
CREATIVITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF COMPREHENDING PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

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Abstract

This article analyses the correlating concepts of ‘spirituality’ and ‘creativity’. The authors prove that creativity can be legitimized in the Russian social and scientific discourse in case it is understood as mass social-related creative work associated with the traditional forms of spirituality. Philosophical reflections reveal that spirituality in the Russian society is not only heritage (a thing of the past) but it is also actualized in the social creative work of Russians. The conceptual division of spirituality and creativity dates back to European rationalism, creative internalization and professional reductionism. The Russian philosophical tradition considers spirituality as the trinity of goodness, beauty and truth. If creativity acquires egocentric characteristics, it leads to disappointing results: the separation of society in a creative minority and an inert traditionalist majority. The article explains this trend by the disappearance of solidary identities and the concentration of professional sovereignty in groups of ‘chosen ones’. However, the priority of interesting and meaningful work, self-realization and public utility demonstrate the limitations of ego-centrism and the ‘narrow corridor’ of opportunities for the majority to participate in joint creative practices aimed at a variety of social initiatives and projects. The main results achieved in this article are, firstly, the substantiation of the inseparability of creativity and spirituality, social actions and moral norms, and, secondly, the appeal to practical spirituality in strive towards a better future for a person and society.

Keywords: personality, individual, social practices, new forms, reality

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1. Introduction

Creativity and spirituality are interpreted as synonymous but opposite in meaning philosophical connotations. Spirituality is associated with the tradition of hesychasm, an insight into a person's nature and their definition as an ideal substance. Creativity is defined in the framework of dephilosophizing the world, shifting to material and practical activities and legitimizing an active person. Essentially, both spirituality and creativity are traced back to 'creatio', i.e. a creative work. However, the Augustinian spirituality is a person's contemplation of divine things. Creativity contains indications of creation and a person's acquisition of the sense of sovereignty. In the context of spirituality, the world is seen as divine. Characterized by completeness, it is formed from some inner source and moves along the path predetermined by order and fate. Creativity is realized as the God's identity existing outside the world and above it.

Y.G. Volkov and A.V. Lubskiy believe that the transition from a monistic interpretation of social reality to a pluralistic one gives Social sciences an opportunity to discover many spheres and move from the idea of a single source of truth and originally given social world to the process of generating a diversity of right and yet conflicting worlds as self-sufficient and coherent social realities [1]. Indeed, the limits of creativity have been outwardly broadened since research eliminated the objectivity criterion determined by philosophical monism. The reality built by a researcher is no longer ontologized in its classical sense; its authenticity is confirmed by 'novelty' and a strive to find new languages and discourses to comprehend the world around. In this context, a difficulty consists in the fact that the correspondence between social reality and cognitive context does not cancel the criterion of objectivity, therefore statements can be groundless and a scientist can experience a new social reality that is unproven or narrowed down to consistent judgments and generalizations. Thus, there is a need to study spirituality and creativity not only from the genetic perspective determined by the deontologization of knowledge but also with due regard to the phenomenon of creativity complemented by parascientific and quasi-scientific theories. These paradigms reveal the devastation of quasi-creativity aimed at imitating new things and removing borders between scientific and unscientific knowledge. It is widely accepted that creativity contains cognitive impulses and modern social knowledge corresponds with the principles of methodological pluralism. The principle of knowledge selection remains unchanged and requires this problem to be comprehended in the context of preserving the philosophical tradition of objectivity. In other words, Philosophy ceases to be the spiritual quintessence of the corresponding epoch if it does not try to establish universal criteria for perceiving the world.

2. Creativity and spirituality: the shift of Philosophy to subjectivity

As the Italian philosopher R. Guardini noted, new freedom and a new worldview are possible from a certain distance [2]. Characterizing this state as

an impulse, R. Guardini justified the proposition that there is a desire to transform the whole world. If spirituality is self-restraint and humble in the face of infinity, sovereignty means a person's creative nature and manifests itself in creative works. That is where the concepts of spirituality and creativity diverge. Creativity determines the capability of a person to become the world centre. Spirituality is characterized by inner scepticism and is proof that the world does not belong to people but rather to God. Creativity, like creative works, aims to explore the world empirically. R. Guardini explained this semantic transition by the cognitive work conducted in the Middle Ages. Medieval philosophers tried considering both Revelation and ancient philosophy to build a model of world perception on the ancient authority, including experimental knowledge of various things and contemplation of their essence [2, p. 175]. Thus, people grow independent in their spiritual development and their worldly activity can be blessed by God. Creativity is the democratization of spirituality and its de-elitization if this process is considered in the context of the Reformation. The Renaissance consolidated the idea of restoring the spiritual and material unity of the world. However, this mental shift showed that the world is split in two: there is a sphere of transcendent foundations and the world of things. A person's choice is influenced by these two poles of being and is manifested in philosophical traditions.

