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## **Russia's Civilizational Choice in the Context of a Modern Interpretation of Russian Philosophy of Personality**

*Abstract.* The article examines Russian classical religious philosophy as a conceptual foundation in the formation of Russia's civilizational identity. It argues that the resurgence of interest in Russian philosophical thought is extremely relevant amid contemporary efforts to articulate a distinct national ideology and to delineate Russian cultural-civilizational uniqueness. However, the emphasis on the religious component presents significant challenges: ranging from the privileging of Christian theology within a secular and multi-confessional society to anti-modernist tendencies that prioritize the past over the future. The study further demonstrates that a non-theistic reinterpretation of key concepts in Russian philosophical classics is both viable and analytically productive. Central to the argument is the proposition that Russian philosophy distinguishes itself less through theological discourse and more through its distinctive anthropology of personhood – namely, its *philosophical personalism*. This perspective remains salient as a framework for comprehending contemporary sociocultural transformations. While Western modernity increasingly prioritizes an expressive, radicalized individualism, Russian *personalism* upholds a dialogical and *sobornost-oriented* (collectively harmonious) conception of the self. Many Russian thinkers emphasized the existential dimensions of dialogue, positing that engagement in public life, creative endeavor, and love constitute pathways to existential fulfillment and even immortality. By contrast, contemporary Western individualism, amplified by applied postmodernism and identity politics, fosters social fragmentation and the erosion of shared cultural frameworks. Consequently, Russian personalist thought may furnish an alternative paradigm for sustaining collective cultural continuity – one that diverges from the Western trajectory. Crucially, such an alternative does not entail bureaucratic imposition or centralized cultural hegemony. Instead, *personalism*

advocates for the expansion of intercultural dialogue, broader political participation, and the elevation of individual significance through communal engagement. Thus, this approach reconciles the affirmation of personal uniqueness with the imperative of cohesive cultural and societal development.

**Keywords:** state-civilization; Russian philosophy; personalism; capitalism; individualism; Russian idea; all-unity; sobornost

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**Introduction.** Russia's search for – or reassertion of – its civilizational identity has intensified significantly since the beginning of the Special Military Operation (SMO). In 2023, the Russian President approved a new Foreign Policy Concept, officially defining Russia as a *civilization-state*. However, it would be premature to claim that this pursuit has yielded definitive results. Ongoing debates concern the very notion of a *civilization-state* and its applicability even to relatively culturally homogeneous nations such as China (Lukin 2023). In Russia's case, the uncertainty is even more pronounced<sup>1</sup>. The core issue lies in the conflict between the practical demand for an *anti-Western stance* and the centuries-long cultural influence of the West, which has inevitably shaped Russians' self-identification. Several other significant challenges further complicate this search.

One such challenge is the crude and selective attempts to reject the West and everything associated with it. These attempts ultimately lead to an anti-modernist and reactionary worldview (the philosophy of Alexander G. Dugin being a prime example<sup>2</sup>).

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<sup>1</sup> Timofeev I. The Civilizational State and Political Theory, 23.05.2023, *Russia in Global Affairs*, available at: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/gosudarstvo-czivilizacziya/> (accessed July 12, 2025). (in Russ.); Barabanov O. The “Civilizational State” in Theory and Practice, 10.10.2023, *Valdai International Discussion Club*, available at: <https://ru.valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/gosudarstvo-tsivilizatsiya-v-teorii-i-na-praktike/> (accessed July 12, 2025). (in Russ.).

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Dugin: “What, then, must we become to prevail in this confrontation – verging on nuclear conflict – with the civilization of

The distinctive feature of Russian civilization is often framed exclusively in terms of a glorified past – something to be revived and reinstated in an almost unchanged form. Consequently, Russia, first, renounces modernity itself, effectively ceding to the West *the monopoly of being modern* (Fishman, Martyanov 2022), and second, is left with fragmented and unstable cultural remnants that are not only difficult to reconcile with contemporary realities but also challenging to coherently integrate with one another. For instance, emphasizing Orthodoxy and Russian religious philosophy clashes with the secular nature of the Russian state, as well as its multiethnic and multiconfessional composition. Foregrounding *Russianness* (rus. *русскость*), likewise, may not only foster patriotism but also risk exacerbating nationalist chauvinism, thereby inflaming inter-ethnic tensions.

