more often extended and varied, thus researchers distinguish several of its stages. Generalizing various perspectives⁶ three main stages of the old age may be listed with age limit assigned to them: early the old age, called also *young old* – around 60 – 74; *old-old* between 75-89; *oldest-old* – people over 90.

Young old is the period of "golden autumn of life", ie. When a person is still full of life and has life perspectives. It is the time of making use of the achievements to date – both in a material and spiritual sense. It is the time of making new undertakings and realization of dreams, including the educational ambitions that had to be postponed due to the responsibilities of adulthood. It is the time of taking more pleasure from activities that before. It is the time of self-realization, time "for me", having been freed from professional duties. New activities and social relations, a new perspective of experiencing life in a different way than it was before – all that adds life to the years. These things enhance joy and self-esteem. **Old-old**, as the time of "the setting sun", means slowly losing the vitality and worsening of illnesses, the increasing sense of aging and systematic, often sudden, withdrawing from the external life as a result of illnesses and disability. This is also the time of summing up life. **Oldest-old** ("on stage till the end") is a very individual period, however, it is the time of approaching the inevitable end and sensing death as "a close guest". It is the time of ordering the experiences to date, time of close relationship with the self, environment, and God. It is the time of transcendence – stepping out of the previous understanding of the earthly existence. A long-lived person, who is usually genetically equipped rather generously, remains in a relatively good condition and psycho-physical health practically till their very end, which allows them to live actively even in just some selected dimensions. On the other hand, for a long-lived person who is ailing or undergoes a persistent therapy, life becomes a burden.

Also, a more and more popular division of the old age into two periods – two epochs should be included here: the third and the fourth age. This division is based on a criterion of dexterity and independence of an aging person, much less is it related to

5 For example in our country the retirement age was 67 since 2012 and currently, since 2017, previous arrangements were restored, i.e. 60 for women and 67 for men.

6 See for example Zych (2007, p. 163); Steuden, (2011, p. 20-21); Brzezińska, (Brzezińska, 2005).

their calendar age, although the conventional border between them is 80 or 90 years of age (depending on classification)⁷. The third age is *independent the old age*, the fourth age is *dependent the old age*. As the person is more and more ailing and disable, they become dependent on the help and care from outside, from institutions, including social care ones. By joining these two divisions, one may say that the young-old usually is the time of independent the old age. Dependent the old age concerns more and more often old-old and oldest old.

The old age is not just a question of years and conventional calendar age, neither is it the issue of arbitrary classifications of the researchers or the result of political decisions. Quite commonly we assume also that the old age is the state of mind, the sense of aging (or not), the sense of being (or not) old. The old age greatly depends on how we subjectively understand it. In our times that bring out the importance of individual experience and the subjectivity of each person so much, the subjective dimension of the old age is all the more important. To a great extent, we shape the old age in our thoughts and emotions and most of all, our actions and behavior. It is an immensely important aspect of our attitude to the old age – since it is very “ductile” and depends so much on ourselves. By and large, it is us who bear the responsibility for our own the old age, although we gladly blame Others (family members, politicians, etc., even God himself, which can be seen in a proverb “God failed us in our old age”).

Dimensions of development in the old age

The old age as a stage of human life depends on the course of development processes. Gerontologists most frequently focus on the processes of aging and list three of them: biological, psychological and social aging⁸. However, it is possible to look into the aging processes in a broader context and analyze them as **a process of development**. Modern gerontological science allows to look at the processes of aging from the perspective of development, to see them both as negative (involutionary processes which mean disintegration, impoverishment, decline, and atrophy) and positive ones, understood as **adaptive changes** based on adjusting to new circumstances, transgressive changes which mean transcending the experience of this earthly existence towards the absolute and universal values. It is worth highlighting that the process of regression is accompanied by the adaptive-regulatory mechanism as “biological mobilization of power to resist the progressive involution leading to death”, which refers not only to the biological but also to the psychological aspect (Olszewski, 2003). A human being is not doomed to recourse – “fall” and a person’s biological, psychological and spiritual sides are evoked by the powers that counteract “disintegration”. There-

7 See for example Dubas (Dubas, 2009); Steuden, (Steuden, 2011); A. Fabiś, J. K. Wawrzyniak, A. Chabior, (Fabiś et al., 2015).

