

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

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Sergei BYSTRIANTSEV,
Elmira BAGANDOVA,
Syuzanna YEGHIAZARYAN,
Peresvet BYSTRIANTSEV,
Evgeny PLESHKOV,
Ishkhan SAAKYAN

THE TRAITS OF SOCIAL IDEAL IN RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY OF THE XIX CENTURY

Abstract

Russian social philosophers developed ideas and disputed them with the European philosophers and social thinkers of the XIX century. The main characteristics of Russian philosophy were the natural synthesis of religious, philosophical and scientific knowledge about the society. That is why any phenomenon of social life had to be analyzed from the point of view of ideal start, theoretical example, to which the practice of social action should correspond.

Keywords: social values and norms, social ideal, spiritual experience, religion.

Social values and norms in the history of Russian philosophy were the object-matter of close and systematic analysis. Russian thinkers in the field of social dynamics, in forming of social ideology studies give priority to mental and moral insights of peoples as a whole and individuals in particular on questions of reproduction and development of the society. Starting from the 30-40 years of the 19th century, Russian social philosophy was in the same current of establishing European ideas on social progress. Therefore it would be wrong to claim that social philosophy in Russia is a unique phenomenon that appeared unexpectedly and unpredictably.

Russian social philosophers continued, developed and argued the ideas of European philosophers. It is known that the classics of Sociology A. Cont, E. Durkheim, V. Pareto made a

break between philosophy on the one hand and sociology on the other. Sociologists of the beginning of the XIX century tried to get rid of notional philosophical operations, being false and useful. They recommended getting rid of philosophical and religious notions in the scientific language, which could not be exposed to empirical analysis and practical measurement. Among such notions was the definition of social-political ideal.

Russian social thought took another way. Its main characteristics were the natural synthesis of religious, philosophical and scientific knowledge about society. Therefore any phenomenon and the fact of social life is subject to systematic analysis from the point of view of ideal start, of notional example, to which practice of social activity should correspond.

Social life started and got the sense, being based on social-political ideal (socially important spiritual and moral values), which was the aggregate of moral notions about the appropriate social order.

For Russian social philosophy, social ideal research became one of its subject-matters. Up until now, modern philosophers, sociologists, state and political leaders turn to this problem research. In other words, everyone wants to understand what is the driving force of social development and what is the role of ideal factors in the historical process. It is important to understand that the whole history of humanity is a long and hard way to search for an ideal social state. Russian people have rich historical experience of falls and rises in the process of understanding of its social order.

Studying Russian history, traditions and national psychology, Russian philosophers came to conclusions, which could be considered to be the basis of notions about the Russian ideal of social order :

- in Russian social consciousness, moral principles and virtues of a person dominate over his material wellbeing and social welfare;
- the goal of the life of a person and society as a whole has a messianic character of searching for the greatest truth on earth and serving it. Russian thinkers who defended this position appealed to Alexander Nevsky, who asserted one of the main moral statements, “Not in the power of God and in truth”;
- experience of the historical development of the Russian society testifies that practical realization of social world order ideal often acquires the traits of political utopia, and Russian people easily became hostages of their mistaken ideas and ideals;

- no other peoples of the world in the new history could demonstrate as much temperament, will, energy, ideological commitment in the field of historical and social creativity. Therefore thousands of years of experience of Russian civilization can be considered as a social-political and spiritual experiment in the arrangement of their existence on Earth.

Russian thinkers logically constructed their assessments, expressing the common spiritual experience of Russian people, studying the social ideal for which Russian society aimed. But it should be noted that Russian social philosophy represents in itself many different trends, each of them presenting its own way of social development and seeing its own way of problem-solving. Neither of the most influential and system-forming Russian trends of social philosophy, such as Slavophilism, Westernism, Conservatism, Left Radicalism, can fully present the specificity of Russian social ideal.

S. L. Frank (1996, p. 162) analyzed the development of Russian philosophical thought in the XIX century and distinguished 30-50 years as the time when Russian world outlook tried to form into a whole system of views about the world and correlated itself with the main trends of world culture. During this period social thought in Russia divided into two intellectual trends - Slavophilism and Westernism. Between these two philosophical trends, there were the most intensive but useful arguments. Until now, ideological disputes of Slavofilists and Westernists are on the basis of thoughts of Russian philosophers, politologists and political leaders.

On the cusp of the 19th and 20th centuries, there appeared in Russia a number of philosophers who studied and logically substantiated in the specificity of their work of the Russian social

arrangement, trying to make a concept of social-political ideal, according to which it could be possible to solve problems that appear not only in Russia but also all over the world. These thinkers are well known not only in Russia but also in the world: they are S. L. Frank, P. I. Novgorodtsev and S. N. Bulgakov. These philosophers wrote about the problems of the social-political ideal and developed a methodology of studies of it.