Further complications arise from attempts to reconcile this *reinvented past* with present realities. No matter how compelling the rhetoric of countering “Western satanism” with Russian “spirituality” and traditional values may seem, ordinary Russians hardly conform to these idealized portrayals – whether in terms of genuine religiosity<sup>3</sup> or actual commitment to, say, family val-

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the Antichrist? The answer is simple: If *Rus'* does not stand as a camp of saints, if we fail to restore our spiritual verticality, if we do not turn to Christ and the spirit of our glorious history, we are utterly doomed. For the Russians are not merely a nation. To be Russian is a spiritual vocation – a choice, a response to the profound call of Being. To be Russian means to be summoned to the final battle at the end of time, to stand with God against the devil. The Special Military Operation (SMO) is a religious war in the deepest and most immediate sense of the term. This, incidentally, is well understood by Russia's Muslims – particularly the Chechens and *the Kadyrovites* (rus. *кадыровцы*) who have explicitly declared the SMO their *jihad*” (Dugin A.G. *The Russian Ideology and the Civilization of the Antichrist*, 08.11.2022, *Izborsky Club*, available at: <https://izborsk-club.ru/23532> (accessed July 13, 2025). (in Russ.)).

<sup>3</sup> Only 6% of Russians who identify as Orthodox Christians attend church at least once a month, and a mere 4% receive Communion regularly (Bormotova A. Only 6% of believers attend church, 20.04.2025, *URA.RU*, available at: <https://ura.news/news/1052920233> (accessed July 13, 2025). For comparison, three in ten Americans report attending religious services weekly (21%) or nearly every week (9%) (Jones J.M. Church attendance has declined in most U.S. religious groups, 25.03.2025, *Gallup*, available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx> (accessed July 13, 2025)).

ues<sup>4</sup>. Consequently, the trend toward reasserting classical Russian religious philosophy (see, e.g., Savenkov 2024) appears highly ambiguous. While turning to this tradition is justified by the need to emphasize an indigenous philosophical foundation for a *civilization-state*, it also entails dismissing vast historical layers – most notably the Soviet era, despite its undeniable contributions to Russian national achievement – as alien to the adopted principles. The challenge is compounded by selective interpretations from scholars who, in defining Russia’s civilizational distinctiveness, focus narrowly on ideologically convenient notions, such as the “reinterpretation of democracy and human rights” (see, e.g., Spiridonova 2022: 119) or the purported “sacrality of supreme authority” in Russian culture (Shevchenko 2019: 40).

We propose an alternative engagement with Russian philosophical thought – one that does not treat it as a set of dogmatic prescriptions but as a source of inspiration: something deeply rooted in Russian culture yet malleable; not rejecting modernity but laying the foundation for new visions of the future; not fixating on a singular (and thus inevitably divisive) identity marker (such as specific interpretations of Orthodoxy) but offering a framework capable of unification and universality.

**The Ambiguities of Western Individualism.** First and foremost, one might agree that the central “antithesis” in question is *Western individualism*. However, even at this preliminary stage, certain complications arise: Is Western individualism a broader metaphorical phenomenon that encapsulates the essence of Western civilization? Or is it, rather, too abstract and diffuse a concept to define Russian civilizational identity in purely oppositional terms – that is, by excluding everything associated with *individualism*? Under the weight of such sweeping generalizations, there is a strong temptation to reject the entire legacy of modernity, revert to a theocentric worldview, or proclaim collectivism

