

УДК 316.48

## **Conflict as a Condition of Development in George Zimmel's Philosophy**

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Received 29.06.2011, received in revised form 25.09.2011, accepted 4.11.2011

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*This paper investigates the theory of conflicts in G. Zimmel's philosophy where the phenomenon of a contradictory interaction is considered as a condition of development. The social conflicts typology is presented (i.e., economic, political, cultural, spiritual, etc.); the process of conflict emergence and connections of those conflicts are explained. Social contradictions are proved to be continuous and stimulate dramatic changes in all the fields of life. The paper indicates that, to a large extent, every choice a person makes is driven by constraints and opportunities, generated by conflicts.*

*Keywords: conflict, human values, religious values, attraction, hostility, social interactions, competition, aspiration for antagonism*

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### **Conflict as a condition of development in George Zimmel's philosophy**

George Zimmel is famous as the author of works dedicated to sociology of culture. In his collected works there are tales, cycles of lectures, articles and discourses dedicated to love, Eros, problems of gender, dynamics of social processes, individualization and religion. He wrote about decorations and fashion, cultural influence of money, Alpes and adventures, about symbolic meaning of bridge and door and philosophic community. "Philosophy of money" (1900), "Religion" (1906), "Sociology" (1908), "Changes of cultural forms" (1916) are among his most popular works.

One of the first Russian critics of sociology of culture was Lev Trotsky, who in "Pravda" (May 1911) expressed very ironic

attitude to the speech of George Zimmel which was delivered on the opening of the artistic exhibition in Vienna. As we know, at that time Vienna was the centre of artistic experiments, and exhibitions in the Vienna Secession produced a lot of arguments, thus congratulatory speech was supposed to be dedicated to the forms and socio-psychological basics of contemporary culture. L. Trotsky wrote that a new spirit of time which Zimmel had written about was "the soul of a big city. Its art is impressionism, esthetically disguised indifference, its social morality, and Nietzsche is its prophet" (Kauffman, 1990, S. 12). So we can agree to the words of the German explorer M. Kaufman that this is characteristics of G. Zimmel himself, as his views were formed under the influence of philosophy of Neitsche, and problems, actualized in his works,

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reflected spiritual searches of intellectual and cultural élite of that time.

The ideas of G. Zimmel were also actualized by L. Kozer in his work "Functions of social conflict" which is filled with references to the German author. That is why in contemporary works dedicated to philosophical basics of conflict resolution we can see necessary indication to the influence of G. Zimmel in the aspect of understanding the essence and the role of conflict in development of public relations (Вяккерев, 2004).

It should be noticed that L. Kozer mainly refers to the early Zimmel's work which he called "Conflict", but we believe that this word denotes hostility and antagonism which present in people's life, and it would be more correct to translate this word as "Streit" in context of Cant's term *Widerstreit* which means confrontation. So the works feature the essence of such social conflicts as fight, in Heraclitus and Neitsche meanings of this word. The philosopher supposes to study authentic basic of life which is in permanent motion, and the condition of its development is permanent struggle and contradiction.

He also uses the term "Conflict" with regard to cultural forms, for example (Simmel, 1892, S. 382), where the speech is dedicated to the conflict of moral values and ideals. Being under the influence of socio-Darwinism, Zimmel considered the role of conflict in development of community and, in this respect, competition is the most obvious example of social conflict.

Here we have to pinpoint that competition for Zimmel is not only an economic notion, he regards its role more globally, accentuating cultural influence most of all. Competition and division of labour make conditions for a stable development of culture. Moreover, permanent competition in different spheres of public life leads to growth and diversity of social interdependencies and, on the whole,

its further social integration. "In competition, individual qualities of a collective are connected with culture in a particular productive way" (Kauffman, 1990, S. 113). Thus, in development of culture, competition contribute to cultural selection, while "it characterizes contemporary culture, and it is becoming a value and composes, according to Zimmel's point of view, contemporary culture of ethos (Ibid. S. 114).