In other words, creativity can be understood as a movement towards secular and reasonable knowledge achieved through the creation of new images and the renunciation of treating the 'old' as an unsurpassed standard. In this sense, spirituality is formed by the limits of cognitive discourse and becomes an attribute of a person's spiritual being. Creativity is associated with a different kind of feelings, one's own importance as a transforming person rather than a carrier of spirituality. Spirituality is objective and universal. Creativity can be seen as a personal gift that gradually unfolds in the process of its own subjective initiative. In this case, the personality and the subject are the same, and it can be assumed that an individual's subjectivity correlates with the world spirit. Their general basis is the capacity for creativity. It comes as no surprise that an interest shown to moral philosophy presupposes new life forms rather than new ideas [3].

During the Renaissance, the concept of natural laws became the main category of scientific explanation. This step was undertaken to legitimize the human nature and exclude the imposition of the surrounding world. Considering the world as a part of nature, people introduce themselves to the environment and better understand their personalities. Embracing the desire for cultural development, people start building their own being [2, p. 189]. Creativity acquires a quasi-religious character since it reveals the true nature of a human being. If a person finds the highest happiness in being an individual, the individual mostly focuses on creativity.

Soul-related discussions are concerned not so much with spiritual aspirations but rather with the worldly nature of things [3, p. 29]. One's soul, knowledge and experience get connected, and a person's greatness consists in

the continuous admiration of himself/herself. Creativity is seen as a link between an intellectual and learning soul and its immortality. This view helps to avoid the rhetoric of a person descending to the level of an animal or the point where a human soul does not differ from a creature's one. The idea of a reasonable person is stated but this rationality is expressed through a concern for the sovereignty of people and their ability to maintain spiritual dominion over the world built into the following gradation – “although absolutely inferior to God, man is immeasurably greater than any other creature on Earth” [4].

Otherwise, spirituality acquires the features of archaism, traditionality, references to the authority and standards of classicism. Creativity is often associated with the removal of barriers to scientific progress, the introduction of new discourses and practices. However, this statement is very dubious, based on subjectivism and loosely related to philosophical traditions. Nevertheless, there are reasons to believe that a sociocultural shift is determined by the dephilosophization of the world. The recognition of multiple worlds gives rise to scepticism and doubts that one can perceive as ‘basic’ foundations of the world. In this regard, creativity is an inspiring idea that legitimizes practical knowledge and feelings beyond the criterion of scientificity.

It should be noted that the initial characteristic of creativity is the ‘goal – principle’ pattern [5] that assumes that a person is aware of the nature and content of creative actions. The problem is that creativity is often associated with the achievement of desired goals, and one's inner cognitive motivation based on spirituality is ignored or goes unnoticed. At the same time, creativity helps to avoid an existential crisis due to its focus on an individual's activity and self-determination.

The Russian religious philosophy recognized the powerful creative power of a wholesome soul [6, 7]. Rational philosophical systems cannot achieve the state of spirituality since they objectify rationality and decline all responsibility for what has been said. For spirituality, it is difficult to be recognized without faith, will and feelings. The crisis of spirituality is the crisis of a high-souled person. However, the retreat of spirituality from the outside world is not the best way to achieve victory over senselessness and vanity.

While considering spirituality and creativity, scholars should overcome the barriers of misunderstanding and alienation, introduce the discourse of spirituality into a person's creative activity without replacing this problem with talks about an open communication or the right to cultural and social diversity. Reflecting on spirituality, one should regard it projectively rather than retrospectively, which requires certain intellectual efforts to comprehend age-old spiritual traditions and the contribution of carriers of higher spirituality [8]. On the contrary, there is a need to comprehend fundamental socio-cultural shifts that democratize the spiritual heritage as an asset of the highest cultural stratum.

3. Spirituality as an alternative to progressivism

Thus, the concept of creativity is formed as an answer to the development of a person and a tool that enables one to see the possibility to satisfy the person's sovereignty through creativity or include individuals in the process of constant transformations. However, the individual's sovereignization through creativity is 'tricky' since creativity can be interpreted as a change in everyday practices, routinization methods or new knowledge.

The criterion of novelty is defining and can be transformed into fashion hobbies or one's desire to appear fashionable. Essentially, creativity is revealed through connotations encoded in the cultural way of life and the so-called limited expression of progressivism. This is an unexpressed but no less effective ban on spirituality since spirituality is projected onto a classical tradition, a person's ontologization and longing for the lost wholesome world. At the same time, one can face profound existential loneliness and the lack of coherence between an individual and the corresponding historical or cultural collectives. In this case, creativity ceases to be a collective quality.