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<sup>4</sup>Elena Mikhailova, an advisor to the Director General of the Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VCIOM), stated that eight out of ten marriages in Russia ended in divorce in 2024. According to her assessment, this ratio marks a historic high, positioning Russia as the third-highest country globally in divorce rates. (Filimonov S. Eight out of Ten marriages fail: Key trends on marriages and divorces in Russia, 11.07.2025, *RBC Trends*, available at: <https://trends.rbc.ru/trends/social/67eb9ba99a7947165b574ab9?from=copy> (accessed July 13, 2025). (in Russ.)).

as the structuring principle of society. As is evident, such reasoning brings us perilously close to endorsing a Hobbesian Leviathan that negates the very notion of human rights and freedoms (Rutkevich 2024).

Yet it is worth noting that *Western individualism* is not a solid phenomenon. Until relatively recent times, it coexisted harmoniously with communal engagement, patriotism, civic responsibility, and adherence to social norms. Moreover, individualism historically served as a moderating force against the excesses of radical collectivism and fanaticism. One cannot easily dismiss the profound humanizing mission of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in “softening social mores”, such as the abandonment of public executions or the slave trade (Ridley 2015). Even capitalism – the primary target of today’s progressive critics – played a crucial role in “mitigating vices”, as members of bourgeois society “developed long-term interests in industriousness, honesty, self-discipline, and a host of other small virtues” (Fukuyama 2004: 347).

What we frequently observe in the West today is not *individualism as such*, but rather its radicalized and absolutized form. The English Christian theologian and church historian Carl R. Trueman identifies this phenomenon as *expressive individualism*. According to Trueman, the world is no longer the objectively authoritative reality it was eight centuries ago; instead, modern individuals increasingly perceive it as raw material to be manipulated according to their own purposes. The ultimate consequence of the collapse of traditional hierarchies is that notions of honor no longer structure social interactions or frameworks of recognition in contemporary society. This role has now been supplanted by the concept of dignity – something every individual possesses not by virtue of social standing but simply by being human. Consequently, *expressive individualism* proclaims the sacredness of personal desires and needs (Trueman 2020).

This individualism, increasingly articulated through postmodern and even Marxist discourse (Pluckrose, Lindsay 2022), frames societal norms as sources of constraint, suffering, oppression, or subjugation. The much-discussed proliferation of queerness (including cancel culture), LGBTQ+ advocacy<sup>5</sup>, and transgenderism ex-

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<sup>5</sup> On November 30, 2023, the Supreme Court of Russia recognized the international LGBTQ+ public movement as an extremist organization and banned its activities in the country.

emphasizes the further radicalization of individualism: only an individual's internal feelings and desires are deemed valid – regarded as inviolable, often irrespective of age, mental state, or other factors. Unsurprisingly, this has precipitated a state of cultural war of all against all, rendering consensus increasingly unattainable.

Moreover, collective identities and cultural artifacts become privatized, fragmented, and appropriated, serving as mechanisms for the assertion of privilege. Hence the discourses surrounding cultural appropriation, micro-aggressions have been proliferating (Mouk 2023). In the absence of a shared normative framework, the cultural sphere devolves into a battleground of institutional power – where the majority's norms are supplanted and enforced by the localized norms of minority factions. Dissenters from these new norms<sup>6</sup> are systematically stigmatized as oppressors (Al Gharbi 2024). In response, those resisting such shifts grow increasingly radicalized – often adopting far-right tactics – exacerbating social alienation and mutual distrust.

