

**Investigation of the Russian cultural context: business elite philosophy**Elena Sergeevna Sakharchuk<sup>1</sup> and Do Jong Kim<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Russian State University of Tourism and Service, Glavnaya Street, 99, Cherkizovo, 141221, Pushkinskiy district, Moscow Region, Russia<sup>2</sup>Wonkwang University (Democratic People's Republic of Korea), Jeonbuk, Iksan, 570749, Republic of Korea

**Abstract.** A social stratum that was informally termed the 'New Russians' deserves close scrutiny for the simple reason that it features all the same wide range of problems characteristic of the Russian society as a whole. Moreover, this range is not limited to the criminal sphere only, as many believe. The 'New Russians' represent a rather notable political force, instigating extremely destructive processes in the Russian economy. But, most importantly, the 'New Russians' are adherents of a particular philosophy that can be described as vulgar monetarism, which at the moment is being forcefully exerted on the Russian mentality, traditional moral values, and the culture of our country in general. First of all, we need to define the notion of the term the 'New Russians'. It is clear that it denotes neither the modern Russian entrepreneurship, nor the criminal world (though, the activities of the 'New Russians' are always associated with both – entrepreneurship and crime). Actually, the fact that the 'New Russians' are filling up the business-criminal niche should be perceived only as a practical implementation of their monetarist thinking. And the very identification of this phenomenon should be based on determining the basic worldview of entrepreneurs form the 'New Russians' cohort. In the most general sense, the 'New Russians' follow the vulgar monetarist philosophy, according to which, the supreme value is assigned to money, the unconditional and universal global equivalent. Such perception of money can be called *pan-monetarism*, which, when it comes to some Russian businessmen, displays all the signs of a true paranoia, when money is no longer viewed as the measure of all values, but rather the world itself turns to be an equivalent of money and the very thing in existence becomes just one of characteristics, a modus of some universal monetary substance.

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**Philosophical origins of the psychology of the 'New Russians'**

The monetarist approach to life has always been inorganic for Russian mentality. For centuries, Russia was living up to an ideal, unfailingly putting the 'arrangement' of its spiritual and moral life above that of the 'creaturely' life, which explains the great tragedy and great vigor of the Russian lifestyle. Its devotion to the spiritual essence of the universe and inexhaustibility of the spiritual potential has always been combined with the leveling of material values, dismissive attitude to flesh and the 'creaturely' human nature. "...In contrast to the rationalist ethics of the behaviour of a Western European, for whom caring for personal well-being is a generally accepted norm, the behaviour of a Russian is not oriented at gaining the benefits expressed in a set of consumer goods, but at achievement of the public recognition, consistent with generally accepted standards. For the Russian public consciousness the acts incited only by one's personal, private interest have never been an accepted norm ..." [1, p. 40]. That is why Russian entrepreneurs were immune to the philosophy of pre-revolutionary capitalism. The overall system of the European values, starting with anthropocentrism and individualism and ending with rationalism and

liberalism had prepared a fertile ground for the acceptance of the mentality of capitalism. In Russia (as well as in the East) such ideological foundation simply did not exist. There was not enough time for capitalism and capitalistic relations to fully flourish either. As a consequence, the concept of capital remained a purely economic category in the pre-revolutionary Russia.

Monetarism did not manage to make advances in the USSR during the Soviet era either. The core communist ideology discouraged it directly or indirectly. The Marxist philosophy, the system of ownership, as well as the implemented principle of egalitarianism, have reduced the value of money to that minimum, which was necessary for the basic life support. Such state policy resulted in a controversy. On the one hand, the real life proved the futility of capital accumulation; population was experiencing a shortage of goods and service rather than funds. On the other hand, lack of economic motivation, low standard of living and a sense of hopelessness encouraged subconscious idealization of the Western values. In this sense, the discontent with the Soviet economic system was causing the growth of oppositional feelings among the people. Rigid constraints imposed on economic freedom would

often associate with unfairly denied opportunities for the arrangement of a decent material-empirical existence. Psychologically, it was one of the reasons for a monetarist stir among a significant part of the post-Soviet entrepreneurs.

