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**Understanding the Concept of “Zhol” in a Philosophical Context**

This article explores the category of “zhol” within a philosophical framework, analyzing its ontological, anthropological, and axiological dimensions. This concept is considered not only as a cultural or metaphorical image, but also as a fundamental philosophical construct that integrates the ontological, anthropological, and axiological dimensions of worldview. The study applies philosophical hermeneutics, elements of process ontology, and value-oriented analysis to reveal the semantic depth and methodological significance of “zhol”. From an ontological perspective, “zhol” expresses an understanding of being as movement, becoming, and openness to the future, where existence is conceived not as a fixed state but as a dynamic process. In the anthropological dimension, the concept functions as a model of the human being oriented toward moral choice, inner measure, and responsibility toward the community. In the axiological framework, “zhol” performs a normative function, shaping ideas of justice, dignity, and ethical obligation. Particular attention is given to the role of “zhol” in the formation of historical memory and collective identity, where it operates as a mediator between tradition and modernity. The article concludes that the category “zhol” possesses significant methodological potential for contemporary philosophical research on identity and value orientations under conditions of globalization.

*Keywords:* zhol (path), Kazakh philosophy, methodology, ontology, anthropology, axiology, Abai.

*Introduction*

The relevance of the philosophical analysis of the category of “zhol” is determined by contemporary processes of globalization and cultural standardization, which often lead to the erosion of national forms of thinking and to a crisis of identity. Turning to this category makes it possible to identify a dynamic understanding of being that is specific to Kazakh culture, as well as to reveal its heuristic potential for contemporary philosophical discourse. Under conditions of the loss of stable value orientations, the philosophy of the path may be considered as a methodological foundation for understanding human existence not as a completed state, but as a process that requires responsibility, choice, and existential tension.

The category “zhol” occupies one of the key places in the philosophical and worldview traditions of various cultures and historical epochs. Already within mythological consciousness, the path is interpreted as a form of destiny and vocation, as a symbol of life trials and transition. In religious and philosophical systems, the path acquires a normative and transcendent character: in the Daoist tradition, the path (Dao) is understood as a universal principle of world order and adherence to the natural structure of reality [1]; in Sufi philosophy, the path (ṭarīqa) denotes the process of spiritual perfection and the movement toward truth [2]. In European philosophy, the path functions as a metaphor for the search for truth, self-knowledge, and

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existential choice, receiving conceptual articulation in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where human being is conceived as *Sem-zum-Weg* — being-in-movement, being-in-understanding [3].

In contrast to abstract or purely individualistic interpretations of the life path, “zhol” in the Kazakh philosophical tradition expresses a synthesis of ontological, ethical, and social dimensions. Here, the path is understood not as a set of techniques for achieving goals, but as a mode of human existence in the world that presupposes movement, choice, and responsibility toward the community and historical memory. For this reason, the category of “zhol” requires consideration not only as an object of analysis, but also as a methodological principle of philosophical thinking, orienting research toward processuality, contextuality, and the value-rooted nature of human existence.

In the Kazakh philosophical tradition, the category of “zhol” carries a special semantic load. It is formed within the context of nomadic civilization, where movement is not an exception, but the norm of existence. Unlike sedentary cultures oriented toward stability and spatial fixation, the nomadic mode of being presupposes a dynamic understanding of the world, in which stability is achieved through the ability to orient oneself within a changing spatio-temporal continuum [4]. In this sense, “zhol” functions not only as physical movement, but as an ontological mode of being, in which the human being constantly correlates actions with nature, the community, and the moral order.

The anthropological significance of the category of “zhol” is manifested in the fact that the path is understood as a form of personal self-determination and responsibility. Following “zhol” implies adherence to measure, honor, duty, and respect for tradition, while simultaneously requiring the capacity for independent moral choice. Thus, “zhol” integrates collective values with an individual ethical position, forming a model of personality oriented toward inner discipline and spiritual effort [5].

Already in the first half of the twentieth century, Martin Heidegger pointed to the problematic nature of the technologization of thinking, emphasizing that technology becomes not merely a means, but a form that determines the mode of understanding the world and the human being. A technical approach to the life path reduces its philosophical content, narrowing it to issues of life arrangement, well-being, and social success. However, such a reduction does not eliminate key existential questions concerning ultimate goals, priority values, the meaning of effort, and responsibility for choice.