Certainly, many Western scholars grapple with the ongoing disintegration of a shared cultural sphere. In response to the rising tide of identitarian particularism, culture wars, and social atomization, attempts have been made to propose universalist solutions (see, e.g., McGowan 2020). A notable example is John A. Powell and Stephen Menendian's *Belonging without Othering*, wherein they argue that if humanity fails to construct a broad and inclusive *we* today, the future risks resembling a bloodstained past: deepening divisions, escalating hostility, persistent fragmentation, nationalist aggression, and the like. Their thesis suggests that the notion of an absolute *Other* or *Them* must be abandoned in favor of a larger, more encompassing *We*. This necessitates collective efforts, such as identifying shared goals or fostering joint initiatives. However, their prescription amounts to only a superficial, symptomatic remedy, neglecting the underlying “malady” – radicalized and expressive individualism. Powell and Menendian seek something ostensibly external to existing conflicts and divides: a generic, abstract “we”. They seem to overlook the most critical issue – the fundamental

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<sup>6</sup>This, by the way, is a well-known contradiction, since the struggle for “emancipation” ultimately leads to the same suppression of dissenters and the triumph of cancel culture.

incompatibility of many interests underpinning ever-fragmenting identities (a paradigmatic case being the incursion of transgender women, i.e., biological males, into female spaces). Additionally, they ignore the destabilized equilibrium of societal forces, in which minority interests are increasingly imposed upon the majority (see, e.g., Gress 2023) – manifest in the enforcement of gender identity policies for children, the promotion of sexual deviations in schools, and similar developments.

Given the observations above, there is a strong temptation to conclude that the root of these contradictions lies either in *modernity as such*, in *individualism in any form*, or in the *ideology of human rights*. Consequently, the supposed retreat from the West would entail embracing that which stands in opposition to modernity – Christian (Orthodox) theology, Tradition, the sacralization of political authority, and similar concepts. In this regard, the heightened attention given to the classics of Russian religious philosophy is understandable. However, there are reasons to believe that no irreconcilable conflict exists between these Russian religious-philosophical traditions and modernity. As will be demonstrated later, it is possible to engage with Russian philosophy without emphasizing its Orthodox or mystical dimensions – a common tendency in existing scholarship. Instead, its value may also be found in its distinctive philosophical-anthropological contributions, which can be analyzed from a confessionally and religiously neutral perspective.

**The Philosophy of All-Unity and the Anthropology of Personality: A Non-Theistic Reading.** A confessionally and religiously neutral interpretation of Russian philosophical classics does not imply the rejection of their metaphysical dimension. Rather, it involves highlighting elements that remain relevant irrespective of one’s religious convictions. Even from an atheistic standpoint, certain philosophical intuitions within Russian religious thought can be productively re-examined and reformulated as conditional “secular” variants – a move not without precedent. For instance, the personalism espoused by Nikolai Berdyaev has been interpreted in non-theistic terms, as noted by the French personalist Jean Lacroix, who observed: “In all individuals, even atheists, every plea contains something spiritual, even if the divine origin of this spirituality is not acknowledged” (Lacroix 2004: 49).

A further consideration is how to define Russian religious philosophy itself – a question made complex by the vast expanse of Russian intellectual history. For our purposes, the focus rests primarily on 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy, both due to its temporal proximity and its profound engagement with the unique historical dynamics of Russia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This period was marked by an unprecedented collision of extremes: the incursion of Western bourgeois ethos and individualism alongside the radical collectivism of Bolshevism – a situation in some ways analogous to contemporary crises. In response, Russian thinkers sought solutions within the traditional sources of their civilization, yet did so through the lens of modernity. Consequently, despite their religious language, their works can be read not merely (or even primarily) as theological inquiries but as explorations in philosophical anthropology. As Vasily Zenkovsky aptly noted: “If one was to offer a general characterization of Russian philosophy – though any such attempt must necessarily lack precision and completeness – I would emphasize its anthropocentric nature. Russian philosophy is not theocentric (though many of its key figures were profoundly religious), nor cosmocentric (despite longstanding interest in natural philosophy). Instead, it is preoccupied above all with the question of *man*: his destiny, his paths, and the meaning and purpose of history. This is evident in its pervasive moral orientation, even in abstract debates – revealing one of the most potent and creative sources of Russian philosophical thought” (Zenkovsky 2001: 21).