8 See for example (Zych, 2007); Szatur-Jaworska, Błędowski, Dzięgielewska, (Szatur-Jaworska et al., 2006).

fore he can adapt to the regressive changes and transcend them. Adaptation, transgression, and development transcendence are an expression of this. Aging processes have complex content and course. They depend not only on hereditary background, environment influence, education impact (including the upbringing), the influence of fate but also, most of all, they depend on the activity of an individual himself. In other words, it depends on the personal involvement of man in his development both in the period before and during the old age what kind of old age he will personally experience. Man's development, also in the period of his old age, maybe analyzed by accepting a general classification in a few dimensions: biological, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual⁹. They will be characterized briefly below.

The biological development of man is the foundation of his existence. According to Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1982), the biological layer is the base of life processes common for all animal world. Man, however, faces the challenge of transcending biological development, which he does in a psycho-cultural dimension. The biological development of man in the old age is most frequently referred to as biological aging.

Biological aging of man is an expression of organism weakening in maintaining homeostasis (balance) of life processes. This means regressive changes appearing at an increasing intensity as far as physical and physiological functions are concerned, which can be observed in the body failure and medical conditions. Biological regressive changes begin to overtake as early as in a person's forties. They manifest themselves in body aging and a decrease in efficiency, in lowered immunity and thus, increased susceptibility to illnesses. Biological recourse is an expression of the body's depletion of vitality. As a consequence, it leads to death, in its natural course to senile decay.

It is possible, however, within the dimension of biological development, to strengthen the body through appropriate nutrition, physical activity, exercises, systematic control of the health condition, revitalization undertaking as well as through asceticism and restraints which favor body discipline and maintain it in good condition. One can adapt to biological aging through, for example using various types of equipment and through rehabilitation treatments. One could even try to "improve" the body condition compared to the previous period, by applying more personalized physical exercises, balanced nutrition adjusted to the possibilities and needs of the body, etc.

Biological development of an elderly person is related to visible changes in appearance, worsened dexterity and physical condition, deteriorating somatic health.

There are numerous theoretical concepts and patterns of thinking about the old age in the context of biological development. It needs to be stressed that the old age pattern present commonly but also in the scientific world, concerns **solely the biological regression**. It is embodied by, for example, a deficit model of old age (Dubas, 2004), where the old age is treated as a development deficiency, the result of body wear

⁹ See: Dubas (Dubas, 2004); Dimensions of development derived from the contour concept of development by Stefan Kunowski (Kunowski, 1993) who distinguishes 5 contours of development: biological, psychological, sociological, cultural and worldview one.

and any revitalization of the organism refers just to the biological sphere. Biological deficits, including the changes related to appearance and the worsening physical condition, directly influence the formularization of **the negative stereotypes about the old age** which refer also to other dimensions in which a person functions, for example, social and cultural spheres. One of those is undoubtedly ageism (Szatur-Jaworska et al., 2006, p. 216–220), which is an example of specific discrimination, marginalization and segregation of people according to their calendar age and the changes in appearance that come with it. The old age is also seen in **categories of ugliness** (the ugliness of an aging body or face). The old age is sometimes pictured as **the negative difference** which disturbs, which needs to be fought with, fenced off from, in which it is difficult to see any value. In opposition to the old age, there is the pattern of eternal youth. This is envisaged in, for example, the concept of “kidult” (Twardowska-Rajewska, 2006), Peter Pan personality or “eternal girl” (Kargul, 2017).

However, apart from those patterns of the old age resulting clearly from the fact of biological aging of the body, one can more and more often notice in scientific studies and colloquial thinking that there is a tendency to break this cliché placed only in the context of biological recourse. It is worth stressing that there is an optimistic overtone of the concept of biological welfare (Olszewski, 2003), whose mechanism can be also found in the area of psyche. Undoubtedly, the concept of **body transcendence** is particularly significant in this context, which can be directly derived from **the theory of gerotranscendence** by Lars Tornstam (1985, a quote from Halicki; also in Malec, 2012). Body transcendence shows that the biological aging of the body can in a way be “outperformed” by the spiritual development of man. The category of carnality is one of five areas of adult education (Kargul, 2001), where multi-aspect references to the human body and formulating individual awareness of one’s carnality as a result of varied processes of learning are included.

