

УДК 100

Transformations of Philosophy in Modern Russia

Boris V. Markov*

*St. Petersburg State University,
5 Mendeleevskaya Linia, V.O., St. Petersburg 190000 Russia¹*

Received 10.04.2008, received in revised form 06.05.2008, accepted 15.05.2008

The article examines the place and role of philosophy in modern Russia and how its transformations are determined by changes in political and cultural life. The relationship between philosophy and the state, the status of philosophy in our information-oriented society, and the influence of globalization on the development of philosophy are also discussed.

Keywords: globalization, information-oriented society, new technologies, new paradigm of classical education, national idea.

Introduction

In the first period of democratization, Russian intellectuals and large sections of the public took an active part in political life. So, political parties and ideologies seemed to be unneeded. New political technologies appeared that aimed to create not to develop and propagate programs of political reconstruction, but to create new mass media that influence people's behaviour by suggestion rather than persuasion. Philosophy lost its position as a fundamental discipline.

Nowadays, notwithstanding the invasion of mass-media, the decline of interest in politics among the Russian public is considerable. This is a real danger for such indifference leads to the death of politics. Now it is time to pay attention to traditional methods of formatting of civic virtues (first of all, civic responsibility) which have always been cultivated within the system of classical education (particularly in philosophy). I don't mean a return to historical materialism. Russian

philosophy is now suffering a considerable transformation that must be described and estimated in the course of a discussion between philosophers and the public. This will contribute to the public image of philosophy. Eventually it remains a compulsory branch of learning in the system of higher education, but people are often careless as to the quality of their education.

So what kind of philosophy is needed now in Russia? The matter concerns not only philosophy as a system, but one that forms the bases of human world-view.

The age of globalization, although providing great opportunities for communicating and exchanging information and products, is fraught with danger: it destroys the of traditional inhabitation of man and the appearance of "citizens of the world". Civic virtues are vanishing, nobody wants to bear the transcendental load of service to his country. The values of knowledge are becoming hackneyed, and nobody wants to

* Corresponding author E-mail address: bmarkov@mail.ru

¹ © Siberian Federal University. All rights reserved

devote himself to the service of truth, to defend it against the pressure of ignorance. If philosophers want to promote the growth of life, their task must be to call society to humanizing of the spaces inhabited by human beings. At the same time, one cannot underestimate positive qualitative changes brought about by communicative transformations. Social reality is becoming more complicated, more differentiated, and it now provides more opportunities for games and freedom. Ecological thinking doesn't allow hostility and violence.

Our nation needs an effective symbolic system of self-preservation which could protect us against submitting to foreign ideology and ensure national solidarity. This purpose can be achieved by means of a national idea. To make the national policy effective, it is necessary to describe the structure of Russian society and answer the following questions: what can now consolidate autonomous individuals into a powerful nation and what is the role of philosophy in this process.

Philosophy and the state

One of the principal trends of the age of globalization is the change of the place and role of philosophy as a form of thinking, as a whole set of methods of intellectual and psychological understanding cultural heritage (the "living soul" of culture); of forms and methods of innovative research that considerably reduces the risks of social development. The danger of unstable development, the increasing harm done by administrative mistakes, to say nothing of the self-interests which are especially destructive in administrative decision-making – all these facts appeal for the review of philosophy's mission and its potential in present-day Russia.

Since the 19th century we have become accustomed to an image of philosophy which occupies a critical position in the relations with public authorities. The state needs not only military and economic protection, but also a

symbolic one to give a stable meaning to life. This is precisely the main function of modern philosophy. Constructive philosophical criticism contributes to the improvement of society and prevents it from falling into lethargy.

In the opinion of intellectuals, philosophy is a form of free thinking intended to educate free intellects that consider the existence of the state of "necessity and reason" as an obstacle rather than a favourable condition for creative work. An established national philosophy is considered to be an ideology.

Does a state need "free intellects" able to criticize it? By the highest standards, they are needed although they give considerable trouble to the authorities. It is necessary to realize that the power of a state is supported not only by implicit obedience. So let us suppose that a philosophical base is necessary for greater policies aimed at the common good. A philosopher should be able to contribute to educate of a qualified statesman. He should also study society and civilization.