The conception of *human person* in 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian religious philosophy encompasses a wide array of variations. Some thinkers – such as Nikolai Berdyaev – lean toward a more individualistic (or rather, *personalistic*) perspective, while others, like Ivan Ilyin, incline toward collectivism and Hegelianism. Yet their positions generally mediate between the extremes of individualism and collectivism. As previously noted, Russian (non-Soviet!) philosophy of this period emerged amidst the dramatic confrontation between Western capitalism and Bolshevik communism. It rejected both the Western model of the self-absorbed individual – reduced to a mere consumer or *petit bourgeois* – and the Soviet bureaucratic machine that subsumed the person under an oppressive political structure. Nearly all these philosophers drew inspiration, in one way or another, from Vladimir Solovyov’s philosophy of *all-unity* (rus. *всеединство*).

We venture to propose that the idea of *all-unity* carries, above all, existential significance. The absolute value and unity of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty are affirmed alongside the unity of all existence and God. Within this framework, the human person is not simply an anonymous part of a “fallen” material world. Human life must possess a higher meaning; it is a fragment of a greater divine design. The human person is made *in the image and likeness of God*, yet as a created being, one must participate in *all-unity* to realize their true self. Personality is not innate but achieved. For this, one must transcend natural egoism and individualism, heed the call of the divine, and embrace their vocation. Only through love and creativity can a person rise above mere animalistic individualism and self-interest. As Solovyov asserts that only through rational consciousness can one distinguish their true individuality from his egoism. By sacrificing the latter and surrendering to love, they discover in it not merely a living but a life-giving force. In renouncing their egoism, one does not lose individual being but rather immortalizes it (Solovyov 2016: 79).

The path of individualism and egotism is one of dissolution in a world where all things vanish without a trace. According to Evgeniy Trubetskoy, here he (individual) grovels, crawls, consumes, surpasses the most bloodthirsty predator in destructive malice, embodies the very negation of all that is sacred – and in the end, he dies (Trubetskoy 2017: 40). Conversely, the path to meaning is one of ascent toward the Absolute, toward God. Yet this does not entail a rejection of the earthly world – a perspective that allows us to engage with Russian philosophers beyond a *purely theistic framework*<sup>7</sup>. Russian religious philosophy rejects the radical dualism of the created and the divine (whether conceived in naturalistic, supernaturalistic or tem-

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<sup>7</sup> Alexey F. Losev would argue that religion constitutes a distinctive form of personal self-affirmation, characterized primarily by its absolute nature. For instance, he wrote that we would not be mistaken in stating that religion invariably represented a form of self-affirmation of the individual within eternity – without, at this stage, addressing questions pertaining to the specifics of the individual’s nature or the manner in which eternity was conceived. Without delving into these more specialized inquiries, we might define religion formally as any endeavor to situate the individual within eternal being, binding them irrevocably to absolute existence (Losev 2020: 143-144).

poral/eternal terms). Humanity advances along the path of *theosis* (deification), and an indissoluble bond exists between all existence, past and future. Human beings are called to become *friends of God*, attaining wholeness through love and creativity, thereby integrating themselves into *something eternal*. As Trubetskoy writes, time is granted to us so that the perfection to which we are summoned may be not merely an act of divine omnipotence, but also our own doing (Trubetskoy 2017: 132). Consequently, the divine permeates our earthly endeavors, and the person strives toward eternity even in the present: Trubetskoy adds that human freedom is not merely a theoretical supposition. In the greatest feats of human intellect and will, in the appearance of saints on earth, in the creative inspiration of prophets, artists, and religious thinkers, it becomes an empirical reality – an observable fact” (Trubetskoy 2017: 252). This synthesis affirms that sacred meaning is both transcendent and immanent, realized through human agency within temporal existence.