It should be taken into account that activity and research analysis of social development of Russia in the works of Russian philosophers were closely connected with the spiritual searches of great Russian writers of the XIX century. It is well known that in Russia, a writer was more than just a writer. Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Turgenyev, Tolstoy were moral authorities in Russian society. The social ideal is presented in Russian literature, and this should be taken into account because Russian social philosophy constantly addressed literature and many philosophers expressed their views in literary form. The majority of the mentioned philosophers actively discussed the questions of social life with prominent writers of that time and sometimes considered them as the active founders of the Russian national outlook and dedicated to the important part of their research in the field of social philosophy.

The religious factor is a specific trait of Russian social philosophy, and it is the basis of the outlook of the majority of Russian thinkers.

The Christian Orthodox outlook is an ideological core in the boundaries of which all philosophical and social problems of Russia is formed. S. L. Frank characterized this trait of national philosophy in such a way: "Russian philosophy is a world outlook theory to a greater extent than Western European philosophy. Its essence and main goal are never in a purely theo-

retical and impartial perception of the world but in the religious and emotional explanation of life. And that it can be understood from this point of view by going deeper into its religious and world outlook roots" (Frank, 1996, p. 162).

Christian faith for some social philosophers turned from the object of theoretical analysis into a sphere of spiritual serving and into a kind of activity, for example, for S. N. Bulgakov, who became a priest. We should take into account that Russian religious-philosophical thought in questions of social development founding solved a very complicated philosophical and ethical task of correlation between the material and spiritual ideal and values, between human goals and agency of Providence and predestination.

The social-political ideal in Russian culture was the result of spiritual experience, which is difficult to understand and determine by means of rational cognition methods. It is necessary to bear in mind that the category of the social-political ideal in Russian philosophy was considered not as a construction of rationally based social ideas that can be disputed, rejected, changed, but as a universal constantly and unchangeably existing ideal model of social development.

P. I. Novgorodtsev (1991), one of the researchers of Russian social-political ideal, wrote: "When the sovereignty of people, parliamentarism, socialism, etc. are the only saving ideals of social construction, it becomes evident that in this case concrete means of implementation of the absolute ideal, predicted by some difficulties and needs of social life, are perceived as the ideal itself" (pp. 119-129).

But absolutization of the ideal model of the social ideal can turn into a social utopia, one of the variants of human mistake about social changes' mechanisms. The complexity of the problem of the social ideal is in the fact that social-

political ideals can be true and false. People can realize false ideal as appropriate and unquestionable. Historical practice becomes the main judge, determining if the ideal is real or false.

Unfortunately, this happened in Russian history. Marxism Leninism as a political ideology of socialist economy construction, of overall social equality and justice, which in practice was absolutized as the unchangeable and the only possible social-political ideal of society existence, turned for Russian people and the Russian state of being a tragedy. The historical experience of the nation made a judgment, showing the false ideals that seemed to be absolutely justified scientifically.

Many researchers paid attention to the ambivalent nature of the social ideal, which regenerates into an Idol because of unconscious mass absolutization. This Idol is an object of mystical worship for an individual and an instrument of ideological influence of totalitarian power on the society. V. Soloviev was the first to address this problem in his work "Idols and ideals" (Soloviev, 1995, p. 220). Later S. L. Frank, S. N. Bulgakov, N. A. Berdiaev, P. I. Novgorodcev and others paid a lot of attention to this question.

Studying social ideal, it is necessary to take into account the peculiarities of social thinking of Russian people. Early Slavofilists A. Khomiakov and I. Kireevsky paid attention to this:

- Russian people cannot think with patterns of objective reality. They tend to the harmony of faith and reasons and so to "overall reason";
- discussing the problems of social life, Russian people don't follow just pure logic, but always ready to appeal to an ideal, to such notion as "truth" which doesn't always coincide with the notion "fact";
- "truth" for Russian people is more prefera-

ble and more often used notion because it unites ethical, formal-logical and legal. S. L. Frank (1996) wrote: "Truth is a unity of justice, godly life and theoretical fact, that is the adoption of real existence" (p. 209). The search for "truth" is equal to search for the ideal for Russian people.

Despite the specific traits of the Russian social ideal, we cannot say that it is a product of purely Russian spiritual culture and doesn't depend on other trends and tendencies of European philosophical tradition. The social ideal of Slavofilists, for example, was formed under the certain influence of German idealism. German idealism gave a lot of theoretical material for Russian philosophy. Russian philosophy turned to German idealism, seeing in it not only the peak of philosophy but also everything that is close to the Russian outlook. The idealism of German philosophy at the beginning of the 19th century turned to be closer to Russian thinkers than empiricism and materialism that dominated western people consciousness at this time. Russian philosophy, as well as classical German philosophy, realized the power of spirit, idea and ideal. Many Russian philosophers developed a philosophical culture based on German idealism.

