

Traditionalism as a factor in the making and development of social and civilization systems

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Abstract. This article provides a brief analysis of the social-philosophical aspects of the development of various forms of traditionalism and the role and significance of traditions in terms of ensuring the sustainability of social systems. Traditions are viewed as a factor in the stabilization of social relations and the kernel of the civilizational foundations of society. The study's novelty is in reconsidering the role and significance of traditionalism in the making and development of society. Traditionalism has been construed as a sort of stereotyped orientation of individuals and social groups aimed at preserving loyalty to tradition. However, having said that, traditionalism, in the author's view, does not rule out the development of innovation forms in the making of the social organization of life based on the reconstruction of the mechanism of positive traditions. The findings of the study provided in the article are based on the principles of a systemic methodology.

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Introduction

The social-philosophical conceptualization of issues in traditionalism is topical in the light of what is going on in the world today. Broadly speaking, traditionalism is construed as the adherence of social groups and individuals to traditions. In relation to the use of the term in the social context, traditionalism is a social-philosophical paradigm by means whereof notions of the characteristics and originality of any given socio-cultural systems are formed.

The methodology of a systemic approach helps bring to light the paradigmatic foundations of manifestations of traditionalism.

As a rule, the domination of notions of any given spheres of being and spiritual activity – predicated on the recognition of the role and significance of traditional values – in various social systems ensures them sustainability and continuous functioning [1].

The scientific explanation of the essence of traditionalism undoubtedly calls for looking into the purpose of tradition.

By extension, construing traditions is traced to notions of ethnic, civilizational systems within the frame whereof traditional forms of man's life activity and various ways of understanding the world based on conceptualizing them emerge.

In modern Western society, tradition is a means of representing rational and normative complexes in the formation of socio-cultural formations. Traditionalism in countries of the East has deeper roots. It is by the measure of serving tradition that the originality of Western and Eastern civilizations is defined.

In reference books, in defining tradition the focus is on that the mechanism of the existence of traditions is predicated on their continuity and translation from generation to generation. In “traditional societies”, where ideological and rational-practical spheres of activity are indissolubly bound up with each other, traditions act as the universal form of social stabilization. In more developed societies, traditions organically complement all other means of stabilizing social life, legitimizing various social institutes and mechanisms for maintaining them, from the standpoint of the historical past. [2].

The groundwork for the formation of traditions is the existence of particular forms of activity, which are stereotyped in public consciousness based on the recognition of their social significance and individual utility [3]. Such an understanding of the essence of traditions is grounded in notions of interaction between the personality and the world during the socialization process.

Quite topical is the issue of drawing upon traditions and traditionalist convictions in the world of political realities as well. Forms of manifesting political traditions include principles and models of behavior as well as ideas formed based on continuity and acknowledged as overriding within the framework of a particular political culture [4].

Abstractly speaking, traditions are concentrating samples, stereotypes of activity, which through temporal transmission ensure the reproduction of human communities in life, the social experience accumulated in the activity of new generations [5]. As integral formations, traditions govern the process of the formation of customs,

rituals, rites, particular social institutes, norms, values, and other stereotyped forms of the organization of the life activity of a society.

The fundamental features of traditions act as a factor in the internal consolidation of human communities, such as, for instance, ethnoses, which are weakly determined and possess a high degree of stochasticity.

Traditions are present in all social and cultural systems and are, to a known degree, crucial to their existence [1]. The diversity of cultures in the world is, to a considerable extent, attributed to the diversity of corresponding cultural traditions.

At present, thanks to the latest means of communication, there is greater potential for borrowing and mutual exchange in the area of the social and cultural legacy of various societies. As a rule, in the process of cultural integration borrowed elements of cultural legacy, which initially act as innovation for the borrowing culture, afterwards get traditionalized in it, becoming an organic part of its own cultural traditional complex [6]. This process is normally repeated after certain periods of time and results in the formation of innovation forms based on the reconstruction of the mechanism for positive traditions with their subsequent rooting in society as sustainable traditionalist complexes.

The mechanisms for social reflexion ensure turning traditions into a sort of samples of the “collective memory” of societies and social groups, ensuring their self-identity and continuity in development. Drawing upon tradition reveals that history makes sense only because it is a chain of dependencies: that what occurs defines the contours of what follows.

Having said that, tradition is not something spontaneous and imposed – it is always a result of choice. Traditions are not so much recollections of the past of a given community – it is rather a process of reconstruction and reinterpretation of the past, an “imagined past” [7].

Everything that gets to us from the past, is passed along in an interrelated historical process makes up society’s legacy. Note that every generation receives into its disposal a particular aggregate of traditional samples and not just perceives and assimilates them in their ready form – it always effects its own interpretation and choice of them. In this sense, every generation chooses not only its past but its future as well.

The force of tradition is what supports any social order as some sort of subordination of roles, powers, functions, adherence to which is what makes up the essence of traditionalism [2]. In public consciousness, traditionalism is predicated on the conviction that the valuableness of traditions is

associated with a holy source. Thus, traditionalism is already a characteristic of specific forms of consciousness and behavior.

Within the framework of the paradigm of classic sociology, traditionalism is defined as being oriented towards what is daily and habitual and having faith in it as an indisputable norm of behavior. Traditionalism in this understanding possesses principal specificness, for the force of tradition is both in its historical expediency and some sacralized symbolic meaning it contains in itself. Thus, the legitimization of tradition is effected through recognizing it as an a priori historical truth.