The 'free rider' attitude of a contemporary Russian businessman was largely formed under the influence of the corrupt principle of distribution of wealth that had been legalised in the Soviet state. The correlation between the amount of wages paid and the volume of work done was rather conventional in the Soviet Union. A Soviet person was placed between the rock of the salary 'ceiling' that could not be raised and the hard place of a social minimum guaranteed to him by the Constitution. Therefore, Soviet people were not inclined to work hard to 'make money', but rather work in a relaxed manner to simply 'get paid'. This atavism has survived in an unchanged form in the psychology of the 'New Russians', who no longer perceive their commercial activities as toil, but as an opportunity to 'shake the money tree'.

In the 'era of perestroika' when Russia once again changed its socio-political system, the experience of Western businessmen was adopted in no time and transferred to the domestic soil. The centuries-old criminal history lessons were also taken into account. And, most importantly, along with the malformed and unnatural economic stencil that is being forced on our country today, the corresponding mentality is steadily gaining momentum. The faulty hierarchy of values, in which an economic element is placed at the top of the list, made further progress and was 'creatively' revised. The resulting axiological monster has exceeded all expectations. The 'Code of Ethics' of the 'New Russians', which has driven the concepts of the Western mentality to their logical and absurd end, with its absolute lack of principles and cynicism, has stunned even seasoned Russian criminals.

The phenomenon of the 'New Russians' [2, 3] could have emerged only in Russia – in the country of peremptory maximalism, where there is no room for a compromise and where every idea, every character trait is taken to its extreme. The philosophy of economic well-being has got a unique opportunity to have a look at its ugly reflection without makeup and embellishments. As in the portrait of Dorian Gray, the 'New Russians' have depicted the profound essence of spiritual poverty of the modern civilization [4].

In all fairness it should be noted that entrepreneurship objectively contains a potential for monetarisation of an entrepreneur's worldview. The goal of any business transaction is to gain the maximum profit. Thus, the universal assessment of a

company's activities and operations as well as its personnel's professional qualities is in direct correlation with its economic performance. In other words, the axiological aspect of business is narrowed down only to the category of cash equivalents. Even such concepts as 'decency', 'honesty', and 'fairness', which can be considered purely ethical, transform in the world of entrepreneurship into strictly rational and economic categories: 'decency' of a partner is construed just as a mere guarantee that profit will be gained and nothing fancier than that.

Monetary intentionality is an intrinsic quality of entrepreneurship; therefore, it does not represent a distorted hierarchy of values itself, as it encircles only the professional activities. By the nature of their work, however, businessmen fall into a kind of a 'risk group'. The hierarchy of monetary equivalents, which is a necessary and quite appropriate element of business endeavors, has a potential of becoming a lifestyle and extrapolate the criteria for evaluation of entrepreneurial activities to the axiology in general. The only guarantee that such extrapolation will not take place is in the high spiritual potential of the person-entrepreneur and his ability to critically assess himself. Unfortunately, the practice of Russian business life shows that today's local entrepreneurs completely lack such mechanism of spiritual protection.

If we recall the times of emergence of the North American entrepreneurship, we can draw quite a few parallels with the current situation typical for Russian business. As we know, the first generation of American settlers consisted of immigrants from all corners of the world. The reasons that forced people to leave their homes were far from being insignificant. Those people were driven neither by some patriotic considerations, nor by the belief in a 'bright future' of the American economy and neither were they fascinated with the idea of building a postindustrial society. The majority of the early North American settlers consisted of 'the dregs of society'. Some of them were fleeing from the law, some others were running away from the failures and disappointments of their own lives, yet others saw an opportunity for a fast and easy track to a wealthy life in the emerging state. Imperfect legal framework and weak state control provoked surfacing of illegal forms of competitive practices, and only the strongest rivals, that is the most unscrupulous, devoid of moral and spiritual 'complexes', so to say 'pioneers', had made it to the final stage of this 'natural selection' marathon.

The current generation of Russian 'businessmen', at its core, is also being formed on the residual basis. First of all, these are the people, who are not capable of putting to work their intellectual

assets or carrying out constructive or creative activities, as a result, the society pushes them to the outskirts of its spiritual and cultural life. The social composition of the 'New Russians' is very indicative in this respect. They are either former nomenclature, who happened to have a finger in the pie of privatised enterprises, and who easily changed their communist beliefs to the monetarist psychology, or they are outright criminal elements who were quick to realise that in the conditions of socio-political and legal instability operating under the cover of a commercial signage was most convenient, efficient and safe. They could be also the youngblood, who have not completed their school curriculum and are not burdened by any signs of thought process.

