

UDC 111.11:005.334

DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/hst-2024-18-95-02>

CATASTROPHE AS EXISTENTIAL-SOCIAL DIMENSION OF HISTORICAL BEING

MYKHAILO, BEILIN¹
ALEKSANDR, ZHELTOBORODOV²**Abstract**

Shocks in the form of two world wars and many ecological catastrophes turned out to be not the most catastrophic for the consciousness of modern man. The catastrophic is seen as disharmony, disconnection with the world, in which cities and the urbanised environment appear as symbols of modern catastrophic loneliness and estrangement. The first decades of the XXI century have supplemented the catastrophic series with all sorts of thanatological perversions, whimsically combining the fullness of the feeling of life with the phenomena of sadism, masochism, sexual revolutions, terrorism and moral degradation. The density of personal, social and national misfortunes is hopelessly catastrophic, turning the catastrophe not into a turning event that brings “negative consequences”, but into a current everyday life filled with the expectation of the negative and destructive, which generates fear, stress and longing on the one hand, and hatred, aggression and desire for revenge on the other. It is substantiated that individual conflicts, due to their mass nature, create a huge and difficult to classify conglomerate of socio-psychological tension, against the background of which many people form psychological and clinical variants of socio-stress syndrome. The reasons for this can be explained by the everyday culture of social space, which forms standardized ideals for a person, and this leads to the loss of individual ideals and values. It is shown that as a result of the disaster a peculiar tragic, moral atmosphere is created, which is a complex system of interrelated principles, norms, values and stereotypes of behavior that differ from the moral standards of everyday life. It is noted that the decrease in the level of moral normativity is the result of ambivalence of morality, associated both with changes in the functional and mental state of a person in stressful conditions, and with the need to follow the values and norms developed in the disaster situation.

Keywords: catastrophic appearance of being, emergencies, military conflicts, mental trauma, stress, fear, destruction, death.

Relevance of the topic

Catastrophe as an event has a significant ontological status, and the situation of catastrophism is characterized by existential and social reflection in historical being, which is reflected in the space of art. Most emergency situations are accompanied by physical death or mental trauma. Modern catastrophes are comprehensive and cover multi-scale natural, social, cultural, anthropological destruction and death, forming a catastrophic character of being. The modern world is filled with multiple military conflicts across the globe, pandemics, and technological systems that can cause man-made disasters. The modern world demonstrates the ontology of catastrophising, its everyday prosaicness and expected inevitability. Despite the publication of a large quantity of scientific works devoted to the topic of catastrophes, the existential and social dimension of catastrophe in historical being has not received comprehensive coverage, which

allows us to consider the address to this problematic as natural and relevant.

The degree of elaboration of the problem

The catastrophe as an object of philosophical reflection was addressed by I. Kant, G.W.F. Hegel and S. Freud. They characterised catastrophe as a negative, often unexpected phenomenon of human being, and highlighted ontological, epistemological and historical aspects of catastrophe. Analyses of general regularities of catastrophe emergence and development, performed at the meta-theoretical level, are presented in the works of A. Arnold, T. Poston, I. Prigozhin and I. Stengers. The comprehension of critical life “boundary situations” and the life path of a person are carried out in the works of existentialist philosophers S. Kierkegaard, A. Camus, J.-P. Sartre and K. Jaspers. Models of the coming anthropo-, socio- and geocatastrophes are presented in the works of A. Bruno, L. Mumford, A. Toffler, E. Fromm and others. The current research situation indicates the need to study the theme and images of catastrophe in the context of historical being and unity with socio-cultural processes, which can contribute to the formation of a more holistic view of the role and significance of the theme of catastrophe in the existential and social dimension.

Corresponding authors:

¹ Kharkiv State Academy of Physical Culture (Kharkiv, Ukraine)
E-mail: mysh07bmv@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6926-2389>

² Kharkiv State Academy of Physical Culture (Kharkiv, Ukraine)
E-mail: reskator2132@gmail.com

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5156-7512>

The purpose of the article

The purpose of this study is to form a holistic view of the role and significance of the theme of catastrophe in historical being and existential and social reflection of the image of the catastrophic.

