

E.M. Spirova

Why do we need history?

***Abstract.** People of the past are alive due to a special kind of social practice — social memory. Modern psychology demonstrates sufficiently that no one can, on their own, have an adequate understanding of their social behaviour and the way of thinking. However sincere his attempts to be the judge of himself, sooner or later he has to resort to somebody else's judgement and interpretation. This also holds true for the consciousness of nations, confessional communities, political and ideological movements. A historian's belonging to some historiographic tradition or another; undoubtedly influences the character of his research. And to the same degree, a historian's work is influenced by his individuality. Problems and methods of historical anthropology are not infrequently called the history of mentality. This is associated with the French School of Annals. The history of mentalities, however, can hardly pretend to have an autonomous status in the system of historical knowledge. We cannot to foresee to what and how history will respond, but there is an old observation by social psychologists that social shifts begin in a form and depth that nobody expects. People of the Renaissance considered that history began with them, they imagined themselves to be pioneers, aware as they were that they were reviving antiquity. Tradition often seems irrelevant, a password for an archaic period and preposterous old times. But it is in tradition that infinite social experience is crystallized.*

***Key words:** philosophy, history, culture, tradition, stability, historicism, reform, revolution, social experience, progress.*

Tradition and stability

«The work of self-awareness and spiritual renewal goes in the better, the higher the achievement through suffering and readiness to consider the other's (be it even tendentious and malevolent) evaluation» [1, p. 3]. If an anthill is burnt, the memory about this com-

munity disappears without a trace. In human society, however, the life of past generations is not lost. The past continues to be present in actual consciousness. In the humanities, the principle of historicism has been rooted in allowing us to comprehend the past within a framework of historical knowledge, the flow of time, and the will to comprehend the

SPIROVA, Elvira Maratovna — PhD, DSc (Philosophy), Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences.

119991, Russia, Moscow, Volkhonka Str., 14/1, build. 5.

[elvira-spirova@mail.ru]

historical process. «It is also essential that people of the past epochs are not at all capsulated in their times: their statements and acts almost always contain an answer not only to the unique content of concrete practical tasks but also to the repeating *structurality of social situations*. Stagnation, crisis, decadence; reform, reformation, revolution; invasion, defeat, captivity, etc. — they are all typologizable events. They have their spontaneous logic, their types of alternatives, their models of personal responsibility» [1, p. 4].

Tradition has formed the group experience of generations. It is tradition that has determined the stable system of generally acknowledged normative values. Stability as steadiness of tradition in this case is quite combinable with a certain mobility. But do we need the apology of tradition? Does it not revive the endless dispute between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers? In this case we would like to do without ideological evaluations. It is the question of the fundamental principles of life in general. Tradition knows answers to the key human questions. Its normative code is permitted to withstand a struggle with time [2]. Only tradition can ensure social consensus and stability. Only from tradition, like from a reed, in O. Mandelshtam words, can one «elicit richness of the whole note». Its alternative is a pogrom of being.

Each nation chooses its own strategy of survival, — noted the American psychologist Erik Erikson [3]. This is an indisputable consideration of social thinkers. The West has cherished the idea of progress for a long time. It has wished to conquer speed. Work tools and means of communication have changed; the wheel, the plough, the ship, the machine. The mill-stones have turned slowly. Caravels have slowly floated across the vast spaces of yet unexplored seas. At first the wind struck the sails. Then the blades of a steam machine began to twirl rapidly. The speed accelerated violently. Metal rails broke into a run. The sound rushed through wires. Without wires... a plane flew around the globe. A rocket went off into cosmic space. The planet was encircled by informational threads. Political regimes were changing and altering. New forms of human societal life

appeared. The idea of civil society was born. Humankind went through the experience of totalitarian regimes.

In the East, the ideas have been different. In the middle ages, the Chinese travelled all over the world and came to the conclusion that life was properly established only in the Middle Kingdom. In the rigorous cult of tradition, of family values, of national pride. Until now, a Chinese engineer who invented a technical novelty would see his merit only in the fact that he found this idea in the ancients. The experience of the Chinese attitude to tradition is itself unique. But in other countries in the East, for example, in India, Japan, Korea, the attitude to accumulated social experience fixed in tradition has been that of great care and reverence. The people of India went through hard times. But they did not only manage to assimilate elements of different cultures; they managed to preserve their ancient heritage.

In the West, however, the priority of tradition in the social system was wiped away in the past century by various modernizations and economic growth. Traditional society began to designate the most archaic ethnocultural formations, which were studied mainly by ethnographers. The essence of traditional societies was associated with uniformity, invariance. It turned out that the social and cultural organization of many traditional systems is characterized by diversity.