One way or another, the generation of 'New Russians' has one feature in common — the moral nihilism, complete inability to any spiritual activity, monetarist psychology and, as a consequence, the 'free rider' mode of existence under the guise of entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is quite logical that growth of the modern Russian businessman's wealth is taking place in the presence of the general decline in production, impoverishment of the country's population, inflation and collapse of the country's economy as a whole.

The best illustration of the shallow inner world of the monetarist philosophy adepts is the multitude of Russian clubs, strip bars, casinos and other entertainment establishments that have gained wide popularity among the representatives of the 'neo-Russian' entrepreneurs. Here they receive everything they need to satisfy their needs, which, as a rule, do not go beyond purely physiological functions. Going to the theatre every now and then, buying expensive works of art and antiquities, which have lately become fashionable in business circles, unfortunately, does not imply that the 'New Russians' are in the midst of a cultural transition, as all these activities are dictated solely by their perception of 'prestige' or the need to create a certain image.

Psychologically, the monetarist mentality is fed by the unconscious inferiority complex in relation to one's own intellectual and spiritual potential [5]. When a person is not capable of developing as a personality, and his creative and intellectual abilities are not recognised as socially valuable, he will naturally find himself in a spiritual crisis. The most adequate way out would be to take real actions aimed at self-education and self-improvement, which, of course, requires significant efforts, great willpower and intelligence. However, if a person has already degraded notably and is unable to recognise that due to his spiritual shallowness, he chooses the other way — searching for the illusions of self-esteem.

One of these illusions is a belief that man is able to form his 'Ego' not from within himself, but from the outside. In this case, the self-assertion of a person becomes dependent not on the real values of one's inner world, but on the public evaluation. Personality ceases to be self-efficient and constantly appeals to the external judges. It is at this point that the philosophy of monetarism comes to the aid, arguing that public recognition may be equivalent to the volume of accumulated capital. The entrepreneur's economic exclusivity is then perceived by him as his exclusivity in general, and the public assessment of his wealth as the assessment of his personality as such.

In closing, based on the above analysis, we can take the liberty of making some conclusions about the viability and prospects of the monetarist psychology of the 'New Russians'.

Firstly, monetarism is not self-sufficient and constantly demands a 'feedback' from public. This is the most vulnerable aspect of the monetarist psychology.

Second, monetarism is alien to the Russian mentality. It ultimately has no future in this country, as it contradicts its traditional values.

Finally, 'pan-monetarism' is a manifestation of a morbid state of mind. Perception of money as a modus of existence and modus of being deprives the human existence of its spiritual meaning and, therefore, is doomed to self-denial.

### **Inferior and superior in christian philosophy**

In some areas of the Russian idealist philosophy the problem of relation between body and spirit (and hence the problem of money and personality) is solved not by placing them in opposition to one another, but by harmonizing them. By and large, man does not have a choice between his 'creatureliness' and spirituality: in his quest for the Absolute, he either makes his flesh superior and becomes the spirit in the flesh, or worships Satan denying the Holy Spirit, and thus dooming himself to the spiritual and physical death. The doctrine of theanthropism does not hold that the spirit should be cleansed from the flesh, but that the flesh should be deified through the spirit. Sophia does not deny material existence, but emphasises its spiritual aspect, adequacy of matter to its Divine purpose. Therefore, the choice that man makes is not about his preference of the spirit over the flesh or the flesh over the spirit; man is unable to choose between the 'superior' and 'inferior'. Focus on the 'superior' is, at the same time, the exaltation of the 'inferior', the universal unity and harmony; focus on the 'interior' is, however, a 'downgrading' of the superior, the

collapse of the spirit and being, destruction, and degradation [6, 7].

To a certain extent, man is fated to the harmony of body and soul, since creativity is his natural state. It is in the process of a creative act that man communes to God, and transfiguration of life in all its forms and manifestations takes place. Therefore, refusal to perform creative, productive activities is, at the same time, the renunciation of God. But the most important thing is that the one-sided focus on bodily-objective existence (and, as we can see, modern rationalism focuses on it) means not only the denial of God, creativity, spirit, but the subjective reality as well.