Thus, human carnality – a biological expression of people’s functioning in older age is also placed in the progressive model of the old age (Dubas, 2004). Biological development takes place in several ways, the most frequent of which is **adaptation**, realized as making use of the still existing capabilities of the body, systematic adjustment to the regressive biological changes, including strengthening through biological revitalization treatments, maintaining good health and physical condition characteristic for the previous development stage, ie. complete adulthood (which is reflected in the conservative model of the old age (Dubas, 2004). Another, a more rare method is **transgression** expressed through improving physical and health condition (perfecting it) and going beyond the capabilities and achievements in one’s physicality to date. Finally, we should look into development **transcendence** as an example of corporeality transgression through other dimensions of development, including spiritual development performed more intensively than previously.

Biological development combined with the processes of learning includes: updating knowledge about one’s changing corporeality, acquiring skills related to coun-

teracting biological recourse, sustaining and strengthening biological development, shaping attitude towards corporeality, including aging of the human body and one's own. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the biological dimension of development in old age are the result of life-long learning in this field, although at the same time there is a possibility to modify them in the period of the old age itself. Raising awareness that such a possibility exists is an important task for andragogy-geragogy. It is worth adding that, as Stefan Kunowski put it (1993, p. 203) the biological layer of man develops through fun, which is a developing form of life. It needs to be stressed that it does not concern just a child and that fun should not be deprived of some motor character. Physical activity that gives pleasure, ie. fun, is an important factor of biological development, which is so often overlooked.

Psychological development of man refers to life-long changes in the area of cognitive, emotional and volitional functions. Psychologists, however, recognize many detailed divisions and distinguish, for example cognitive, emotional, social, moral, personality or individual differences division (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2010), they write about identity changes (Brzezińska, 2005) or highlight the changes in cognitive processes (Olechnik, 2000). Stefan Kunowski, a pedagogue, links psychological development to the development of intelligence and interests. This aspect of development expands, in his opinion, through learning, searching and practical activities (Kunowski, 1993, p. 198–203). The author also notices that through development in this area, a man joins the “wisdom” of human species (*ibid.*, p. 198).

Old-old (late adulthood) is linked with the processes of psychological functions recourse. In this context, gerontologists often write about the psychological aging of man. It refers to the changes and decrease of man's capabilities related to psychological functions, in this area of incredibly important cognitive processes, among which aging of memory, decrease in efficiency of thinking processes and learning are very significant. The will weakens, efficiency and agency decrease. Personality changes, control mechanisms weaken, fears grow. Motivation to live drops as a result of, for example, oversaturation with life experience. Strategies of self-control and dealing with emotions change (Raniszewska-Rain, 2005).

Brain activity understood broadly as learning is immensely important here (through adapting to changes and transcendence). This is realized as:

- Remembering, unlearning the old and learning the new (as knowledge, abilities, and attitudes);
- Learning both in institutions (which is pictured by formal education – school, non-formal – extracurricular, for example, courses, at the University of Third Age, etc.) and outside, ie. in everyday situations and in everyday relations (which must mean non-formal, incidental and accidental education);
- Learning in modern culture (ie. using modern technologies, for example, the Internet, computer, e-learning, blended learning) and in traditional culture (for example using books, traditional teaching methods);

- Learning realized as a reflection/thinking process/meditation on life and others, on oneself and one's biography, which favors the understanding of life (Dubas, 2007), gaining "transcendent wisdom" (Straś-Romanowska, 2000);

- Learning is realized during the process of solving problems, also those in everyday situations, which favors managing life;

- Emotional learning as work on and with emotions which should not destroy relations with other people but strengthen the positive image of an elderly person, for example, a senior or mentor of a family;

- finally, learning is realized as permanent self-formation and self-creation, which favor gaining a mature identity, as identity, by changing throughout life, is also assigned to man¹⁰.

Learning as a process that supports psychological development in the old age, based on important values, related to the healthy lifestyle and physical activity that brings pleasure, can undoubtedly be accepted as a panacea for elder age.

