UDC 140.8

Russian National Character: from Traditionalism to Radicalism

Pobegutsa Aleksey Vasilyevich
applicant of the Department of Philosophy
Kuban State Agrarian University
Krasnodar, Russia
e-mail: hamster_ares@mail.ru

Danilova Marina Ivanovna (research advisor)
editor of Polymathis Scientific Journal
Doctor of Philosophy, VAK professor, the head of a chair of the Department of Philosophy
Kuban State Agrarian University
Krasnodar, Russia

Abstract

The market reforms of the last decades of the 20th century were based on the theory of rational economic behaviour of a so-called homo economicus. Narrow-mindedness of this point of view is obvious. An economic player is under influence of various factors including those of non-economic origin. Ethnocultural and ethnopsychological characteristics have earned a special place among them. The author tries to answer the question how, to which degree, and in what direction the national character and the mentality of the Russian people influence the economic culture and the assessment of rationality of economic behaviour. The national psychology forms world orientation and social experience, develops certain mental and behavioural predispositions. This article covers the features of the Russian national character and mentality which possesses dualism and radicalism. These two traits show themselves in history and economic culture which have a negative impact on the state of the society and the human. A special attention is paid / The authors pays a special attention to the ethical principles of economic culture and activity which are the key values of all the Russian culture. The task is to blend, if possible, the ideals and the traditions of the society with its up-to-date changes. One should show preference to the evolutionary path of development as opposed to the revolutionary one.

Key words: national character, national spirit, traditionalism, radicalism, ethnicity, national way of life, Russian intelligentsia, revolutionary nature, criticality, social ideal,

welfare of the people, culture and civilisation, moral absolute.

Drastic changes in the Russian history and economic activity [see 1] can be explained to a large extent by the peculiarities of the national character and mentality of the Russian people, the dualism and contradictions of which were noted by Nikolay Berdyayev in his Russian Idea [2]. These dualism and contradictions resulted from various causes which as a whole led to the pendulous character of the changes.

Igor Kon defines the national character as "a unity of psychological features and ways of action formed and adopted in the course of joint historical development and imprinted in the social mind." [3, pp. 17–28] The first attempts to explain the peculiarities of the national characters by the differences in climate and geographical conditions can be traced back to Herodotus. In the Age of Enlightenment, Montesquieu introduces the notion of national spirit which, according to him, depends on the environment and climate. Spiritual way of life, as Gustav Shpet says, is a variable value, but a value which is constantly present in full social experience. The strong point of tradition is that the spiritual wealth of an individual correlates with the past of the people among which they reckon themselves. The spiritual way of life matches of a person the spirit of their people [4, pp. 475–577]. According to Shpet, ethnical identity shows itself through subjective consciousness that a person belongs to a certain ethnos. An ethnos is, according to Nikolay Trubetskoy, a symbolic person.

On the contrary, Lev Gumilev supports the point of view that collective psychology has an impact on an individual. He writes about the power of an ethnic field which he calls passionarity. It creates the rhythm at the heart of the work of ethnic groups which is called historical activity. Any break in this rhythm may adversely affect all the efforts.

In harsh times, as a reaction to uncertainty, the role of ethnicity, as the most ancient and stable form of informational structuring of the world, increases [5, pp. 26–29].

Tradition is not only stable and conservative, it also possess potential creative power. "All the great things a man or a people can tell only in their own way and all the work of a genius is born right in the fold of national experience, spirit, and way of life." "Show me how you believe and pray, how your kindness, heroism, sense of honour and duty show themselves, how you sing, dance, and recite poetry, what you call 'to know' and 'to understand,' how you love your family, who your favourite leaders, geniuses, and prophets are: tell me all this, and I will tell you what nation you are son of; and all this depends not on your conscious rule, but your unconscious spiritual way of life." [6, pp. 134–289]

Inconsistency of the Russian character springs from struggle between the East and the West, two tendencies of Russian historical development, in the history of the Russian people. Along with a great faith in messianism of the Russian people, there were split and discord which led to the age of criticism [2, p. 21]. In its turn, it had an influence on a revival, on search of a person's moral ideal in the fold of freemasonry. The latter prepared for search of true universal Christianity and for coming of the age of philosophy in Russia.