Originally on the early stages of development of society, competition was a complete realization of struggle for existence like the one in animal combat. As it was noted, G.Zimmel mentions competition and its role in public life in the context of fashionable in that time socio-Darwinism. In social development like evolution of species natural selection has the leading creative power on the basis of permanent struggle for existence. But gradually, struggle for existence is becoming more and more complex cultural form, which becomes apparent in all diversity of social life, e.g. in politics, economics and legal sphere. So religion as sacralized system of values connects selfish interests of a human being and interests of society, presenting altruism as an ideal. So we have to understand that as a factor of development of society and ways of its cultural life competition should be maintained both economically and politically.

According to Zimmel, socialism is the most perfect display of positive aims of a human being. But absolutely uncompetitive society cannot be created. On the contrary, the author supposes that individualization and competition always present. If in process of social development separate individuals achieve freedom, it won't lead to disappearance of competition.

It can be noticed that "Zimmel met the Marxist philosophy of history with his own philosophy of history in which Hegel influence is apparent" (Ibid. S. 23). That's why socialism for him is an ideology of equality of individuals, so

the consequences of this development he defines differently from Karl Marx”.

G. Zimmel also supposes that forms of production of material welfare play a great role in development of a society, he thought that stability and changes are in dialogic interconnection making a contradiction and its solution leads to the change of cultural forms. He “borrows elements of Marx theory for its model of development of culture. This closeness to material understanding of history is especially seen in Zimmel’s discourses about dynamics of socio-economic development” (Ibid. S. 129).

Though, this contradiction between productive forces and relations of production are interpreted in the vein of philosophy of life, making a conflict between content and form of culture. “Between life that runs as a full-flowing stream, which energy always grows and forms of historical expression, that persist in its immovable identity, appears inevitable conflict which fills all the history of culture, however it proves openly” (Simmel, 1984. S. 94.)”. In other words, life as a flowing stream is a creative power of history, which enriches it with permanent diversity, completeness and culture made by human beings, and realized in different forms cannot express the fullness of life, cannot correspond to dynamics of its motion. G. Zimmel uses traditional for philosophy categories as life, competition, force. In understanding of history of culture notions of change and conflict become basic, G. Zimmel understands them mystically and gives them ontological meaning.

He considers development of culture as changes of cultural forms that lose their elasticity and become more and more conservative, they become stable and lose their functionality. New relations, needs and interests come into conflict with the old forms of culture and this fact leads to destruction of the old archaic forms, because they don’t correspond to changes and creation of the

new ones. On this phase independent intentions of separate individuals change and groups work spontaneously. Changes of cultural forms, escort conflicts and influence both individual and collective reality. Since historical objective reality on every higher stage displays two rows: on the one hand, non-personal foundations, object order and labour, on the other hand, personalities with subjective qualities and needs, very often distinction in their rates of development becomes apparent (Kauffman, 1990, S. 130).

Here it is logical to find out if a personality in its unique manifestation or forms of connections of separate individuals become a certain generality. A philosopher of the philosophy of life indicates inimitable dynamism of development of individuality that sets up some people in front of time and note that their life to a considerable extent is signified with cultural conflicts. It doesn’t mean that there is no reverse effect, because changes of cultural forms according to the new relations come into conflict with well-established mentality and require its changes. G. Zimmel considers the process of cultural development in context of the problem of individuality as varied and dialectical.

In history of religion the philosopher mentions several examples which confirm his understanding of the essence of development of culture. That’s why he analyzes culture of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century within the limits of those contradictions that become apparent in religious life. For a long time Christianity played a great role in creation of cultural forms in which social relations were developing and become fixed. But it is visible that the role of Christianity has changed and contemporary culture has lost that religiousness which, for many centuries, was its distinctive feature. There is a loss of domination of a certain cultural form under the influence of new relations and new content of culture. The process of formation of the basics

of new cultural forms still continuous, including new religious culture.

G.Zimmel excludes the opportunity of cultural development out of religion, in any case, a person realizes needs of religious feelings, that's why we see crisis of the dominating cultural form and culture in this case culture enters into an era of religious search. Contemporary culture proves it by demonstration of a sort of new mystics and it experiments in the area of religious life, thus creating a lot of sects. Out-of-confessional forms of realization of the religious needs lead to appearance of a new attitude to the problem of faith and changes of the role of church in people's life. A soul wants to find God, but refuses to have some mediators and tries to get some form of a new religious view of the world, which would correspond to the changes that happen in the sphere of political and economic relations.

