MRSP #1792247 VOL 58, ISS 3

The Benefit of Meaning in Andrei Platonov: Russian Motivation Toward Life and Work

Grigorii L. Tulchinskii

QUERY SHEET

This page lists questions we have about your paper. The numbers displayed at left are hyperlinked to the location of the query in your paper.

The title and author names are listed on this sheet as they will be published, both on your paper and on the Table of Contents. Please review and ensure the information is correct and advise us if any changes need to be made. In addition, please review your paper as a whole for typographical and essential corrections.

Your PDF proof has been enabled so that you can comment on the proof directly using Adobe Acrobat. For further information on marking corrections using Acrobat, please visit http://journalauthors.tandf.co.uk/production/acrobat.asp; https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/how-to-correct-proofs-with-adobe/

The CrossRef database (www.crossref.org/) has been used to validate the references. Changes resulting from mismatches are tracked in red font.

AUTHOR QUERIES

Q1 Please double-check spelling as Nikolsky or Nickolsky here and in notes

RUSSIAN STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY
2020, VOL. 58, NO. 3, 1–14
https://doi.org/10.1080/10611967.2020.1792247

The Benefit of Meaning in Andrei Platonov: Russian Motivation Toward Life and Work

Grigorii L. Tulchinskii

ABSTRACT
This article presents the research on three issues. First, revealing the features of Russian culture's semantic picture of the world in relation to a person's positioning in society and attitudes toward work, as they are expressed in A. Platonov's writings. Second, identifying Platonov's contribution to understanding and expressing a "Russian" attitude toward life and work. Third, determining the prospects of this kind of motivation toward life and labor activity, along with its compatibility with the transformation of social reality we are experiencing today.

KEYWORDS
Andrei Platonov; comprehension; death; life; motivation; meaning; work

Many economists have noted that low labor productivity is a key factor long recognized as a problem in developing modern Russian society, including during the Soviet period. There is no doubt that the roots of this phenomenon run deep and branch widely, from the unique features of the country's geographical positioning and climate conditions to the unique features of its sociopolitical institutions. One way or another, all of these reasons are focused on people's real-life experiences as expressed in their culture, which represents a system of generation, selection, storage, and transmission of social experience. Developed and established values and norms of behavior and morality, including motivation toward labor

---

English translation © 2019 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, from the Russian text, "Renta smysla u Andreiia Platonova: motivatsiia k zhizni i trudu po-russki." This is an original, unpublished manuscript. Published with the author's permission.

This research was carried out with the support of a grant from the Russian Science Foundation project RSF project No. 20-68-46013 «Philosophico-anthropological analysis of the Soviet being. Prerequisites, dynamics, impact on modernity.»

Grigorii L. Tulchinskii, doctor of philosophical sciences and honored researcher of the Russian Federation, is professor of philosophy in the Department of Problems of Interdisciplinary Synthesis in the Field of Social Sciences and Humanities at St. Petersburg State University. He also serves as professor in the Department of Public Administration at the National Research University "Higher School of Economics" in Moscow (Russia). Email: gtul@mail.ru

Notes have been renumbered for this edition.—Ed.

Translated by Brad Damaré.

© 2020 Taylor & Francis Group, LLC

activity, themselves act in turn as a resource for, and sometimes a barrier to, social development.

It is no accident that, with some gentle prodding from Max Weber, the historical process of modernization became associated with the Reformation, with a change in the semantic (primarily ethical) picture of social reality, which created a powerful motivational message about personal responsibility for arranging one's own life in this world.[1] Part of this message was a somewhat rigoristic motivation toward work and personal success, including professional success. Not for nothing are the German words for "vocation" and "profession" represented by a single term, *der Beruf*, which is in fact predestination.

In actuality, societies are historically and "geographically" distinguished by the degree of inertia or dynamism in their social experience. The dynamic development of most Western European and North American countries is striking in contrast to countries on the Asian continent that were, until recently, inclined toward a traditional inertia. Three civilizational "waves" of modernization stand out in an obvious way. The first covered Protestant countries: the Netherlands, England, and then the countries of northern Europe. The second stage of modernization included countries where Catholicism was the dominant confession.[2] The third wave swept through Eastern Europe, with the most painful modernization (built on market economy institutions, an emphasis on the role of legal protection of property, and political democracy) taking place in Armenia, Greece, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Romania, and Ukraine, countries that were not only in the former "socialist camp" but that also possessed a culture deriving from Eastern Orthodoxy.