Presenting main material

Interest in the theme of catastrophe was aggravated by the events that shook humanity, among which were the World War I, the sinking of "Titanic", revolutions and the collapse of social systems in the 20th century, which contributed to the formation of mass apocalyptic consciousness and existential state of fear and horror. The concept of catastrophe acquired an interdisciplinary status and began to be interpreted not only as a tragic event in the life of an individual or a group of people, but also as a universal condition, acquiring the status of an anthropological catastrophe. The concept of "catastrophe" and images of the catastrophic are associated with upheaval, overthrow, death and denote abrupt changes with negative consequences, such as death, destruction, disintegration, collapse, damage, numerous victims, irreparable, severe, fatal consequences.

The ruinous and tragic touches deep existential feelings, giving rise to questions about the sense of life. Scientists see the modern world as unstable and fragile; the smallest and the largest fragments of existence, local changes and global consequences are connected with inevitability. Any definition of catastrophe points to its universal significance, emphasizes the extraordinary epistemological, axiological, ontological potential of a large-scale negative event and direct human participation in its experience.

Concerns related to overcoming various crisis phenomena arising in the process of development of earth civilization occupy more and more place in the life of modern mankind. At the present stage, such phenomena have become frequent, large-scale and dangerous. Their consequences are considered as extraordinary incidents and emergency situations (Gunn, 1988). The situation is complicated by the social and psychological situation characterized by the fracture of structural elements of the spiritual life of society and people's life orientations. Dynamically developing states of psychoemotional overstrain and mental maladaptation is, in fact, a natural "experimental model" of social stress disorders (Knoepfel, 1980). They are observed, in all likelihood, in many people when the deep-rooted mass consciousness and way of life are changed. The life

catastrophe in these cases is somewhat "stretched" in the time needed to realize what has happened, which distinguishes the observed disorders from post-traumatic stress disorder and acute reactions to stress (Brown, 1986).

The main cause of social stress disorders is political and economic chaos, aggravation of interethnic conflicts and local wars, which leads to millions of refugees, stratification of society, growth of civil disobedience and crime. These causes and their escalating nature have led to a multitude of intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts, which are based on the rethinking of life goals, the collapse of life plans, the debunking of authority, the impoverishment that affects the main layers of the population, the disbelief in the many promises of the official authorities and the lack of hope for improvement of the situation. Individual conflicts, due to their mass character, create a huge conglomerate of social and psychological tension, against the background of which psychological and clinical variants of social stress syndrome are formed in many people (McDaniel, 1988). The reasons for this phenomenon can be explained by the social culture that forms standardized, common ideals for all individuals, which leads to the loss of individual ideals and values. During the period of destruction of the old social system with its dogmas, these ideals are overthrown. The old ideals are destroyed, "cancelled". All this generates not only social, but also personal chaos. The general social and psychological situation has a significant impact on social groups and individuals, who become hostages of tragic circumstances caused by natural and technological disasters.

The events of recent decades have taken on the attributes of a global catastrophe, taking place in the sphere of politics, economy, morality and other areas of human being and consciousness. At the same time, it is obvious that it is at least incorrect to directly link many of the catastrophic phenomena of technological origin and, even more so, natural disasters with changes in the social environment. Mankind always suffers from natural and man-made cataclysms. It is hostage not only to those surprises prepared by nature in the form of earthquakes, floods, storms, snow storms and volcanic eruptions, but also to its own technical inventions, which sometimes get out of control (Gunn, 1988).

