Psychological Features of Eschatological Expectations of Youth with Various Types of Creative Thinking

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Abstract. This article highlights the results of the research on psychological features of eschatological expectations of young people with different levels of creative thinking. Our study shows that 26% of respondents believe that the End of the World will not arrive. Twenty-four per cent of respondents are skeptical about the likelihood of the Apocalypse, but they admit its possibility. Thirty-seven per cent of respondents believe that the End of Time will not come soon and the remaining 13% expect the Apocalypse very soon. Some respondents (7.5%) indicate that growth in the rate of prophecies connected with the End of the World in recent years suggests that humanity itself seeks it, while 9% of respondents state the religious point of view in their works. Also 9% of respondents believe that there will be no destruction of civilization or destruction of the planet but there will be a mental transition to another level of being. The existence of correlation between creative thinking and eschatological expectations was also empirically established in our study, especially in the group of respondents with a high level of verbal creativity. There is no correlation between the index of non-verbal creativity, personal religiosity and eschatological expectations in the sample. These results confirm that our study is relevant and offers great prospects for further scientific research.

Introduction

The expectation of any significant event has an influence on the mental state and behavior of individuals as well as small and large social groups. It is known from history that at the end of any century, let alone millennium, the distress and uncertainty are strengthened and mass inadequate responses are stimulated, accompanied by the revival of occult sciences representatives. The traditional world was being filled in with some real signs of the End of the World. The representatives of traditional faiths, including Christianity, in one way or another reflect the mindset of the public in their sermons. Moreover, one of the aspects of the Christian doctrine, eschatology, is directly linked to an attempt to respond to the anxieties and expectations of humanity in real historical times. The eschatology is in close contact with the world of critical utopias of religious motivation.

In the process of historical development, eschatology overcomes all religious frames and becomes a definite cultural and ideological concept. This is the relevance of theoretical and analytical part of the study that forms the idea of eschatology as a certain cultural universality, which provides a perspective for finding new opportunities in the development of personality and society to begin a new, more humanistic round of history. Whatever changes take place in modern technological civilization, in society and in human consciousness on the current level of development, its focus and eschatological historicism remain. It is in times of crisis, when science cannot predict the future clearly, that the eschatological openness becomes relevant again. The eschatology serves as a mobilization of public’s attention (mainly its silent majority) to expectations of serious changes in social life.
Unfortunately, now we live in an eschatological, even fatalistic society. Signs of this include lowering of cultural standards, primitivization of art and decline of morality. This assertion may be illustrated by the quote of F. Polak [1, p. 19]: "The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures. As long as a society's image is positive and flourishing, the flower of culture is in full bloom. Once the image begins to decay and lose its vitality, however, the culture does not long survive."

Formation of the image of the future is one of the main components of individual’s health, and the images of the future that exist in our consciousness can have an active influence on the actual course of events in our lives. Therefore, it is clearly relevant to research psychological features of eschatological expectations of youth with different levels of creative thinking as the most socially active layer of society. To substantiate the relevance of the study, one can use such a concept as the "social imaginary" of K. Castoriadis [2]. The author cites it as an average between the freedom of individual fantasy and its repressive rationing by society. All of the theories about the End of the World existing at the moment are the same "social imaginary" K. Castoriadis spoke about. A social picture of catastrophic changes of the traditional world is shaped under the influence of eschatological impulses. Eschatological impulses are symbols of the outer world, metaphors and allegories of texts, their decoding that are connected with certain social motivation to imagine ideas of the end of the civilization development, demographic, social, environmental and natural cataclysms corresponding to the critical historic moment. We studied how the eschatological expectations and expressiveness of the Apocalypse's image has been changing, depending on the degree of freedom of the individual fantasy among youth.

The purpose of this work is to study the phenomenon of eschatological expectations both theoretically and empirically, and to investigate the level of formation and expressiveness of the Apocalypse's image, its general features, among students with different levels of creative thinking.