Additionally, research on the role and significance of sociocultural experience in societal development conducted from the mid-twentieth century to the present day has shown quite convincingly not only that "culture matters"[3] but that historical experience is also important: "history matters."[4] It is no accident that, over the past quarter century, the Nobel Prize in Economics has primarily been awarded for analysis and elaboration of the role of sociocultural factors of economic development.

As for Russia in that regard, the concepts of a "special path" (*Sonderweg*), "gauge," "Russian system,"[5] "institutional matrix,"[6] "Muscovite matrix,"[7] and constant pendulum swings of developmental "inversions"[8] have been gaining more and more resonance. Similar qualifications are warranted here. We can clearly trace an obsessive repetition in Russian history: relatively short-term attempts at radical change aimed at intensifying the country's economic and sociopolitical life give way to a return to habitual, established practice. In this regard, Sergey A. Nikolsky has proposed the concept of "constants" of Russian society that prop up this "stable periodicity."[9] Without going into details now (this work has been done elsewhere[10]), I should note that, according to the neo-institutionalist typology, approaches in the spirit of "matricity," "constant," and so forth allow us to categorize Russia among those societies with institutions of limited access to resources,[11] which, given the experience of recent history, makes its prospects for the future rather poor.

These descriptions of certain persistent factors successfully describe the symptoms but do not provide a diagnosis. The question of causes and factors that generate these features remains open. Without identifying these factors, prospects for modernization risk lacking knowledge of important factors that can be employed for successful reforms, which is especially important in relation to the possibility of stimulating motivation.

As for possible factors related to semantic worldview, we can find important material for understanding them in the creative output of Andrei Platonov, an author who stands in sharp contrast to other Russian-language writers of the mid-twentieth century. There are a number of reasons for our interest in Platonov's work. First is the style itself. Against the Russian classics, as well as twentieth-century literature both domestic and foreign that is rich in descriptions and comprehension of everyday life and mores, Platonov stands in sharp contrast in terms of his system of images and his writing style, which go beyond the usual ways of representing reality by the total elimination of that reality when a person finds himself in a situation where the typical image of existence is broken in the name of realizing abstract ideas.

Second is the specific features and scale of his way of understanding of modernity. The great anti-utopias of Evgenii Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell, where the prospects of the mass-industrial society then emerging were interpreted prophetically, came to be written almost at the same time as Platonov's. The latter's anti-utopia is a different scale: it leads to the prospects of a new anthropology whose features we are only just beginning to understand. Third and finally, in relation to the topic of this article, Platonov's work is interesting in that he used the attempt to radically reorganize Russian society on the basis of a specifically Russian understanding of Marxism as his material.

Our discussion below will be built around the search for answers to three main questions:

1. Platonov, as both a person and an author, did not appear from out of thin air but expressed and continued certain features of the Russian way of perceiving the world, including a person's positioning in society and his attitude to work. What are these features?
2. What is Platonov's contribution to understanding and expressing this relationship?
3. What are the prospects for this kind of motivation for life and labor activity, and is that motivation compatible with the transformation of social reality that we are experiencing today?

Life and work in the Russian semantic picture of the world

Many researchers have already conducted analyses of the semantic content of the Russian cultural experience using material in which the understanding of social reality has accumulated in its most condensed forms: mythology, folklore, features of Russian Orthodoxy (both canonical and in everyday religious experience), philosophy, artistic culture (especially literature), political and economic history, everyday discourse, and the impressions of travelers (both domestic and foreign). The current author has already conducted a systematization using their generalized results.[12]

Extracting the content of these results made it possible to present the semantic content of the Russian cultural experience as a system of several semantic clusters, such as "Truth," or the desire to live "in truth" ("not in lies"), which makes the moral person who is prepared to suffer in his selflessness one of the main values of the Russian experience. Meanwhile, moral maximalism is combined with a neglect of law, which can sometimes be used and sometimes be overstepped depending on expediency and opportunity. Grace is above the law, which, like a wagon axle, points wherever you steer it.