An important state function was and is the protection of the population and national patrimony from the consequences of emergencies: accidents, catastrophes, environmental and natural disasters,

as well as armed conflicts (Peper, 1991). The very concept of “catastrophe” includes three types of phenomena: 1) tragic events that shook the foundations of sociocultural integrity and caused the fracture of existence; 2) events that had an irreparable negative impact on an individual or on humanity as a whole, including radical social and political changes, wars; 3) events that reveal the state of strong internal discomfort of a person and are associated with isolation, loneliness and hopelessness, physical suffering. Being one of the permanent human states, fear also becomes a key concept of culture, a subject of philosophical reflection, forming deep and diverse existential states of experiencing the catastrophic (Gazniuk, 2008). Catastrophic events that a person may face must be defined, it is necessary to learn to recognize them in time. The catastrophic not only chooses themes and subjects that are traditionally intended to embody tragedies, catastrophes and disasters, but also claims the space of art. The consequences of warfare, epidemics, torture and executions as historical, social and cultural determinants of destruction, the quantitative scale of death inevitably reveal such facets of the catastrophic as apocalyptic events, violence, terror and wars (Moore, 1987). The fear of death is increasingly expressed in a hypertrophied attraction to the sight of physical torture, the horrifying practice of transpersonal states of consciousness with the imagination of a variety of monsters, scenes of torment and torture, which inevitably fuels the fear of physical deformities, horrors and death. Longing, anxiety and confusion are obviously consonant with catastrophic loneliness and “abandonment”, the theme of madness and the image of abnormality as a tragic hypostasis of the catastrophic in being. Natural cataclysms and their devastating consequences, military actions, which bring desolation and death, are the most indicative in understanding and comprehending the catastrophic (Moore, 1987). The beginning of the XX century was the time of experiencing a spiritual catastrophe, which has a cultural and personal dimension. A chronic feeling of alienation becomes the cause of a catastrophic shift in worldview and a reassessment of values. The experience of the catastrophic most often has a tragic and existential-dramatic spectrum: anxiety, fear, hopelessness, longing, nervousness, dissociation, increased emotionality, expressing the horror of understanding the ongoing catastrophe.

The drama of the eternal confrontation between man and the elements is one of the most typical

aspects of catastrophic problems. The experience of the modern apocalypse reflects the ultimate fragility of humanity and, at the same time, the desire to discover new creative abilities, to discover a new world, to experience the apocalypse as a catharsis and to comprehend war as an opportunity to transform the world. In the “person-society” opposition, the individual placed in the space of the megalopolis feels hopelessly unfreedom, unclaimed and unnecessary. The concept of catastrophe consists in the acute feeling of alienation from one’s epoch, awareness of the all-presence of evil, their terrifying face, which dramatizes the reflection of one’s own existence.

The opposition “human-city” is presented as the apocalypse of urbanized space, which torments man, but is the only possible environment for his existence. Apocalypse is the deanthropologization of people, who turn into half-animals; it is the leveling of the moral foundations of society, the loss of the value of humanity in human beings; it is “apocalypse today” as the catastrophe of a society mired in debts, troubles and vices. The apotheosis of the catastrophic is world wars as events that radically change the world and are closely connected with the image of the “end of the world”. World War I immeasurably increased the scale of military catastrophes, turning its participants into apocalyptic personages and vivid embodiments of the catastrophic face of war.

The theme of war can be presented as: 1) the war “here” and “now” with the direct experience of the catastrophe; it is a war filled with horror and suffering, and the fixation of everyday life of the war; 2) the catastrophe of the past war, its post-apocalyptic consequences, shown through the images of cripples, invalids, homeless people who found themselves “overboard” in the new post-war life (Saleun, 1986). The catastrophe of war manifests itself as an individual experience, and its protagonists are war invalids, cripples, homeless, declassified elements, who in the changed socio-political situation find themselves on the marginal boundary of everyday life. Large-scale disasters become not only a universal catastrophe but also an individual misfortune. For many of the maimed, ugly, and destitute participants of the war events, the battle is not over; for them, the world appears only as an appearance, another face of war as a symbol of its destructive power and heroic stoic confrontation, and for others as a symbol-warning of a possible new catastrophe. Generations that have witnessed horrific global disasters are doomed to

experience the large-scale catastrophes of their time. Over time, they have acquired a special significance as testimonies of epochal events and as prophetic warnings of even more monstrous wars of the future.