Also, it became clear that many traditional societies that have chosen the path of modernization obtained an odd result. Social systems are breaking up, cultural standards are destroyed. An idea appeared that tradition far from impedes modernization and the very opposition between tradition and modernity has since been questioned.

But can one suppose that the cult of tradition is related to the search for social stability and harmony between various layers of the social system?

Not for the first time in history do politicians remind us of the saving role of tradition in extreme situations. During the stern years of war Stalin recalled our great ancestors and heroes. V.V. Putin also reverted to the grandeur of history. Today he warns

against ill-considered social experiments often mixed with unjustifiable liberalism or social demagoguery.

The essence of tradition doesn't seem to be in opposition to change. Tradition expresses certain unchangeable, universal constants of human life. We can find it in all cultures and in all societies. The main universal constants of human history, such as social progress, eternity of life, and the cyclicity of ecosystems, lose their significance in the modern unstable world. But worship of economics is a comparatively recent phenomenon. For many stages of human history economics did not play a decisive role in the fate of mankind. The role of a stabilizer was played by religion, culture, philosophy, ideology or art.

In a certain context, the words «tradition» and «stability» are synonymous. Are there reasons to regard tradition as an incompletely realized project? In this context it might turn out that more and more programmes requested by the authorities are eventually leading to the deepening of social contrasts; one-sided technological transformation, rejection of the moral dimension of history, which are unfit for the current situation in Russia.

On the other hand, the cult of tradition and the cult of development are worldview extremes. Tradition ceases to preserve a relation to real life if it is not associated with development. Meanwhile, the people of Russia are tired of stability. They have been trained for too long in the idea that for the sake of «vertical of power», a guarantee of mightiness, for safety and national revival, they can relinquish their excess freedom, common sense, inalienable rights, and democratic procedures.

The principle of historicism

Historicism (of Greek *historia*) — investigation, inquiry. The term «historicism» is used with a minimum of three main meanings. The first — as «anamnesis» (Greek *recollection*), a property of the human soul to be aware of itself in eternity, outside the material body; this is the term from Plato's

theory of knowledge, in accordance with which human consciousness is able to recollect the latent knowledge hidden in the soul. Plato believed that ideas abstracted from material things might be comprehended only through anamnesis, that is, the human soul's recollection of knowledge it had before it was incarnated in the mortal body on earth. In Aristotle, anamnesis appears as calling to memory certain knowledge. The second meaning, derivative from the first, is the understanding of historicism as an inalienable property of artistic thinking in general, to an equal extent in various qualities inherent in Classicism and Romanticism. Historicism is the basic idea, the cultural memory of art, a guarantee of spirituality, a link that connects generations. Historicism is the property of the human soul, «universal responsiveness» (according to F.M. Dostoevsky).

There is a differentiation in this, however, from which the third meaning of the term «historicism» is derived: the name of a concrete historical period in the development of European art in the 1830-1880 s. The historicism of the 19th century is pragmatic. Employing particular historical forms and techniques, artists began to express the actual content but dressed their works in «historical costumes», hence a feeling of play or carnival. The historicism of classical art is ideal, romantic, while the historicism of the 19th century is speculative. From the 1830s, there is an increasing discord between classical and modernity, between the high or fine art and craft; «artisticity» and large-scale production of manufactured mass items. Therefore, the threshold of the 1830 s in Europe is associated with an end of classical art. Previously, historical artistic styles had existed; later they were stylizations.

Historicism is the principle of viewing the world, its natural and socio-cultural phenomena in the dynamism of their change, formation in time and regular historical development, presupposing an analysis of the objects of study in their relationship with concrete historical conditions of their existence. Historism (Ger. *Historismus*) is a German philosophical school of the late 19th — 20th centuries, the representatives of which

are W. Dilthey, G. Simmel, F. Meinecke, H. Rickert, M. Weber and E. Troeltsch.

Friedrich Meinecke (1862-1954), a German historian and philosopher of history, sought to portray the rise of historicism and its significance. He regards the phenomenon of historicism, its origin and development, as the greatest spiritual revolution experienced by Western thinking. In his book he created a grandiose conception of the genesis of historicism as a pan-European phenomenon. Historicism rises as a natural result of the ideological development of the West, beginning with antiquity, as the supreme expression of human spirit. Meinecke thoroughly investigates the sources of historicism in major English, French and German thinkers. Trying to overcome and demonstrate a gradual transformation of enlightening thought into historical thought, he pointed out that there is a diametrical opposition between the Enlightenment and its historicism. His book offers an impressive picture of the development of historical thought in Western Europe and opposes a negative attitude to historicism as a way of thinking.