The semantic cluster "Miracle" is closely tied to "Truth." For a Russian, the supreme expression of moral triumph is the ability to overcome the burdens (*beda* = "burdens"; *po-bedit'* = "to triumph") that this world bears. The world in itself and the life within are denied values, serving as a valley of suffering, moral trial, and advance preparation. The real value is life in the other world, in the bright future "beyond the hill": the more I suffer in this world, the more I will be rewarded in the next. But this reward is possible only "after life." Man is not in a position to make his life and that of his loved ones happier through his own labor. The Russian language's abundance of intransitive verbs expressing the processuality of action but not its results (we "work" a lot but "do" little) is striking. Labor is in vain and nowhere imputed: "The birds of the sky neither sow nor reap, but they are fed," "God's little birds know neither worry nor labor."[13] Humans are not destined to think about their own prosperity: "God has given, and God has taken away."

The extremely unfavorable climate conditions frost, drought, fire, and other calamities or misfortunes, not to mention arbitrary exercise of power by the authorities, could deprive a laborer of his crops and modest prosperity within a matter of hours. He then had one actual alternative: to set out on the road with a beggar's bag over his shoulders or a flail in his hands, as in the proverb, "Don't rule out poverty or prison!"

Hard work cannot be a source of prosperity; it is just a component of suffering in this life. Opposed to it is creative work, the one-time act of godlike creation "suddenly," "out of nothing," akin to a miracle. In that regard, so-called utopianism (from irresponsible Manilovism to aggressive revolutionism[14]) is not a cause but a consequence, manifestation, and expression of the rejection of this world's value (and the value of labor in it) combined with a desire for godlike or even god-opposing creativity.

It is typical that Russian poetic discourse practically never takes on the theme of labor as one activity linked to the experience of positive emotions.[15] Perhaps the only exception is the poetry of N. Kol'tsov, but this is an exception that proves the rule. Furthermore, a striking feature that sharply distinguishes Slavic mythology as a whole from other well-known epic and mythological systems is its lack not only of any cultural hero who taught others to work (like Prometheus) but simply of characters like builders, weavers, artisans (even blacksmiths!), basically of peasant laborers.[16] Fairy tales, meanwhile, do represent the people's fears like poverty, hard work, and grief but also its dreams, hopes, and desires to acquire "cunning craft" that provides for a satisfying and carefree life, including by means of expropriating from the expropriators (the king, the rich man). The characters succeed not by labor but by the wave of a magic wand or some other kind of miraculous means.

Also related to these is the semantic cluster "Escapism," a departure from this reality. In many ways, Russian history is the history of "exodus" in search of a better life on the Don, across the Kuban, to the Urals and beyond the Urals, to Siberia, across the Bering Strait. While the authorities were fighting without much success in the West, the empire was growing in the East due to "colonization by the people." In its ultimate expression, escapism represents a timeless end of the world and the triumph of an ultimate justice, the "Truth" before which all are equal. Hence the constant Russian struggle with history, the rejection of a specific time in favor of eternity, yet another motivation for disregarding human life.

The person, the human individuality, acts as a means of realization and an embodiment of community, unity, communality, symphonic personality, and so forth, which are basically the values associated with the semantic cluster "All-Unity." This is not merely a collective formed to uphold a community of interests and express that community of interests, their balance, and their need for cooperation. This all-unity is metaphysical, extending to the world as a whole, and it laid the foundation for the emergence and development of Russian cosmist philosophy, the brilliant technical ideas of Konstantin E. Tsiolkovsky and Alexander L. Chizhevsky. "All-Unity" is, among other things, expressed in "Beauty," which is understood as a harmony of a unique collectiveness: from the aesthetics of architecture to the moral demands of art and the aestheticism of Russian historiosophy that seeks a particular plotfullness in history.

Thus, the Russian cultural experience suggests an extremely holistic worldview and world-sense related to a very intense moral feeling.[17] This moral ground turned out to be fertile indeed for perception of the idea of communism, a society whose construction requires the highest intensity of moral and physical forces, personal selflessness and self-sacrifice. To suffer for an idea this lofty is, of course, no sin. Nor is it a sin not to spare others in the name of a great idea. This justifies violence, disregard of law, on the basis of “expediency.” This is morality with practically no normative component.