The concept of individual alienation in the big city manifests itself as a space-time continuum of collective madness and individual catastrophes. Megapolis makes social contrasts catastrophic: in its space there are scenes of violence and murder that are gruesome in their brutality, the destruction of the family as a sacred bulwark of society, loneliness and social isolation; the catastrophes of the individual in the big city are supplemented by the motives of suicide in the tragic reality of life and catastrophic premonitions.

Catastrophes generate fear, terror and panic, accompanied by screaming, and are embodied manifestations of despair. Screaming becomes an expression of an individual's reaction to the premonition or experience of catastrophic existence, to the tragedy that has occurred or is about to occur. For a person, the scream plays the role of psychological defense, expression of emotional shock and release of horror. The cry itself is filled with its own semantic shades, but in all cases it is a manifestation of the isolation of the individual from the surrounding world, articulating the moment of experiencing the tragedy and catastrophe of life. Loneliness, bitter despair, chronic fear, loss of values and the meaning of existence become the universal, commonly understood language of the catastrophic.

One of the most frequent techniques is the convergence of the mask and the human face, which creates a sense of indistinguishability between the real and the imaginary, the erasure of the boundary between the living and the dead, between the true and the false. The camouflage of existence, its secrecy creates an image of anxiety, instability, catastrophic confusion and defenselessness. The face-mask motif is extremely expressive and deep in meaning, and it acquires special significance in biblical stories. The mask in this context often symbolizes the sinful side of man; the face-mask motif symbolizes a betrayal and creates a disturbing impression. The weary face, expressing bitterness from the events it predicts, becomes the archetypal image of the soothsayer, a human out of time. The mask as an image symbolizes the ghostliness and fragility of existence, the desire to hide from reality.

The theme of catastrophe is manifested through semantically close images of the ugly, tragic, human struggle with the elements, apocalyptic images of the catastrophic. The catastrophic is manifested in

the image of the big city, in the motifs of the mask and the scream, expressing the existential loneliness of man, the tragedy of the alienation of the individual in society. Many catastrophes are fraught with the death of a large number of people and are accompanied by social crises, aggravation of political contradictions, changes in the way of life. Wars, deep economic crises, mass deaths of people have always influenced public consciousness, leaving indelible imprints in material and spiritual culture. There is no area or subsystem of spiritual life that would not react sensitively to vitally significant cataclysms occurring in society, which are often caused by natural and technological disasters (Beilin, 2022).

An important part of the spiritual life of society is scientific research in the field of forecasting, prevention and elimination of consequences of natural and technological disasters, as well as the study of human behavior in extreme situations. At the moment of catastrophe, all structures directly involved in it – from biochemical changes in a cell to global changes in an ecosystem, from the biological level of human organization to broad social structures – are subject to drastic changes. Any catastrophe is a tragedy, accompanied by moral feelings and losses, which can become extreme in the case of simultaneous death of a large number of people. Moral consciousness in emergency situations is not only a special component of the human mental world, but also a means of salvation, which is one of the first to be included in the process of struggle for survival at the level of individual and social being. The discordance of individual and universal consciousness occurring in the conditions of emergency situations and catastrophes, as well as psychological reactions and related moral conflicts are not of any specific character peculiar to a natural disaster or technological accident. Rather, it is a universal moral reaction to danger in general. The content, depth and intensity of these discrepancies in the sphere of moral consciousness are determined by the personal significance of the disaster and the state of morality before the disaster.