A semantic 'trap' is expressed in boundless individualization, sensitivity to one's own needs and the pursuit of one's self-interests accompanied by obligatory self-expression, indifference to others and the neglect of moral and social consequences of creativity. This creative self-esteem can produce the effect of 'collective madness', i.e. propensity for extremism.

In other words, creativity as a means of regulating aesthetic motivations transforms a mere participant of a dialogue with the world into a person who can become virtuous thanks to good laws. Spirituality is revealed in its initial form: it is a purely individual choice that is not connected with such institutions as culture, family or Church. "Realizing how dangerous it is to delegitimize spirituality, the Russian philosophy of 'unitotality' spoke of the world disintegration, noted that the sum of individual wills was not identical with the universal spirit, and claimed that spirituality aimed to realize the world integrity, the unity of truth, good and beauty." [9, p. 48]

In this regard, the authors of the article can state that the main problem of modern social theories is that they have not developed the understanding of empirical reality, and have not realized that 'great' empirical discoveries are not made through creativity. There is a certain temptation to regard creativity as an alternative to theoretical reflection and contemplation. In this context, spirituality is recognized as the limit of implementing creativity and forcing a theory to reflect a common sense. Indeed, the European intellectual history demonstrates that the 'turn' towards subjectivism or the 'great internalization' (as the English scientist F. Turner called it) excluded spirituality from the highest reasonable source [10]. The ambiguity of these changes was expressed in the fact that the search for inner realities acquired the feeling of incontrovertible inner experience and the dominance of one's opinion over the truth.

The Russian philosophy questions the idea of egocentrism and defends the truth based on impulses and incentives for creativity. The experience of intellectual reflection shows that creativity arises from spirituality, becomes the quality of a thinking person, relies on its own authority and spiritual revelation. The Russian philosophy advocates collective salvation and sharing a person's concern and anxiety not as a unique individual or a bearer of special creative qualities but considering creativity as a way to feel a kinship with others and improve self-awareness as responsibility for the symphony of world principles.

Thus, there is a semantic conflict associated with the division of creativity and spirituality that creates the illusion of immense human freedom but makes people vulnerable in the conditions of massification and the loss of an individual's own face. The Russian philosophy proceeds from the premise that the Kantian postulation of the duty of all sentient creatures to act in accordance with universal laws is not enough to perceive creativity as the expression of spiritual solidarity. A duty is an act of coercion even if it is an inner choice. Spirituality is associated with an individual's voluntary acts and self-aware correlation with others based on the renunciation of one's exceptionalism, i.e. spirituality determines creativity, creative individual acts for themselves and others, and creativity is impossible for a person with a bad conscience.

Taking into account the prevailing intellectual and cultural context, the concept of creativity acquires special significance in the Russian society. This issue is relevant for discussing the nature and direction of modernizing the Russian society, choosing a special path of the Russian development and determining what type of personality dominates in the contemporary Russian society. It seems that millions of Russians have overcome common apathy, indifference and self-isolation, and have taken an interest in self-realization and participation in social life.

The inner meaning of creativity is affirmed as the obviousness of a modern society but creativity understood as freedom does not result in any prescriptions. The theorist of a creative class R. Florida suggested that the reconstruction of creativity introduced into Western sociology in the 1970s and 1980s was associated with the transformation of everyday life, with the fact that social changes were not accidental or chaotic, and human activities became their driving force in economic and social matters [11]. R. Florida considered creativity as the ability to create meaningful new forms. In fact, this understanding follows the progressive and actual interpretation of creativity formed in the modern era. The difference of R. Florida's concept is that the creativity of masses becomes the marker of a modern person. To some extent, R. Florida's ideas criticized the theory of mass-management of a controlled crowd proved by manipulative technologies. This statement rejects a person's simplified positivist interpretation and at the same time reproduces the scheme of sovereignizing an individual, turns creativity into creation rather than destruction.

As the Russian researcher I. Ilyin stated, postmodernists opposed the “sick” civilization of a capitalist society to the work of “genuine artists” acquiring the features of social outcasts in their rejection of society [4]. Despite the pathos of this opposition, postmodernism doesn’t underestimate the potential to manipulate the mood of masses or control human behaviour through expert knowledge (under the guise of neutral knowledge) but falls into the trap of absolutizing self-expression. This situation is emphasized by concerned liberal theoreticians who do not question the postulate of negative freedom but believe that “pangs of conscience” are caused by the fact that the majority is deprived of freedom while self-expression can be based on the deprivation of others’ freedom [11, p. 23]. They also criticize the theory of sacrifice as groundless in the context of achieving equality and freedom. The meaning of creativity addressed to the highest ideals of reasonableness and justice is not recognized.