Thus, we can say, that at the contemporary to G. Zimmel time there was a conflict of religious cultures, in which we can also see the conflict of values. Strictly speaking, religion always contradicts those senses which a person faces in everyday life. Calling to peace, he suggests people who are enemies in their everyday life to restrain their ambitions and come to consent. Economic and family systems of values also contradict to each other, thus, competition and pursuit of profit and altruism and solidarity do not correspond to each other, so a person, who plays different social roles, have to find some way out of this cultural conflict. Scientific vision of the world contradicts to religious vision of the world. The philosopher considers culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the culture, where the old Christian values face the skeptical value guidelines of the contemporary science, and mystic senses, which appear in the process of formation of the religious culture of numerous sects which have arisen lately.

In the culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century money have got absolutely new value, money started to

play the role of a universal value. It concerns not only economic sphere, bit also many others. It is connected with the fact, that money became a universal equivalent, which created the basis of world-view role, it is what forms unity of endless variety of the contemporary reality. So money get some kind of transcendental sense, it is the limit where multitude acquires unity. That is why in the contemporary world money tend to have the role of God in its metaphysical influence for many people (Simmel, 1977, S.240). For this kind of cultural function money have a considerable resource, because money, unlike Christian religion, which more and more moves aside periphery of the world of values, are always in the centre of social life. A new culture of money is being formed, thus creating corresponding forms.

Money open new prospects of development of individuality. Above all, money make a person more independent, having money a person may not be guided by any principles, money release a person from traditions, affections and necessity to follow moral norms. So individuality receives new prospects of development and opportunity of self-realization. Now a person may be what he couldn't be before, since everything is measured by money, it's possible to measure talent of a singer or an engineer, we may compare a price of a picture and a landscape. So the new scale of values is forming and we can define exactly how much freedom costs. Being a symbol of freedom, money become an underlying reason of hostility that appears as soon as financial interests clash.

But a change in this situation leads to the loss of spirituality, to that emotional emptiness which fills an époque with a feeling of disaster. The power of money deprives a person of Motherland, friends, love, it forms new relations in which sincerity stays unclaimed. That's why the loss of money becomes a big tragedy, because not only freedom is lost, but the price which a person had

to pay for the aspiration for wealth is endured. Unlike religious good, unlike Christian God, money don't leave any hope to forgiveness, the lost spirituality is irreplaceable. Thus, a symbol of a new culture is a conflict of the old cultural forms incarnated of religious symbols and that demonic element that money cause.

Philosophy in that classical form was typical for the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in G. Zimmel's opinion, doesn't correspond to the changing elements of life. Here we have to say that Zimmel defended his thesis of Kant, he was fond of Hegelianism, but he understood the insufficiency of the previous systems for explaining the changes, which happened in history. "Our spiritual means are not enough for what we want to express, life is not only included in this image, but explodes it inside and finds new forms that also incarnate just foreboding or vague actuality, aspiration or clumsy try to display its mysterious presence" (Simmel, 1984. S.99).

Life is the basis which provokes a spiritual conflict of world-views, because it is in permanent motion, its form existence is contradiction, fight, antagonism, that is why it is impossible to put system in constantly changing reality. So the philosopher thinks that the task of philosophy is not to produce a final scheme, but to correspond the rate of changes in the search of expressive means. In his works he tried to find the new forms of philosophy, which could express the spirit of new time more adequately. He was reproached by critics for absence of a system and universality to a considerable extent and it was explained by an aspiration to be more contemporary. Understanding life as an irrational process the thinker refers philosophy to the number of those cultural forms that go out of date quite fast and require permanent updates. Since religion, science and state dominate as cultural forms, philosophy also has to become their petrified image. Philosophy has to be more open to individual

and unique content of life. In some works the philosopher even says that philosophy has to be created by women to obtain alive emotionality.