In this context, the need arises for a philosophical rethinking of the concept of the life path that transcends utilitarian-instrumental understanding. Of particular interest is the turn to national-cultural philosophical traditions, within which the category of the path retains worldview depth and existential richness. In Kazakh philosophy, such a concept is represented by the category of “zhol”, which possesses not only descriptive, but also normative and methodological significance.

#### *Materials and Methods*

The methodological framework of the study is determined by the interdisciplinary nature of the problem under consideration and includes a set of complementary philosophical approaches aimed at revealing the ontological, anthropological, and axiological content of the category of “zhol” in Kazakh philosophy.

First of all, the study employs the hermeneutic method, grounded in the tradition of philosophical interpretation developed by Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. This approach enables us to consider “zhol” as a meaningful structure that unfolds within a specific historical and cultural context. Hermeneutic analysis allows the category of “zhol” to be interpreted not as an abstract concept, but as a phenomenon embedded in lived experience, cultural texts, and philosophical reflection [6].

The second methodological foundation of the research is the process-ontological approach formulated within the philosophy of process, primarily in the works of Alfred North Whitehead [7]. This approach enables us to interpret “zhol” as an expression of being understood as movement, becoming, and the unfolding of possibilities. Within this framework, reality is conceived not as a completed substance, but as a dynamic process, which corresponds to the nomadic worldview and its emphasis on movement and transformation.

The third methodological tool is philosophical-anthropological analysis, oriented toward the study of the human being as a subject of moral choice and self-determination. Drawing on the philosophical traditions of Karl Jaspers, Nikolai Berdyaev, and Merab Mamardashvili, the category of “zhol” is examined as a model of personal formation that includes responsibility, inner measure, and spiritual effort. In this context, “zhol” is understood as a path of personal becoming, in which ethical choice and existential self-reflection play a central role [8–11].

In addition, a comparative-philosophical method is employed, ensuring the comparison of the Kazakh understanding of the path with analogous concepts in world philosophy, such as *Dao* in the Chinese tradition,

ṭarīqa in Sufism, and existential interpretations of the path in European philosophy. This approach enables us to identify both the universal and the culturally specific features of the category of “zhol” and to determine its place within contemporary intercultural philosophical discourse.

### *Results*

From an ontological perspective, the category of “zhol” expresses the processual character of being, within which the world is comprehended not as a set of static entities, but as a space of movement, transitions, and temporal pauses. Being is understood as the unfolding of possibilities, as continuous becoming, in which the human being does not occupy a fixed position, but exists within the dynamics of the life path. Such a vision presupposes openness to the future and recognition of the temporal extension of human existence, which aligns the philosophy of “zhol” closer to process ontology developed in twentieth-century Western philosophy, particularly in the works of A.N. Whitehead, for whom reality is process rather than a completed substance [7; 22].

The ontology of “zhol” is fundamentally rooted in the practical experience of life. Movement here is not an abstract metaphor, but a real mode of existence that determines the rhythms of labor, communication, and spiritual life. This lends the philosophy of the path existential credibility: the human being is comprehended through participation in movement, through involvement in natural and historical cycles. In this aspect, the category of “zhol” resonates with existential analytics, where human existence is understood as a path of understanding, and existence itself is conceived as a project unfolding in time [6; 10].

In the anthropological dimension, “zhol” forms an image of the human being as constantly seeking meaning and orientation. Stable expressions such as “to find one’s path” (oz zholyn tabu) and “to stray from the path” (zholdan adasu) indicate the existential character of the path as a form of self-determination. In the Kazakh philosophical tradition, the human being is conceived not as a completed essence, but as a becoming being whose existence is realized through the choice of direction and acceptance of responsibility for that choice. Life is interpreted as “zhol keshu” — the traversal of a path that presupposes trials, effort, and inner work on oneself.

The anthropology of “zhol” emphasizes the responsibility of the subject: the path is not given once and for all, but is formed through actions, decisions, and relationships with others. Freedom here is not opposed to duty, but presupposes it, since individual choice is always correlated with cultural tradition and collective memory. In this sense, “zhol” expresses the existential dimension of human life, in which personal autonomy is inseparable from ethical involvement in the community.