If creativity means Sophia, spiritualisation of existence, then its true opposite would be the denial of spirituality, spiritised flesh, that is, reduction of anything and everything to inferior matter. This process was aptly characterised by B. Vysheslavtsev as ‘speculation for degradation’, with its philosophical apotheosis being materialism in all its known forms, from Marxism to Freudism. No matter what type of matter is considered the basis of the Universe – economy, atoms, establishment, money, sexuality – the important thing is that in materialism reduction of spiritual being to material factors is a downward process. “The fundamental error of this method, which has been affecting science, philosophy and human psyche in their entirety for centuries, can be expressed in the following statements: ‘culture is only economy’, ‘the spirit is only sexuality’, ‘man is only an animal organism’, ‘organism is only a mechanism’, and all these statements are false! Precisely: not only, but as well! The act of coming down the stairs does not explain anything ...” [8, p. 217]

The “speculation for degradation” transforms the spirit into matter, and a human into an animal. But if we want to be consistent to the end, we must admit that, in contrast to climbing “up the stairs”, the end point of which is the Absolute, the descending “down the stairs” is not limited to the transformation of a man into a beast, but by the laws of logic leads him to non-existence. The fact is that man by definition is not able to be animal-like and concentrate only on his natural biological aspect. An animal is deprived of the ability to conduct spiritual activities and, therefore, the problem of its existence, let alone the antinomicity of its being, are but senseless matters to it. An animal only follows its nature and purpose; its actions are instinctive, it cannot ‘perfect’ itself or ‘degrade’ itself. Man, on the contrary, is fated to make choices and have freedom. He is fated to use his mind and make choices based on his ability to spiritual life. A man cannot just turn into a beast and simply become a creature. A particle

of God that is manifested in him through his mind and spirituality raises man above his flesh and spiritualises it, otherwise the flesh subdues the mind and spirit. The inferiority of the ‘human animal’ is not that he leads a beastly way of life, but that by becoming an animal, he betrays his spirit, deliberately destroys his Ego and renounces God [9].

The animal state of a man is not as harmless and innocent as the original animal state of a natural creature. While for an animal its state is natural, for a man it is a descent, degradation, submission of mind to creatureliness. Human mind slaved by the flesh is disgusting because while dehumanizing and degrading itself, it denies not only itself, but even its animal side, its very nature. The animal world does not know what war and weapons of mass destruction are. Cynicism and vices are alien to the animal world. The animal world does not destroy itself and its habitat. And only man, who dehumanised his mind to the animal state could ‘hit upon the idea’ of crucifying his God. Man cannot alienate from his mind and spirit. Having learnt what good and evil is, he is doomed to make choice. In the *Heart of a Dog* by Mikhail Bulgakov the problem of human ‘animal state’, the ratios of the spiritual and the creaturely, in general, and the problem of human identity is presented in an exceptionally subtle and profound way. Let’s recall how professor Preobrazhensky produced some creature through a fantastic surgery by transplanting human pituitary gland to the animal’s brain. Even the author of this remarkable story finds it difficult to classify this creature. Throughout the entire story Bulgakov cannot, so to speak, identify Polygraph Poligraphovich Sharikov. He calls it different names – ‘a former dog’, ‘a creature that was born in the science lab’, ‘a talking dog’ – but not a man. Why is it so? After all, Sharikov had all the formal attributes of a human being: he could speak, reason, and act rationally; he also had a passport, residence permit, and was engaged in socially meaningful activities. We think that Bulgakov refutes the Darwinian concept in an artistic and aesthetic form, showing an imaginary experiment on the transformation of an animal into human by improving its abilities to reason. Thus, Bulgakov simulates a literal image of Homo Sapiens. As can be seen from the described events, Sharikov would perplex two people ‘with a university diploma’ on numerous occasions. The logic of his reasoning was often so impeccable that two Russian intellectuals could not object it. At the same time, we cannot identify Sharikov as an animal, though he used to be such before and even seemed to be quite a sweet, loving and loyal mongrel. However, Bulgakov cannot classify it as human either. Why is it so?

It seems that Bulgakov answers this question at the end of his novel. Addressing the observation of the investigator at the fact that Sharikov was 'talking', Bulgakov through the character of professor Preobrazhensky, reasonably remarks: "It does not mean that he is a man though" [10].