The main reason for this review, which is important for understanding Platonov’s contribution to understanding the social, anthropological, and personological content of the Russian experience, is that, in this experience, life (one’s own and that of others) and the health, property, and labor associated with it are values secondary in relation to a moral maximalism oriented toward a justice and harmony “not of this world,” transcendental in relation to our given reality. The kind of semantic picture of the world that appeals to the rejection of existence, to an acceptance of suffering in the name of destruction and to a transformation of existence in the name of higher ideals, is itself the ideal material and instrument for radical experiments on society and man. In this regard, the Soviet experiment did not contradict the semantic content of Russian culture but represented an eidetically pure embodiment of its semantic clusters.

We should note the general spirit of the era of scientism, of faith in scientific–technical progress, of the idea of scientific management of the natural world and society, from the ideas of Vladimir I. Vernadskii and Nikolai F. Fedorov and the science fantasies of Jules Verne to Taylorism and Fordism. Carrying out violence against society to bring society in accordance with the supposedly overt laws of social development was no great challenge: one needed only take power and expropriate from the expropriators.

The symbiosis of Russian culture and the communist idea served as the source of a powerful explosion of spiritual and political energy expressed in unity of a global magnitude, scientific in depth and presentation, as well as the mobilizing force of a revolution of the destitute who had nothing else to lose in this world. This means an experience focused not so much on creative activity but on targeted morality and an activism of justified violence.

Platonov, who was at the epicenter of the consequences of this radical reorganization of society and man with the goal of building an unprecedented world, served as a witness, partially a participant, and, most important, an interpreter of this experiment.

Labor and freedom in Platonov’s works

The history of the Soviet experiment has been described many times over. With the passage of time, more and more new aspects have been discovered in its understanding, important not only for understanding its goals, course, and consequences in economic and political terms but also, and probably more important, for understanding its humanitarian results. In that regard, Platonov’s work in the late 1920s–mid-1930s, namely, the corpus of texts that includes his early stories and the novels *Chevengur* (1929), *The Foundation Pit* (1930), *The Sea of Youth* (1934), and *Soul* (1934), provides extremely informative material.[18]

The time period of this writing was no accident: this was the New Economic Period (NEP), which allowed the country to overcome the destructive consequences of war communism and civil war, strengthened the peasantry, and revived the urban bourgeoisie. Trotsky's policy, later intercepted by Stalin, for the forced dismantling of NEP's semi-market economy, collectivization, and industrialization, known was the "Great Turning Point," was adopted and resulted in enormous violence against the huge mass of peasants. In the years 1935–1937, this violence spread to the urban population, to the revolution's creators, to the civil war's victors, to the creators of the Turning Point itself. Other writers would address this Great Terror, but Platonov returned to literature only with the Great Patriotic War.

It seems the late 1920s–mid-1930s represented a time of changes in the views of Platonov, who had been in the provinces observing the transition from "war communism" to the "Great Turning Point." The faith in and devotion to communist ideals characteristic of young Platonov[19] were replaced by an ironic, if not sarcastic, attitude toward them.[20] The power of Platonov's anti-utopias consists in the fact that he brings the aspirations of a rejected past and present into a most beautiful but abstract future, to a concretization of this future that has arrived catastrophically.

It is important to understand that this is not about a civilizational phenomenon related to realizing the ambiguous political potential of a mass industrial society. Similar processes were simultaneously taking place in post-Weimar Germany, as well as in Italy, in Poland, and partly in the Baltic countries. The philosophical and social kinship of German (Hitlerian-Nazist) and Soviet (Stalinist) totalitarianism, and partly Italian *ducismo*, was revealed by the Frankfurt School philosophers: Hannah Arendt, James Burnham, and Eric Hoffer wrote a great deal about this, and convincingly so. The stylistic unity of totalitarian imagery found expression in the cinema of Dziga Vertov, Leni Riefenstahl, and Sergei Eisenstein. However, the anthropological nature of this experiment on society and man was perhaps first identified and felt by Platonov, who is credited with one of the firsts texts in Soviet literature on fascist totalitarianism, first published only in 1966 under the title "Rubbish Wind." He had originally called it "In the Year 1933 (The Tale of a Certain Westerner's Fate)."[21] In content, the story directly intersects with Platonov's story "Doubting Makar" that Stalin had so sharply criticized, after which Platonov was long denied the opportunity to publish. In 1934, Platonov sent "Rubbish Wind" to Maxim Gorky, who was so stunned by the story that he doubted the possibility of publishing it "anywhere at all."[22] The "class sense" and political intuition had not failed either the "father of peoples" nor the progenitor of socialist realism. Platonov himself, who subtly sensed the deep anthropological kinship of these modified totalitarianisms, addressed this topic in his story "Across the Midnight Sky."