Theory

Theoretical and methodological basis of the research was formed by scientific positions of Amos, I. Bogoslov, Ezekiel and others [3], who expressed religious views on eschatology; A.A. Pelipenko, I. G. Yakovenko [4,5], who considered the metaphysical and ontological aspects of eschatology; O.V. Kuznetsov [6], G.R. Konson [7], who considered eschatology to be the manifestation of “catastrophy archetype”; religious eschatology was viewed upon in historic perspective in F.N. Petrov's [8], V. Dokash [9] works; the anthropological aspect of it is disclosed in A.G. Klyuyev's [10], A.V. Bocharov and S.U. Burkin [11] works; general and systematic theoretical findings on general and individual eschatology are presented in the works of V. Dokash [9], V.D. Gubin and H.N. Nekrasova [12], I.V. Zheltikova and D.V. Gusev [13] etc.

In our research the Apocalypse is a universal archetype which generalizes the themes and plots of global catastrophes of natural, technogenic, social-economic, military and religious character resulting in the cessation of civilization existence, that of the Earth as a planet or even of the Universe. They shape eschatological expectations of a personality, a social group or society as a whole.

On the basis of the last decade discourse we can state that there is a competition among various apocalyptic prognoses searching for signs of approaching catastrophic destruction of the World which is confirmed in the work of H.V. Ivanova [14]. More often than not these signs are not based on religion, they are deduced from scientific or pseudo-scientific points of view. They shape eschatological expectations of a personality, a social group or society as a whole. Eschatological expectations are understood as a pattern of the possible End of the World shaped in person’s (social group, society) consciousness and accepted by it, sustained by perception of information in specific situations depending on their beliefs or from the atheist point of view.

Eschatological images and elements comprising it that create a clear picture of the Apocalypse in conscience are always “some deep social and psychological needs of personality” [11, p.77].
Mechanisms of eschatological thinking are closely connected with effects of stereotyping, religious projection, reflection of life experience on the global picture of the Universe, creativity.

The main theoretical information about creativity and the most important directions in the study of creativity are highlighted in the writings of M. Wertheimer [15], J. Guilford [16], K. Duncker [17], A. F. Osborne [18], B.M. Teplov [19], R.L. Solso [20], V.N. Druzhinin [21] etc.

Materials and Methods

During the theoretical and empirical research, methods of theoretical analysis of multideterminism and mutual influence of psychic phenomena were used, which allowed to reveal the connection between psychological features of eschatological expectations of youth and different levels of creative thinking. Empirical methods included: the questionnaire on religiosity (A.U. Yegorov) [22], the Torrance test of non-verbal creative thinking (adapted by A.N. Voronin) [23], S. Mednik's test of verbal creativity (adapted by A.N. Voronin) [24], essay on the topic "The Apocalypse: My Vision" and the author’s questionnaire of eschatological expectations. We account for the use of the test of personal religiosity by our reliance on the theory of N.A. Berdyaev [25], V.P. Shestakov [26], P.A. Florenski [27] stating that the eschatological component is inherent in religious, first and foremost, the Christian religious conscience. This allowed us to obtain valid and representative results. The sample of respondents consisted of 54 students aged 20 – 23 years. Such a sample was chosen because students are the most active stratum of society and these are the students who are quite sensitive to new information that appears in their sight.

The results of the study were assessed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ-Spearman) and were synthesized using the interpretive methods.

Results

1. The results of the research using S. Mednik's (RAT) method of verbal creativity in adaptation of A.N. Voronin [24]. It has been established that the largest number of respondents (48.2%) have an average level of verbal creativity. This corresponds to the normative indicators determined by this methodology.
2. The results of the study using the Torrance test of non-verbal creativity [23]. The results show that the largest group consists of students with a high level of non-verbal creativity (48.2%).
3. The results of the study of personal religiosity using A.U. Yegorov's questionnaire [22]. This test makes it possible to determine which religious confessions the respondents attribute themselves to, the degree of general religiosity, and allows to assume which of the scenarios of the End of the World may be closer to each respondent. According to the results of the survey, 24.0% of respondents have a low level of religiosity, with the number including people who indicated in the answer to the question "What religion do you belong to?" that they are atheists, and those who have indicated a certain religious denomination. Most of the respondents (59.3%) have an average level of religiosity, and 16.7% have a high level of religiosity.
4. Results of the author’s survey of eschatological expectations. The results of the author’s survey of eschatological expectations showed that the average in the group of respondents is 13.32 points, at max=20 points: 14.81% received low points, 57.41% - average points, and 27.78% showed high results of eschatological expectations. In general, the sample demonstrates normal distribution of eschatological sentiments in students. The respondents are acquainted with religious, scientific and pseudoscientific theories of the Apocalypse. A possibility of the End of the World occurred at least once to the majority of respondents (death as a personal apocalypse), but it is not perceive as real and possible in the near future.
5. The results of the study based on the essay called "The Apocalypse: My Vision". Writing an essay on the above-mentioned topic disclosed the attitude towards the End of the World as a fact, depicting the respondents’ imaginary pictures of the Apocalypse.
For further processing of the data we have proposed certain criteria for evaluating the essay:
1 point – the possibility of the End of the World is rejected; 2 points – a person supports one of the commonly accepted theories; 3 points – a person departs from the generally accepted standards, complements the well-known theory with author's details and their own reflections on the topic.