A special place in the philosophical comprehension of the moral path belongs to the heritage of Abai. In his Words of Edification (Qara Sozder), the human path is associated with self-knowledge, the “labor” of the soul, reason, and conscience. Human life appears as movement toward inner harmony and justice, where following the path signifies not only fidelity to tradition, but also personal responsibility for spiritual self-perfection [5; 11].

In the axiological dimension, “zhol” functions as a bearer of value orientations. The distinction between the “righteous path” (adal zhol) and the “false path” (teris zhol) confers normative status upon the path and makes it an object of moral evaluation. Following the path presupposes responsibility not only toward oneself, but also toward one’s kin, community, and ancestors. The values associated with “zhol” include honor, justice, fidelity to one’s word, respect for tradition, and harmony with nature [4].

Within the logic of “zhol”, destiny is understood not as fatal predetermination, but as the result of a set of traversed stages and made choices. Thus, the path becomes a form of realization of values within concrete life strategies. Under conditions of contemporary society, characterized by value pluralism and a crisis of identity, the philosophy of “zhol” acquires particular relevance, offering a model of moral choice as a prolonged and responsible process rather than a single, momentary decision.

### *Discussion*

The problem of the human life path occupies a central place in the history of philosophy and serves as a universal mode of comprehending human existence. Already in ancient worldviews, the path was interpreted not merely as a direction of movement, but as a form of destiny, spiritual growth, and moral choice. In ancient Indian philosophy, the distinction between the “path of the gods” (devayana) and the “path of the ancestors” (pitryana) reflects the idea of different ontological trajectories of human existence and the posthumous fate of the soul. In Buddhism, the Noble Eightfold Path establishes a normative model of

liberation through right understanding, action, and way of life, thus linking the ontology of suffering with the ethics of emancipation.

In the Chinese philosophical tradition, the key concept is Laozi’s Dao, understood as the universal principle of cosmic order, natural alignment, and harmony of the world. Dao is not an individual route, but an impersonal ontological law with which a person must align their life. In ancient Greek philosophy (Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics), the life path is conceptualized in terms of virtue, measure, and inner stability: the human path is movement toward eudaimonia through rational and virtuous existence.

In the Sufi tradition, *ṭarīqa* is interpreted as the spiritual path to God, involving inner purification, ascetic discipline, and the gradual passage through spiritual “stations” (*maqamat*). Here the path is strictly normative and oriented toward a transcendent goal. In modern European philosophy, especially in the philosophy of life and existentialism, the path increasingly becomes associated with the individual life project and freedom of choice.

In Russian religious philosophy (V.S. Solovyov, N.A. Berdyaev, S.L. Frank), the life path is understood as the process of spiritual formation and the unfolding of freedom in relation to absolute values. The patristic tradition, in turn, interprets human life as a path of salvation, a spiritual trajectory of ascent in which movement is connected with repentance, transformation, and inner struggle [12–14].

The ontological meaning of “zhol” is revealed in the understanding of being in nomadic culture as a process rather than a fixed state. Life is a path from birth to death, filled with trials, choices, and responsibility. A person does not simply exist — they “walk” or “go.” Hence the numerous expressions in which the life process is described through the metaphor of the road. In this context, “zhol” becomes a universal metaphor of human existence. Kazakh expressions such as “zholyn bolsyn” (may your road be open), “zholdan taima” (do not deviate from the path), “ata zholy” (the ancestral path), and “tura zhol” (the straight path) demonstrate the deep cultural and existential content of this concept.

Nomadic culture forms a specific type of spatial consciousness. Space here is not static and not centered around a fixed point; it is perceived as a dynamic field of relations. A person does not “possess” space but correlates themselves with it. Consequently, “zhol” is a way of orientation in the world, a mode of being included in the natural order. It presupposes knowledge of seasonal cycles, understanding of natural patterns, and coordination of human activity with the rhythms of earth and sky. In this sense, the ontological character of the category becomes evident: “zhol” expresses a mode of being-in-the-world.