G. Zimmel pays much attention to the role of social contradictions in a social life of a person. In his conception all the emotional forms of display of disagreement a person practices in relationships may give an opportunity of development of individuality and a feeling of fullness of life. Hospitality, dissatisfaction, overt disagreement seem to be negative social factors, but they let a person to understand his/her own difference and freedom. "Our contradictions give us a feeling, that we are not depressed, it gives us power to express itself, and endows with vivacity and interaction of relation which wouldn't have any value without this correction." (Simmel, 1908, S. 252).

In people's relationship conflicts don't always lead to destruction of relations, on the contrary, people who experienced quarrel can define the resource of their own freedom in the formed relations and understanding the development of these relations in the future.

That's why a person doesn't have to be afraid of conflicts and argues, but he/she can see them as manifestation of viability of these relations. "Erotic relationships are the closest example. Very often they are made of love and attention or inattention, of love and sensual harmony of natures and simultaneous understanding of addition of contrasts of each other, of love and love of power or need of submission" (Ibid. S. 255). A detached observer, according to Zimmel, can see just one side of relations and he can't understand the nature of the formed emotional reciprocal influence. We can agree to this example, because quarrels of spouses, which frighten people with their scales don't end the relationships, and damaged side refuses to take any legal help.

The philosopher thinks that ambiguity of erotic relationships cannot be obvious for lovers

themselves, they see the ideal of relationships quite unidirectional. In fact, it's a common diverse process, the direction, according to which aspiration of any person for the maximal development of his/her individuality is formed. "In the conscience of a person the main conflict and the main unity are between You and I" (Simmel, 2004, S. 116), love, in its essence, is a unity of opposites, and in the conscience of a person there is an image of inseparable unity, but in overcoming of egoism.

The thing, that we call respect, is a result of reciprocal influence of the two opposite feelings: amicability and apprehension. Distance that appears between people is the result of mathematical proportion of liking that attracts them to each other, and antipathy that makes them to avoid communication. Thus, we can say that conflict is an indispensable constituent in forming considerable, in social respect, relationships. In public conscience love and friendship are valued very high, but these feelings are based on interaction of positive and negative feelings.

G. Zimmel also wonders to what extent a person has a feeling of so called pure hostility, to what extent we can call permanent aspiration for competition an inherent quality of people. Of course, we know about childish negativism, when a child rejects all offers of grown-ups, and he/she does everything the wrong way in a spirit of defiance. This kind of behavior puzzles parents, since they are used to see rational basis of conflict.

However, in history there are lots of examples of unexplainable fight of people, in other words, official reason of an armed conflict was absolutely insignificant, but conflict had been developing for several decades – Zimmel gives examples of the Wars of the Roses and the fight of the Guelphs and Ghibellines. Perhaps these examples show that it's quite natural for people to make hostile relations. And if we follow the logic of skeptical

moralists, we see that search of an enemy is a moral necessity, because "misfortune of the best friend doesn't always upset us" (Simmel, 1908).

We even can say that a person will always find an opportunity to express his/her feeling of hostility and aspiration for antagonism. "They say that people acquires religion not because of their belief in God, but because their soul tends to believe in God" (Ibid. S. 262). A young man has the same need when he falls in love, because he wants to love and, as poets say, he loves love actually. This relation spontaneity forms not only pure impulses of soul, but also a special condition for a physical development of an organism, which leads to redundant emotionality.

A need to love leads to the fact, that sometimes a little reason is enough to see the object of love idealistically. Since we can imagine the object of love, we can also make the appearance of an enemy in our imagination to send the spontaneity of our hostility to a certain channel. Zimmel believes that since a feeling of hostility is combined with a feeling of affection, because every state is a condition for display of the other state, perhaps two opposite aspirations joint energy, which unites all the spiritual processes and forms a person.

For a separate person, the process of detection of friends and foreigners is the process of socialization and cognition of him/herself. That's why a person will value the feelings that connect him with the other people as well as the feelings that intensify this connection, for example, hatred of enemy.