Also to process the text adequately the method of qualitative analysis was applied. With the help of qualitative analysis, certain inherent trends were highlighted in the sample. The essay answered the following questions: "Which of the variants of the End of the World is the most common in the sample?", "Which theories received the least support among the respondents?" Or "What were the most original theories?" The essay outlined what students think about the End of the World.

The content analysis of the essay texts confirms the results of the author’s survey – the majority of respondents do not take eschatological ideas seriously. According to them, frequent information in the mass media about the coming Apocalypse is perceived as a “routine background of mass culture”. It was also confirmed by the research of I.G. Yakovenko [4].

Thus, 26% of respondents think that the End of the World will not arrive at all. We illustrate this by the statement of one of the respondents: "I do not view myself neither as a pessimist, nor as a naive optimist, because I believe: "The future is bright and wonderful". Another 24% of respondents are skeptical about the probability of the Apocalypse, but assume that it is possible: "...I admit the possibility of the Apocalypse. After all, there are plenty of reasons for this... But it is important to only allow for a possibility, and not wait for it from day to day..." One third (37%) of those surveyed believe that the End of Time will not come soon: "... in about 5 billion years the End of the World will come and our planet will be destroyed", and the remaining 13% expect the Apocalypse very soon. They say: "Over the next few decades, climate can radically change: as a result of the constant growth of the air temperature the glaciers will melt, part of the land will be flooded, and the climate of the Earth will be close to the climate of the desert zone."

Some respondents (7.5%) noted that growth in the frequency of prophecies of the End of the World has recently suggested that humanity itself is striving for it. As an illustration we suggest an assumption of one of the respondents: "Nowadays all people talk a lot about the End of the World. For some reason, everyone has decided that it must necessarily come... It gives an impression that people like frightening themselves, they aspire for the Apocalypse to come." It testifies to the idea that the more imperfect the World, the stronger eschatological brewing in peoples’ minds. We cannot but mention here the Christian idea of trial people deserve for “for their sins”.

The religious point of view was expressed by 9% of the respondents in their works, among them 5.5% of respondents imagined themselves amidst the Apocalypse catastrophe and what they would see after it: "...so interesting what will happen after... Will my consciousness survive and where will I find myself, what will be going on around and how everything will be organized "somewhere out there"? I hope that then I will be able to understand the whole plan of the universe... "

A fraction of respondents (5.5%) believe that humanity will perish from the pandemic of a terrible incurable disease: "It's extremely unprofitable to use nuclear weapons... Why wipe out the already established infrastructure and pollute lands rich in minerals? You can grab that!"; "Viruses quickly mutate and people will not be able to invent a vaccine in a timely manner from numerous diseases, our immunity cannot be quickly strengthened, and viruses will continue to change." Four per cent of the respondents believe that a nuclear war will take place: "I think that while the world government works as it does now, such an opportunity cannot be ruled out. Although I do not want to die of an explosion, but it's a relatively quick death." Another 4% of the respondents say that when the threat of destruction of our planet approaches, humanity will go to live on another planet, adapt it for itself: "Everything around is ablaze. The woods, fields, people's dwellings are all burning... People chaotically run through the streets in panic. Special services calm the population down and gradually evacuate it to another planet." Also 9% of the respondents believe that the civilization and the planet will not be destroyed, but there will be a mental transition to another level of being: "In my opinion, the End of the World should be understood not as something
catastrophic, but as the end of one epoch and the beginning of a new era. The emergence of new people's abilities is possible." The theory of ecological disaster of the planetary scale associated with human activity has the greatest number of supporters – 44%: "Humanity itself will create all the favourable conditions for this. The apocalypse will begin when there will be not enough drinking water, no land capable of yielding crops, or when the oxygen expires. And if you imagine our planet as a dog, and people as fleas... The more fleas the dog has, the more they bite it, the stronger the dog starts itching and throwing the fleas off"; "In my opinion, the Apocalypse is not something described in the Bible, fantastic and beyond the limit, but rather a logical phenomenon, which has to be, though not soon. In my opinion, it represents a complete exhaustion of natural resources; water, air and soil pollution; extinction of animal and plant species etc...".