Beyond its natural dimension, “zhol” also includes a social dimension. Nomadic communities were founded on principles of mutual responsibility, clan solidarity, and moral regulation of behavior. In this context, “zhol” also means “ata zholy” — the ancestral way of life, the normative order in which values of justice, honor, hospitality, and fidelity to one’s word are embedded. Thus, movement in space is accompanied by movement within a moral trajectory. A person walking the “zhol” must consider not only the physical route, but also the moral order.

It is important to emphasize that the dynamism of the nomadic model does not imply chaos. On the contrary, movement is subordinated to a specific order. This order is not externally institutionalized but internally assimilated through tradition. The ability to “hold one’s path” is both a practical skill and a spiritual quality. A person must be attentive to the environment, responsible before the community, and faithful to moral principles. Stability, therefore, is achieved not through immobility, but through inner orientation.

In nomadic culture, the concept of “zhol” was formed not merely as an indication of movement, but as a profound philosophical category describing being itself. For the nomadic way of life, movement was not accidental but a natural form of existence. Seasonal migrations, adaptation to space, and living in accordance with the rhythm of nature shaped a dynamic model of being. In this context, “zhol” becomes not simply a direction in space, but an ontological mode of existence.

Whereas in sedentary cultures stability is ensured through attachment to a particular place, in the nomadic worldview stability is preserved through movement. The open and boundless steppe required exceptional orientation skills. To find the path meant preserving life. Yet this orientation was not only geographical but also spiritual. Losing the path meant not only losing direction in space, but losing one’s life orientation.

Nomadic culture was based not on possession of space, but on harmony with it. Living in accordance with nature, observing seasonal rhythms, and adhering to communal agreements expanded the content of “zhol”. The path symbolized not only movement but also order.

Moreover, “zhol” is closely connected with cultural memory. The concept of “ata zholy” signifies continuity of tradition and the transmission of moral norms. In nomadic society, established ways often held greater authority than written laws. The path became a measure of justice and honor. Therefore, “not deviating from the path” meant preserving one’s humanity.

Philosophically, “zhol” expresses the processual character of being. Life is not static but a constantly unfolding process. The human being is the conscious subject of this process. Life is perceived as a journey in which a person masters not only space, but also their inner world. The path thus becomes a form of self-knowledge.

In nomadic worldview, time was cyclical. Seasonal repetition reflected the rhythm of life. Yet each migration brought new experience. Thus, although the movement recurs, its content is renewed each time, revealing the possibility of spiritual growth.

The concept of “zhol” is also inseparable from communal responsibility. Migration was not the movement of one individual, but of an entire clan. The path therefore embodied collective agreement and mutual dependence. Yet this did not negate individual responsibility: each person had to know their place and fulfill their duty.

Consequently, in the Kazakh philosophical tradition, “zhol” cannot be reduced to spatial movement. It expresses an integral mode of existence in which movement becomes a form of stability, and the path becomes a form of being. A person in motion does not lose support, because their support lies not in a fixed point, but in the ability to orient, choose, and relate oneself to the world.

Within this framework, the Kazakh understanding of “zhol” reveals a distinctive philosophical specificity. The path is never conceived outside social and historical context. Personality is formed within the space of clan, community, and nation, and individual choice is always correlated with collective responsibility. The principle “One who abandons the people cannot be a hero” expresses the fundamental connection between personal path and communal destiny.

At the same time, Kazakh philosophical tradition does not idealize society: it may serve both as a source of moral formation and as a factor of distortion. Therefore, the search for the “straight path” (tura zhol) requires spiritual vigilance and inner purification. This idea receives profound development in the philosophical heritage of Abai and Shakarim, where the human path is linked with self-knowledge, conscience, and responsibility before truth [15].

