



REVIEWS. CRITIQUE. INFORMATION

BOOK REVIEW

DOI: 10.21684/2587-8484-2018-2-4-81-85

The ways of life of the contemporary Russian intelligentsia

Review of the monograph: Toshchenko J. T. (ed.). 2018. How do you live, intelligentsia? (sociological essays). Collective monograph. Moscow: Center for Social Forecast and Marketing. [In Russian]

Valentin G. Nemirovsky

Dr. Sci. (Soc.), Professor,
Chief Editor of the Scientific Journal Siberian Socium,
University of Tyumen (Tyumen, Russian Federation)
valnemirov@mail.ru

We review one of those innovative monographs, which are devoted, on the one hand, to the poorly studied problematics, and on the other hand, the issues studied in it themselves are debatable. The mass rejection by Russian social scientists of the ideology-driven scientific picture of the social structure of our country built on the “dialectical unity” of the triad (including the working class, the collective farm peasantry and the “layer”—the intelligentsia), provoked the attempts (in different ways methodologically grounded and not always successful) to create a new picture of the social structure of society, in which often there was no place for the intelligentsia. And if there was, the state and functions of this social group were often depicted in negative colors. Despite serious research conducted at the end of the past—the beginning of the current millennium among the Russian intelligentsia, there are ambiguous and contradictory approaches to the definition of this social group in the Russian scientific literature. Moreover, even today there is a denial by some scientists of its very existence.

The research results published in the monograph “How do you live, intelligentsia?” are aimed at overcoming such problems. Their object is the elements of this social group, in which, perhaps, its features are most clearly manifested—representatives of the humanitarian intelligentsia: teachers, health care and culture workers. Among the undoubted merits of this work is the desire of its authors to answer such pressing questions concerning the intelligentsia as, for example, the reality of its existence in modern Russia, the preservation in it of those features that were traditionally inherent in its representatives, etc.

The monograph under review, along with the Introduction, Conclusion and Appendices, includes 10 chapters, each of which covers various aspects of the life-worlds of the Russian humanitarian intelligentsia employed in the fields of health, education, and culture. The first field is crucial for understanding the subsequent content of this deep, non-trivial work.

The theoretical and methodological basis of these studies is the works by the classics of sociology E. Husserl, who first introduced the concept of “life-world”, and A. Schütz, who viewed this phenomenon as the embodiment of life-practical meanings. The authors of the monograph did not ignore other well-known foreign and Russian scientists who explored certain aspects of the life-world (p. 13). In particular, they logically appeal to the works by K. Marx, P. Sorokin, J. Alexander, and other classics of world science.

According to the definition given in the work, the approach to the study of the meaning of life is based on the concept called the “sociology of life”, because it operates with the characteristics of people’s interaction in the process of solving real problems and attitudes to everything that happens in the society that surrounds them and in which they are involved with all their lives¹.

The monograph presents the following definition of the category of the meaning of life: it should be understood as “a set of goals-principles forming a strategic core of attitudes that represent the core of people’s consciousness and behavior and constitute the underlying, inner content of their life” (p. 20). At the same time, the authors rightly emphasize that “the meaning of life includes active participation in its realization” (p. 20).

The validity of the materials presented in the monograph, the logic and persuasiveness of the conclusions made on their basis is largely determined by its serious empirical base. We are talking about a number of Russian studies: *How do you live, intelligentsia?* (2016), *The life-world of Russians* (2014), *Transformation of the economic consciousness of Russians* (2012), *Political consciousness of Russians: 25 years later* (2013), *Man and Morality* (2014), as well as the results of research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the Federal Science and Research Sociological Centre RAS (FSRSC RAS), Institute of Socio-Political Research RAS (ISPR RAS), RLMS, Russian Public Opinion Research Centre (RPORC), Levada-Centre, Foundation Public Opinion, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), data from an international project *The Barometer of Trust* (p. 9, 12).

In our opinion, one of the serious advantages of the monograph is the analysis of the specificity of the diverse life-worlds of the modern Russian humanitarian intelligentsia in the following important aspects:

- as a social and professional group;
- as a worldview community (socialist, liberal, nationalist, patriotic, technocratic, etc.);
- by characterizing its main activities (labor, politics, culture, daily life, etc.);
- as aggregates of social groups, more and more obvious characteristics of which are becoming the precarization of work and way of life (p. 9).