Svetlana S. Neretina has wittily remarked that the Western world took the path of embodying the dystopia of Huxley, Russia of Orwell, and China of Zamyatin.[23] There is a reason Platonov does not fit into this framework. He is deeper, because he is not so much about mass collectivism as about anthropology, about the possibility of rebuilding man as such, and in his unity with the cosmos, about a single universal means of being for both the living and the dead. This is a different scale and depth of thought and feeling about the complete emptiness of doctrinaire Marxism's rationalist activism, understood as a practical maxim of universal will. Sometimes one can only stand in awe before this scale and this depth.

Platonov is a truly Russian writer: his characters, actively engaged in "constructive activity," most of which is trivial, philosophize according to abstract schemes. For example, his doctrinaire practitioner Lev Chumovoi from "Doubting Makar," "living by his bare wits" and standing at the source and conclusion of Makar's "odyssey" under "the golden domes of the leaders," as if copied from Trotsky, contributes to the gallery of ambiguously "positive" characters in Russian literature from Chatsky to Shtol'ts.[24]

The lack of motivation for constructive work among Platonov's heroes is not some manifestation of laziness (which could be greatly constructive) but a principled position aimed at benefiting from natural forces and elements like "the sun, the eternal proletariat" or from machines.

Nor is this simply what many have called a Platonovian hymn to technology. As with Epishka in "The Inventor of Light," who imagined an apparatus for generating food, or with Makar, who somehow managed to get iron from clay in a well, technology is also perceived as "self-sowing," simultaneously cosmic and beneficial, in the universal plane of being, both in its relation to nature and in its relation to people. In that line of thought, "self-flowing" improvements in nature in the spirit of engineering "improvements" of cattle, and ideas of utilizing living people and corpses, appear natural, whereas communism as a society of machines appears to be an experience of transcendental in-humanity. What is the mechanism for realizing these forces? After all, Platonov is not talking about fairy-tale miracles but about the self-embodiment of these forces. His machines and devices, both real-life steam locomotives and the embodiments of bizarre fantasies from his "creative characters," are essentially the manifestation of some single living meaning of existence. His character in "Rubbish Wind" senses the torment of the atom and empathizes with it. Only with this in mind can we sometimes understand Platonovian expressions that produce the impression of oxymorons, like "thoughts thrust through the bone like stubble."

If this is mythology, then it is radically different from the usual sort. In some ways, if not fundamentally, Platonovian mythology is closer to the metaphysics of Amazonian Indians as described by Eduardo V. de Castro.[25] In "European metaphysics," nature is one, though perspectives on it differ: meanings, cultures. Semiotically speaking, the denotate is one though its meanings differ. To understand the other is to adopt his perspective. This kind of opportunity is what has endowed people with con-sciousness (*con* = "with"; a kind of shared knowledge). "Nonpeople," like objects, things, animals, and machines, do not possess consciousness, or in the spirit of Spinoza, they possess it, but a very undeveloped version. In "Indian" metaphysics, the universal meaning is one, and the perspective on the natural-different is also one. There is only one meaning, but its denotate (embodiment) differs. To understand the other means to adopt the body, the flesh of another. In that regard, "nonpeople" (things, animals) may have been people but changed their corporeal nature. Thus, de Castro characterizes European metaphysics as multiculturalism and "Indian" metaphysics as multinaturalism.