People are always in relationships with very different people, so the feeling of affection and love towards other people cannot fill all the spaces of social connections. Due to antipathies and opposites the crowd of a big city receives necessary distances, hence an opportunity to keep friendly relationships. Variety of polar interactions, opportunity of conflicts

and expression of antipathy make conditions for socialization. So we can say that social conflicts make a variety of social groups and form a social structure. "Cogent arguments of it are Indians tribes, which are in a state of war on principle" (Ibid. S. 263), castes also quarrel with each other, and this state is necessary to form the whole, to organize relationships inside groups. In other words, contradictions inside a group establish relationships between people, and contradictions are resolved by making personal bounds, but necessity to be enemies guarantees integrity of relationships that are formed in a group.

In the end G. Zimmel comes to a conclusion that any interaction inside a group may be very effective, if there is an outward enemy, this is just for small groups as well as for the states that sometimes achieve unity of common conscience after declaration of a war. That's why politicians instead of common creative aims declare a common enemy and unite their atomized allies according to their party interests. Of course, it is a "political wisdom – to take care of an enemy to keep unity of elements to maintain their vital interests".

Thus, all kinds of social interactions is the result of two tendencies, monism and antagonism, it is the only way of a stable development of relationships. Moreover, in the history of politics there are a lot of examples when stability of political situation was maintained by official declaration of the possible opposition. Thus, a political conflict gets more institutional forms and doesn't lead to revolution, on the contrary it improves balance.

Certainly, there are such kinds of antagonisms when it is very difficult to find the thing, which unites enemies. When a murder or a thug attacks, it is hard to find something what unites them. Especially when an assault happened all of a sudden, we can be sure, that only a criminal had

a feeling of hostility and a victim didn't have any relationships with a criminal before. In this case, Zimmel believes, that we have no chances to find something in common.

Zimmel also wonders how relationships inside a group change in the result of inner and outer conflicts. It's obvious that competition unites a leader and facilitates rallying of a group. But we also have to know if strategies of fight of small and big groups differ and where the border between friends and foreigners lies (Ibid. S. 315).

Thus, we can say that G. Zimmel in his philosophy represents several levels of consideration of a conflict. First of all, he considers history as a resolution process of contradiction between a form and content of culture. In this context he uses a word "conflict" to show dialectics of history of culture. Conflict is a principle of connection and a principle of alteration of the cultural forms. Secondly, we have to emphasize that hostility and antagonism are characteristics of life, they compose spontaneity and unpredictability of life. So we can never tell if there will be a conflict and in what form. Thirdly, G. Zimmel studies how competition among people can be expressed in personal relationships, how groups fight and how confrontation develops.

Relationships and actions are inseparable since Zimmel tries to describe confrontation as vital state. In contemporary literature hostility is understood as a deliberate confrontation which is expressed in a certain kind of behavior, and G. Zimmel speaks about unconscious state of hostility. Moreover, competition is not only personal, it is a universal state of life in general. That is why he refers to those cases of hostility where one side quarrels purposefully and the other one is an innocent victim and its resistance is a protest of an alive creature who struggles for life.

As every element which forms the content of history, struggle, being a feature of life, evokes to create corresponding cultural forms. State and religion are the forms that try to incarnate variety of relationships, that is why struggle obtains ways of its realization in the form of norms, rules and world-views. Necessity of aspiration for life obtains world-view justification for maintaining peace.

In all the spheres of cultural life competition plays a great creative role, that's why it's not only economical occurrence, but also it is a sign of life in general. Due to competition art and science develop, new crafts appear, competition is a mean of cultural selection. In competition there is a dialectic coincidence of collectivity and individuality and integrity of life makes itself known.

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## Конфликт как условие развития в философии Г. Зиммеля

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*Эта статья посвящена исследованию теории конфликтов в философии Г. Зиммеля, где явление противоречащего взаимодействия рассматривается как условие развития. Представлена социальная типология конфликтов (то есть, экономическая, политическая, культурная, духовная, и т.д.); показан процесс появления конфликтов и их связи. Социальные противоречия непрерывны и ведут за собой значительные перемены во всех областях. В статье показано, что, в большей степени, выбор человека обуславливается ограничениями и возможностями, произведенными конфликтами.*

*Ключевые слова: конфликт, человеческие ценности, религиозные ценности, притяжение, враждебность, социальные взаимодействия, конкуренция, стремление к антагонизму.*

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