The eternal and all-encompassing can only exist as one integral whole. Consequently, the anthropological models advanced by Russian philosophers emphasize the potential connectedness, embeddedness, and profound immersion of the individual within the communal whole. True richness of personhood is attained not in isolation but through love and solidarity with others. Thus, Russian thinkers explicitly rejected Enlightenment conceptions of the subject as an isolated *self*. There is no such thing as a refined, detached *I* – human subjectivity (or *the soul*) constitutes a dynamic complex of experiences, sensations, and psychological and spiritual dimensions that ceaselessly interact with both the external world and other individuals.

According to Semyon L. Frank, the inner life of man is by no means confined to the singular material of sensation or sensory-emotional existence, nor is it wholly predetermined through its supra-sensory formative unity. Rather, it transcends this singularity and separateness, serving as a conduit for higher, universally human – and even supra-human – principles and driving forces (Frank 2015: 322). Therefore, the highest expression of personhood does not lie in the egocentric appropriation of the material but rather in creative *outpouring* – an active and profound engagement with the social whole through dialogue. Crucially, individuality is not erased in this process; on the contrary, it is actualized. As Frank observes,

*genius* is simultaneously the most capacious entity, whose creative output carries objective significance and thus elicits the broadest understanding and resonance within humanity (Frank 2015: 326).

The immersion into the social whole must not imply the dissolution of the individual within the collective. The tyranny of the mass leads, again, to the death of the individual in faceless uniformity. Even thinkers with Hegelian leanings, such as Ivan Ilyin, affirmed the necessity of free choice. Yet here we observe a stark contrast with the contemporary Western cult of radical self-determination, wherein the unified social whole is increasingly perceived as inherently oppressive (Michel Foucault's discursive power). This has given rise to postmodernism's war against all normativity – a struggle that culminates in the triumph of nihilism. Conversely, Russian philosophy is one of *all-unity*, a dialogical whole in which the individual cannot be severed from either the social or the divine. Yet neither should society, if aligned with divine providence, compel the individual into submission by force, for in doing so, the person ceases to reflect the image of God. Of course, truth, even concerning one's own identity, cannot be self-contained – according to Ivan Ilyin no man has the right to rely solely on his own, isolated strength; for he may be certain that even a life of utmost concentration and effort would not suffice to fathom God's mysteries (Ilyin 2024: 65). Nor, however, should truth be imposed coercively – only through persuasion. Ilyin noted that spiritual freedom did not entail rejecting the wisdom and experience of others but consisted in inwardly liberating oneself for spiritual life – free from external violence, coercion, or intimidation. That is why children, in particular, cannot be left to the arbitrariness of *external* and *negative freedom*; rather, they must be nurtured for *internal, positive freedom*. The matter is not about *leaving them in peace or refraining from interfering in their inner life*, but about awakening them to spiritual life – not through force, but through love; not through fear, but *through living example* (Ilyin 2024: 93-94).

The person perishes not only when withdrawing into isolation or when consumed by the collective but also when severed from what may be called *cultural eternity* – the participation in enduring cultural meanings and the transcendent. Personality is formed solely in dialogue: with others, with the social whole. Here, Russian personalism resonates with the dialogical thought of figures like Mar-

tin Buber, who contrasted the inauthenticity of an isolated I with genuine relational being in the *I-Thou* encounter. Buber comments that separation reveals the self-contained essence in its detachment from other self-contained essences. Personality is revealed when it enters into relation with other personalities. The former is the spiritual image of natural isolation; the latter is the spiritual image of natural interconnectedness. The aims of isolation are experience and its utilization, both of which belong to *life* – that prolonged dying which fills the span of human existence. The aim of relation is its very essence: the touch of *Thou*. For through each *Thou*, we are touched by the breath of eternal life (Buber 2024: 88-89).