Everyone has a right to express his views, but only few of us are capable of a public attitude. Philosophers need to form theirs first. Their main function consists in interpreting society's spiritual values rather than in criticizing. A positive attitude is needed now. To protect science and public authorities from hysterical criticism and instill self-confidence into people's minds – this is the "immune" function of philosophy.

So long as nobody knows what kind of philosophy is needed, the philosophers'elite should not dictate its form and content. Let's take as an example the public opinion to which we refer as to basis and which we form at the same time. What kind of philosophy is being formed today in the minds of our fellow-countrymen and is it the one we would like to have? Formerly the support of philosophy was determined by the belief that it promotes the formation of civic virtues. Then it began to be considered as an ideology.

A certain compromise was achieved within academic freedom: public authorities did not impose a certain kind of philosophy as required, and professors, in turn, did not propagate their political views within the walls of their university. Of course this balance was not controlled, but on whole the teaching of philosophy within the system of classical education fulfilled the task of forming a “political animal” – zoon politicon, according to the definition of a human being given by Aristotle.

But the question is whether a professor is able to rise above current politics and not to stoop to support or to criticize it. Can one unsuspectingly believe in the patriotism, impartiality and selflessness of bureaucracy, police, guardians of cultural heritage, soldiers, and scientists? Isn't it true that everyone tries to benefit from his status? Is it possible to create a society which would not depend on the personal qualities of its members? It is apparently impossible; nevertheless it is necessary to provide honesty and competence of management personnel. Formerly this goal was achieved through fear rather than through morals, so restoring the old order will not be effective.

Philosophy as a vocation and trade

The decline of philosophy's prestige is accompanied by the general crisis of the educational system. This crisis is one of main phenomena of current Russian reality. University science, which worked for industrial giants, as did the entire educational system, had an applied character. Industrial stagnation led to the fall in demand for scientific development. Since state financing was reduced, the leading profile and special departments of technical universities have been stagnating.

Nevertheless, we don't call for the total restoration of the old system. Certainly a utilitarian approach ensures neither pluralism nor freedom, so it is necessary to critically estimate

the old ideal of science and education. The ruin of fundamental science was predetermined by the disintegration of the USSR. Since Russian economy is development stopped, there has been no need either for fundamental or applied research. All over the world, the state is suffering a crisis and is losing its leverage. Economy, finances, information are leaving its control. If a state even wanted to save such symbols of its power as science, education and culture, it has no means to do it. Civic society is unable to maintain all these institutions up to standard. Science, education and culture are left to their own resources. Knowledge is becoming an article of trade. Those who always considered truth and did not demand a measure of utility in science are against such a way of development. But come to think of it, truth is a relative concept. Relativistic physics does not claim any more to give an exhaustive picture of the world through devices and experiments. In exactly the same way we should consider the practical needs that determine the demand: it is also a modus of being.

The market is more dangerous for humanities: driven to despair, people need not scientific criticism, but myth and religion. It is also a challenge for serious scientists. They must understand that the “criticism of prejudices” in which they specialized is becoming destructive. Instead of introspecting, they should produce some positive ideas concerning the future of our country. As a result, the truth will correspond with the practical need and will find a market.

Philosophy as the “queen of sciences”, as a producer of the method, a legislator of rationality is now a glorious past. The Bologna process placed the profession of philosopher in danger. In modern Russia there is no need for philosophers, just as for universities, theatres and other symbols of a nation's ambitions. With the breakup of “the coldest monster”(according to the definition of Nietzsche), a hard time for philosophers is

coming. What is the role of philosophy in the open society? It is no longer needed as an ideology; its methodological function is also in doubt. Perhaps philosophy should return to the ideal of wisdom and perform cultural and educational functions?