In "Indian metaphysics," as, incidentally, in the metaphysics of Hinduism and yoga, the semantic unity of the world appears and manifests itself differently in objects and living beings. The differences involve the degree of representation. But how fundamental is the difference between these two "metaphysics"? From the perspective of scientific–technical rationality and the familiar "European" metaphysics, nature is creative, and cognition reveals (or ascribes?!) a rational character to natural processes. It is precisely this possibility of cognizing the laws of nature and the possibility of using them to transform this nature that has fueled and continues to fuel scientific–technical process. Platonov's work seems to be about this, about the use of science and technology—but why are his "users" so irresponsible, while the responsible and strong-willed "transformers" and their decisions are so tragicomic?

The fact is, the world's presumed rationality and cognoscibility is a condition for cognition. The poet Fyodor I. Tyutchev brilliantly expressed this idea:

> Thus connected, ever united,
>
> By the bonds of blood kinship
> Are the rational genius of man
> And the creative power of nature.
>
> Should he speak the sacred word,
> Nature is forever prepared
> To respond to his kindred voice
> With a new world.

The civilizational breakthrough that defined the face of the modern world, all of its achievements, prospects, and problems, came from the "meeting of Athens and Jerusalem" (specifically the meaning and not the antinomy, in the spirit of

Lev Shestov), the synthesis of two great ideas: Jewish monotheism and Greek logic. The consciousness that the world was created by a single will and according to a single rational plan, that man has been given intellectual means and abilities to grasp this plan (*Logos* as a rational idea, thought, and law of the world order), is a key moment for understanding how scientific–technical progress became possible precisely in the bosom of the Judeo-Christian tradition. From sophisticated analysis and interpretation of the sacred texts to recognition of the possibility of questioning nature itself, of torturing it (*pytat* = "to torture"; *o-pytnoe znanie* = "experimental knowledge"),[26] then, through deism, of discarding the "hypothesis of God" and moving on to not only cognitive but also transformative activity, with all the consequences that ensue: from grandiose scientific–technical achievements to environmental disasters and the false posturing of moral mangodhood.

However, at the foundation of this impressive progress lies the completely "Indian" assumption of the semantic unity of the world and human reason's participation in that unity. In that sense, Platonov "felt the pulse" of metaphysics and anthropology permeating the activity of human life and expressed the deep essence of this quite "Indian" metaphysics, where the meaning that permeates everything and is embodied in people and things becomes a creative force, and the production of goods turns out to be the benefit of that meaning. "The creation of benefits" occurs on its own. Platonov's characters behave just like Indian shamans, empathizing with things, trying to adopt their corporality. At the same time, however, the human body may be devoid of meaning. This is a dead body, which explains why and how Platonov brings the utmost clarity to the lack of motivation for an active life in this world, including constructive–transformative activity.

Platonov's heroes are united by their inability to endure this life, by their search for some way out of intolerable being. Chepurnyi speeds up time to reduce the long-suffering nature of life and history. Dvanov could not endure life without knowing in advance the beauty of the other world. This inability to tolerate the present world makes death the main idea, path, and escape, the alternative to an intolerable world subject to destruction. A yearning, an interest in the other world, in the dead, an empathy with them, are characteristic of all of Platonov's works. In this it is also surprisingly equivalent to the Russian–Soviet experience in its desire to establish a final kingdom of justice in this world, and what could be more just than a death that equalizes everyone, the road to the "foundation pit" from which there is no return?

Platonov's art describes a terminally ill public organism. In Platonov's body of texts, this is not a dystopia, not a particular idea of a possible future, but a shock from the collision with the unexpectedly ambiguous future that arrived and a longing and suffering due to our attempts to understand it. These attempts at comprehension lead to the need for a new homodicy, a new justification of man's existence in the face of his irrelevance and exhaustion. In a certain sense, Platonov appears to be the prophet of a humanity immersed in the prospect of total digitalization (the Internet of things, artificial intelligence, and other digital technologies), but this is already beyond the scope of our present study.

This shows that the sociocultural “engineering” Platonov depicts is mortally dangerous in that it tempts the powers-that-be with their own power in their self-proclaimed desire to make people happy quickly, in fits and starts that debilitate society as a whole and each person individually. The Russian–Soviet cultural experience is very ambiguous and awaits serious contemplation, not only in terms of the current emphasis on heroism but also on the nature of that heroism, the reasons for it, and, at the same time, the reasons for oblivion and grief and, most important, what hopes may be associated with this experience. Platonov’s lesson provides a serious call for this kind of comprehension.