Russian neo-Kantianism was a bright example of turning to German idealism. It appeared largely due to appearing crisis in the theory of social cognition. The crisis was connected not only with positivism but also with subjectivity and relativism in social sciences. Neo-Kantianism tried to overcome these shortcomings and find a method that could present a really scientific picture of the social world. P. I. Novgorodcev, in his book "About a social ideal" (1991), proceeded from the Kantianism idea about the relativity and imperfection of all the forms of subsistence, including social ideal in its

historical forms.

The undoubtedly social ideal is a system of values that in various forms exist in practically every developed philosophical system and national tradition of thought. Russian original philosophy appeared in a serious dialogue with Western philosophical thought. Getting acquainted with the system of overall human and Western values, refusing or accepting them, Russian social school moved towards the ideological, philosophical synthesis of science, religion and philosophy.

If we analyze problems, ideological trends of Russian and Western philosophy, especially at the end of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century, it will be clear that we have a comparable and greatly close philosophical tradition. In the West, as well as in Russia, anti-positivist, idealistic and axiological tendencies became stronger. They revealed most clearly and consistently in Russia among the representatives of the religious and philosophical trend. This trend of Russian thought became most productive in the understanding of the problem of Russian social ideal (Put, 1992).

Russian religious philosophy deals with absolute, ideal principles, which constitute its main subject. Representatives of religious philosophy tried to substantiate the religious bases of a social ideal. S. L. Frank was very consistent in this in his work “Religious bases of civil society” and continued that search in another more exhaustive work “Spiritual bases of the society: introduction to social philosophy” (Frank, 1992). He wrote about the role of religious principles in the life of society: “We should remember that, no matter if we want it or know it or not, our life is administered by some spiritual principles, which are independent of any human ideas, not subject to any fashion or historical influences, and that it de-

pends on us not to create or change them, but to know about them and either consciously lead our life according to them or break them and die from the punishing results of our ignorance and wickedness” (Frank, 1992, p. 10).

S. L. Frank was sure that religious bases were the core of the society around which all other elements of the society group. Russian thinkers, after the fruitless search for ontological bases of social existence and its ideal forms, came to a conclusion that ideal forms are possible only in the religious sphere.

Orthodox-religious ideal differs from the social-carnal by the fact that carnal presupposes happiness and perfection in future. The social ideal is always turned to the future and is an ideal form to which humanity should aim but which it cannot reach. Orthodox ideal allows us to solve this contradiction because serving God gives an opportunity to be with the ideal – God himself now and here. Through charitable life and prayers, a trusting person gets an opportunity to touch with the ideal in real life. The orthodox church offered this way to reform social life. Russian philosophical thought also called to follow this way.

Calling to follow an orthodox ideal, Russian religious philosophy determined ideal as a certain social model which served to reform a reality. At that, orthodox social ideal didn't correlate with real problems of social life. There was a great distance between the problems of social development and the problem of a social ideal. Social myth creation is natural for social consciousness and to a great extent for philosophy. As S. L. Frank pointed out, social ideal can't be universal and applied to any political, social and other problems: “...Policy of narrowing down complicated and lively variety of life to one abstract example is a destructive doctrinarianism,

despotic aspiring to ruin life” (Frank, 1991, p. 373). Social-political ideals, as he said, should correspond not only to eternal principles of social life but also to the material, spiritual state of the society, its social stratification and to a historical task of the society. Frank warns that faith in absolute meaning and applicability of concrete social ideals (a certain form of administration, certain social order) is the transformation of relativistic into absolute, which is idolatry.

The general conclusion that S. L. Frank made about the nature of social ideals is that “neither of them is an absolute truth realization, but only a relative and partial realization of it. The best state is always only a relatively but not absolutely best state” (Frank, 1991, p. 374). He thought that trying to formulate and realize the social ideal, and it is necessary to remember that evil cannot be eliminated completely - in the framework of historical experience until people and the world are changed completely.

Hvostov V. M. (1920) also wrote about this in his monograph “Bases of Sociology” (pp. 55-60). In particular, he wrote about a logical process of ideas’ creation, their struggle, synthesis, expansion by means of imitation and turning of the rational idea into an ideal, which will be then realized in social life. As well P. I. Novgorodtsev and V. Vundt considered that implementation of ideals (reforming of the society) could never be realized absolutely, there will always be a falsification of sense, the appearance of unexpected consequences because of complexity and constant changes in the society, the relative imperfection of social science and certain heterogeneity of social ideals.

Hvostov V. M. understood the problem of the social ideal as a contradiction between an individual and society. An individual is trying to fulfil his own interests. At the same time, society

demands that the members of society correlated their personal goals with the norms of society as a whole. Hvostov V. M. thinks that these contradictions could be overcome by means of the creation of social ideals according to which mankind can reconstruct life. Though there are various ideals, their essence is reduced to a notion of “social justice”, that is, to the reconciliation of personal freedom and social prosperity.

Ideological struggle in society is reduced to the establishment and subversion of social ideals. Society should be interested in forming ideal models of social development and people’s behaviour which would be in the interests of social development, state preservation and personal establishment. If a social ideal is formulated wrongly, it can ruin society.

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