As a result of a catastrophe, a peculiar spiritual atmosphere inherent in any tragedy emerges as a system of interrelated principles, norms, values and stereotypes of behavior, largely different from the moral standards that existed at the time preceding the catastrophe. There is a change of functional and mental state of a person in stressful conditions, transformation of norms, values and rules of behavior, which allows surviving in the conditions

of a catastrophe not only an individual, but also a group of people, the population of the region and the whole human community, preserving human essence. In the first moments of a catastrophe, in situations involving a real vital threat, people's actions are practically devoid of any moral basis. The absence of moral choice in preference of this or that value, moral norm or principle is the result of peculiarities of functioning of the psyche in the state of anxiety and stress, determined by the fear of death, severe physical and mental traumas. A kind of "switching off" of individual moral consciousness in this situation increases the possibility of preserving life. In the stage of psycho-emotional shock and supermobilization there is a gradual "switching on" of the mechanisms of moral regulation. Moral consciousness in this period fixes the necessity of saving people and implementation of skillful actions to get out of the crisis situation, psychoemotional and moral influence on people, contributing to their quick orientation and adequate perception of the situation. Morally justified in extreme situations is the leader's going beyond the moral norms accepted in a normal situation. Such a right of "exit" is conditioned by a narrow range of choice: "to save oneself – or to save others (to win)". "Switching on" the moral consciousness of the individual in a life-threatening situation during the period of supermobilization in the absolute majority of cases occurs through the resolving of contradictions associated with the need to make a choice, which creates a situation of moral conflict. In the stages of psychological

and psychophysiological demobilization and the stage of resolving there is a complete "inclusion" of moral consciousness. Grief and sadness caused by the loss of loved ones, the rupture of established social ties, material damage, reach their peak. During this period there is a decrease in the threshold of moral norms, caused by such a feature of morality as "reversibility". The weakening of control by the social environment, the breakdown of interpersonal and intergroup ties gives rise to permissiveness and forgiveness. The hope that the catastrophe will "write off" everything, that in the chaos "everything is possible", gives rise to such deviations from generally accepted norms as murder, cannibalism, looting, suicide on the grounds of "guilt complex". The main regularities of changes in the moral consciousness and behavior of people in the post-catastrophic period correspond to the phenomena of morality, which are observed in the process of medical, psychological and social rehabilitation of survivors (Hafner, 1986).

Conclusions

Thus, the experience and understanding of the catastrophic is formed from biblical apocalyptic prophecies and warnings to images of natural disasters, to earthly, cruel and prosaic wars, to the space of the lonely soul and the mortal suffering body. Remaining eternal, these themes in each epoch acquired their own face, their recognizable signs. Concerns related to overcoming the crisis phenomena arising in the course of the development of earthly civilization occupy an increasing place in the life of modern man.

REFERENCES

- Beilin, M.V. (2022). Ecological consciousness in the context of multi-confessional worldview pluralism. In: Religion in late modern society : (a thematic collection of papers of international significance). Todorović, D., Matić, Z., Blagojević, M. (eds). Niš: Yugoslav Association for the Scientific Study of Religion (YSSSR); Požarevac: Committee of education and culture of the Diocese of Požarevac and Braničevo, 91–108.
- Brown, J.T. (1986). Grief response in trauma patients and their families. *Psychiatric aspects of trauma*, 16, 93–114.
- Gazniuk, L.M. (2008). Philosophical studies of existential-somatic being: monograph (in Ukrainian). Kyiv: PARAPAN, 368.
- Gunn, S.W.A. (1988). The Coordination of governments and the relief agencies. In: *Medicine for Disasters*. Baskett, P., Weller, R. (eds). London: Wright-Butterworth, 145–151.
- Gunn, S.W.A. (1988). Earthquakes. In: *Medicine for Disasters*. Baskett, P., Weller, R. (eds). London: Wright-Butterworth, 285–289.
- Hafner, B. (1986). Die Wehrmedizin-Schrittmacher der Katastroph-henmedizin. *Wehrmed. Wehrpharm.* 10 (2), 81–89.
- Knoepfel, H.-K. (1980). Psychische Reaktionen in Katastrophen. In: R Lanz, R., Rossetti, M. (Hrsg.): *Katastrophenmedizin*, Enke-Verlag, Stuttgart, 204–214.
- McDaniel, E.G. (1988). Psychological response to disasters In: *Medicine for Disasters*. Baskett, P., Weller, R. (eds). London: Wright-Butterworth, 231–245.
- Moore, G.R., Dembert, M.L. (1987). The military as a provider of public health services after a disaster. *Military Medicine*, 152 (6), 303–307.
- Peper, E. (1991). Angstbewältigung ein Beitrag zur stress und Panik Prophylaxe. *Wehrmedizinische Monatsschrift*, 35 (10), 441–444.
- Saleun, C. (1986). Les mission humanitaires du servise de sante des armees. *Médecine, Armée*, 4 (8), 631–638.