Potential for and prospects of an “otherworldly” attitude toward life and labor

Several somewhat paradoxically related generalizations follow from the review we have conducted. The first is the lack of any real constructive potential in the semantic picture reproduced in Russian culture. This is in fact precisely the conclusion that Alexei P. Davydov arrived at after consistently and systematically re-reading all of Russian literature, classical and modern, in search of a constructive, positive source in the topic of Russian cultural pride. His result, published in a number of detailed manuscripts, proved to be discouraging.[27] The attitude to life and work “à la Russia” hovered between the extremes of passivity of contemplative good-naturedness and the cruel, soulless violence of transformative activism. This enthusiasm for violence alongside the dream of lying in the sun and doing nothing, of a mad waste of one’s powers for the sake of rejecting all efforts, leading to the extinction of vital energy, of man’s worthlessness and uselessness, was the subject of Platonov’s reflections.

His conclusions can be supported by the general trend of modern civilizational development. On the one hand, the post-industrial information society of mass consumption literally realized the great Enlightenment humanism project and its slogans of “Everything in the name of man!” “Everything for the good of man!” and “Man is the measure of all things!” Based on market economics and technology marketing based on Big Data, it is in a position not only to satisfy any needs but also to stimulate them. On the other hand, digital technology and above all artificial intelligence, the Internet of things (IoT), and robotization are “cleansing” the labor market of human beings. A new anthropology is taking shape before our eyes, one where a person needs not so much reasoning and reflection as the ability to use a gamer’s skill in operating with the options provided not *by* him but algorithmically *for* him. Labor itself becomes more precarious when responsibility for the object of labor, for organizing it, including the search for customers, technological support, safety, and so forth, is all assigned to the worker himself. Even his free time becomes indistinguishable from work.

In fact, we are facing the logical stage of transformation of capitalism, an inhuman system focused on the self-expansion of capital, into a stage where it is further dehumanized: digital platforms see no difference between a thing in the IoT and a person whose vital activity is reduced to actuating options. The growing trend of new social inequalities, the degradation of natural intelligence, various “cyperpunk” trends, the irrelevance of the subject comprehending the world “in the first person,” where all problems are solvable for him and solved without him by embodiments of meaning “in the third person”: all this warrants a fresh re-reading of Platonov.

At the same time, it seems that new “otherworldly,” “first-person” perspectives are opening up in the comprehension of the world so characteristic of Russian culture, by which I mean the undoubted creative potential of this kind of worldview. Russian mathematics and programming, “paper” architecture, design, fashion, political and business consulting—all of these up to and including the notorious “Russian hackers” are highly competitive on the market of “virtual creativity” precisely due to their capacity for non-trivial solutions and suggestions. More and more, contemporary employers are actively expressing their request for people with “soft skills,” critical thinking, independent reasoning, and the ability to seek solutions within group communications. The digital economy requires first-person understanding as a source of change and development. The essence of self-consciousness lies precisely in its going beyond the limits of the given, beyond the framework of the program or the algorithm, into their context, toward new horizons, visions, and experiences. This remains the main advantage and the dignity of the person. Platonov’s art provides a striking example of this.

Ergo

The content of the Russian semantic picture of the world is characterized by an apophatic orientation not so much toward the experience of real life in this world, including constructive labor, as toward the experience of participation in a transcendental that extends past the limits of everyday life, sometimes even rejecting it.

In Platonov’s work, this kind of orientation receives a figurative expression and understanding of its consequences, which turn out to be a serious call both for social reality and for the existence (including biological) of the individual person.

The search for an “otherworldly” semantic foundation for the existence and development of society and of each individual person is unexpectedly consonant with the contemporary transformation of social reality due to the widespread adoption of digital technologies.

In this regard, Platonov is more relevant than the alarmism of the philosophers of the Frankfurt school of critical social philosophy and modern "horrorization" via digital post-humanity and transhumanism. His relevance stems from the depth of topics and questions he raises, whose content we are only now beginning to uncover.