While describing the phantoms of the Russian society clearly manifested in Russia and former Soviet republics, the Russian scholar J.T. Toshchenko has concluded that spiritual narcissism (spiritual impoverishment) is typical of a society with a disoriented public opinion where it is difficult to adequately describe reality [12]. Creativity understood as the freedom of expression can lead to insinuations, incompetence, parascientific and pseudoscientific knowledge. Therefore, it is so important to develop the understanding of what can be attributed to creativity at the individual and collective level or refer to an imitative activity oriented to market conditions, fashion, consumer demand and value palliatives [13]. In such a difficult situation, it is significant to forget about inflated social expectations and focus on everyday creative works, to undertake step-by-step activities within one’s own knowledge, talents and capabilities. To experience the impact of creativity means to be faithful to one’s public and professional duty, useful to one’s family, relatives and society.

Creativity is not an alternative to the Russian tradition of spirituality. Contradictions between life realities and social creativity arise in the conditions of elitization, isolation from society and devotion to the ideas of choosiness and exclusive esoteric knowledge. In other words, creativity as the awareness of subjective significance is reduced to the cultivation of individual characteristics and to the fact that creativity as the ability to create something new neutralizes fears, phobias and anxieties of a modern person. A creative work becomes creativity in the world of social uncertainty and the conditions of obsolete progressive ideals because it assumes a frivolous attitude to things in existence, i.e. the main thing is not to see clearly but to be a person of action. In this regard, the orientation to individual variability is asserted. Creativity is arbitrary and even destructive innovation advances social changes. In fact, a creative person does not understand or foresee the outcome of the struggle for new things.

4. Creativity and spirituality as reflected in the Russian society

The problems of creativity and spirituality seem to be the concern of a narrow circle of people. The Russian intellectual elite often conceals these issues

and presents them to mass consciousness in the form of ‘glossy glamor’. Furthermore, the most striking fact is that social creativity is formed on the level of an actual request in the Russian society. This idea is proved by the results of sociological surveys where every second Russian agrees to take on a more interesting job to better realize his/her professional potential and to accumulate knowledge and experience [14]. Volunteer movements and the participation of Russians in various social and socio-political initiatives are an indisputable fact of their public life. Social creativity is a hard-to-explain phenomenon since it contains ideological meanings and is characterized by the pathos of rebellion and inconsistency. These ideas can be the source of heated discussions due to a number of reasons. The tradition of ‘literary centrism’ and the exclusive attribution of creativity to the so-called ‘elite’ claiming to be heirs of the Russian intelligentsia and having no ‘love for the people’ is preserved and expressed in a critical assessment of the current moral and psychological state of society, the lack of social empathy and the departure to the world of consuming illusions.

Opponents to the above-mentioned beliefs highlight the rooted national virtues of patriotism and solidarity. However, social reality is much more complicated than theoretical schemes. Therefore, social creativity should be regarded alongside growing awareness of Russians about its significance in the context of real patriotism (business, professional and civil). There is no doubt that periods of economic instability make Russians cautious of any drastic changes in their lives. Opportunistic behaviour is noteworthy because it is influenced by demonstrative patterns but there is also a positive aspect of considering social creativity in the Russian society through the increase of positive mentality and perception of opportunities for professional and social growth [14, p. 238; 15]. The point is that social and genuine creativity is not a universal social value. However, it is impossible to deny that active groups see their public mission in participating in social initiatives and socially useful activities, as well as developing new social projects.

5. Conclusions

The Russian public discourse has adopted the ironic and pejorative meaning of creativity (as an Americanism), which does not correlate with the national tradition of spirituality. It is often considered as a creative class, or a mythologem, based on manipulating the individualism of those who essentially become the subject of new economic coercion and exploitation. In addition, the so-called ‘creacles’ (a creative class) are connected with the future of nomads, people without any personal attachments or favourite jobs, who are not subject to social and market conditions. It is worth mentioning that the Russian society that needs permanent modernization has disposed of retroactivism, i.e. its past ceased to determine the future. It means that the tradition of spirituality can be reconsidered. Incredible as it may seem, the thesis that the Russian society pays its respects to traditional spirituality but is still atomized is quite true since the

experience of mutual help and social sympathy has been lost despite the pride in spiritual traditions.

The Russian society has faced the consequences of consumerism. It becomes obvious that a typical 'consumer' in Russia did not succeed not because the nation hopelessly falls behind in the global consumer race but due to the limits of consuming expansion. In this regard, the authors of the article support R. Florida's concept. The essential difference between two interpretations is that creativity as a mass creative work contains the belief that people can be masters of their destiny if they realize the danger of arrogance and will be aware that the main means to solving rapidly arising problems is the responsibility to themselves and the world around. Refusing to interpret creativity as the growth of power over things in existence, one can be convinced that the Russian society has an opportunity to become a leader in the field of humanitarian knowledge, art, literature and new forms of social creativity. This is the triumph of spirituality.

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