МИХАЙЛО, БЕЙЛІН – доктор філософських наук,
професор, професор кафедри гуманітарних наук,
Харківська державна академія фізичної культури (Харків, Україна)
E-mail: mysh07bmv@gmail.com
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6926-2389>

ОЛЕКСАНДР, ЖЕЛТОБОРОДОВ – кандидат історичних наук,
доцент, доцент кафедри гуманітарних наук,
Харківська державна академія фізичної культури (Харків, Україна)
E-mail: reskator2132@gmail.com
ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5156-7512>

КАТАСТРОФА ЯК ЕКЗИСТЕНЦІЙНО-СОЦІАЛЬНИЙ ВИМІР ІСТОРИЧНОГО БУТТЯ

Анотація

Потрясіння, що стали результатом двох світових воєн і безлічі екологічних катастроф, виявилися не найкатастрофічнішими для свідомості сучасної людини. Катастрофічне розглядається як дисгармонія, роз'єднаність зі світом, у якому міста, урбанізоване середовище постають як один із символів сучасної катастрофічної самотності та відчуження. Перші десятиліття XXI століття доповнили катастрофічний ряд усілякими танатологічними перверсіями, які примхливо поєднують повноту відчуття життя з феноменами садизму, мазохізму, сексуальними революціями, тероризмом і моральною неосудністю. Безнадійно катастрофічним постає щільність особистих, соціальних, національних нещасть, що перетворюють катастрофу не на поворотну подію, яка має «негативні наслідки», а на поточну повсякденність, сповнену очікуванням негативного й руйнівного, що породжує, з одного боку, страх, стрес і тугу, а з другого – ненависть, агресію і бажання помсти. Обґрунтовано, що індивідуальні конфлікти, з огляду на свою масовість, створюють величезний і складно класифікований конгломерат соціально-психологічної напруженості, на тлі якої в багатьох людей формуються психологічні та клінічні варіанти соціально-стресового синдрому. Причини цього можуть бути пояснені повсякденною культурою соціального простору, яка формує в людини стандартизовані ідеали, що призводить до втрати індивідуальних ідеалів і цінностей. Показано, що внаслідок катастрофи створюється своєрідна трагічна, моральна атмосфера, яка являє собою складну систему пов'язаних між собою принципів, норм, цінностей і стереотипів поведінки, що відрізняються від моральних стандартів повсякденного життя. Зазначається, що зниження рівня моральної нормативності є результатом амбівалентності моралі, пов'язаної як зі зміною функціонального і психічного стану людини в стресових умовах, так і з необхідністю дотримуватися цінностей і норм, що склалися в обстановці катастрофи.

Ключові слова: катастрофічний вигляд буття, надзвичайні ситуації, військові конфлікти, душевні травми, стрес, страх, руйнування, загибель.

© The Author(s) 2024
This is an open access article under
the Creative Commons CC BY license

Received date 17.01.2024
Accepted date 01.02.2024
Published date 17.02.2024

How to cite: Mykhailo, Beilin, Aleksandr, Zheltoborodov. Catastrophe as existential-social dimension of historical being. Humanities studies : Collection of Scientific Papers / Ed. V. Voronkova. Zaporizhzhia : Publishing house "Helvetica", 2024. 18 (95). P. 18–23.

doi: <https://doi.org/10.32782/hst-2024-18-95-02>