The age of criticism gives rise to the Decembrists and opens the age of revolution. Secrets societies provided for appearance and strengthening of socially tinged thoughts. The Freemasons and the Decembrists prepared for appearance of the Russian intelligentsia and the Russian literature. As N. Berdyayev writes, the themes of the Russian literature will always be Christian, even when the writers, in their own mind, will depart from Christianity [2, p. 32]. These are the problems between creativity and sanctity, creativity and salvation. The Russian intelligentsia is an idealistic class which ideas lived in the past and the future, but not in the present, therefore they felt themselves groundless.

N. Berdyayev convincingly shows that not only tradition, but also revolutionism (utopianism, nihilism) is historical in Russia [2, p. 34]. It is revolutionism in which the writer sees the dynamism of how changes in the life show themselves. If the Russian dogmatists take a religious form, the left

intelligentsia assumes a character of a monastic order (asceticism, ability to sacrifice, going through martyrdom). The appearance of them both is legacy of the split which gave rise to the conflict with state authority.

N. Berdyayev considers Radishchev, accuser of serfdom and one of the first Russian populists, to be the founder of the Russian intelligentsia. The populists (narodniks) put welfare of the people and supremacy of conscience above everything else. The Russian intelligentsia was not homogeneous, but it was united by the radicalism of their views: in search of ideal reality and better life, they saw their ideal, some saw it in the past, in pre-Petrine Russia or in the ways of development of the Westernism, some saw it in a revolution to come. They were consumed with emotional revolutionism, as N. Berdyayev characterised this state of the society [2, p. 36]. Criticality, overestimation of the value of all the political forms of government, being against the empire and "for the sake of people," feeling of guilt towards it, and desire for serving it, these are the features of the Russian intelligentsia.

According to N. Berdyayev, Russian thinking tends to totalitarian teachings, this results from religious mentality of the Russian people in search of the final truth and justice. Berdyayev's thought turned to be prophetic: the seeds of Marxism fell on fertile ground.

Radicalism also influenced the formation of philosophy and the perception of reality. The rise of philosophy under the impact of the German classical literature was positive (one should notice that it soon became a disappointment), while German influence on the Russian statehood was harmful and fatal, according to N. Berdyayev. On the one hand, aspiration for progress, revolution, and the latest achievements of civilisation, on the other hand, acute realising of vacuousness and deformity of all the results of the world progress [2, pp. 39–41].

The Slavophiles were the first Russian populists and the first who opposed a religious culture to a godless civilisation. Religious thinking is more coherent than the Western one, according to the Slavophiles. The Western theology is abstractive in its mind, while the Orthodoxy possesses inner integrity and aspiration for inner real content. Fedor Dostoyevskiy stood

for necessity of the moral absolute. The source of the moral deadlock of the West, as the writer thought, was "ruin of the moral absolute." The moral absolute is either present in the mind of the people, and lives, or not, and then it goes to its end.

The Slavophiles sought in history, society, and culture the same spiritual integrity they found in their soul. They wanted to discover an original type of culture and social order on the spiritual ground of the Orthodoxy. They believed in a great mission of the Russian people and in a truth hidden within it. It was a social ideal which the Slavophiles created. But, as Lev Tolstoy wrote in his letter to Yakovleva in 1910, the ideal is always unachievable, but it does not mean that one should give it up as hopeless and not follow it; right on the contrary, one should do all their endeavours to become more and more close to it.

It is faith in which Khomyakov saw the motive basis of the history, while the Western rationalism was chained with necessity. The Russians have more spiritual freedom than the more free and educated peoples of the West, it is a polar feature of the Russian people, according to the Slavophiles. This results in religious wayfaring and Russian rebelliousness.