Prior to F. Meinecke, the problem of the crisis of historical thinking was considered by Ernst Troeltsch. He outlined the general philosophical foundations and elements of historical consciousness, how one can think of and construct relations of historical events. According to E. Troeltsch, «the immense urge towards unification of historical life, towards its united forces and goals, towards interpenetration of historical values in the creation of the spiritual and live whole, quite naturally appeared as a response to the split and devastation of history» [4, p. 13].

Troeltsch held that K. Marx and thinkers spiritually close to him undermined the habitual picture of the world. F. Nietzsche, having broken accepted values, was offering a new interpretation of European history.

By historicism, F. Meinecke understood the application to historical life of new life principles acquired in the course of the great German movement from Leibnitz to Goethe. After the Reformation, historicism was the second grandiose event. Historicism is not only a method in the human sciences. Justifi-

cation of the human (spiritual) sciences is the term used to denote the programme of justification of the humanities by *Wilhelm Dilthey* (1833-1911), which he undertook from psychological positions and on the basis of the hermeneutic methodology. Dilthey believed that the method of understanding is a method of immediate apprehension of spiritual integrity. The subject of understanding may be man's inner world, the external world and the culture of the past. Understanding the inner world is realized through introspection. The external world is accessible to understanding just as the objectively existing world is comprehensible for man. For understanding the culture of the past, Dilthey employs hermeneutics.

Dilthey divided the whole sum of spiritual phenomena, referring to the sphere of science, the natural sciences and the human (spiritual) sciences, which only have a relative difference in their subject matter and specificity of methods of investigation. This is conditioned by the fact that the world of nature and the spiritual world are closely connected with each other. Nature is a factor, condition and moment of the activity of the human spirit, rigidly determining human life. At the same time man has a reverse influence on nature, changing the natural world and himself as part of this world. The inevitable action of the natural, not dependent on man, forces and the free human spirit intertwine into a unified universe of properties, relations and connections, parts of which exist independently from the whole and from one another only in the mind.

The core of historicism is an individualizing approach. This does not mean, stresses F. Meinecke, that historicism excludes a search for the general laws and types of human life. Certainly, man's individuality and social and cultural formations he has created have not been studied until now and have not been taken into consideration. It was believed that man preserves his nature at all times. This, however, does not take into account the deep changes and diversity of the forms of being. «The belief in the stability of human nature and primarily, the human mind was formed under the

influence of natural-law thinking that had reigned since the times of antiquity» [5, p. 6]. Natural law as a historical idea and force also became operative along with the breakthrough of a new individualizing method of thought. The 19th century turned into a true melting pot, where both approaches formed a certain single whole.

F. Meinecke sees in historicism the highest level ever achieved in understanding man-related things. Historicism presupposes a reconstruction of the contents of any epoch, its unique character and colour. Under the influence of the idea of development, he believes, the prevailing method of

treating historical changes, termed pragmatism, has been overcome. The hegemony of the analytical tradition in British-American philosophy faced strong challenges of hermeneutic, post-structuralist and post-Marxist theories developed by Continental philosophers. Unlike the traditional analytic philosophy, but in accordance with pragmatism these theories oppose historical positivist values [6, p. 26].

Each phenomena, each process, each discovery, does not arise from nowhere. They have their prehistory. Man cannot be understood without tracing the history of his formation.

References:

1. Solov'ev, E.Yu. Proshloe tolkuet nas [The past interprets us]. (Essays on the history and philosophy of culture). M., 1991.
2. Collingwood, R. The idea of history. N.Y., 2001.
3. Erikson, E. Gandhi's truth on the origins of militant nonviolence. L., 2009.
4. Troeltsch, E. Historism and its problems. M., 1994.
5. Meinecke, F. Die Entstehung des Historismus. M., 2013.
6. Shusterman, Richard. Pragmatist aesthetics. M., 2012.
7. Boas, G. The history of ideas. N.Y., 2004.
8. Dilthey, W. Die Philosophie des Lebens: Eine Ausw. aus seinen Schriften. Stuttgart Göttingen: Teubner: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961.
9. History, historicity and science / edited by Tom Rockmore, Joseph Margolis. Aldershot, Hants; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006.
10. Williams, Bernard, Arthur, Owen. The sense of the past: essays in the history of philosophy. N.J. Princeton; Oxford: Princeton univ. press, 2006.
11. Gurevich, P.S. Tradition as a Guarantee of Stability // 2011. №7. С. 4-7.
12. Gurevich, P.S. The Stable Society Phenomenon // 2011. №8. С. 61-74.
13. Gorelova, T.A. Modernization or Social Progress? // 2013. №1. С. 69-78.