Social development of man understood as a socialization process, ie. preparation for functioning in a given society, is carried out through socialization interactions and broadly understood education (formal and non-formal). Work is thus a developing form of life (Kunowski, 1993, p. 203). Development in this dimension means accepting norms and mechanisms of social functioning, learning the roles related to participation in social life. This process is life-long, provided a person remains in social interactions (direct and/or indirect ones) throughout his whole life. We could say that man develops permanently in his social roles, which allows him to function in social life more adequately and according to his capabilities. The omnipresent processes of socialization change their character in different periods of man's life. Primary socialization shapes attitudes of man's social nature by equipping him with a dimension of social norms, habits, and rituals. Secondary socialization, at a later stage of life, in the time of adulthood, contributes to "perfecting" social nature in man, as a result of which he acquires skills necessary to do tasks for this society that are important and responsible, such as procreation, securing existence and raising the next generation(s). The third type of socialization is related to the old age, it confronts man with other social and personal challenges. This type of socialization often referred to as desocialization, shows the difficult process of learning life from scratch, so to say, in a changed reality. In case of dependent the old age – disabled and not independent, sometimes referred to as the fourth age, the fourth socialization, through "learning" how to deal with the burden of aging, slowly prepares an elderly person and his environment for passing away.

The repertoire of social roles that are the field of social development of man is very rich, it starts with the first role – the one of a child, through the last one – a dying person. Some roles appear some others vanish. Oftentimes the roles evolve, i.e. their

10 The description of learning and educating related to the stages of adult life, including old-old and oldest-old can be found in Dubas, 2009, s. 125–129.

content changes, the role command is weakening, etc. The reasons for this evolution are the following: biological changes (including the aging processes) that man undergoes and which cast on his functioning in everyday life and modify social expectations towards him, and cultural – civilization changes which create new social roles. Many social roles are continued almost throughout the whole life, although slightly adjusted. Such is the role of a child, roles of parents, grandparents and – in the era of permanent education – also the role of a learner.

Social development in the old age is frequently simplified and reduced to social aging, which is highly conditioned by the social norms, it reflects the changes in the dimension of the roles played in society. Some roles vanish, e.g. professional role. Others undergo modification, e.g. parental role changes as children grow and leave home. Yet other roles appear as new ones, e.g. carer for the ill spouse, the role of a widow or a widower, the role of an ill or a disabled person. Most of those roles are not easy and exhausting, with a tremendous existential load which includes concern and fear for one's life in the context of more and more frequent contact with death. A particular place in the repertoire of roles of an elderly person is one of a grandparent, which can be described as the role "full of joy". What also changes is the social position of a senior citizen and their lifestyle that results from retirement and having plenty of time of their hands. The old age from that perspective requires afresh socialization, re-learning how to exist in society in this new role. Despite the previous contact with the old age in "the current of life" through participating in social life, family life in particular, through observation of social behavior towards the old age and in it, an elderly person may lack proper knowledge, skills, and attitude. Social aging is strongly related to the stereotype of the old age that function in a given society. Typically in our times, these clichés are negative. Successful aging would require resisting those stereotypes personally and that, in turn, calls for a new approach both towards the old age and oneself as an elderly or even old person.

Learning is undoubtedly related to the social development of man, also the elderly one. Theories of learning make it all too clear by accentuating the social aspect of learning (Bandura, 2007; Illeris, 2006). Because learning is a social process. It takes place in socialization, where observation, copying, and modeling are important. It is also realized through formal and non-formal education. Roles models, personal patterns and mentors play an important role here. Learning is present in the processes of self-reflection/ reflection when it favors the increase of (self)awareness, (self)control and (self)formation. It is a life-long character since throughout all our life man learns references and social attitudes. Throughout all life man also remains in the role of a learner of other people and the world of social norms. In the period of old age/the old age, a man also becomes a more or less conscious teacher of other people, including being a counselor, trustee, mentor, "the teacher of life". It is worth remembering also about the "teaching" aspect of socializing adults and older people by the younger generation, ie. adults learning from children.

In the presented perspective, the social development of an older person is obvious.

The cultural development of man favors bringing out the specificity of the human world compared to the animal world. Creation is a person's developmental form of life (Kunowski, 1993, p. 203). It introduces man into the world of culture: material goods created by man (including the civilization, technological or architectural achievements) as well as spiritual ones (in the area of art, science, religion, tradition, sport, entertainment, etc.). Cultural development is sometimes recognized anthropologically (descriptively), where every person is treated as a cultural being and each culture is equiponderant, and normatively (qualitatively), when culture is treated as a reserve of values selected by a given society as particularly appreciated. In this sense, we may talk about the cultural development of man through, for example, participation in higher or elite culture, or about the development of a personal culture of man and becoming a man of culture.