Thus, the possible catastrophe and even the eschatological nature of contemporary life can be interpreted through the global problems of mankind. Lack of spirituality of an individual personality, social group or society as a whole ranks low among other problems. According to A.V. Bocharov, S.U. Burkin, the eschatological sentiments of society can be regarded as “a side effect of the crisis of belief under the influence of outer crises” [11, p.77].

Here are examples of the most original eschatological expectations. One such essay partially supports the theory of global warming, but also contains author's details: "Humanity will drift in the vast ocean on the wreckage of its own civilization... It is clear that in the predominantly aquatic environment, the forms of marine life have a predominant advantage... Further, as always in nature, the human body will begin to adapt to the new transformed environment. New-born babies will appear to have gills and membranes between fingers. And so with each subsequent generation the human body will become more streamlined, the skin will become thicker and cooler..." Another essay that struck with originality of thought was based on the theory of the possibility of eternal human life by modifying genes in the DNA of the cells: "...The planet's population is not decreasing, but on the contrary – increasing. Gradually all resources of the Earth are exhausted and famine begins. The cannibalism is breaking out... Imagine that the planet is still alive, but there is no food, no water on it. Thus, people die of thirst – they start eating plants. Their life fully depends on rainfalls. Eventually, plants become scarce, animals also become rare. People gradually become unsociable. The struggle for survival begins. People start eating each other... In the end, even if someone survives, he wouldn’t be called a human being..."

The next step was to study the presence or absence of a correlation between the results of the methods that were indicated above.

First, the results of the research of correlation of indices of verbal creativity originality and the points of eschatological expectations obtained in the survey in the sample (N=54) revealed the existence of a meaningful correlation (\(\rho=0.416\), at \(p\leq 0.01\), while the study of correlation of results of verbal creativity and the points obtained from essays demonstrated the availability of moderate correlation (\(\rho=0.288\), at \(p\leq 0.05\)). It is reasonable to state that the higher the indexes of verbal creativity, the higher eschatological expectations indices.

Second, the results of the research of correlation of indices of verbal creativity originality and the points of eschatological expectations obtained in the survey in the sample (N=54) revealed the existence of a moderate correlation (\(\rho=0.286\), at \(p\leq 0.05\)), while the study of correlation of results of verbal creativity and the points obtained from essays did not reveal meaningful correlation (\(\rho=0.108\), at \(p\leq 0.1\)). It can be accounted for by the weak correlation of these categories as essays and the questionnaire were based on descriptive verbal plots of the Apocalypse picture while the non-verbal creativity implies artistic imagery.

Third, the analysis of the results of correlation of general religiosity with other methods demonstrated that all the \(\rho\)-Spearman’s indices obtained from sample (N=54) did not confirm the existence of meaningful correlation: verbal creativity (\(\rho=-0.128\), at \(p\leq 0.1\)), non-verbal creativity (\(\rho=-0.156\), at \(p\leq 0.1\)), essay “Apocalypse: my vision” (\(\rho=-0.083\), at \(p\leq 0.1\)), the author’s questionnaire of eschatological expectations (\(\rho=-0.070\), at \(p\leq 0.1\)). The results of correlation pointed out to a tendency of reverse connection – the higher the level of religiosity, the lower the indices of creativity and eschatological expectations in the sample. This fact is confirmed by the previous research data [28].
On the one side, this finding can be accounted for the characteristics of the sample, i.e. by the atheistic orientation of the majority of the students in our society the increase of the religiosity might entail the rigidity of thinking and decrease creativity. On the offer side, the insufficient sample size might negatively tell on the level of the correlations.