Nowadays it is mass-media and not books or lectures that serve as the principal means of education, so the old practice of classical education becomes unclaimed. Philosophical departments are no longer popular among high school graduates who prefer to choose culturology, political science or religious study. Philosophers are underpaid for their profession, which seems a waste of time. But we professional philosophers should not only adapt our profession to the market, but also create it. So vast discussions between philosophers and public concerning the advantages of philosophical studies must be organized. Philosophy was formed in the fight with ignorance and in the search for the truth. Although the relationship between philosophy and sciences is now far from ideal, there is no doubt that they are closely connected. It seems that the methodological and Weltanschauung functions of philosophy are not still in question. At the same time, philosophers have always been concerned about forming civic virtues and even sought to rule over their countries. Now such an intention seems too orthodox; nevertheless the educational mission of philosophy should not be abandoned. In the last century, it basically developed as criticism of ideology and the positive forms of power. Existentialists used to concentrate on negative rather than on positive experience. Aristotle had considered surprise as the source of philosophy; Heidegger replaced it with horror. It is evident that philosophy like this has a destructive rather than a positive effect.

Philosophy in information-oriented society

The dominant role of mass-media in forming a new type of a man for whom written texts are of secondary importance has already become a generality in the world of information culture. The idea of a book as principal means of education and of the ideological unanimity of society turned out to be a great illusion. The “universal literature” is being replaced by new transnational information structures.

The spread of the Internet modified the modern cultural situation. Media instruments determine the essential features of human life, not only in the field of literature and art, but also in their influence on science, philosophy and politics. The Internet seriously intends to create a certain world community. The habitual world-view and way of thinking are suffering considerable changes; many fundamental principles of life are being revised. The Russian philosophical community is responding to this process in different ways. The older generation considers it a symptom of cultural decay and a danger that they try to resist, essentially with administrative methods, by strengthening the traditional educational system. Young scientists show more flexibility in this matter. They begin to use the media as their main source of information and as an instrument of mind control. A typical feature of the younger generation is the so-called “clip perception”, that is a series of pictures quickly replacing each other which don't attract special attention.

The arguments of both the opponents and defenders of electronic media are well known. First of all, there is the problem of educational method: a book develops the skills of thinking, a screen – those of manipulation. The use of new media for political purposes causes the most serious concern. Mass media have always been used as a concentrated influence on public opinion. But

written texts could be subject to criticism, which allowed them to be kept at arm's length. Modern media are of little use for discussing of theoretical problems. Certainly free public discussions are still present on television, but they mainly turn to be a performance rather than a form of direct democracy. Under the circumstances, any serious analytic work is not efficient.

But it is true that along with the destruction of old forms of solidarity, modern media provide new facilities for people's integration. So the actual types of communication and collectivity should be described and analyzed in order to make the planning and carrying out of social reforms more effective. This purpose requires serious theoretical and philosophical methods of interpretation of the new information reality in which modern man exists.

The problem of man in the global world

The source of our problems is to be found in the global changes recently experienced by the world. Old collective spaces where people lived together, spoke one language, produced common feelings and ideas, have been suffering from the process of destruction for a long time. Formerly the exchange and unity of ideas served as the base of solidarity. But now such unity of autonomous individuals, hurrying after work to their separate habitations, is scarcely possible. Are there any common problems that could involve them in public life? Classical scholars are constantly warning about the danger of political indifference, apathy and conformism.

But the prospects are not as disheartening as it seems to the defenders of tradition. Actually the life of society continues, although its basic principles have changed. Those who rely on old truths and morals cannot notice the new forms of people's relations in the social system. If we live in an apocalyptic time, we are neither

to praise nor to blame for it. The consequences of the present situation may be graver than traditionalists can suppose. Technological culture caused a condition of language which has nothing to do with religion, humanism or metaphysics. Traditional characteristics no longer allow the full comprehension of such phenomena of culture as instruments, signs, works of art, laws, customs, books, machines and other artificial objects, which cannot be put into such categories as spirit and substance, soul and body, object and subject. An attempt to interpret such complicated phenomena in terms of single-valued ontology and double-valued logic can have a destructive effect.

Actually new technologies are more humane than traditional ones. It is the mode of thought of those who use these technologies rather than technologies themselves that should be a matter of concern. Formerly scientific and technical discoveries were used by the military, but even now large companies regard discoveries in the fields of genetic and computer technologies in just the same way as the capitalists of the earlier times relation to mineral resources.