These reflections remain profoundly relevant to contemporary realities. When culture disintegrates – when individuals isolate themselves, each constructing their own “norms” and “truths” – the fabric of social unity unravels. In the earthly realm, cultural values forged within a fragmented world are doomed to oblivion and decay. This, in our view, is precisely what is unfolding with increasing rapidity in the West: sincerity has waned, the accessibility of others’ experiences has diminished, and communal bonds have weakened. Some even contend that the distinction between men and women no longer exists (or should not exist). Instead, we encounter micro-aggressions, mis-gendering, identity politics, cultural wars, postmodern nihilism, the trivialization of the sublime and the glorification of the low, posthumanist reductions of persons to mere *assemblages*, biological machines, or so-called “cybernetic agencies” (see, e.g., Haraway 1985), and transhumanist fantasies of omnipotence – up to and including assertions of humanity’s inevitable obsolescence (see Davydov 2020). All of this, we argue, underscores the urgency of a non-theistic (*not atheistic!*) reinterpretation of classical Russian philosophy.

Nikolai Berdyaev foresaw the impending threat of cultural collapse. Justly regarded as *the philosopher of freedom* (Berdyaev 2010), he is, even more fundamentally, *the philosopher of meaning* – one who centered his inquiry on the profound tragedy of meaning’s loss in the face of mortality and nothingness. His works offer the most vivid articulation of *dialogical personalism*, and he remains a trenchant critic of all atomization and the reduction of human society to a faceless mass. His critique of individualism is strikingly pertinent to several prevailing cultural trends in the West today.

Berdyayev conveys the idea that sophists, relativists, and positivists failed to recognize man as a microcosm, as the image and likeness of absolute being. For them, man was reduced to a relative condition – a drop in the ocean of worldly necessity, a grain of sand in the desert of existence (Berdyayev 2018b: 55). Such a grain of sand is destined to dissolve into nothingness. Only through creativity and dialogue can one access eternity and meaning: “The creative life is an eternal life, not a decaying one” (Berdyayev 2018b: 202). True creativity entails both the creation and the participation in the eternal and divine: “In the *Mona Lisa*, there is eternal beauty that shall enter into the divine life everlasting” (Berdyayev 2018b: 202). Through creativity, not only is the eternal preserved, but human, personal forces are elevated: “Mature, substantive freedom presupposes the growth and ascent of the inner man, his organic reunion with others and with the cosmos” (Berdyayev 2018b: 357).

Berdyayev’s philosophy is marked by a certain skepticism toward the material world – the world of objects. Material creativity, in his view, risks succumbing to “objectification”, wherein the person is consumed by the transitory, perishable reality of the immanent. But what if, beyond this world, we are granted nothing else<sup>8</sup>? A non-theistic<sup>9</sup> interpretation of Berdyayev might posit that, in the absence

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<sup>8</sup> Apart from the earthly world given to us, nothing at all may exist. However, even if we remain on the position of faith in the transcendent, there always remains the possibility that the desire for eternity on this side is something very closely connected with the attainment of eternity on the other side of the “created” world.

<sup>9</sup> It should be reiterated that this perspective *is not atheistic* – rather, it maintains a neutral stance toward any particular confession or religion as such. In the case of Christianity, such a non-theistic interpretation, when properly approached, need not exclude but could instead complement theistic understanding. As previously noted, the idea of all-unity (rus. *всеединство*) implies the absence of a strict dualism between the worldly and the divine. Thus, in striving for unity in the here-and-now, human action aligns right here and now with the divine design. Furthermore, one might even consider something akin to *non-theistic religion* as the metaphysical foundation for a creatively developed Russian *personalism* and spiritual communality (rus. *соборность*). A possible conceptual framework for this foundation can be found in Karl Jaspers’ notion of *transcendence*, posited alongside *the world* and *existence*. Although devoid of strictly religious (let alone confessional) connotations, this transcendence nevertheless makes spiritual culture possible.

of the transcendent, the only certainty we possess is the earthly world. Thus, the clear path to meaning for the person lies in *unity and the immortality of human culture – in the eternal dialogue between all its members*. A life of meaning is one that leaves an enduring mark<sup>10</sup> on human culture, one that partakes, however modestly, in that which will resonate with future generations – even if individual contributions pale in comparison to those of history’s great creators and geniuses. Humanity can strive for unity *right here and now*.