Based on the results of research, representatives of the humanitarian intelligentsia do not differ from the general mass of the population in many characteristics of their value orientations. But it is important to note that specific indicators were found that are unique to this group. First of all, it is a higher assessment of the significance of labor, compared to other respondents. The authors rightly emphasize: “such an attitude to work gives hope and confidence that the humanitarian intelligentsia has a significant creative energy reserve (hereinafter the author’s italics—V. N.) to benefit the country, show creativity in work, show other social communities and groups example of performing job duties ...” (p. 23).

Among other features of the value orientations of the Russian humanitarian intelligentsia mentioned in the monograph is its higher commitment to cultural leisure activities and communication in its life practice. On the contrary, only a small part of the respondents recog-

¹ Toshchenko J. T. 2016. *Sociology of life: monograph*. Moscow: YuNITI-DANA.



nizes politics as a significant factor in their life (p. 24). As you can see, there are active processes of social stratification of the humanitarian intelligentsia, and each of its folding layers has a specific life-world. In particular, it concerns its ideological positions. Thus, about 14% of the respondents from the humanitarian intelligentsia have communist and socialist views (p. 24). Besides, an insignificant in number, but a very influential group with right (neoliberal) orientations is singled out. As a result of the social changes in Russia over the past two decades, these people have significantly benefited. Well-off and wealthy, they advocate for Western norms and values, actively promoting them. As the authors point out,

“for them, what has been tested abroad becomes an ideal and guideline, but they do not pay attention to the extent that this corresponds to the national traditions and spiritual and moral orientations of Russians” (p. 26).

Some of them hold comprador positions, they would like to move and work abroad, their children and families often live there. A rhetorical question is appropriately asked in the paper: “Can we assume that this group will be a sincere defender of Russia’s national interests?”¹

These two groups of the Russian humanitarian intelligentsia that are approximately equal in number and opposite in their worldview (socialist and neoliberal) are in rather tense relations that can potentially lead to social conflicts. At the same time, it is difficult to disagree with the author’s opinion that “the flaws of liberal politics are becoming increasingly apparent to most people—their economy management since the early 1990s led to the collapse of the country’s economy and the loss of potential that Soviet Russia had in the late 1980s years” (p. 27).

In the meantime, the confrontation between socialist and neoliberal worldviews that characterize the antinomy of social consciousness is being replaced by another complex, contradictory phenomenon—an orientation toward patriotic and national views. In particular, every fifth of those surveyed in 2016 (22.1%) claimed that the ideas of patriotism were closer to them, and 7-8% expressed their commitment to national (nationalist) orientations. The author of the section comes to the logical conclusion that a significant percentage of the intelligentsia is in favor of supporting the directions of official policy, which are aimed at strengthening the statehood, external and internal independence of the country.

According to the data cited in the work, among the humanitarian intelligentsia, there are approximately two times less than the total surveyed population of those who adhere to extremist nationalist convictions—3.6%. The increase in the size of this group in recent years (mainly due to people with a low level of education), not just its activity, but often insolent actions lead to conflicts and clashes on ethnic and religious grounds.

Considerable scientific and practical interest is presented in the monograph classification of ideological orientations, depending on how they consider the implementation of the principles of government. In particular, there is a significant group of knowledge workers who support the establishment of an authoritarian regime (about a third of the respondents). Significantly, there are one and a half times more of them than the supporters of democracy and freedoms in our country (p. 28).

Particular attention is paid to the characterization of “small but ambitious and persistent groups that adhere to monarchical views (2.7%, among the population—5.2%). Only 1.6% acknowledged themselves to be oriented toward governing the country from the standpoint of religious tenets and canons (among the population—1.5%)” (p. 29). Based on these data, in the monograph a logical conclusion was made about the low influence of similar attitudes in our country.

¹ See more: Toshchenko Zh. T. 2015. The phantoms of Russian society. Moscow: Center for Social Projection and Marketing Publ. [In Russian]

Of considerable interest are the detailed explanations of the quantitative indicators given in the work (percentage distributions) with the use of vivid illustrative material from “real life”. In this case, with the appeal to the 2017 scandal surrounding the film *Matilda*, which was initiated by Natalia Poklonskaya, a Deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation.

There are also other small groups identified on this basis, for example, anarchists, which are sometimes quite noticeable against the general political background, but they play an insignificant role in the social life of modern Russia. A reasonable conclusion is made, according to which the modern Russian intelligentsia is heterogeneous, but is a combination of groups of different composition and size, occupying different ideological positions, sometimes not just far from one another, but even of a confrontational nature (p. 29-30).