Cultural development also takes place mainly through the processes of inculturation (introducing a person into the world of cultural values), but also socialization and education. It combines with the consumption of cultural goods (using cultural goods through, for example attending theatres, reading, etc.) and creating it, which may be realized in the narrow, sociological or broad, psychological sense that is "customized", as everyday creativity. In the first case, it is about creating something new, original and valuable that would be a part of an individual's experience of a wider community or even more universally – the whole humanity. Education (by definition) makes higher culture accessible and directs towards values that are objectively higher in the hierarchy of values¹¹ which results from the studies by Szpakowski, (2014). It teaches us to use cultural goods and teaches creating cultural goods. In the cultural development of man, older generations play an important role because of the pass on cultural values from generation to generation.

The cultural development of an elderly person that is often, quite wrongly, described as aging and it refers to the changes in the functioning of an elderly person in the sphere of cultural values, both material and spiritual. By limiting the possibilities, for example financial, health, communication ones, oftentimes also cultural, the use of cultural goods and institutions changes and may be limited to home only. Here prevails using mass media (radio, TV, newspapers) and gradually, also the repertoire of the used programs and media content is limited to those requiring the least effort. Often this use is passive. Also creating cultural goods changes. As understood universally and timelessly, it is more and more rarely realized by elderly people whose strength is weakening. Frequently, this does not concern professions – artists, scientists and representatives of other areas of culture. Creating cultural goods, as understood broadly, psychologically may, however, be realized by everyone to the best of their abilities. Such creativity (with a small "c") also is a source of joy and can be good for

11 Referring to the hierarchy of values by Max Scheler

the closest ones. Using culture and creating it are important aspects of making life more beautiful and thus counteracting the routine of everyday life. It is worth emphasizing the importance of cultural activity that is based on making music, painting pictures, writing poems, stories, autobiographies. This is yet another example of adding life to the years (Zaorska, 1999) in this way counteracting the negative processes of aging. One cannot mention the importance of the oldest generation in the process of passing on traditions and introducing the youth into the values of the world of culture (inculturation). The greater amount of free time that the elderly have on their hands than people who are professionally active also is important culturally. Organizing and realizing activities in that time is mostly done in the area of culture, although it is not necessarily always the elite one.

An elderly person is also a cultural being – they make use of cultural goods, although they do it slightly differently and to a more and more limited extent, however, they do work out their standpoint towards culture, they pass on to others the values which they managed to externalize thus far in the process of their long life, they create goods and values of culture made to their measure, but thanks to them they have their place in the “generations race”, which cannot be underestimated. In their experience of the old age, they join the cultural heritage of the community they live in.

The spiritual development of man is related to the process of changes in human spirituality. Spirituality is understood rather broadly nowadays, stepping out way beyond the religious aspect (Groeschel, 1998), and including its many dimensions (Socha, 2000). Spiritual development is a specific and overreaching dimension of human development, the one that penetrates all other dimensions. Although man enters adulthood having his spirituality fully developed, yet older life is related to visible changes in that area. Spiritual development, if it evolves with age and experience of man, favors achieving coherent identity and fullness of humanity. Thus, it joins the process of personalization – bringing out the fullness of a person in man.

It is hard to call spiritual development in old age aging. Spiritual development in the old age may favor a harmonious merge of all the dimensions of the triple nature of man (*triune*) – the body (*soma*), psyche (*psyche*) and the spirit (*spirit*). It is related to certain spiritual competence, that is the ability allowing to shape one's life based on the highest values (the truth, goodness, beauty, sanctity) in the context of unquestionable difficulties that appear while experiencing the old age. These difficulties may develop than competence even more compared to the previous period. The old age brings many existential concerns which include suffering, loneliness, dying and death (Fabiś, 2013). All of them “require” some answers. The more a person is developed spiritually, the more mature in experiencing their the old age he is, and that means providing answers to the difficult, existential questions. The old age may be the time of particularly intense spiritual development, which is the opposite of spiritual impoverishment. Spiritual maturity, that is aging in its positive meaning – “maturing”, may be observed in, for example:

- in the dimension of perfecting and complementing social and moral attitudes towards the closest ones, towards the younger generation, towards people in general, which reveals the socio-spiritual aspect of spiritual development,

- in the dimension of perfecting the outlook on religion, including shaping a grown-up attitude towards God, the Absolute, which is reflected in the religious aspect as well as in the outlook on spiritual development,

- in the dimension of maturing in aesthetic attitude, which is reflected in perceiving beauty in life and in creating life, also this everyday one in one's biography¹², which is an aesthetic aspect of spiritual development,

- in the dimension of making mature choices from the parent, universal and transcendental values, ie. the truth, goodness and beauty, and sanctity, which outlines the aspect of spiritual development,

- in searching for answers to the question about the sense of life, the value of human fate and that of humanity, through which the cognitive-existential aspect of spiritual development is expressed¹³. It can also be seen in:

- achieving life wisdom that allows life-affirmation together with its hardships and also allows to find joy in life¹⁴ as well as

- in clarifying one's philosophy of life, including attitudes towards the old age, death and achieving the art of life¹⁵.

Spiritual development understood and realized as improvement, favors mature preparation for passing away and "crossing to the other side" - without being disappointed, without regrets or jealousy. In the dimension of spiritual development, the old age is the time of many challenges and possibilities. It can be the time of "going forward" and heading for fullness despite the regressive biological changes. It can be the time of a deep transition and understanding the essence of everything. Sometimes not an only adaptation but also transformation and transcendence. The spiritual development of man at an older age is confirmed by the gerontological theory of gerotranscendence¹⁶. Transcendence – reference to immortality, may be interpreted as a result of the ninth development phase as suggested by Joan M. Erikson¹⁷. It is not always, however, that we deal with spiritual development in old age. Oftentimes the old age ends a person's life with great disappointment and despair, deep and unsolved drama of existence¹⁸. A person "subsides" in his humanity and treats the old age as a curse.

12 See: the issue of aestheticization in the old age: Dubas, (2008).

13 See also the selected aspects of spiritual development/spirituality: Socha (2000); Dubas, 2004; Fabiś, (2015); Fabiś, Błachnio (ed.) 2015.

14 See: "Transcendent wisdom": Straś – Romanowska, (2000, p. 282–287).

15 See: the art. of life – the art of aging: Dubas, (2012).

16 See: Lars Tornstam, following: Halicki, (Halicki, 2006); Malec (Malec, 2012).

17 See: essay: Bugajska, (Bugajska, 2015).

18 See: Erik Erikson, integrity versus despair and possible results of development in the eighth stage of life; following: Bugajska, (Bugajska, 2015).

From the viewpoint of Stefan Kunowski, human spirituality is expressed through wisdom in searching for the truth and goodness, evaluating according to the ultimate perfection, metaphysical profoundness, deep reflection, joining the supernatural world. Spiritual development takes place through prayer which, in Kunowski's opinion, is the main progressive life form (Kunowski, 1993, p. 203). In the context of contemporary studies into biographies and human narrative, emphasizing the significant importance of human reflection and contemplation in the process of spiritual development. From the andragogical perspective, which is focused on noticing and enhancing the processes of learning throughout the course of an adult's life, spiritual aging is an expression of education understood as an in-depth life learning, as "meditation over life" (Czerniawska, 2000, p. 177–178). From this meditation understanding of the meaning of life may emerge (Dubas, 2008a), which – as a result – means clarifying the meaning of life as an individual, as a species or even in the cosmic sense. Experiencing life as meaningful is, after all, a person's great expectation. The meaningful life cannot include meaningless the old age, thus a question arises concerning giving or restoring this meaning to the old age also, as it is the last stage of life.

Models of the old age and development

The old age has been explained in various ways – there exist different models¹⁹. According to the deficit model, of the old age, man's aging is treated as a defect that needs fixing through various treatments to sustain the life functions of the organism and, to some extent, prevent disintegration for some time. Such an old age is related to the negative stereotype of the old age. However, it can be looked at through an active old age model, assuming that by sustaining man's activities, the process of aging can be delayed and the organism's dexterity characteristic for the middle age, can be maintained for some time. Finally, the old age can be explained through the development model of old age which describes it as the time of human development or even the time of a person's improvement. The presented models of the old age are not just a more or less accurate result of scientific research, but also a recommendation of a certain kind of lifestyle at an older stage of life. Opting for one of them determines the way of thinking about aging and, as a consequence, creates certain social attitudes towards the old age and also individual ways of experiencing one's aging. The progressive model of the old age²⁰ **brings out the value of aging as a person's stage of life**, it shows the opportunity that the old age gives, highlights the overall perspective of development as heading towards the fullness of life despite numerous limitations.