The tragedy of spirituality lies in its fragility and vulnerability. Material matter in its object-empirical existence is always more stable and reliable. Things survive people. Man is more vulnerable than a machine. It is easier to kill a living being than to destroy a soulless one. "It is always easier to descent than ascent – it is the law of narrow-mindedness of the human nature, a more inert pass" [10]. Creativity and spirituality require some effort, some will. Lowness does not commit to anything. "Just look at the delight of man learning that he has descended from apes, that he is only an animal, only a matter, that sacred love is only sexuality, etc. It seems that every 'only' brings him deep relief, while every 'not only' disturbs and forces to make an effort. Just look at the passion and virtuosity, with which people reveal 'carefully guarded secrets', finding greed and lust everywhere" [10]. There is no 'up' or 'down' for a fallen. A fallen will never admit that there is 'superior', as in this case he will have to admit his 'inferiority'. Economic mentality will never recognise any value other than that of money, because recognition of 'nobility' is, at the same time, the recognition of dissatisfaction with the 'value'.

Rationalism (and monetarism, as one of its most corrupt forms) is in opposition to the spirit, spiritual fullness, because 'strictly' utilitarian and pragmatic interests represent nothing more than the 'speculation for degradation', degeneration of existence to pure materialism. In this sense, it denies the very possibility of creativity; it rejects the very essence of spiritual transformation. "Money is the strength and power of the world separated from the spirit, that is, from freedom, from meaning, from creativity, from love. <...> Money is directed primarily against the holistic spirituality saturating human life in its entirety" [11].

### Conclusion

Despite the heterogeneity of the analyzed concepts and regardless the fact that they all spring from different bases, we, nevertheless, can state that 'duality' of human nature and presence of 'superior' and 'inferior' in men, which exist in permanent confrontation, has been unanimously recognised. And, although each individual personality is characterised by a unique combination of different traits and attitudes, the fact that basic intentions, constituting the content of a man's spiritual life, can shift to one of the extremes allows us to talk about

the prevalence and domination of one intention over the other. It is on the basis of this methodology that we have every right to suggest two basic types of personality [12, 13].

The first type – the most characteristic of the present society and in tune with the spirit of modern civilization – focuses primarily on possessions and market relations; its spiritual life is based on the immanent and empirical intention. This type of person is always inherent to the monetarist approach to life. The intensity with which monetarist features are manifested in this type may have a very wide range: from the 'anal' personality of a petty bourgeois to market-oriented 'pan-monetarist', who personifies a complete negation of individuality. Practical activities of a representative of this type are also invariant: starting from the inability to create and ending with the destructive aggression. Social significance of this type can be assessed in different ways, depending on the results of his business activities, but assessment of his spirituality and cultural development will always bring a negative or zero result [14].

The second type is characterised by the predominance of transcendental-eidetic intention, by the focus of the individual on existence, life, and performance. This type of person devotes his life to creativity, serving the higher manifestations of the spirit. This type, with all the diversity of its representatives, is rather small-numbered. In its most generalised forms it is expressed in the phenomena of a genius, a prophet, or a saint. As a rule, the tragedy of the people of this type lies in their inability to adapt to the conditions of social and living environment because their interests go beyond the realm of common reality and are not determined by the objective and empirical existence. It is this type of people that provides for the spiritual enrichment and cultural 'progress' of the society and guarantees the preservation of the mankind. However, the value of their social and business activities can be estimated as minimal. The cases when the socio-economic and cultural-spiritual values of an individual are leveled can be rightfully called a happy exception to the rule [15].

Should we consider the third type, which would harmoniously combine the ability to possess and to create; to take descent care of the flesh and to fulfill the need for spiritual expressions; to have the rational vision of 'the earthly' and to be not alien to the 'heavenly'? We have to mention it, even if its existence seems to be more hypothetical than real. It is this type of personality that can ensure the future of humanity, otherwise, the modern monetarism, like a cancer, would effortlessly destroy culture and spirituality. And the destruction of the very

foundations of human existence can only lead to one outcome – nonexistence.

Overcoming of the tragic antinomy of man's spiritual life should, in the first place, be based on the awareness of this antinomy and those philosophical issues, which a modern man encounters. As history shows, the triumph of comfort and possession should not be void of spirit.

An individual governed by the flesh becomes mere flesh. But the flesh subdued to the spirit is capable of spiritual perfection.

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