Notes

1. M. Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik, 1904. Bd.20, no. 1, pp. 1–54; 1905. Bd. 21, no. 1, pp. 1–110. In English: M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism: And Other Writings* (Penguin, 2002).
2. *Evraziiskii mir: tsennosti, konstanty, samoorganizatsiia*, ed. Iu.V. Popkov (Novosibirsk: Nonparel, 2010).
3. L.E. Harrison and S.P. Hantington, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, and M. Minkov, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*, 3rd edition (McGraw-Hill, 2010).
4. S. Hedlund, *Invisible Hands, Russian Experience, and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding Systemic Failure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
5. Yu.S. Pivivarov and A.I. Fursov, "'Russkaia sistema' kak popytka ponimaniia russkoi istorii," *Polis*, 2001, no. 4, pp. 37–48.
6. S.G. Kirdina, *Institutsional'nye matritsy i razvitie Rossii. Vvedenie v X-Y teoriiu* (Moscow; St. Petersburg: Nestor-Istoriia Izd., 2017).
7. A.P. Zaostrovtsev, *Rossiia i strany Baltii: raskhozhdenie tsivilizatsii* (St. Petersburg: Evrop. Univ. Izd., 2017).
8. A.S. Akhiezer, *Rossiia: kritika istoricheskogo opyta (sotsiokul'turnaia dinamika Rossii)*, vol. 1: Ot proshlogo k budushchemu (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1998).
9. S.A. Nikolsky, "Rossiiskaia filosofiia istorii: opyt ponimaniia," *Filosofskii zhurnal*, vol. 11, no. 4 (2018), pp. 115–28.
10. G.L. Tulchinskii, "'From the Top Down' and 'from the Bottom Up' Factors of Inversions in Russian History," *Russian Journal of Philosophical Sciences/ Filosofskie nauki*, vol. 62, no. 8 (2019), pp. 16–32.
11. D.C. North, J.J. Wallis, and B.R. Weingast, *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
12. G.L. Tulchinskii, *Politicheskaia kul'tura Rossii: istochniki, uroki, perpektivy* (St. Petersburg: Aleteia, 2019), pp. 75–121.
13. The "God's little birds" line is from Alexander Pushkin's narrative poem *The Gypsies*.—Ed.
14. "Manilovism" is a neologism that comes from Manilov, a character in Gogol's *Dead Souls*. It is used as a common byword for the comfortably smug and complacent.—Ed.
15. G. Gachev, *Obraz v russkoi khudozhestvennoi kul'tury* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1981).

16. V.V. Ivanov and V.N. Toporov, “Slavianskaia mifologiia,” *Mify narodov mira*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Entsiklopediia, 1980), pp. 450–56.
17. K. Kasianova, *O russkom natsional’nom kharaktere* (Moscow, 1994).
18. A. Platonov, *Sobranie sochinenii v 8 tomakh* (Moscow, 2010).
19. N.G. Poltavtseva, “Platonov i Lukach (iz istorii sovetskogo iskusstva 1930-kh godov), *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, vol. 107, no. 1 (2011), pp. 107–18.
20. S.S. Neretina, S.A. Nikolsky, and V.N. Porus, *Filosofskaia antropologiia Andreia Platonova* (Moscow: IF RAN, 2019).
21. A. Platonov, *Musornyi veter* (Tallinn: Eestiiraamat, 1991), p. 333.
22. “Gorky i sovetskie pisateli. Neizdannaia perepiska,” *Literaturnaia nasledstvo*, vol. 70 (Moscow: Izd. AN SSSR, 1963), p. 315.
23. Neretina et al., *Filosofskaia antropologiia Andreia Platonova.*
24. Chatsky is the main character of Alexander Griboedov’s play *Woe from Wit*, and Shtol’ts is the character of Ivan Goncharov’s novel *Oblomov*.—Ed.
25. E.V. de Castro, *Métaphysiques cannibals. Lignes d’anthropologie post-structurale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2009). In English: E.V. de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
26. Not without reason did science, *scientia*, as experimental knowledge arise simultaneously with the rampaging Inquisition and witch hunts.
27. A.P. Davydov, *Nepoliticheskii liberalism v Rossii* (Moscow: Mysl’, 2012).