Discussion

The analysis of the empirical research shows that despite identical values of different types of creativity the results of verbal creativity have a more powerful impact on shaping brighter eschatological imagination of students. The students’ essays with an adequate level of verbal creativity demonstrate non-traditional, consistent, well-thought of plots with complicated bright descriptive images of a possible End of the World. The essays of respondents with prevailing non-verbal type of creativity more often depict only artistic images of the End of the World without causal-consecutive connections. The research resulted in obtaining meaningful correlation of eschatological expectations with verbal creativity and a moderate correlation with non-verbal creativity.

The general results of the research confirm the eschatological nature of Christian mentality by indirect characteristics. 74% of respondents evaluate the World as tragically imperfect, having something in common with the Christian idea of eternal struggle of the Virtue and the Evil [3]. The images of the Virtue and the Evil are viewed as generalized. The result of this struggle is the destruction of the traditional world (different kinds of catastrophes).

Quite unexpected is the absence of meaningful connection of religiosity of a person and their eschatological expectations. Most probably it can be accounted for by religious people’s belief in God (the Saviour) and their salvation through Him. According to the results of our survey, for the majority of our respondents the Apocalypse is connected with the lack of spirituality of mankind, that is ‘the time has come’. It is confirmed by the results of our previous research [28].

Part of the respondents (7.5%) consider that most probably the so-called “eschatological hysteria” occurs when the traditional world is under threat or total extinction which does not foresee any possibility of restoration or cardinal transition to a qualitatively new level of organization.

It should be mentioned that the vector of expectations of catastrophes has shifted from fear of natural disasters and catastrophes to the fear of irrational man-made power, calamities, global conflicts unleashed by separate individuals or groups of people. It was confirmed in the works of G.R. Konson [7], H.V. Ivanova [14], S.N. Zigunenko [29] and others.

The analysed plots of a possible Apocalypse are far from the classic Christian teaching, they are modernized and fairly realistic. The bright descriptive images, logically built plots of a possible Apocalypse presented by the majority of respondents can testify to their awareness of a possible collapse of the stable peace people are adapted to. It is the need of global changes in life or, as an alternative, disappearance of humanity from the historical arena testify to the considerable discrepancies of people’s imaginations of ideal and real worlds. The anticipation of catastrophic changes causes inner discomfort and stress. We consider that they can become the moving force giving an impetus to psychological development and self-perfection of a person, social group and to humanization of society as a whole. That is eschatological sentiments, as shown by I.G. Yakovenko [4], that at times dominate in society are a natural reaction to the non-ideal world full of vices.

Conclusions

The theoretical-empirical research carried out by us makes it possible to come to the following conclusions:

1. The concept of eschatological expectations has received recent research attention. However, a relatively scarce number of interdisciplinary research works devoted to the study of peculiarities of eschatological expectations of contemporary youth in theoretical-methodological and empirico-applied aspects is observed. This accounts for the topicality of the research and its urgency.
2. The synthesis of the survey results and the essay content analysis demonstrated that, first of all, the majority of respondents do not take eschatological ideas seriously, most probably due to the fact that the very idea of the end of the traditional world is horrible in its nature, on the one hand, and such psychological protective mechanisms as negation and postponing are quite natural for young people, on the other; secondly, eschatological sentiments appear as a result of inner crisis of personality and projection of inner fears on the catastrophic image of the future; thirdly, eschatological expectations are problem-oriented to large-scale cataclysms, natural disasters, or catastrophes of technogenic, social-economic, military or religious nature which inevitably transform the traditional World and change the life.

3. The empirical research demonstrated the availability of meaningful correlation between eschatological expectations of youth with the verbal type of creativity and moderate correlation between eschatological expectations of youth with the non-verbal type of creativity.

4. The availability of meaningful correlation between general religiosity of personality and various types of creative thinking and eschatological expectations has not been confirmed.

5. This pilot empirical research and its results outline perspectives of further study of the phenomenon of “eschatological expectations”, the building-up of the plots and causal-consecutive connections in one’s consciousness depending on their types and productivity of thinking.

References


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