The most impressive example of technological violation at an intimate level is the phenomenon of genetic engineering which offers the idea of reconstructing of a human being. If the organic body cannot be saved, an artificial one is to be created. Until scientists can obtain such an artificial body, it is possible to use cloning to replace diseased organs. The fear of the technological violation of the subject is based on the threat of objectification. Geneticists don't use the notion of the personal subject in a moral or causal sense; such an attitude leads to the idea of the total loss of subjectivity. In reality, the philosophers' apprehension results from a double-valued logic. Understanding this fact caused philosophers to move from Heidegger's post-metaphysical ontology to Deleuze's theory of the multiple world. Anti-technology hysteria

is, to a large extent, a product of the philosophy engendered by the fear of a process that makes the metaphysical differences between things disappear. At the same time, man owes his status of a human being to technology. When we describe man as a subject, we reduce technology to a simple means of realizing spiritual projects. Probably the old technologies brought nature and substance into a state of ontological servitude. New technologies tend to give things an opportunity to be themselves. Substance is no more a raw material used by a subject-master for his own needs. Information technologies open the door to non-violence and form a new type of rationality, instead of ignoring it in the search for self-actualization. Thus the matter is of synergy, of cooperation. Many scientists begin to mention a “dialogue with nature”, giving up the habitual idea of its conquest. The growth of military and technical madness is incompatible with new technologies. In a world that is now a system of inter-intellectual connections, cooperation is becoming more effective than subordination. Man has always been a product of domestication, socialization and civilization. We should remember that even the most formal business relations have very intimate and profoundly human bases.

Conclusion

Modern time is not something homogeneous. That’s why it cannot be evaluated in one-sided way. Perhaps it can be described not as a sphere, medium or membrane, but as a network consisting of thin channels in which people, goods, knowledge and capital (including cultural and symbolic ones) circulate. In this situation a “molecular” approach could be effective. The course of “globalization” has its peculiarities depending on concrete conditions. It is necessary to describe the channels of circulation of money, information, cultural artifacts and other values. It is important to examine people and organizations serving these systems, the effects of imitating European cultural patterns in the fields of economics, politics, human rights, art etc. by non-European nations and vice versa. Talking about interaction between cultures is not enough; it is necessary to observe the transformations of cultural and other capital. For example, it is necessary to establish the extent of the changes in the mentality of Japanese and other Asian nations that are competing successfully with the West in the field of industry. Finally, we must determine the real effects of modernization in Russian history and decide if we can manage to save our identity this time in spite of the current protracted reforms.

References

- B.V. Markov, Democracy and Internet. *Internet and the Contemporary Society* (St. Petersburg, 2000), in Russian.
- B.V. Markov, Hermeneutics Dasein and the Destruction of the Heidegger’s Onology, *Hermeneutics and Deconstruction*, (St. Petersburg, 1999), 10 – 33, in Russian.
- B.V. Markov, Is the term of life actual for the cultural anthropology, *Culturology as It Is* (St. Petersburg, 1998), in Russian.
- B.V. Markov, *Philosophical Anthropology*, (St. Petersburg, 2008), in Russian.
- B.V. Markov, “Philosophical Anthropology and Problems of the Complex Research of Human”, *Man. Philosophy. Humanism*, Vol. 9 (St. Petersburg, 1998), in Russian.
- B.V. Markov, *Science and Alternative Forms of Knowledge* (St. Petersburg, 1995), in Russian.

B.V. Markov, “Scientific Cognition and the Civilization”, *Science and Culture* (Moscow, 1995), in Russian.

B.V. Markov, *The Heart and the Intellect: the History and Theory of Mentality* (St. Petersburg, 1995), in Russian.

B.V. Markov, *The Human Problem In the Mass Media Epoch. The Human Prospects In the Globalizing World* (St. Petersburg: Philosophical Society, 2003), 62–84, in Russian.

B.V. Markov (in co-authority) *The Orientation Strategies in the Post Contemporaneity* (St. Petersburg, 1996), in Russian.