**Conclusion. A Source of Inspiration.** Thus, the classics of Russian philosophy can indeed serve as one of the cultural and ideological foundations of Russia as a *civilization-state*. However, an attentive reader will quickly discern the fallacy of any attempts to locate in the works of its leading thinkers a blanket condemnation of individualism or an unconditional justification of state authority. On the contrary, what they will find is a distinctive anthropology of the person rather than an uncritical cult of state service – regardless of its underlying aims. As Evgeniy Trubetskoy writes, the modern state, with its amorality, with its tendency to exploit the whole of culture as a means of realizing the animalistic ends of collective egoism, presents itself as a concrete embodiment of the principle of beast-humanity (Trubetskoy 2017: 310). Similarly, Nikolay Berdyaev asserts that man, always individual and irrepeatable, is for Christianity a more primary and profound reality than society. A man may – and often must – sacrifice his life, but not his person; his personality must be realized, and sacrifice is a condition of that realization. It is the person who is called to eternal life, constituting the conquest of eternity (Berdyaev 2018a: 147). Equally dubious is the invocation of Russian religious philosophy to justify *nationalism*. On the contrary, the very essence of the key idea championed by its classical thinkers – the concept of *all-unity* – lies in affirming the unity of humanity, the earthly world, and God, as well as humanity’s receptivity to shared, universal truths. Moreover, Russian philosophy itself is deeply rooted in Western thought, while Berdyaev’s philosophy, in particular, exerted a profound influence on French personalism (see: Mounier 1999).

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<sup>10</sup> Of course, it is hardly possible to hope for this *worldly eternity* on a rational level. However, for a person, subjectively perceived *eternity* can be a very long time.

There is no necessity to reduce the classics of Russian religious philosophy either to Christian theology alone or to an ideological basis for a “return to the Middle Ages”, let alone a justification for rejecting human rights discourse or seeking *sacral foundations of Russian statehood*. This philosophy, in fact, belongs to the world of modernity. As demonstrated earlier, a non-theistic reading of some Russian thinkers remains viable. To look to this tradition for inspiration means discerning a set of meaningful ideas that can be creatively reinterpreted in response to contemporary challenges. Above all, Russian religious philosophy is distinguished by its *personalist anthropology* – one shaped through dialogue and oriented toward a harmonious, all-encompassing unity (*sobornost'*), which bears no resemblance to the atomized individual of capitalism nor the depersonalized subject of mass bureaucratic and authoritarian societies. It is also a philosophy imbued with profound existential significance. The yearning to transcend mortality, to resist *nothingness*, is what shaped the fundamental intuitions of the thinkers examined.

How might these insights inform current reflections on perceived cultural threats emanating from the West? The primary concern is arguably the risk of dissolution, that is, the erosion of hope for human unity and a severance from the eternal. Can *dialogue and love oriented toward eternity* persist in the absence of shared authorities and norms? If neither paternal nor maternal authority remains – replaced instead by the dictates of unfettered desire – can any meaningful order of things endure? Is *sincerity* possible when individuals fear accusations of mis-gendering, sexism, racism, or other transgressions, opting either for silence or performative compliance? Can *fraternity* exist among people fragmented into countless gender identities, or among those compelled to navigate pronoun protocols and anxieties over “cultural appropriation”? Can *love* retain its depth when the masculine and the feminine are reduced to sites of mutual envy, and sexual difference is dismissed as insignificant?

If Russia seeks to avoid cultural dissolution, it might draw upon the *personalist intuitions* embedded in its philosophical tradition. Yet this path must avoid simplistic solutions. Preserving normative order cannot be achieved through bureaucratic imposition. If personhood indeed flourishes in harmonic dialogue, in *sobornost'*

and *all-unity*, then norms themselves must emerge through participation, engagement, and democratic consensus – not coercion.

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