A traditional society is built in the same way as family relationship is. According to N. Berdyayev, a greater community character is peculiar to the Russians as compared with the peoples of the West, and it is a metaphysical quality of the Russian people. Khomyakov saw the ideal of the social life structure in Russian community in which one feels free "as in a chorus." Generally speaking, there are three bases of Russia, according to Khomyakov: the ideal Orthodoxy, the ideal autocracy, and the ideal nationality. Berdyayev calls it a utopia [2, pp. 55–60]. Dostoyevskiy also opposes the fixed ideal of the Slavophiles and stands for tragic realism of life.

Russian thoughts of property are defined not by attitude towards property as a social institution, but by attitude towards the person, towards the search of social justice, these are the things the struggle against the bourgeoisie and rejection of the bourgeois world are connected with.

Philosophy was considered either a way of changing the soul

(disposition of the Slavophiles towards religion) or a way of changing the society (that of the Westernisers towards revolution, towards socialism), and the second line won, though in both cases philosophy carried a dual character. As early as in Herzen's works one might observe appearance of the populist socialism to oppose the petty bourgeoisie of the Westernism and disappearance of personality, as a person is only possible in community. And, as N. Berdyayev notes, the socialistic Westernism is here more Eastern than Western [2, p. 68], in the Marxism of the Communists there are some features of the Russian messianism [2, pp. 72–73], but there is also radicalism, as we would say.

The beginning of the 20th century in Russia is marked by the development of industrial capitalism and the socialist revolution, by the destruction of the state apparatus which followed it, and by building of a new socialist economy. The end of the century is characterised by the breakup of the state, shock therapy, privatisation, and modernisation of the economy. The difficulties of the transition period were connected not only with the moral losses, but also with the real events of the civil war in the first case and with the gangster repartition of property in the second case. The expenses were too high. Perhaps, more balanced combination of traditions and innovations in the process of building a new life without shock could lead to the same results, but with lesser losses [see, e.g. 7]? It is not radicalism, but evolutionism which is a more humanitarian way of development which take into account all the spiritual and cultural experience of the people. A special attention should be paid to the creative potential of the tradition in contrast to the destructive power of the revolution despite all the dynamism of the latter.

Ivan Turgenev's words sound as an edification for the descendants when he says that in the ages of the people's life which are called transition, the cause of an intellectual person, of a true citizen of the homeland is moving forward despite the difficulty and, often, filth of this way. To go without any loss of the basic ideals (Dostoyevskiy's spiritual absolute) which all the life of the community is built upon, the community which they justly belong

to. Sometimes, in such periods there is a lack of everyday laborious task in order to achieve the social harmony in the combination of old and new, of traditions and innovations, of consideration for the people.

References

1. Danilova, M. I., Anastasov, V. D. & Pobegutsa, A. V. (2012). Radicalism in Solving the Peasant Problem in Russia. *Scientific Journal of KubSAU, 2012*(5). In Russian. Retrieved from: http://ej.kubagro.ru/2012/05/pdf/36.pdf

2. Berdyayev, N. (2015). *Russkaya ideya [Russian Idea]*. Saint Petersburg: Azbuka.

3. Kon, I. S. (1971). K probleme natsionalnogo kharaktera [On the Issue of National Character]. In Porshnev, B. F. & Antsyferova, L. I. (Eds), *Istoriya i psikhologiya*. Moscow: Nauka.

4. Shpet, G. G. (1989). Vvedeniye v etnicheskuyu psikhologiyu [Introduction to Ethnic Psychology]. In Shpet, G. G., *Sochineniya*. Moscow: Pravda.

5. Lebedeva, N. M. (1997). Etnicheskaya i kross-kulturnaya?.. K voprosu o metodologii otechestvennoy psikhologii [Ethnic and Cross-Cultural? On the Issue of Methodology of the Domestic Psychology]. In Lebedeva, N. M. (Ed.), *Etnicheskaya psikhologiya i obshchestvo*. Moscow: Staryy sad.

6. Ilin, I. A. (1993). *Put k ochevidnosti [A Way to Openness]*. Moscow: Respublika.

7. Pobegutsa A. V. (2017). The Dialectics of Traditions and Innovations in Economic Culture. *Society: philosophy, history, culture, 2017*(7). In Russian. Retrieved from: http://dom-hors.ru/vipusk-7-2017-obshchestvo-filosofiya-istoriya-kultura/