In the axiological dimension of Kazakh philosophy, the category of zhol is inseparable from the concept of ar-uyat (conscience, moral dignity). If zhol expresses the direction and meaning of human existence, then ar-uyat acts as the internal value criterion that regulates this movement. In the works of Abai and Shakarim, conscience becomes the inner measure of truth and justice, preventing a person from deviating from the moral path. Thus, the path is not merely a trajectory of life, but a value-oriented process guided by moral self-awareness. Abai’s Seventeenth Word, depicting the dialogue between intellect, heart, and will, symbolically reveals the inner structure of the path. Intellect is the instrument of cognition; the heart is the seat of compassion and justice; will is the driving force of action. If one dominates excessively, personal integrity is disrupted. The path thus becomes a process of harmonization. The “complete person” emerges from this harmony, giving the path not merely moral, but ontological significance. Abai further concretizes the model of the complete person through the concepts of knowledge, justice, and mercy. Knowledge signifies striving for truth; justice reflects conscience; mercy embodies humanity. Together they form the formula of spiritual perfection. The path is therefore spiritual labor — not a static state, but continuous self-improvement.

Shakarim deepens this axiological perspective by emphasizing the primacy of conscience (ar-uyat) as the highest moral authority. In his philosophical reflections, conscience is understood as an inner spiritual law that connects human actions with universal truth. A person who follows conscience preserves the purity of the path, while the loss of conscience leads to moral disorientation. Therefore, the unity of zhol and ar-uyat forms a value foundation of human existence: the path determines the direction of life, and conscience ensures its moral authenticity and responsibility before truth [15].

In this sense, the problem of the path is not only ethical but also epistemological. Reaching truth means traversing a path — not merely through external knowledge, but through inner spiritual search. Shakarim complements rational cognition with conscience-based knowledge. The path thus unites reason and moral awareness.

The problem of the path is also inseparable from freedom. A person chooses their own path, yet each choice entails responsibility. The path of desire leads to degradation; the path of conscience leads to perfection. Thus, the path represents the unity of freedom and responsibility.

Time and space also play an important role in shaping the life path. Concepts such as zaman (epoch), dauiren (era), and tagdyr (destiny) reflect the historical conditioning of human choice. The historical era does not prescribe a ready-made path, but presents challenges requiring moral decisions. Therefore, “zhol” remains a dynamic category, open to change and demanding constant effort.

Its axiological dimension is expressed through enduring spiritual values: honor (ar), dignity (namys), shame (uyat), justice (adilet), compassion (meirim), and labor (enbek). These values serve as universal orienting points regardless of historical transformations. Following the path presupposes inner agreement with the moral order.

A central role is assigned to self-education as the key mechanism of the path. Folk wisdom and Abai’s philosophy emphasize inner labor over external coercion. Purity of heart, sincerity of intention, and control over passions are seen as necessary conditions for following the righteous path (izgi zhol).

The specificity of the Kazakh understanding of “zhol” lies in the synthesis of spatial, ethical, and cultural-historical dimensions. Unlike the abstract Dao or the purely individual life project, “zhol” is rooted in the concrete experience of nomadic civilization, collective memory, and tradition, yet remains open to philosophical dialogue with other cultures.

The philosophy of the path also develops in the heritage of Al-Farabi, who interprets happiness as the result of purposeful moral and intellectual perfection. His conception of development as a directed process of self-improvement allows “zhol” to be understood not as mechanical adherence to norms, but as conscious movement toward the good [16; 17, 22].

Thus, comparative analysis demonstrates that “zhol” represents a distinct national-cultural form of the universal philosophical motif of the path, integrating ontology of becoming, ethics of responsibility, and historical memory. This makes it significant not only for Kazakh philosophy, but also for contemporary intercultural philosophical discourse.

### *Conclusion*

The category of “zhol” may be considered not only an object of philosophical reflection but also a methodological orientation for philosophical inquiry. In this sense, it directs research toward processuality, contextuality, and the openness of knowledge. Within the logic of zhol, cognition is understood not as the possession of a final truth, but as a dynamic movement toward understanding that unfolds through time and continuous reflection on lived experience. Such an approach highlights the emergence and transformation of meaning rather than its fixation within rigid conceptual schemes.

From a methodological perspective, zhol encourages the interpretation of philosophy itself as a path of thinking. Truth, in this framework, is disclosed through the interaction of personal experience, cultural tradition, and rational reflection. This orientation shifts philosophical analysis away from purely abstract universal models and toward recognition of the historical and cultural conditioning of knowledge. Consequently, philosophical understanding develops within a hermeneutic space where logical reasoning is complemented by axiological, existential, and cultural dimensions of thought.