In the West, they quite often call traditionalism a primitive, intuitive, “instinctive” form of social orientation characteristic of a feudal society [8]. According to the above point of view, traditionalism is construed as a general psychological position expressed in tending to hold on to the past and shun novelty. At the same time, it is apparent that traditionalism, under certain circumstances, becomes one of the factors in the formation of new forms of social interaction.

Nominally, there are two ways traditionalism is manifested. In this case, we are talking about the existence of traditionalism as an integral and ideological formation.

Integral traditionalism reproduces the initial paradigms of activity, which are normally passed along through initiation and sacral rituals. Integral traditionalism is characteristic of traditional society and closely bound up with its set-up. Traditionalism appeals to foundations that are the sustainable components of the entire life of the human genus, including those lost or damaged in the modern world. In traditional societies, traditionalism is a mechanism for ceaseless continuity.

Ideological traditionalism occurs only in societies that already cannot be called traditional. This is conscious traditionalism, an ideology that protects certain spiritual, political, and social principles. Such a dual understanding of traditionalism as being, on the one hand, an “ante-reflexive” social organization and, on the other, as being society’s ideological reaction to the impact of a foreign factor, which oftentimes drastically changes the world order, has been adopted by most modern thinkers.

In a narrower sense, traditionalism is construed as specific-historical ideologies which emerged in the mid-19th century in third world countries as a negative reaction to massive pressure from contending social-political blocks.

In this sense, traditionalism is the more modern, compared with all the other, ideological

form, which includes neo-conservatism, liberal conservatism, and certain forms of nationalism.

Modern traditionalism is permeated with utilitarian tendencies [9]. Utilitarianism is the basis for turning the elements of an open society into value for people in a closed society. Thus, in the modern world, the power of traditionalism is, to a great degree, in its focus on the use of achievements of Western science and technology. Utilitarian notions express, in particular, the aspiration of representatives of Western societies towards attaining the ideals of embodying amenities and comfort in social and individual life.

However many meanings the term “traditionalism” may have, we can be satisfied with that it is the experience, topical nowadays, of the existence of traditional institutes and forms – religious and ethno-cultural, in the first place – in the modern world [10].

The spiritual side of life in any society finds embodiment both in people, who make it up at any given moment, and the legacy of the past – tradition, which is reproduced in historical consciousness and facilitates the establishment of society’s identity, its cultural difference from “others”. Among tradition’s major functions is maintaining stability in human collectives irrespective of their local specificity [11].

Tradition accumulates the group experience expressed in socially organized stereotypes, which through spatial-temporal transmission is reproduced in various human collectives [5].

At the same time, tradition as experience accumulated in the form of a system of stereotypes of human activity, as well as stereotypes of notions of forms of this activity embodied in symbolic thought-pictures, is not identical with historical legacy.

Traditions are not so much recollections of the past of a given community – it is rather a process of reconstructing and reinterpreting the past. Traditional notions are formed on the basis of, above all, the attitude of contemporaries towards the objects and ideas of the past, which makes it possible to include a given part of historical legacy in the content of the category of “tradition”. Historical memory, however paradoxical it may be, is always the present. Therefore, what is “recollected” in the first place is what is in harmony with the present, is made topical by it; note that quite often this kind of selection is carried out with bias which idealizes and distorts the past – hence, in particular, the “invented tradition” phenomenon.

Tradition is selected, created, modeled in accordance with the present needs and aspirations of participants in a given historical situation [7].

At different stages of historical development, the significance of any given elements

of tradition is different – so are interpretations of the past. This circumstance, in turn, allows us to assert that due to the flow of processes characterized by the moment of variability, we can speak of the existence of objective facts of history only nominally. All historical facts, in any event, are the product of interpretation by those who have bigger or smaller rights to their legitimate nomination. Processes of historical variability impact the content of traditions and govern those necessary changes to them which ensure the functioning of traditional elements of culture in the mode of adaptation to new conditions of life [12].

Since tradition is quite pliant, it has a more or less effective mechanism for perceiving innovation. In his “Criticism and Tradition”, K. Popper wrote that society will never be able to completely break free of the fetters of tradition, and every time the shift to new forms of social development is invariably characterized by a shift from one tradition to another [7]. Moreover, traditions are functionally capable of serving as a sort of identifier of the limits of innovation and the primary criterion for their legitimacy.

Thus, there is no impassable edge between tradition and innovation. The nature of traditionalism, as it seems, is definitely not about the absence of innovation but the prevalence of the value of staticity, which, in turn, finds expression in the rigorosity of the filtration of novelties, squelching everything that is out of line.

All the above leads us to conclude that traditionalism is aimed at maintaining stability and order in society within the limits of acceptable historical expediency.

Traditionalism is a factor that cements society’s social and civilizational foundations. In this case, it is apt to refer to civilization being defined as a philosophical category. Note that there is no universally accepted definition for civilization. At the same time, in modern science approaches to defining the essence of this term based on the use of the ideas of synergetics have become pretty common.

Within the frame of the synergetic paradigm, civilization is defined as a sustainably unbalanced system of a special kind, which functions based on the mechanisms of cultural mediation: language, mythology, morals, etc. The main essential characteristic of civilization is its cultural content, i.e. an aggregate of fundamental ideas, values, worldview paradigms worked out by any given community over the period of its historical existence.

As we can see, the formation of the socio-cultural component plays an important part in the process of civilizational development [9]. However, since any socio-cultural system rests on the

traditional foundation, this circumstance underscores the significance of tradition in the development and making of civilizational foundations.

Every civilization possesses its own identification kernel based on which there occurs the archetypization of the structures of human consciousness.

Thus, the above lets us believe that it is traditions that are the major elements of the identification complex of the civilizational foundations of society.

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