19 See: Dubas, 2004, p. 136 and further; a different classification points to, for example, the pathological, normal and successful model

20 Related to, for example, the theory of human development by Paul Bates and the concept of development tasks by Robert Havighurst; see: Fabiś, Wawrzyniak, Chabior, 2015, p. 34–36.

The old age is, to a great extent, a result of previous "lessons of life", previous experiences, life choices and acquired attitudes towards life.

Throughout the whole life, we learn life by experiencing it. What allows us to complete our life beautifully and successfully close the cycle of our development is included in the art of living that is acquired through our life. This art of living also means the art. of aging (Dubas, 2012).

The old age is not easy. But it does not fall upon us suddenly. We have many years to tame it, to learn it. Undoubtedly, the old age is a certain everyday task for us (to perform). Oftentimes it turns out to be a challenge, too. But it can also be a gift²¹ - an opportunity and value; it serves a purpose – and it is worth learning what it is and engaging in that service. It is a service to ourselves – it helps us to mature as a person and understand the meaning of (our) life. This is the service helping us develop towards fullness.

Summary

Reflections presented above allow for a summary of a few general conclusions and the main theses. And so, if we understand development as the process of changes a person undergoes, together with his identity and the world of his life, then development is a **life-long** process which concerns also an elderly person (which is reflected in *life span development psychology* theory). In this context, an elderly person does not age but **still develops**. It is, therefore, adequate to talk about, for example, the social development of an elderly person rather than about the social aging of a person. This is not just the question of naming the problem, but of awareness that is opposed to a stereotypical approach to the old age and provoking to choose a different paradigm of studies on older age, presenting it in a progressive model (and not the deficit or cognitive one). An elderly person has **many reasons** to develop. These are the needs, duties, expectations which are strongly conditioned by his existential situation. **The personal engagement** of an elderly person in his development is very important. It is he who, to a great extent, is responsible for the results of his development. The old age is **an important link** in the process of human development. Without the old age, the life cycle of man is incomplete. The old age closes man's life circle. In this meaning, the old age is **a value** because experiencing it allows a person to realize some important values to a fuller extent, perhaps understand what life is and what it was or could have been. It is thus significant, to bring **the meaning of the old age** back as the time of life that is experienced so that we can understand life.

The processes of learning related to deepening awareness and self-awareness which are recognized as important and implemented in various dimensions of everyday activities, allow experiencing the old age as a progressive process. They are the key

21 See also similar: Zych (ed.) The old age is a gift, a task, and a challenge. Selected conference materials. Wyd. Progres, Sosnowiec – Dąbrowa Górnicza 2014; Dubas, 2016.

elements that favor successful aging and experiencing the full circle of life as a value. It is also reasonable to make people aware of the fact that, at any age, that learning as an existential experience which is an ally of better fate and a development factor understood as heading towards the fullness of humanity, is crucial.

Perceiving the old age as a progressive process in a life of a person means that it becomes a perspective of “becoming in the old age” as opposed to the perspective of “being in the old age”. “To be old”, ie. to become an old man, is a static perspective. Objectively speaking, it means reaching the social status of an elderly/old person having reached the period of formal old age, which is usually at the retirement age. Subjectively speaking, it means the feeling of “being old” which is shaped by personal and individual experiences of aging. The sense of being old is currently placed between 70 and 80 years of age. “To become in the old age” on the other hand is a dynamic category, it is a conscious and realized attitude of perfecting humanity despite the regressive changes experienced in the old age. It is conscious engagement in the process of permanent clarification of one’s identity, using the subsequent years of life and subsequent experiences to “become” someone more than this far. “Becoming in the old age” points to the expressed needs of learning oneself and life. “Becoming in the old age” is unquestionably a progressive process that is characterized by faith in the possibility of becoming someone more than this far, determination in dealing with the challenges of fate and the joy of achieving what seemed impossible.

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