In the context of intercultural dialogue, the category of zhol provides a productive framework for reflecting on questions of identity, cultural memory, and moral orientation. It allows individual life trajectories to be interpreted in relation to collective historical experience and shared value systems. In this way, zhol does not eliminate cultural differences but transforms them into a basis for dialogue and mutual understanding.

Thus, the philosophy of zhol may be interpreted as a holistic worldview framework in which the path functions simultaneously as a mode of being, a principle of self-knowledge, and a value orientation guiding human action. Its ontological, anthropological, and axiological dimensions allow this category to occupy an important place within the Kazakh philosophical tradition. In the context of globalization and rapid cultural transformation, the concept of zhol retains considerable heuristic potential for philosophical reflection on identity, meaning of life, and moral responsibility, offering a model of thinking grounded in openness, continuity of cultural memory, and ethical self-awareness.

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### Жол ұғымын философиялық кең мәтінде талдау

Мақалада жол категориясы философиялық кең мәтін аясында қарастырылып, оның онтологиялық, антропологиялық және аксиологиялық қырлары талданған. Аталған ұғым тек мәдени немесе метафоралық бейне ретінде ғана емес, дүниетанымының онтологиялық, антропологиялық және аксиологиялық өлшемдерін біріктіретін іргелі философиялық құрылым ретінде қарастырылады. Зерттеуде философиялық герменевтика, процессуалдық онтология және құндылықтық талдау элементтері қолданылып, жол категориясының мағыналық тереңдігі мен әдіснамалық әлеуеті ашылған. Онтологиялық тұрғыдан жол болмысты қозғалыс, қалыптасу және болашаққа ашықтық ретінде пайымдауды білдіреді; мұнда болмыс тұрақты күй емес, үнемі жүрін отыратын үдеріс ретінде ұғынылады. Антропологиялық өлшемде жол адамды адамгершілік таңдауға, ішкі өлшемге және қауым алдындағы жауапкершілікке бағдарланған тұлға моделі ретінде көрінеді. Аксиологиялық аспектіде жол әділеттілік, ар-намыс және адамгершілік міндет туралы түсініктерді қалыптастыратын нормативтік ұстаным қызметін атқарады. Сонымен қатар жолдың тарихи жады мен ұжымдық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудағы рөліне ерекше назар аударылған, мұнда ол дәстүр мен қазіргі заман арасындағы дәнекер ретінде қызмет етеді. Мақалада жол категориясының жаһандану жағдайында бірегейлік пен құндылықтық бағдарларды философиялық тұрғыдан талдауда елеулі әдіснамалық әлеуетке ие екені тұжырымдалады.

*Кілт сөздер:* жол, қазақ философиясы, әдіснама, онтология, антропология, аксиология, Абай.

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### Осмысление понятия «жол» в философском контексте

В данной статье категория «жол» рассматривается в философском контексте, а также анализируются её онтологические, антропологические и аксиологические аспекты. Данное понятие рассматривается не только как культурный или метафорический образ, но и как фундаментальная философская конструкция, объединяющая онтологические, антропологические и аксиологические измерения мировоззрения. В исследовании используются философская герменевтика, элементы процессуальной онто-

гии и ценностно-ориентированный анализ, что позволяет раскрыть смысловую глубину и методологический потенциал категории «жол». В онтологическом плане «жол» выражает понимание бытия как движения, становления и открытости будущему, где существование мыслится не как фиксированное состояние, а как динамический процесс. В антропологическом измерении данная категория выступает как модель человека, ориентированного на нравственный выбор, внутреннюю меру и ответственность перед сообществом. В аксиологическом аспекте «жол» выполняет нормативную функцию, формируя представления о справедливости, достоинстве и нравственном долге. Особое внимание уделяется роли категории «жол» в формировании исторической памяти и коллективной идентичности, где она выступает медиатором между традицией и современностью. Делается вывод о значительном методологическом потенциале данной категории для современного философского анализа идентичности и ценностных ориентиров в условиях глобализации.

*Ключевые слова:* жол (путь), казахская философия, методология, онтология, антропология, аксиология, Абай.

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