Of undoubted interest to the reader is the material devoted to the complex and contradictory processes of precarization of the modern Russian humanitarian intelligentsia. In particular, the essence of the so-called “snob-intelligentsia” is clearly and convincingly shown (pp. 33-34). Significantly, the degree of precarization varies in different groups of the humanitarian intelligentsia. Anxiety to lose work is more common among medical workers and cultural workers (p. 77), which, in our opinion, reflects the process of “optimization” and controversial reforming of these fields conducted by the state over the past two decades.

Among the undoubted advantages of the monograph under review is an analysis of the relationship between the precarization of the employment of the intelligentsia and its institutional trust. The assertion that an unstable life situation or its perception as such creates among many representatives of a given social group a distrust of the surrounding reality seems fully justified. Accordingly, “instability, precariousness of one’s own position of the intelligentsia reinforces a feeling of caution and distrust towards institutions” (p. 137). It is difficult to disagree with the authors’ opinion that for the intelligentsia the processes of precarization are reflected in the devaluation of their labor, which is associated with a decline in its prestige and pay, the widespread practice of concluding short-term labor contracts, etc. All this causes frustration among the masses of highly skilled intellectual labor workers in the future, uncertainty about the future, institutional mistrust (p. 137).

At the same time, a significant factor determining the political activity of the intelligentsia is the situation that forms the external features of its life-world: a sense of its inability or impossibility to influence the decisions of the authorities, as a result—self-withdrawal from the election of this authority. According to the cited data, more than 90% of the representatives of the humanitarian intelligentsia believe that they cannot influence state decision making, the decision making of the republican, territorial, regional, and city (district) authorities (p. 157).

As a result of all this, in recent years the leading role among the value orientations of the Russian humanitarian intelligentsia is primarily played by “everyday life”, which includes family, inner circle, personal life, professional activity, and free time (p. 197).

Based on the conducted research, the authors come to a disappointing conclusion about the intelligentsia as an inert and passive mass, which focuses on their daily interests. Against the background of the passivity of most Russian humanitarians on their behalf, although small in number, but quite ambitious groups are speaking in order to realize self-serving interests (p. 36).

In our opinion, it is important to single out the indicators of satisfaction with the life of the humanitarian intelligentsia cited in the work—more than 73%, which is slightly higher than the national figure (66%). And only 5% of the representatives of this social group would like to live in another country. This denies the widespread opinion that this social group lacks patriotism. Based on the results of the conducted research, the authors express an informed opinion:



“... we can state not only the special role of the intelligentsia in the past and present of Russian society, but also pin hopes on the future, created and realized by representatives of this specific social group” (p. 53).

One cannot but agree with the clearly formulated conclusions, according to which “the wage growth of the humanitarian intelligentsia is accompanied by the emergence and spread of new, more sophisticated forms of exploitation of social and humanitarian workers. Owing to these processes, we believe that the social community “state employees”—as the definition of the mass layer of the “new poor”, which includes, among others, the Russian intelligentsia, has acquired a new form and character, reflecting a different social reality” (p. 97).

At the same time, the thesis that “despite deteriorating working conditions and the inability to protect one’s rights, the intelligentsia remains loyal and faithful to its work” seems to be very significant in characterizing the life-world of the modern Russian humanitarian intelligentsia (p. 113).

The conclusions formulated by the authors of the monograph on the results of their research (pp. 228-231) have a serious scientific value and practical significance. In our opinion, they objectively reflect the situation in the life of the Russian humanitarian intelligentsia, which leads to profound deformations of its life-world. Certainly, “what is happening with the intelligentsia at the present time, raises many questions that require urgent solutions” (p. 231).

An important advantage of the monograph is a clear language, an intelligible, bright style of the material presentation. Along with tables and graphs, percentage distributions, convincingly confirming the conclusions of the authors, it contains elements of scientific journalism, interesting examples that explain the scientific arguments to the readers.

The contradictory, ambiguous processes occurring in recent years in Russian society, which increase its social stratification, tension in relations between “ordinary” citizens and the authorities, increase people’s desire for social justice, and they cannot but affect the life-world of the humanitarian intelligentsia. In many respects, the future of Russian society depends to a large extent on what position the representatives of this public group will take, what worldview attitudes will become widespread in its life-world and how they will manifest themselves in the real behavior of the intelligentsia. Therefore, this work seems to us today relevant as never before. It seems appropriate to continue the research conducted by the authors of the monograph, which will allow us to understand more deeply both the processes taking place in Russian society today and the prospects for its development.